



VIETNAM

APRIL 2015

TECHNOMAD

Using Technology
to Travel More

PAGE 22

THE MINIATURE ARTIST

It's a Small World After All

PAGE 26

CHEESE, PLEASE!

Saigon's Only Swiss
Restaurant

PAGE 52

SOUL TREK

A Journey of Peace
From Within

PAGE 72

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Contents



WINE & DINE

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

We indulge our cheese craving at Saigon's only Swiss restaurant, then head for some Gallic fare located on the upper level of a clothing boutique

50

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

FEATURES

P10 DATEBOOK

With these events, you'll never have to be bored again

P14 THE BULLETIN

Checking out the latest promotions and openings

P20 TROI OI

Find out why sexual harassment, a giant chicken and a 71-year-old woman made it into our list

P22 TECHNOMAD

A new lifestyle of using high tech to travel indeterminately

P26 THE MINIATURE ARTIST

A small world of clay figurines awaits

P30 THE ENDING MATTERS

Raising the question: Have we exalted longevity over what makes life worth living?

P34 MY LIFE AS...

An analog photographer

P72 SOUL TREK

How travel and spirituality can intersect

P78 THE MANY FACES OF CHAU DOC

Meet the locals who live off the Mekong Delta



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COVER STORY

WE MEAN BUSINESS

Every entrepreneurial journey starts somewhere. See if you recognize yourself in these stories

38

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

COLUMNS

P82 CRUISE CONTROL

Rolling on the Saigon River on a lazy afternoon

P84 ANTARCTICA

Snow, ice, water, rock - this vast white wilderness is simply stunning

P93 WHO'S THE BOSS?

Defining an authoritative structure with your child

P33 RX

To vaccinate or not

P36 LEGAL EASE

A Las Vegas wedding finds legality in Vietnam

P37 HOME, SWEET, HOME

Introducing rhythm into your home

P57 CHEERS!

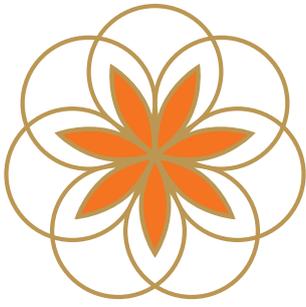
Learn the basics of wine tasting

P88 BLANK CANVAS

The graffiti and tagging culture shifts to Vietnam

P95 HIGHER LEARNING

The importance of a 21st century education



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Datebook

What's on this month...

APRIL 4

What: Information Day of Renaissance Three-Week-Summer Program in Los Angeles

Where: Renaissance International School Saigon (74 Nguyen Thi Thap, D7)

About: Renaissance International School Saigon is offering a three-week summer program from July 5 – 26, 2015 in Occidental College (Oxy), Los Angeles for pupils aged 14 – 18. This is a unique opportunity to gain first-hand experience of life on campus, visit leading US universities including the University of California, the University of Southern California and Claremont College, and explore Los Angeles with fun trips to Universal Studios, Disneyland, Hollywood Walk of Fame, etc. The academic program has been designed for Renaissance and non-Renaissance pupils and provides rich and diverse learning opportunities. The total cost is USD4,975. On the day you will meet pupils and teachers who joined the trip last year, along with a Q&A session.

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

APRIL 4

What: AusCham Fireside Chat

Where: Sofitel Saigon Plaza (Diamond Hall B, 17 Le Duan, D1); VND700,000; 6pm – 8pm

About: Trish & Vietnam: 20 Years of Loving Lives with Professor Gael McDonald, President RMIT University Vietnam. Trish studied at Loreto College in Victoria, Australia and in 1970 entered the Loreto Sisters. Two years after she moved to Vietnam in 1995, Sister Trish founded the Loreto Vietnam Australia Program, which has now helped educate 3,000 children. Come along and listen to her reflect on 20 years of passion, planning, strategizing, managing stakeholders and building lives for kids. Trish will leave Vietnam on July 31 and a wonderful legacy.

Contact: Email events@auschamvn.org for more info

APRIL 9

What: Lecture: The Chimurenga Chronic Ntone Edjabe

Where: Hoa Sen University (8 Nguyen Van Trang, D1); 6:30pm

About: Born in Cameroon, Ntone Edjabe will give a lecture on his role in establishing and directing Chimurenga - a print and online pan-African platform that focuses on art, society and culture. His presentation will focus on Chimurenga's latest editorial project, *The Chimurenga Chronic*. The Chronic was a social sculpture that embraced the newspaper as a popular medium and raised questions of news and newness, of how we define both the now and history - to reconsider the past as a territory to explore, and the present as a precarious and elusive entry-point through which radically different future might make its appearance. This fictional newspaper has since become a reality as a quarterly publication distributed across the continent while continually exploring the possibilities of this old technology - the newspaper as art object, as curriculum, as cartography, and more.

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



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APRIL
10

What: Ntone Edjabe with Beats of Africa

Where: Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 11:30pm

About: Born in Douala, Cameroon, Edjabe moved to Lagos, Nigeria to study before arriving in South Africa on the eve of democracy in 1993. Three years later he established the Pan African Market - a cultural center for African immigrants - in Cape Town. More recently, Edjabe, who is also a DJ, created the Pan African Space Station, a music platform that brings together diverse African genres both online and in venues across the continent. Its radio station PASS streams music, shows and interviews live around the clock. Edjabe believes firmly that music cannot be divorced from politics.

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

APRIL 11

What: Color Me Run

Where: Truong Van Bang Street, D2; 3pm – 9pm; VND550,000 per person or VND500,000 per person for groups of 10 or more

About: Following the success of the first Color Me Run last year with over 6,800 participants, Color Me Run 2015 promises to be a unique sporting event organized throughout the country to spread the message: "We will be united." Participants can expect to experience a 5km colorful jogging, walking or running session while being doused from head to toe in different colors at each kilometer. A live music event will be held after the run with rapper and composer T-Pain, Atran & Manfred, who's played at the world famous South by Southwest Festival, and international pop sensation G.R.L.

Contact: Visit www.colormerun.vn for more info

APRIL 11

What: DJ Graham Gold

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND170,00 in advance, VND220,000 at the door

About: DJ Graham Gold is the only Asia based DJ who spent eight years in DJ MAG Top 100 poll, with five of those in the Top 40 and two years at number 22. He is also currently the 83rd most popular DJ of all time. Years of experience has taken him to all corners of the world playing 150 cities in 43 countries for all the major brands and festivals, including Glastonbury, Homelands, Gatecrasher, Gods Kitchen, Passion, Slinky, Impulz, Earthdance, W.E.M.F., Summadayze and The Street Parade in Zurich.

"Last time I was in Vietnam I got food poisoning so firstly I hope this time will be different! What I did notice about Vietnam was the serious clubbing vibe in the after-hours area so I am very much looking forward to presenting a different side of me. Although it's a Peach night, there will be no trance or classics. If Nick Curly, Monika Kruse, Peter Makto - Gregory S, Riverside Dive, Steve Lawler, Sidney Charles, Green Velvet, Chus & Ceballos is your thing then you need to come. I might even throw in some Prok & Fitch and S-Man too!" says Gold on returning to Saigon. The event is a collaboration amongst Saigon Sound System, Scientific Sound Saigon and the famous Peach brand from Camden Palace fame.

Contact: Visit www.saigonsoundsystem.com for more info

APRIL 12

What: Wedding Bliss

Where: Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa; 10am - 3pm

About: A one-stop opportunity to plan the ultimate wedding with a bridal fashion show at 10am. Highlighted partners at the fair include Phuc Studio (bridal gown), Jen Nguyen (wedding planner), Long Beach Pearl (jewelry), Thao Mai Shop and Flower Sa's Style. Along with exclusive wedding perks, a lucky draw with an amazing prize from Long Beach Pearl, couples who confirm their wedding banquet on the same day will enjoy additional benefits such as a complimentary one night stay at Sheraton Nha Trang or Le Meridien Saigon, a romantic dinner for two on their first anniversary, and more.

Contact: For more info, call (058) 388 0000

APRIL 12

What: Songkran

Where: Saigon Outcast (188/1 Nguyen Van Huong, D2)

About: Songkran, also known at the Water Festival, symbolizes cleansing and rejuvenation of the body for the New Year. The people behind Saigon Outside will be armed with water guns and water balloons to help celebrate with their neighboring Thai countrymen. A waterslide, barbeque, and DJs will also make an appearance.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "Saigon Outcast" for more info



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APRIL 16

What: Paint Night

Where: Grado Art Studio (170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2); 6:30pm - 9:30pm; VND850,000

About: Looking for a way to explore your artistic side but don't know where to start? Paint Night is the perfect event to get together with friends and family to relax, unwind, and enjoy time painting together while sipping a glass of wine. Whether you consider yourself an artist or have never painted before, an instructor will be there to guide you and at the end of the night, you'll go home with your own unique masterpiece. Wine, drinks, finger food and all the necessary materials for painting will be included.

Contact: Visit www.grado-artstudio.com for more info and ticket price

APRIL 17-19

What: Saigon Belly Dance Festival

Where: Saigon Belly Dance (96 Duong So 2, Cu Xa Do Thanh 4, D3)

About: Continuing on the success of last year's festival, this year's event will be bigger with international dancing stars in attendance: Alex DeLora from the Ukraine, Brancy Nekvapil from Malaysia and Klára Daila Jansiková. Workshops will be held throughout the month with performance night on April 19.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "Saigon Belly Dance" for more info

APRIL 18

What: Hanoi Vertical Run

Where: Landmark 72 (E6, Pham Hung, Tu Liem, Hanoi); 3pm; Online: USD20 for the Fun Climb, USD25 for the Challenge; Onsite: VND420,000 for the Fun Climb, VND530,000 for the Challenge

About: The third Hanoi Vertical Run will take place at Vietnam's tallest skyscraper. To cross the finish line of this stair-climbing race, runners will have to ascend 1,914 steps, equivalent to a 350-meter climb. The run has two race categories: The Challenge: 72 floors – open to anyone over 16 years old and The Fun Climb: 38 floors – open to anyone over 12 years old.

Contact: Visit www.runhanoi.com for more info



APRIL 18

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What: EIS Open Day 2015

Where: European International School (730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2); 8:30am – 12pm

About: An opportunity for prospective parents and students to visit the school that includes a campus tour, meeting with staff and students, and to ask any questions you may have. There will also be a chance to engage in a number of activities that showcase the life, work and achievements of their students.

EIS is a Nobel Talent School and belongs to the Nobel Education Network. NEN makes a difference by connecting specialized schools and empowering them to provide world-class 21st century education across countries and cultures. The geographical distribution of Nobel Talent Schools is wide and reaches from Europe to the Middle East to Southeast Asia.

Contact: Visit www.europeaninternationalschoolhcmc.com for more info



APRIL 18-19

What: Ta Lai Trophy 2015

Where: Ta Lai Longhouse (Cat Tien National Park, Cat Tien); VND3.2 million per person

About: A three to eight hour wilderness adventure race that involves running, mountain biking, swimming and kayaking through the jungle as teams of two. Price includes accommodation, meals and transportation.

Contact: Visit www.tailai-adventure.vn for more info

APRIL 22, 23, 25

What: Gruesome Playground Injuries

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND300,00 in advance, VND350,000 at the door; 7:30pm

About: Dragonfly Theatre Co. and Saigon Sound System are proud to announce the premiere of *Gruesome Playground Injuries* by Pulitzer Prize finalist and playwright Rajiv Joseph. The show is directed by Peter O'Neill and will be performed in English by the Thailand-based professional English language theatre group Peel the Limelight. *Gruesome Playground Injuries* is a modern love story that begins at age eight on the playground and it reveals, over 30 years, the beautifully destructive nature of romance. Kayleen (played by Siree Riewpaiboon) is a troubled girl from a dysfunctional family. Doug (played by Jaime Zúñiga) is her accident-prone knight in shining armor. As they grow older and life gets in the way, will these two ever get together? Will they make it out alive and in love? Is love just another form of self-harm? All questions director Peter O'Neill wants the audience ponder on. The play is rated R and is not suitable for young children.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "dragonflyvietnam" for more info

APRIL 23

What: Network Girls – Breakfast

Where: 100% Alimentation Generale de qualite (3A Ton Duc Thang, D1); 7:30am - 9am

About: Network Girls is a monthly event at venues in Ho Chi Minh City that gives expats and local female working professionals in Saigon a channel to meet each other and exchange ideas on life in HCMC, employment and business. Members of Network Girls usually meet on the last Thursday of every month for breakfast (7:30am - 9am) or cocktails & canapés (6:30pm - 9pm).

Contact: To attend, please RSVP to Ms. Van Ly at networkgirlshcmc@gmail.com or find them on Facebook: "NetworkGirlsHCMC"



APR 24 - MAY 16

What: Bridget March: A Brush with Asia

Where: VinGallery (6 Le Van Mien, D2)

About: Bridget will be showing her recent watercolor paintings from around Vietnam and debut her new book, *A Summer in Sapa*, which is full of drawings and paintings from her time spent there. A range of canvas prints, postcards and guides will be on sale to help raise money for the education of underprivileged children near Sapa.

Contact: Visit www.bridgetmarch.co.uk for more info

MAY 12

What: San Art Laboratory Session 6

Where: Saigon Domaine (1057 Binh Quoi, Binh Thanh); 6pm

About: Session 6 looks forward to the final exhibition by three experimentalists: Orawan Arunrak (Bangkok), Tran Tuan (Hue), and Ta Minh Duc (Hanoi). Duc has discovered more than a story of domestication, and with his video-notes will tell a different anecdote. Tuan distills various experimentations into a juxtaposition of society and family. Arunrak continues her adventure to paint people's dream of ownership. Guided tours are available every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10:30am - 4:30pm during the exhibition period.

Contact: Email hello@san-art.org for more info



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

LES SAIGONAIS OPENS

April 11th will see the grand opening of Saigon's newest avant-garde art space/boutique/cafe called *Les Saigonais* (Floor 1, 77-79 Ly Tu Trong, D1; Facebook: Les Saigonais). The brainchild of Vietnamese designer Dieu Anh, Les Saigonais is a marriage of the quintessential trendy Saigon cafe with an exhibition space reserved not only for Dieu Anh's pioneering fashion collections but also for fellow artists and designers wanting to show off their creations in an art collaborative environment. Les Saigonais' décor and style is inspired by the charms of old Saigon through contemporary eyes. The café is decked out with cozy furniture, wide open windows and an airy balcony that invites guests to take their time to enjoy a cool drink, hang out with friends, work or even discuss business matters. For artists looking for exhibition space, Les Saigonais has its own dedicated exhibition area. Visit Les Saigonais on its grand opening day to be dazzled with Dieu Anh and Crazy Monkey's newest collections and enjoy a round of cocktails on the house.





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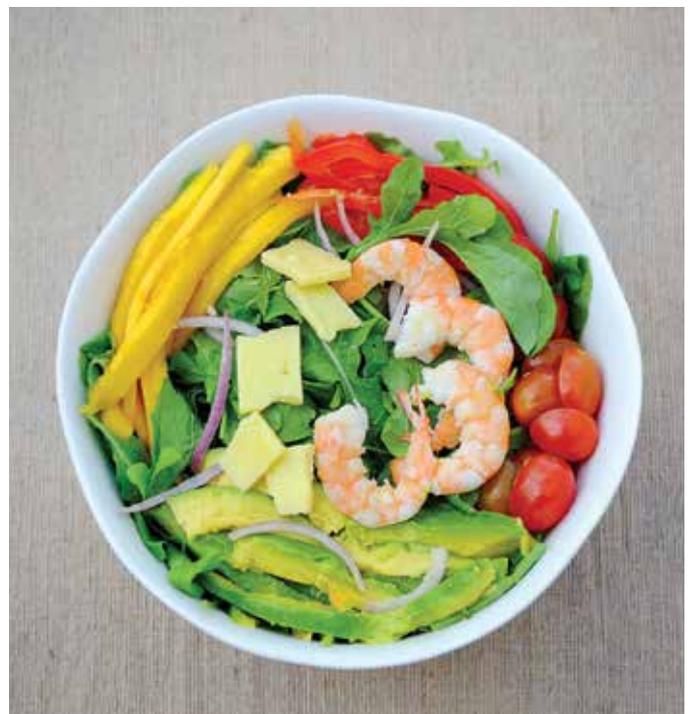
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- Alternative Rock Combo applies for Zone OOH! in A O Show.
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GREENS OPENS

Reports of chemically tainted food are appearing more frequently in the local media along with concerns of child obesity and the rise of diabetes, so many Vietnamese are seeking a healthy alternative. Enter GreenS (Facebook: *GreenS*) - a salad delivery service. They use the freshest ingredients in their salads, working closely with organic farms in Da Lat to source ingredients, to ensure quality and chemical free healthy meals. GreenS offers several salads options and sizes (medium and large) such as Spicy Beef, Mango Prawn, Greek and more.



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CARAVELLE PROMOTIONS

Get a delicious start to your Reunification and Labor Day on April 30th and May 1st at Nineteen Buffet Restaurant. The buffet will include Vietnamese delicacies and Asian and Continental favorites. From fresh oysters and seafood, to salads, soups, and steamed fish, live grilling stations and tempting desserts, there's no better way to celebrate. Dinner buffet priced at VND1,118,000++ per person.

A decadent, do-it-yourself chocolate fondue is coming to Café de l'Opera from April 13 - 19. Chocoholics will swoon for a melted lava fountain of 55 percent dark chocolate, presented with an array of irresistible bites for dipping, such as meringue sticks, strawberry sponge, fresh fruits and vanilla marshmallows. Each chocolate fondue is priced at VND168,000++ per person, served noon to 5pm.

For info, call 0906 900 523 or email eam-fb@caravellehotel.com



HOTEL EQUATORIAL PROMOTIONS

For King Hung, Victory Day and Labor Day holidays, Hotel Equatorial Ho Chi Minh City (www.hochiminhcity.equatorial.com) will host a buffet dinner party at Chit Chat restaurant on April 28, 30 and May 1 respectively. The buffet will feature chilli crabs, *kaki furai*, grilled lobsters and an international cheese board. Priced at VND840,000 ++ per person. While at Orientica seafood restaurant there will be an all-you-can-eat dim sum priced at VND398,000 ++ per person from 9am - 2:30pm.



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LE TERROIR OPENS

Veering from the typical French bistro trend, Eric opened Le Terroir (30 Thai Van Lung, D1; Facebook: *Le Terroir*) as a French country kitchen dining space that celebrates provincial French cooking while giving it a slight twist. Le Terroir (a French word meaning from the terrain, soil, land, ground, earth) serves dishes such as Bouchée à la Reine duo (VND105,000; savory chicken and seafood Vol-au-vent in a puffed pastry with a rich creamy sauce), Pan seared salmon (VND205,000; two large salmon fillet served with vegetables and creamy dill sauce) along with pastas, risotto and decadent desserts such as Japanese green tea pudding and chocolate fondant made with Valrhona Coeur de Guanaja. The wine list here is an oenophile's dream with over 200 labels in stock from Australia, California and Chile to Italy, Germany and Spain, along with everything in between. The restaurant is on two levels with a small terrace in the ground floor.



MAY PROMOTIONS

At May Restaurant & Bar (19-21 Dong Khoi, D1) make mornings easier. When you buy breakfast from 8am to 11am, receive a free cup of Ronnefeldt tea or Lavazza coffee. Set lunches are priced at VND199,000 and include three courses, a cup of Ronnefeldt tea or Lavazza coffee (Monday - Friday) from 11am to 2pm. Happy Hour buy one get one free cocktail, wine or beer from 3pm - 7pm. Every Sunday is family day at May - kids get a free meal from the kids menu.



KING PRAWN PROMOTION AT SHANG PALACE

This month delight in plump king prawns expertly prepared by talented chefs at Shang Palace (1st Floor - Norfolk Mansion, 17-19-21 Ly Tu Trong, D1; www.shangpalace.com.vn). Menu highlights include: Fried king prawn & goose liver served with black pepper sauce, Stewed king prawn with vermicelli & dried shrimp paste in a casserole, and Sautéed king prawn with spicy sauce. With professionally trained staff that speak Chinese, English and Vietnamese, fascinating food and a warm and comfortable atmosphere, Shang Palace is a great restaurant for those who love Hong Kong and Cantonese cuisine.



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INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG PROMOTIONS

Gather friends and family together to celebrate the Easter holiday (April 5) at Cookbook Cafe. The buffet dinner highlights a hot carving station with traditional lamb and roasted ham as its centerpieces, along with mud crabs, jumbo tiger prawns, an array of desserts, and free flow of beer and soft drinks. And as a special surprise from the Easter Bunny, children will receive chocolate gifts at the end of the evening. Easter dinner priced from VND699,000++ for adults and VND349,000++ for children. Advance bookings for four will receive a complimentary bottle of sparkling wine. The hotel's Specials of the Day are exclusive recipes that combine Nha Trang's freshest local ingredients with Executive Chef Dennis Barton's culinary talents. Taking inspiration from some of Vietnam's famous dishes and complex palate, the rotating daily menu will keep diners excited and intrigued. From 6:00pm until 10:00pm at Cookbook Café, every day except Thursdays and Saturdays throughout April.



EASTIN GRAND HOTEL SAIGON OPENS

The second flagship property, after the Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn Bangkok, is a 10-minute drive from Tan Son Nhat International Airport and 15 minutes from the city center. The hotel consists of 268 deluxe rooms and suites equipped with modern amenities. The hotel also provides large conference rooms with state-of-the-art facilities and dining options including Café Saigon, Lotus Court Chinese restaurant, Iki Japanese restaurant and Cay Da Café Bakery. Guests staying in the Executive Club rooms and suites are entitled to additional benefits. Other facilities include a swimming pool and a fully equipped gym.

Eastin Grand (253 Nguyen Van Troi, Phu Nhuan) is offering special launch rates to celebrate their grand opening. Rates start from USD90++ per room per night plus free Wi-Fi and other benefits. The offer is valid from now until June 30, 2015. Book online at www.eastingrandsaigon.com or call 2838 449 ext. 222.

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FRENCH CUISINE AT CORSO

From April 3 - 12, Corso Steakhouse & Bar (Ground Floor - Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, D1) welcomes guest chef Jeremy. Jeremy is also the chef and owner of the popular French restaurant Vis-à-vis - recognized for its excellent catering service for significant French conventions in Singapore, and has consistently been nominated for the Tattler Awards' 100 best restaurants since 1993. During his visit, Chef Jeremy presents his favorite selection of French delicacies, starting with Pan-fried *foie gras* with wasabi *ganache*, Baked *matcha* cake, lychees and rhubarb sauce, Apple and celery soup layered with *carpaccio* of scallops and prawn roe; and mains such as Roasted rack of lamb crusted with Provençal herbs in red wine and thyme sauce and Chocolate brownies topped with dark chocolate mousse and mango *ganache* dessert for an unforgettable dining experience. For more info, visit www.norfolkhotel.com.vn

ESCAPE & SAVE

Head to Danang for the International Fireworks Festival in April and take advantage of Pullman Danang Beach Resort's (Vo Nguyen Giap Street, Khue My Ward, Ngu Hanh Son, Danang) Escape & Save promotion that offers a 50 percent discount on your second night with accommodation for a minimum stay of two consecutive nights, with a breakfast buffet served daily in the restaurant and late check-out. Starting from VND3,500,00 nett/room/night. This offer does not apply to groups and cannot be used with other promotions. No changes or cancellation possible after making the reservation. Full amount of stay is payable in advance at booking time. For bookings, email info@pullman-danang.com or call (0) 511 395 8888.



SUNDAY BRUNCH ON THE RIVER

Sunday Brunch has a new venue in Saigon – The Historic Lady Hau Cruise is launching a special Sunday Brunch Grill. Join them on board and enjoy views of the Saigon skyline from the peace waters of the Saigon River while indulging in a special Sunday grill menu that includes lobster, steak, jumbo prawns and free flow drinks.

Relax on board from 11.30am before the cruise departs at noon for a two-and-a-half hour cruise up the Saigon River towards District 2. Sunday Brunch is VND1.2 million per person including free flow wine, beer, Prosecco and soft drinks.

Lady Hau departs from Lan Anh Village Pier, for reservations and details call Hanh at 08 6294 7048 or email sales.ladyhau.sgn@emmhoteles.com.

LIVE LIFE TO
DISCOVER



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April 1 – June 30, 2015

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Troi Oi

The country in numbers

6

day holiday in April has been approved by the labor ministry. To celebrate what will be Hung Kings' Temple Festival, which pays tribute to the original founders of the nation, and Liberation Day on April 30 that marked the end of the American War in 1975, and Labor Day, state employees will have six days off from April 28 to May 3. They will work on Saturday, April 25, in lieu. The labor ministry had submitted two options for this holiday – six or eight days – to the government for consideration, saying it was in favor of an eight-day break but the government eventually opted for the six-day option as state employees just received nine days off for Tet.

6,200

people were hospitalized for fighting during the Tet holiday. Dong Nai, Dong Thap, An Giang and Kien Giang Provinces in the southern region are among the localities that had the most people hospitalized during the period. This figure was much higher than that during previous Tet holidays.

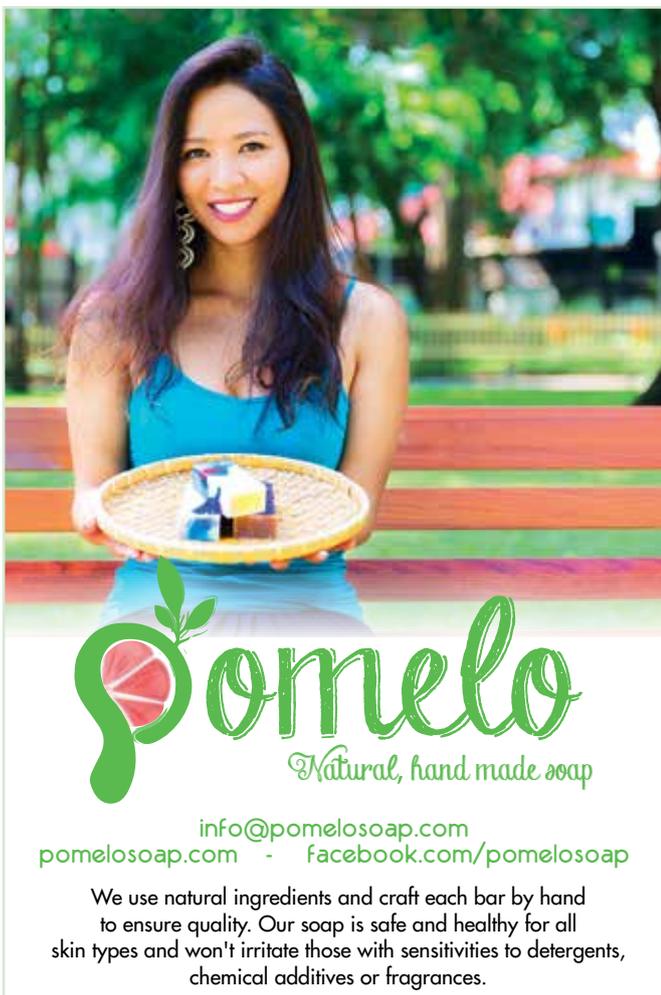
**VND1.4
MILLION**

in government financial assistance will be granted for the cremation of a deceased if they fall into one of the following categories: had been listed in a household registration book in the city, a retired civil servant, or was a member of a poor household. The support will increase to VND2.5 million if the cremated deceased was a "heroic Vietnamese mother, People's Armed Forces hero, a member of the Communist Party of Vietnam with seniority of 40 years or more, revolutionary veteran, war invalid, or sick soldier who lost 81 percent of their working capability and is a member of a poor household." Cremations of dead children under six years old will be performed free of charge if the deceased was listed in a household registration book in the city.

77%

of Vietnamese drivers don't know how to save fuel, according to the Shell Fuel Efficiency Fact or Fiction Report. The report was commissioned by US-based oil company

Shell and was conducted by an independent research firm. It used an online questionnaire with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Vietnamese drivers aged 18 to 40. In the study, 64 percent of the respondents say they feel anxious about trying to decide how best to save fuel, leading many to believe in fuel saving myths. The research shows that 85 percent warm up their engine before setting off to make them more fuel efficient, while 41 percent think filling up at night does the same trick. Furthermore, 97 percent even practice driving slowly all the time to help them save fuel. And finally, 83 percent keep their engine running to avoid frequent restarts. The results also reveal that the confusion on the road is in stark contrast to what goes on inside the homes: 92 percent of the participants say they frequently turn off the lights to save energy when leaving the house, but only half check their tires to make sure they are properly inflated at the correct pressure. Drivers are also unable to distinguish between different types of lubricants, with seven in 10 (71 percent) not knowing the difference between a mineral and synthetic engine oil/lubricant.



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reward will be given to anyone (locals and foreigners) with tips leading to either an arrest or fine of perpetrators found littering, panhandling, harassing tourists, and unauthorized advertising in public places in Central Vietnam. Doan Ngoc Son, Deputy Chair of the Hai Chau District People's Committee, said that the local People's Committee is poised to form a rapid action team that will operate all day long and set up a hotline to receive such information.

8,000

workers at Tinh Loi 2 Sewing Ltd. Co. in Hai Duong Province gave their Tet gifts - cooking oil and fish sauce - back to their

employer. According to the workers, after receiving the items, they found that the lids from the cooking oil were not wrapped with plastic seals and the fish sauce didn't smell "normal."

Pham Dinh Hoa, a representative of the company, told *Tuoi Tre* newspaper that the company has certificates ensuring product quality and food safety. "We tried to explain but the workers didn't listen to us." He said the company worked with the seller on the seals of the cooking oil bottles. "They said that this kind of product was designed that way and confirmed it's not fake," Hoa added. "They also agreed to recall the product and refund us if the workers do not like it." Each gift is worth VND120,000 and Tinh Loi 2 Sewing Ltd. Co will give money to those who refuse to keep the gifts.

USD450 MILLION

has been allocated to clean the Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe canal. The cleanup will focus on restoring and protecting the ecosystem of the Saigon River and the lower course of the Dong Nai River in addition to upgrading the urban area. A wastewater treatment plant with the capacity of 480,000 cubic meters per day and an eight kilometer sewer system to collect wastewater will also be built under this project. Households that do not have the financial capacity to build sewers from their houses to public sewers will receive financial support from the government. With a waste treatment plant to be built, all the wastewater in the Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe basin and some wards in District 2 will be cleaned before entering the Saigon River.

1ST

10 applications have been accepted under Vietnam's new regulation on surrogacy. The new regulation is part of the revised Law on Marriage and Family allowing people to act or have others act as surrogate mothers for humanitarian purposes on a voluntary basis after satisfying certain requirements. The three major clinics assigned by the ministry to handle surrogacy cases are the National Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Hanoi, the Hue Central Hospital, and Tu Du Obstetrics Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. Under the new regulation, surrogacy is allowed when the woman who has found another woman to act as a surrogate mother has no uterus, has a deformed uterus that is unable to bear a fetus, or has had her uterus cut out. Surrogacy is also allowed when a woman suffers health problems that can endanger her life and the fetus if she gets pregnant, or when a woman has undergone repeated miscarriages or has repeatedly failed to get pregnant despite the support of reproductive assistance techniques.

USD350 MILLION

airport to be built in Quang Ninh Province, home to Ha Long Bay. The 288.38-hectare airport will be able to serve 2 million passengers a year, with a runway capable of receiving

wide-body jetliners such as the Boeing B777 or those of similar size. Construction is expected to be completed in two years, but the investors will need as long as 45 years to recoup their investment.

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Technomad

Remote working to fuel your travels

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

IT ALL STARTED on September 28, 1983 when 30-year-old freelance writer/consultant Steven Roberts got on his computerized 8-foot long recumbent bicycle that would eventually see him riding 17,000 miles around the US while working as if from an office. The term “technomad” was born.

Armed with a Radio Shack Model 100 laptop, a CompuServe account, solar panels and assorted camping gear (all weighing in at 135 lbs), Roberts explained his mission: “The whole trip offers an opportunity to test the viability of the information society. I want to see if I can maintain a heavily interactive, information-oriented professional practice involving a lot of clients, with an absolute minimum amount of paper — and complete freedom from the confines of an office. I’ll exist in a totally asynchronous fashion.”

While technology has come a long way in the last 30 years making the “electronic cottage” Roberts talked about increasingly more comfortable (Roberts typed in binary with four buttons on his handlebar keyboard and needed pay phones to download files), the motivation to free one’s self from a physical desk remains the same. “My reality had become one of performing decreasingly interesting tasks for the sole purpose of paying bills, supporting a lifestyle I didn’t like in a house I didn’t like in a city I didn’t like. I had forgotten how to play. Could it still be possible to construct a lifestyle entirely of passions, or was losing the spark a sadly inevitable part of growing up?” wondered Roberts.

One afternoon, Roberts made a list of all his passions — writing, adventure, computer

design, cycling, romance, learning and networking — and set about trying to find a way to combine them all into a life of full-time travel.

In the decades that followed, technological advances such as Wi-Fi, Skype, Elance (an online service for finding and hiring freelancers from around the world), PayPal (a speedy way to pay anyone anywhere with a bank account and an email address), and the decrease in laptop prices as well as changing attitudes towards working from home, made it easier for people to become location independent.

In fact, statistics from 2012 show that while 3.3 million Americans (not including the self-employed or unpaid volunteers) considered home their primary place of work, representing a growth of nearly 80 percent



IMAGE BY MICROSHIP

Steven Roberts

from 2005, a much larger number (over 64 million US workers or about 50 percent of the working population) *could* work from home at least part of the time. FlexJobs, an online job listings board for telecommuting, flexible schedule and freelance jobs, saw a 26 percent increase in the number of jobs posted on its site over the last year, with many large companies like Amazon, Kaplan and Nationwide Insurance joining the movement. Global Workplace Analytics estimates that if those with compatible jobs and a desire to work from home did so just half the time, telecommuters would save between USD2,000 and USD7,000 a year and there would be a reduction in greenhouse gas roughly equivalent to taking the entire New York State workforce permanently off the road. It also makes good business sense for employers to allow for remote work, with the typical business saving up to USD11,000 per telecommuter per year.

Many of those telecommuters are now asking themselves: If I can work from home, why can't I work from anywhere? A beach in Brazil? A café in Saigon? In fact, many of us here in Vietnam are already on the path to blending work and travel – enjoying the reduced commute, putting ourselves in a position to learn about a new culture, and in many cases, working less than if we were living in our home countries.

But if one wanted to live the life that Roberts dreamed about, where “home, quite literally, became an abstract electronic

concept” and where “from a business standpoint, it no longer mattered where we were,” what would that entail?

I tapped Drew Gilbert, creator of a new documentary entitled *The Wireless Generation* (available for digital download June 2015 from www.thewirelessgeneration.com) to help answer that question. Named National Geographic Travelers of the Year (2014), Drew is an animator with a degree in Animation/Media Arts and Christine is a writer and photographer. Now with their two children, they've been working online and traveling the world together since 2008. Their film follows 18 individuals across five continents who have parlayed working from home into world travel.

A common theme in the film is one of exchanging material things for memories and experiences as well as getting out of the typical work/home/TV routine. At what point did that happen for you?

It was somewhere around the point Christine was ready to quit her job despite her making more than I was at the time that we both realized we could give it a try. I was making a modest (by US standards) salary, and this pursuit for money hadn't made Christine any happier. She was miserable and something had to change. I was the one who told Christine to quit her job, and really, even if her blog (www.almostfearless.com) hadn't taken off the way it had, it would have

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE BECOMING A REMOTE WORKER

ARE YOU ORGANIZED?

It's important to remember that organizational skills will be the cornerstone of any remote working endeavor. If the role you currently perform contains many moving parts —meetings, people, ideas, documents — there will be an intense need to ensure that everything is where it needs to be when it needs to be addressed. If somebody else is responsible for your organizational skills, then that's a big problem for remote working.

HOW WILL YOU ESTABLISH PROCESS?

As a remote worker, you will be responsible for creating and implementing a process that meets the needs of your colleagues and your individual responsibilities so it's important that you set a process that will help you work efficiently.

WHAT SORT OF ENVIRONMENT DO YOU THRIVE IN?

Remote working can be lonely. There are probably social parts of your working day that you enjoyed—stopping by a friend's desk for a quick break and chat, or taking part in team drinks and events. If you think the idea of being by yourself all day is daunting, then you might want to reconsider working remotely full time.

Source: Forbes.com



The Gilbert family



been worthwhile for the memories we've made along the way, and the fact that we appreciate and enjoy our lives in a more meaningful way than we did when she was climbing the corporate ladder.

Working remotely seems to entail that couples/families are always together. How do you not drive each other crazy without a work buffer?

Oh, we just drive each other crazy. There's almost no way around it. I try to push Christine out the door to go do her work in a café or somewhere outside of the house, but she likes working in the house or wherever we are staying. I think the only thing that makes driving each other crazy okay is the fact that we are best friends, so at some point we just laugh about how crazy it is to be working with four of us in an occasionally small space. We're a team, that's the decision we made.

One of the families mentioned the struggle their children had with adjusting to life on the road – the unwanted attention that a Western blond child gets in Asia, the photo-taking by complete strangers. How have your own children coped?

I don't know if all kids are pretty flexible about this sort of life, but my limited experience tells me that Cole and Stella are really resilient and flexible because it's all they have known. I've seen other children struggle a little more who came from a more normal family routine, living in a house with people they know around all the time, then put into a situation that is new and scary for them at first. Ultimately I think that all children are a lot more adaptable than adults are in most things, and those scared kids won't stay that way for very long if the parent isn't also scared. In our case, we have two immensely flexible kids who we try very hard to make sure to keep fed, otherwise they become inflexible quickly.



A lot of the people interviewed had businesses that were almost road-ready: a psychology professor teaching online from Thailand, a day trader living in Colombia and website builders traveling across Asia. What advice do you have for those of us who aren't so lucky?

Christine and I are both very aware that this life choice isn't an approach everyone has an opportunity to take. There simply aren't jobs that give people the freedom to pick up and run off with. I also think that is okay. I try



FROM TOP: Cherie and Chris, software developers; Dave, a blogger based in Medellín, Colombia; Jack, a psychology professor teaching online from Thailand, and family

very hard to make it clear in talks after the screenings that this isn't "the best" way to live one's life. There are many right ways to live, many right ways to find happiness and contentment in life, and if a person is happy not traveling the world, I actually think that's great. "Traveling the world" as a way to appreciate and enjoy your life is a pretty labor-intensive way to find happiness. We did want to show people who might not be aware of it, that for some fortunate enough to potentially do it, that this could be an option worth exploring.

It takes a certain type of person to be able to work productively while sitting in a café or on a beach somewhere. What adjustments did you need to make to be successful at working from anywhere?

I started working remotely in 2006 and found that while it was a challenge to be self-motivated at first, eventually there are other issues where you don't have appropriate boundaries on when the workday begins and ends. I would be extremely productive because I would often roll out of bed and start work immediately, not bothering to shower or brush my teeth or do any of the normal morning stuff. Workdays would end when Christine would threaten to throw the computer away if I didn't stop working. [Laughs]. That's not actually true, but it was very hard to learn to stop at the end of a workday...

With digital nomads, income tends to be feast or famine. How do you budget for that?

I think at this point we're always trying to budget for famine. It took us a while to learn to do that, but we know we want to be able to have certain tech when it comes out, which eats into a budget very quickly. To be able to do that, you can't just spend money at the times when it's coming in strong, instead, we've become as thrifty as possible at all times so we can splurge on occasion.

For how long do you envision this nomadic lifestyle for you and your family?

The idea is to slow down sooner than later. Cole is nearing school age and is a sociable kid who wants friends, and we want to give him that. Barcelona is the current plan to settle down in, but I am currently touring the film around the US and am starting to feel like maybe we can squeeze in a little more travel between now and whenever we end up back in Spain. ■

While not yet as popular as Thailand or Indonesia, Vietnam is slowly beginning to gain a reputation for being a safe, remote work-friendly hub with good year-round temperatures, decent internet speed and relatively low local costs. Jodi Ettenberg, a freelance writer and website/social feed auditor, has made Saigon her base for three years in a row. Being a food writer, "the history of the foods in the country were what

brought me back, but the infrastructure - good internet, ease to get around, proximity to other countries I needed to visit - made it a great place to stay and write after I ate," she says. Stephenie Harrison, who together with her husband, provide graphic design, web development and online marketing services, agrees. "We were able to live quite comfortably, two people, for about USD30/day. This afforded us a private room, a motorcycle, a SIM card (with unlimited data), and eating out all of our meals. We even went to the dentist while in Vietnam, and had x-rays done for less than USD1! For self-employed individuals who are just launching their business/career and are operating on a tight budget, Vietnam offers an incredibly high standard of living for next to nothing."

Jodi lists time zone differences and occasional internet outages as drawbacks whereas Stephenie recalled about her time working remotely in Vietnam: "We would interact with locals on a daily basis (using limited Vietnamese in combination with English) and met up with some travelers passing through, but for the most part we were alone. We would have loved to have made some more local friends, but opportunities for this seemed few and far between, and we also found Vietnamese [language] quite difficult. However, in combination with friendly locals, an incredible food scene, and the possibility of obtaining a 90-day tourist visa, all of these things made basing ourselves in Vietnam to work a no-brainer!" ■



NomadPlus



NomadKey

GEAR REVIEW

THE NOMADPLUS AND THE NOMADKEY

Being a digital nomad entails staying connected whether by phone, email or internet.

While uncoupling from our desks, we're increasingly dependent on our devices which in turn are dependent on electricity. As anyone with an iPhone has experienced, come late afternoon, an angry red battery light usually signals a premature end to the digital day. Enter the NomadPlus (USD39.95), an elegant, space-saving device that adds an 1800mAh battery to your regular Apple charger for that extra boost when you need it. This nifty solution means your backup battery is literally always charged and ready to go which is important for me, as my other spare battery never seems to be charged when I need it.

The NomadPlus uses pass-through technology, meaning it charges your device first before switching to its own backup battery, all in a unit that is tiny — 53 mm x 53 mm x 31 mm, weighing just 60 grams. The small size means that while it has the juice to fully recharge an iPhone 5, it'll only recharge 50-70

percent of an iPhone 6. In my testing, it added about 20-25 percent to a more power-hungry iPad mini. But for the size and portability, it's a terrific product to just throw in your bag in the morning to make sure your device has enough power to last the day.

Nomad bills itself as a "modern and minimalist lifestyle brand," and that shows in its NomadKey. A very short, key-shaped smartphone cable that fits onto your keychain, the NomadKey (USD24.95) means that as long as you have your keys, you'll never need to remember to bring a cord. Plug one end of the NomadKey into a USB port and the lightning end into your mobile device for charging and syncing. The whole device is only 8 cm long which makes it ideal for charging via your laptop.

The NomadPlus and the NomadKey are available from www.hellonomad.com



The Miniature Artist

Creating art on a small scale

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

SIX MONTHS AGO an online game designer with a steady, high-paying job took a huge gamble and went offline. “I didn’t even dare tell my parents or my in-laws. My friends all told me I was making a mistake and that I was being crazy,” says Vo Thi Anh Nguyet, founder of Clayyot (www.clayyot.com), a studio that handcrafts miniature figurines. “My boss even told me, ‘Maybe you are having an artistic whim. Just take a month off and see how it goes. If it doesn’t work out, you can come back here.’ Until I created the first piece, I had never once thought I would earn a living making clay figurines.”

But before becoming a sculptor Nguyet was a digital graphic designer at VinaGame for seven years – a job with a high salary, staff benefits packages and a great boss - which made her decision to quit a shock to her parents and friends. “Only my husband believed in me,” says Nguyet. “I followed my artistic instinct. Stability is great but it can also kill an artist’s creativity. I’m lucky that success came so quickly and smoothly, but even if it had been harder, I think I still would have taken the jump.”

Luckily for Nguyet, she landed on solid ground. Within the first two months of

opening, she had more custom orders than she could handle. By the fourth month, the studio was receiving proposals from independent art dealers wanting to exhibit her work. Soon after, international artists like Andrew Hickenbottom (he mailed her a signed painting of his work after she sent him a photo of a figurine she made based on his art) and local celebrities were fans on her Facebook page. Now Nguyet is contemplating expansion to meet demands.

How did it all begin? “I saw some photos on the internet and read some instructions on how to make one,” she shares. “I had received training in basic sculpting techniques back at art school so I decided to make a portrait of my boss and give it to him as a present.” Though it was her first attempt, the figurine’s striking resemblance to her boss was the result of Nguyet’s job as a 3D graphic designer. He liked the figurine so much that he placed it on his desk where it became a conversation starter and also the start of many custom orders from her colleagues.

Nguyet’s pieces are hand-sculpted from polymer clay, baked then painted. A single piece can take from a week to a month to finish, depending on size and intricacy, and

range from VND800,000 upwards. Since she has taken on an intern to work the bodies, production time has decreased to half, but the effort and attention required remains the same, especially to faces.

She has big plans for the future. “We have a small work table here for two and maybe one more, but I’m thinking of a big workshop or artist studio in the near future, with a team of young artists all working under the banner of Clayyot, in collaboration with a number of art dealers.”

“If you want to make it big as an artist, you can’t think small. I want to make money. I want to be rich... and big,” she adds. “Many would think such ambition unseemly for an artist, but I have never wanted to be a poor artist who lives on nothing but passion. As an artist, I aspire to create great art and want to see great art in all forms and disciplines. But art of that level is expensive. It’s expensive because it requires enormous investment and dedication and commitment. A poor Vietnamese artist would never be able to afford a ticket to the Louvre to see the Mona Lisa. To be able to reach great art and see great art, I need to get on that same level. I, and my art, need to be just as great.” ■



Life's a Beach

Ancient charm marries modern living

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **BOUTIQUE HOI AN RESORT**



JUST FIVE MINUTES FROM THE ANCIENT TOWN OF HOI AN, ISOLATED ON A STRIP NEAR CUA DAI, LIES THE BEAUTIFUL BOUTIQUE HOI AN RESORT.

STEP BEYOND THE main entrance and you will be greeted with a calm wide open space. At the center of the garden is a large swimming pool that can rival an Olympic pool. Beyond the garden is a beautiful white sandy beach that stretches out toward the majestic East Sea with its blue clear waters, inviting you for an afternoon dip. Guests can take a swim in the sea, or enjoy the breeze under the palm trees that provide shade on the soft beach chairs dotted in the area. It also a great place to read while sipping a cold refreshing cocktail, or two.

The architecture of the resort is based on a traditional colonial style of the early 1960s, depicting a simple but luxurious design. The red tiled roofs complement the white façade of the main buildings offering a picturesque reflection on the surface of the center swimming pool. The designs also incorporate natural

sunlight into the building to emphasize the ambiance of the colonial theme.

As the name implies, Boutique Hoi An Resort has only 82 rooms and villas with beachfront facing views along with modern amenities. The resort is small enough that they can provide special attention to guests to make their stay as enjoyable and memorable as possible. Guests staying in any of their spacious Beach Villas, which are situated on the beach, can wake up every morning with a spectacular sight of the sun rising from the sea. The Boutique Deluxe rooms are favorites for honeymooners and couples who want their stay to be as romantic and memorable, each have their own private terraces.

Boutique Hoi An Resort includes a few exquisite restaurant and bars. The main restaurant, Le Café, serves a buffet style breakfast and lunch while dinner

is a la carte with various dining menus featuring the fresh ingredients and local catches of the day and Hoi An specialties.

The Le Salon lobby lounge is the place to be with your friends or family to enjoy your favorite cocktails in a colonial atmosphere. Le Salon also boasts a great collection of wines from around the globe.

Right next to the large swimming pool is Le Spa where guests can be pampered after a hard day out in the sun. After that, guests can visit the pool bar, La Piscine, right next to the pool to enjoy an ice-cold beer or cocktail with delicious finger food.

At Boutique Hoi An Resort one can relax and enjoy calmness and tranquility, soothing the mind as intended by nature, yet retaining the service of modern day amenities. Visit www.boutiquehoianresort.com, call (0510) 3939 111 or email info@boutiquehoianresort.com for more info. ■



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The Ending Matters

Reviewing Atul Gawande's bestselling book *Being Mortal*

TEXT AND IMAGE BY **JAMES PHAM**

RETIRING AT 65 from her international tour operator business, Dyanne Kruger sold her belongings, took her pension and moved to Vietnam where she spent her days geocaching and teaching English on the side for extra travel money.

"I absolutely *loved* the two years that I lived in Vietnam," she recalls from her new home in Ecuador. "I had nothing but good experiences there." She found the dental services top notch, "even better than in Seattle," but ultimately, it was the language barrier that prevented her from settling down permanently here. "After two years, it was clear that I would never be able to learn Vietnamese well enough to be even halfway proficient. Once you realize that you will be an expat for the remainder of your life, being



IMAGE BY REHAHN PHOTOGRAPHY

“It’s been an experiment on social engineering, putting our fates in the hands of people valued more for their technical prowess than for their understanding of human needs”

book, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (Metropolitan Books, 2014), Dr. Atul Gawande beautifully addresses the modern experience of mortality. A practicing surgeon at Brigham and Women’s Hospital (Boston, US), Gawande crisscrosses the country, merging challenging concepts and thorough research with stories of family members, patients and colleagues into an ultimately readable, riveting book about the imbalance brought about by the advances in medicine that allow for a good death countered by its limitations in enabling a good life, especially at the very end.

“Modern scientific capability has profoundly altered the course of human life,” he writes. “People live longer and better than at any other time in history. But scientific advances have turned the processes of aging and dying into medical experiences, matters to be managed by health care professionals. And we in the medical world have proved alarmingly unprepared for it.” Gawande opens by contrasting the experiences of two family members. His grandfather lived an active life in India until the age of almost 110, cared for in a multigenerational home allowing him to continue about with his daily activities until the very end. While he wasn’t able to do many of the “Independent Activities of Daily Living” — defined as being able to shop for yourself, manage medications, handle finances, make phone calls, etc. — no family crisis meeting was required to decide what to do with him. In contrast, once Gawande’s wife’s grandmother was unable to care for herself, her family put her into a retirement home, a more common solution in the West where the old and frail are often consigned to ‘live alone, isolated in a series of anonymous facilities, their last conscious moments spent with nurses and doctors who barely know their names.’

In *Being Mortal*, Gawande takes the reader through innovative ways of dealing with the aged, from the stages of needing only a limited amount of help (like the community cooperatives which organize affordable services like plumbing and laundry in an effort to help the elderly stay in their homes) to the final moments when people need to decide how they want their story to end.

While the overall topic is grim (Gawande describes the physical breakdown of our bodies along the lines of hair running out of pigment cells, skin cells bloated with waste, causing age spots and the lenses in our eyes becoming less elastic leading to farsightedness), the book contains many uplifting stories, like the nursing home

medical director who decided to put green plants in every room, tear up the lawn and create a vegetable and flower garden, and bring in two dogs, four cats and 100 parakeets. The result was the residents began to come to life as they joined in the work of taking care of the animals. Prescriptions fell to half the average and deaths fell 15 percent. “I believe that the difference in death rates can be traced to the fundamental human need for a reason to live,” said the medical director.

While innovative places like the Chase Memorial Nursing Home are inspiring, the problem with most nursing homes is that they aren’t truly made for us, with their bleak spaces, tiny rooms shared between strangers and regimented activities, valuing safety and treatment above home and care.



At the age of 80, Thuy found herself in an untenable situation. Never married and with no children, diabetes and high blood pressure along with obesity made living alone no longer an option. Her family found a private nursing home in Phu Dong, 20 km outside of Hanoi, making weekly visits still possible. Thuy’s new life represented a significant adjustment. She traded in the space of her comfortable home where she kept stacks upon stacks of clipped recipes from newspapers and magazines for a small but airy room with space only for a mini-fridge, a dresser and a microwave. She was able to hire a round-the-clock caretaker to supplement the center’s nursing staff who came in a few times a day to administer medication and give her a bath. Set in the countryside, the rooms were built around a courtyard where Thuy could be taken in her wheelchair, and a communal dining room provided opportunities to socialize. While she enjoyed singular moments — visits from overseas relatives or simply a tasty snack brought in by a visitor to contrast the bland meals at the home — no one ever asked her whether she still enjoyed the things that make life worth living, the “self-actualization” pinnacle of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the feeling of self-fulfillment through the pursuit of moral ideals and creativity for their own sake.

Gawande cites studies that find that as people grow older, they focus more on “being” than “doing” and on the present more than the future. He theorizes whether this behavior change is forced upon the elderly rather than actually reflecting what they want. Does the world stop for them simply because

able to speak the local language is a must. For me, that was a deal breaker.”

For those with good health, age is only a number. For her birthday this year, Dyanne booked herself a trip to Macchu Pichu. She also writes a blog, *TravelnLass*, aimed at encouraging older ones to get out and see the world. However, when I asked her if she had given any thought to what she would do once she wouldn’t be able to travel anymore, she retorted: “Let me turn that question back on you. Have YOU given any thought to what you’ll do when you aren’t as mobile as now? Health issues/accidents can strike at any time/age, and I fully expect to be going strong for many years to come.”

Whether 17 or 70, one’s own mortality is an unpleasant issue to face. In his bestselling

they are old? To what extent is assisted living actually assisting someone *with* living, instead of becoming a series of tasks geared towards control — dressing someone like you would a rag doll, relegating someone to a wheelchair because they may fall if they try to walk on their own? “For more than half a century now, we have treated the trials of sickness, aging, and mortality as medical concerns. It’s been an experiment on social engineering, putting our fates in the hands of people valued more for their technical prowess than for their understanding of human needs,” writes Gawande.

Instead of simply prolonging life, Gawande laments medicine’s failure in addressing the concerns of the seriously ill: avoiding suffering, strengthening relationships with family and friends, being mentally aware, not being a burden on others, and achieving a sense that their life is complete.



After decades of living in the US, Huynh, 74, made a decision to move her 80-year-old husband back to Vietnam when she found it increasingly difficult to look after her husband’s mental and physical maladies

on her own. Researching the bleak state of nursing homes around Saigon, both public and private, and after a particularly shocking stay at a local private hospital for her husband, she decided to create her own version of assisted living. The living room of their rented house has been converted into a bedroom for her husband and two caregivers take turns helping him go for walks, read the paper and perform personal hygiene tasks. After a recent mini-stroke, she opted to have a doctor come every day for three weeks to administer medication instead of taking him in to the hospital. “We’ve traded in the advanced medical care available in the US for a lower standard of care here, but a better quality of living for my husband and for myself,” she says.

The later chapters of *Being Mortal* discuss changing attitudes towards palliative care, the act of relieving pain without dealing with the underlying cause. Standard medical care often sacrifices the quality of life now — through surgery, chemotherapy and intensive care — in hopes of gaining time later. Hospice care, on the other hand, aims to give people the fullest possible life now.

Instead of discussions focused on facts and options, palliative specialists try to determine

how much patients are willing to go through to have a shot at being alive and what level of being alive is tolerable. For one man, it was simply being able to eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on TV. For Gawande’s own father, also a doctor, it was the ability to write emails and to communicate with family while dealing with a spinal tumor.

Our lives are like stories, ones that we judge by the psychological Peak-End Rule, based on what we remember from peaks (both high and low) and the ending, rather than the total sum of every moment of the experience. That’s why an exciting three-hour football game can feel unsatisfying if it ends on a bad few minutes. “Our ultimate goal, after all, is not a good death but a good life to the very end,” writes Gawande. In an eloquent 282 pages, Gawande acknowledges that the medical profession has been wrong about what their role really is. It’s larger than just ensuring health and survival. It’s one of enabling well-being, not just when debility comes, but all along the way.

“In Situ” is our new feature putting reviews of bestsellers within the context of Vietnam. If you have a book you’d like to see reviewed, email us at: editorial@oivietnam.com ■



Huynh and Thai

Taking the Shot

To vaccinate your child or not



Dr. Jeremy Ostrander is an American family doctor, board-certified by the American Academy of Family Medicine. He grew up in the Pacific Northwest United States, and trained in Family Medicine in the state of Idaho. In 2012, he and his family moved to Ho Chi Minh City where he currently works at **Columbia Asia Saigon International Clinic** (www.columbiaasia.com/saigon; 3823 8888).

I've recently given birth to my son and now have to think about whether he should be administered the MMR vaccine. There is a movement in the US where parents are choosing not to vaccinate their children because they believe the vaccine causes autism. Now because of this, there have been measles outbreaks in California, Delaware and New Jersey. Where do you stand on this?



HILLARY CLINTON ONCE said: "The earth is round, the sky is blue, and immunization works." However you feel about Mrs. Clinton, her thoughts about immunization are right on.

Throughout history, the discovery of vaccination has stood out as one of the major achievements of modern medicine. Many diseases that routinely caused death or disability in the past were literally eliminated, mostly due to appropriate vaccination.

MMR stands for measles, mumps and rubella - three different viral diseases. It is a live attenuated vaccine. This means that it is composed of live virus, but the virus has been altered to prevent it from being infectious. It has been around for over 40 years, and over that time the incidence of measles eventually approached zero.

That, however, has changed.

In the late 1990s a doctor from England named Andrew Wakefield had been researching the MMR vaccine and its possible relation to autism, a childhood pervasive developmental disorder. That was a time when the diagnosis of autism had begun to increase, and distraught parents were searching for an answer as to why their child had developed it.

Dr. Wakefield published an infamous article, which was based on a series of only 12 patients, and concluded that autism was likely caused by the combination MMR vaccine.

His theory was quickly debunked, as no other researchers could validate or repeat its results. Furthermore, he had falsified data, and also there was a conflict

of interest. His results, and his theory on why the MMR vaccine caused autism, could have potentially led to the sale of the vaccine that *he* had been developing. Dr. Wakefield's paper was eventually retracted, and his license to practice medicine in the UK was revoked.

Since then, many research papers have been written investigating any connection between the two, and the conclusions are all the same: there is absolutely no connection. Despite the many times it has been disproven, the idea was already out there. People were hungry for an answer, and the vaccine seemed suspicious and a likely culprit. Thus, the rate of MMR vaccination decreased, and an already suspicious group of parents became more wary of doctors' advice.

Now we are seeing random outbreaks of measles throughout the country, and throughout the world. The answer to why this has happened is important to consider. In the early 1990s the diagnosis "autism spectrum disorder" was first introduced and made popular. Soon after, doctors began to use it and the incidence of the disorder naturally increased.

Over this same period of time the immunization schedule also expanded to include more immunizations. People naturally connected the two, and Wakefield's paper just added fuel to the fire. Mix in Jenny McCarthy, Jim Carey, a small army of anti-vaccine people, and throw it all onto the internet and we have our current problem.

Another coincidence is that the MMR vaccine and autism both 'occur' at around

the same age for a child. The first MMR is given at 12-15 months of age, and the first symptoms of autism are usually seen at 18 months. So it seems to fit in a cause-and-effect way. But this does not mean the two are in any way related. Consider this: children usually get their first teeth around six months and they start to walk around 12 months. That doesn't mean that the presence of teeth leads to the child's ability to walk!

Finally, it's a common misconception that the diseases we immunize for are harmless. Parents ask themselves, "If they are harmless, then why should I expose my child to any risk of autism, no matter how low it may be?"

The problem is that people don't see these diseases anymore, so they don't understand the risk of becoming infected. And the main reason that we don't see them anymore is because of immunization! Children had a much higher rate of death from infection in the past than they do now, thanks mostly to immunization.

So the long answer to your question is that there is absolutely no evidence that the MMR vaccine is in any way linked to the development of autism. Getting immunized is a healthy idea, not a risky one. I fully support and encourage all of my appropriate patients - both young and old - to receive all recommended immunizations following the regular immunization schedule as published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. ■

My Life as... an analog photographer

INTERVIEW BY **MICHELLE TA, NGO MAI HUONG, TINA THY PHAM, AND NGUYEN HA PHUONG NINH**
IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



When I discovered how the camera allowed me to capture moments in life, I felt this rush of excitement.

I'M 73 YEARS old, and at my age most people have already retired and spend their days relaxing with their kids and grandkids. But me, I want to keep busy: not working would seem like a waste of time. I've been a professional photographer for about 30 years now. It all started in 1973, when a friend of mine let me borrow his French-made camera. When I discovered how the camera allowed me to capture moments in life, I felt this rush of excitement. From that moment, I guess it was my fate to be a professional photographer.

Before that, I was a third grade biology teacher. At the time, the Ministry of Education had a program to publicize

the efforts of outstanding students and teachers. So from time to time, journalists would come to the school to interview and photograph people for an upcoming article. A lot of times, I had already taken photographs of the people, so when the journalists found out, they started asking to use my photos. That's how I got a reputation as a bit of an artist. It must have been around 1975. That's when I first started going to workshops and meetings about photography.

You have to understand that back then, it was really rare for someone to be a photographer, not like today. Pretty soon I was being called on to accompany this Minister or that Deputy Minister on



trips to the provinces to open a factory or launch a new program. When I was on one of these trips, I saw myself as a kind of journalist who worked with images. Before I'd take a picture, I'd always identify the purpose of the story, the intended audience, the correct style... sometimes I'd even write the stories to accompany the images.

Being a photographer back then wasn't easy. Times were hard, and everyone was so poor. [Sighs] I had to save a long time before I could buy my own camera. That was back around 1984, I think. Then once I got it, I still had to keep saving so I could buy film. I'm not sure people today can even imagine how hard it was. There were times when I was very hungry. I'd see a loaf of bread for ten hao (one tenth of a dong) but still I wouldn't buy it. I'd just keep saving my money to buy film and

developing chemicals.

The Camera Is Just a Tool

My first camera was made in Russia. It was pretty difficult to use, not like the digitized cameras everybody's got today. In those days, I'd often go to camera shops in the Old Quarter to see what they had for sale. I remember one time there was this camera I liked so much that I just had to have it. I gave the shop owner whatever money I had on me as a deposit. Then I ran around the city borrowing money from all my friends until I had enough. [Laughs] Of course, nowadays I have more than a dozen cameras.

I've worked hard to develop my professional skills over the years, and even today I continue to study. I love reading about the newest developments and trying new techniques. I can honestly

say that my technical skills are on par with anyone's. But the important thing is that whenever I hold a camera in my hands, I feel I have a duty to capture the spirit of whomever or whatever I'm photographing. I think that's why my clients keep coming back to me, even for something as simple as a passport photo.

I've read a lot of books about photography over the years. There's this one I read that I didn't believe at first: "Photographs aren't captured by the lens but by the photographer's eyes, which are the windows to his soul." It's only as I gained more experience that I really began to understand this line. Now I know that the camera is just a tool. Especially these days, cameras are so sophisticated that it's easy for a photographer to create exactly the image they want. But if we depend on the tool too much, we end up just imitating life without capturing its spirit.

I'm actually not the greatest businessman. [Laughs] One time a couple came to me and asked me to photograph their upcoming wedding. They explained that they didn't have much money and asked me just to charge them whatever was reasonable. How could I not agree to help them remember such an important moment? At the end of the wedding party, they paid me as agreed, but I took most of it and gave it back to them as a gift. The way I see it, you should always try to live with sympathy and compassion.

I'm very lucky to have been able to make my passion my career. Photography has given my family a good living all these years. This house, the furniture, these motorbikes, they're all thanks to the money I made from photography. Let's be realistic: you can't just live for your passion without caring about your material needs. I just try to make sure that the money I make reflects the quality of my work. I'm always working to improve the quality of my photos while still keeping the prices reasonable. I guess that's another reason my clients keep coming back.

I'm also lucky to be able to share my passion for photography with my wife. She works as a second grade teacher but she's also developed into a really good photographer. It's wonderful to be able to discuss our experiences and share our ideas with each other. As for our kids, we have three daughters; two of them are married and have families already, and our youngest is in her second year at university. Whatever careers they end up pursuing, I really hope they find a way to make art and creativity a part of their lives, like I've been able to do with photography. It's things like this that bring meaning and color to our lives. ■

*Additional editing by Gerard Sasges. Excerpted from **It's a Living: Work and Life in Vietnam Today**, available on Amazon and iTunes. Or look for the Vietnamese version, **Việt Nam ngày nay: Chuyện mưu sinh** in local bookstores.*



I Can't Help Falling in Love

Is a wedding in Vegas only legal in Vegas?

Dear Hadrien and Marijn,

My boyfriend and I just got back from our Tet holiday in the States. We visited Las Vegas and one night we had so much fun winning at the casino that we went to the Little White Chapel and got married - even Elvis was there – unforgettable! The next day we talked it over with the help of a few aspirins and decided to stay married. I'm Vietnamese and he's Swiss. Would our marriage be recognized in Vietnam, or will we have to get married again as in a “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” kind of situation?

FIRST OF ALL, congratulations on your Vegas wedding and especially on your decision to stay married after all. What a great way to start the New Year! We had a look at Vietnam's Law on Marriage and Family of 2014, Decree No. 126/2014/ND-CP and it states that a marriage between a Vietnamese citizen and a foreigner conducted by a competent authority overseas shall be recognized in Vietnam but under certain conditions.

This means, firstly, that your marriage must comply with the provisions of the law of the foreign country (or state) where the marriage was concluded (in your case, the State of Nevada, US) and, secondly, that the two of you must comply with the conditions for getting married under the Vietnamese Law on Marriage and Family.

We are not experts on family law in the US in general, and of the state of Nevada in particular, so we will not be able to give definitive advice on the first condition aforementioned. However, considering the popular permissiveness of Nevada's marriage law, we are pretty confident that you are covered there. It is safe to assume that as long as you obtained your marriage certificate in Las Vegas, and a wedding official performed the ceremony, your marriage qualifies to be recognized in Vietnam.

The second set of conditions can easily be met. In order for a marriage that was conducted overseas to be valid under Vietnamese law, the couple must satisfy the same conditions applicable to those getting married in Vietnam,

described below.

In order to legally marry in Vietnam, a man must be 20 years or older, and the woman must be at least 18. Furthermore, the marriage must be conducted on a voluntary basis and with neither of you having lost your civil capacity to act. Finally, the marriage must (naturally) not fall within the category of prohibited marriages such as sham marriages, underage marriages, bigamy, or same direct bloodline marriages.

On the other hand, if your marriage took place outside the opening hours of the Little White Chapel without the certificate and without a wedding official involved, the first condition for recognition in Vietnam would not be met and you will need to conduct the standard procedure for registration of marriages under Vietnamese law, as if nothing happened in Las Vegas.

If this applies to your case, you will first need to submit an application for marriage registration to the Department of Justice at the place of your residence in Vietnam. Then you will both be invited for an interview during which, among other things, your personal background, the voluntariness of both you and your partner, the purpose of the marriage, and the understanding of each other's family background will be discussed.

After having concluded the interview stage, the Department of Justice will report to the provincial People's Committee, thereby enclosing a set of application documents for the marriage registration. Within five working days of receiving the



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

report, and provided the application meets all the legal requirements, the Chairman of the provincial People's Committee will sign the marriage certificate and return the documents to the Department of Justice.

Subsequently, within five working days from the date the marriage certificate is signed, the Department of Justice will hold a marriage registration ceremony at its office. Both of you need to be present and a representative of the Department of Justice will act as the marriage officiant.

We fully understand that this procedure is not as exciting and extravagant as your recent adventure in Las Vegas however, as the two of you decided to stay together, we are confident that obtaining the legal proof of your marriage will be worth the extra trouble.

** Disclaimer: At the time of publishing, we were still investigating whether Elvis Presley really needs to be there in person. And to find a little bit of that Las Vegas magic here, you can still hire Elvis Phuong to sing at your wedding!*

We wish you lots of happiness together and we are looking forward to receiving a postcard from your honeymoon destination!

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

Go With the Flow

Create movement and rhythm in a space



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



Siam Hotel



Coco Chanel

IF YOU'RE AN appreciator of music, you've already experienced the way rhythm can move you. You know that the steady, measured pulse of a classical piece has a different feel to the twists and surprises of jazz, but both create forward motion. Visual rhythm is much the same. In interiors, elements are repeated in such a way that creates movement and flow. Imagine a long, narrow hallway hung with silk lanterns at regular intervals; your eyes will naturally be drawn through the space as your body traverses it.

Another form of rhythm is progression, where the repeated element is slightly altered in each instance. You might see a row of vases steadily increasing in size, or in color from dark to light. And just as the chorus, verse, and bridge of a song are alternated and repeated to form the whole, visual components can be arranged to create a pattern; for example, ABAB or ABBABBA. This form of rhythm is known as alternation.

The glamorous bathroom in Bangkok's Siam Hotel is a great example of this. The designer alternated hanging lights with hanging mirrors, and the impact is major. Not only do you see an ABABA pattern at eye level, the thin chains used to suspend the mirrors form a second pattern above — ABBABBA. If we look a step further, the bold black and white color scheme also forms alternating horizontal bands of color. The lines in this space move your line of sight in two directions: vertically, in the mirrors and lanterns, and horizontally, in the bands of color. That contrast creates a tension that's both dramatic and exciting.

Hallways and staircases are an ideal place to observe rhythm in action because they're also areas of physical transition and movement. The iconic staircase in Coco Chanel's Paris apartment features alternation in the railing elements, but the softly curved shape eases the transition. An application of mirrored panels to the

walls amplifies that repetition, so that the lines seem to continue endlessly.

While the most sweeping examples of rhythm tend to be architectural, you don't have to be in the midst of a renovation to welcome a little repetition and movement into your own home. A blank space is what you need to start: a hallway or stairwell, even just a blank wall. Spend some time with an image search for "gallery wall" to get an idea of whether you'd prefer an evenly measured, grid-like installation or an eclectic, gallery-style spread. A clustered grouping is tougher to get right, but there are countless tutorials and tips for this online. Think about where you want to draw the eye; along a hallway or staircase, the center point of the grouping should be at eye level, rising with the steps themselves. On the other hand, you might choose to emphasize the high ceiling of a single wall with a dramatic bottom-to-top installation. ■



WE MEAN BUSINESS

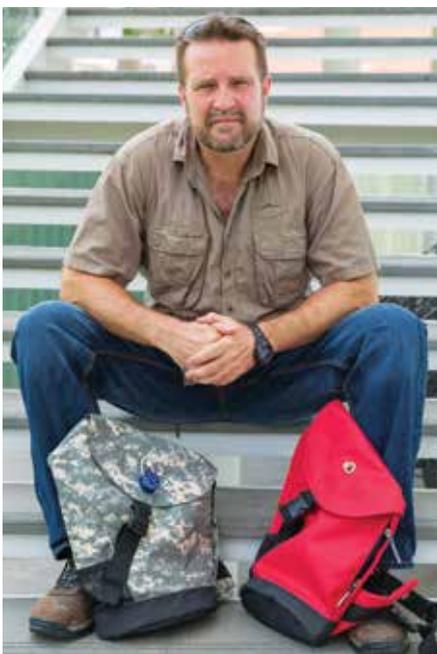
These days, it sometimes seems that almost everyone is thinking about becoming an entrepreneur. Whether they are pursuing fame and glory, self-satisfaction, an escape from a bad boss or just money, we speak to six business owners to hear their stories.

Tied to a Palm Tree

A new solution to an age-old problem

TEXT BY MORAY HEATHER

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



They say inspiration comes from the unlikely places. That is certainly true for Dirk Witte struck with an inspiring idea while lying on the beach in Danang. Alone on a hot, sunny day with the East Sea beckoning, Dirk realized he couldn't fully enjoy a swim without constantly checking that his clothing and wallet were still where he left them on the beach. "If only I had some way to secure my valuables to one of the palm trees I could really relax," he mused.

This led the security expert and his partner Luanne Nguyen to research available options. What they found ranged from solid containers that worked fine on the beach but were impractical to carry, to steel-reinforced systems that were easy to carry but could result in injury if suddenly taken by force.

With over 10 years of experience in the security industry, Dirk decided to design his own practical yet attractive bag. The result of four years of design, planning, and testing is the Eazylock sling, a hip Kevlar bag with a unique locking system.

The first challenge was designing the locking mechanism. "As you do, I overcomplicated things in the beginning" he said of his initial idea of a retractable design. "But I soon found it was too bulky and impractical for a bag." Their ultimate solution was to use the sling strap itself. During normal use, three riveted holes provide a decorative touch to the sling bag's strap. However, when the user needs to leave the bag for a while, the strap can be unclipped at its base, wound around a fixed structure, say a piece of furniture or even a palm tree, and one of the holes slots over a small but sturdy metal hub on the front of the bag. A lock of your choice or Dirk's preferred Master combination lock, can be slipped through the hub above the strap to secure the bag firmly in place.

To prevent slash and grabs, the bag itself is made of Kevlar (the same textile used for bulletproof vests and body armor). While strong enough to stop a bullet, or, in this case, a bag slasher, it remains light

and flexible for wearability. The Kevlar is covered by an outer PU film shell, which is both breathable and water resistant. The interior of the bag is fully lined and has useful pockets to hold and protect devices. There is even a pocket big enough to hold an 11-inch laptop. The bag closes with a tamper-proof zip that has steel loops to fit over the hub. For extra protection, a large flap folds down over the zip. Like the strap, the flap has a riveted hole that slips over the hub on top of the steel loops. Finally, a lock holds everything in place keeping the valuables inside, out of the reach of opportunistic pickpockets.

The greatest challenge in producing the bag has been importing the Kevlar from China. Since the carbon fiber fabric has military uses, its import is subject to greater scrutiny and control than other textiles, which translates into a lot more paperwork and effort to get it into the country.

The central hub for the locking mechanism also proved difficult to produce locally as the quality of the metalwork ended up inconsistent. This is also sourced from a factory in China. However, the final manufacturing occurs in Vietnam.

The team used personal testing to determine if the bag design was practical and useful. A previous version of the bag was given a severe workout in the Dominican Republic where one of their friends and product testers used it for over a year to carry equipment on visits to job sites in remote jungle locations. The bag is reportedly still going strong.

At the moment it can be purchased for USD120 online at eazylock.com (along with retro combination locks for USD15). The idea is to gradually introduce it in markets like Vietnam and Spain where the safety features of the bag will be most appreciated. Other bag designs are under development like a saddlebag and a ladies' bag for excursions around town. Of course, all this also means the next time Dirk and Luanne visit the beach, a friendly palm tree and their Eazylock will be all that's needed. Who says you can't buy peace of mind?

The Gift of the Present

A self-taught artist teaches the joy of painting

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



It's a little before 3pm on a Tuesday afternoon as a little girl with a braided ponytail and a crooked smile skips into the sunlit room. Within minutes, she's donned a paint-splattered apron and is seated in front of her easel, lips pursed in concentration as she paints an orange rainbow. The other easels down the row sport fish, a wintery landscape and Roy Lichtenstein-esque pop art. Next to her, two other young ones flip through a book containing images of everything from dolphins to Van Goghs, searching for inspiration.

We're in the **Grado Art Studio** (170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2), a cheery space presided over by owner/instructor Ignacio de Grado. When the economic crisis hit Spain, Ignacio took a tidy severance package from his Project Director job in a multinational construction company and promptly moved to London, to "change the air," as Madrileños are fond of saying. There, he worked towards an MA in Creative Arts Management, but more importantly rekindled his passion for drawing and painting.

"When I was 16-17, I was a good drawer,

but thought that I wasn't good enough to create works like I saw in fine art museums. So I opted for a 'safe' career. It was only later that I realized that artists only show their best works; they don't show the things they do when they were learning."

Finding himself doodling during boring lectures, Ignacio got back into drawing and eventually painting and honing his craft. "We tend to think that drawing and painting skills are gifts from God, but that's a total mistake. Now I realize that you can have a gift, a talent but if you don't work a lot at it, you end up with nothing."



While he also paints abstract pieces, it's in his ultra-realistic works where his animation background shines through. His studio space showcases watercolors of daily scenes in Vietnam — a bicycle propped against a faded wall, a snoozing cyclo driver, a sleepy café — as well as stunning real-to-life portraits. In his private studio in the back of the space, Ignacio is halfway finished with a commissioned portrait of a family in a frozen moment of serenity on an afternoon outing.

“When working in 3D animation, I used a lot of knowledge about perspectives, tones and in some ways, drawing. There are three things that define a painting where you want the observer to identify what's on the canvas: Shape, color and tones, meaning how light and dark things are. The ability to see tones is really the hardest thing to be seen by the eyes of the artist but it is absolutely the key to success for many, many painters.” Fitting, considering that the “The Dress” debate of 2015 has taught us that tones are very much in the eye of the beholder.

TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Opened just a few months ago, the Grado Art Studio is a place for Ignacio to share the techniques that he has learned along the way. “I always found that most of the problems that people have when painting are about technique, not ideas. All of us are creative but we may have technical limitations. So lessons here are basically

about technique. I invite students to try different styles. I wanted to set up a place where I could teach the same things that I struggled with in the past. Because I'm a self-taught artist, I know the challenges people have when they try to paint on their own.”

Ignacio organizes lessons for children, teens and adults. Children learn how to mix colors, handle a brush and the stages of developing a painting. Teenagers who are thinking of taking fine arts studies may come to prepare a portfolio. The adults at the studio run the gamut of those just starting to paint as a hobby to serious artists looking to create their own collection of artwork.

“Teaching requires a lot of patience, but it's something that I really like to do,” says Ignacio. “I share all my knowledge with my students; I don't hide anything. And when you see someone able to paint something they thought they wouldn't be able to do, or when kids smile, happy to take a finished painting home, it's very rewarding.”

The Grado Art Studio is comprised of a large workspace with lots of natural light from the huge floor to ceiling windows where the group lessons are held. There's also a sitting area served by a coffee maker, an exhibition space and Ignacio's private studio.

“You need the best conditions to paint,” explains Ignacio. “From the light to the space to the color of the walls — everything. It took me time to find a place like this with high ceilings, fantastic light

and to invest in top quality materials like the very best professional easels. But I'm happy that Vietnam has given me the opportunity to set up this kind of business.”

For now, Ignacio remains cautiously optimistic about Saigon's art scene. “It's developing but for the size of a city like Saigon, it's still somewhat limited. It's a good place to live for artists with lots of opportunities to exhibit artworks which isn't so easy in other major cities, but there aren't as many buyers as more established markets like Singapore and Hong Kong.”

Eventually, Ignacio wants to host selected art exhibitions as well as hold social events centered around drawing and painting. But for now, he's pleased with running a business centered around his passion. “One of the reasons I paint is because it gives me peace. It's a wonderful way to be present. We're always attached to the past and the future, but the only thing we have now is the present. When I paint, I feel I'm in the present moment, not concerned about the past or about the future. It's a great feeling.”

The Grado Art Studio offers private lessons and small group lessons for children and adults. Ignacio works personally with every student to instruct on subjects such as watercolor, oil and acrylic painting, drawing, creativity and figure painting. He also gives feedback on personal projects. Pricing plans make the lessons as reasonably priced as VND175,000 per hour. Visit www.grado-artstudio.com for more.



Ms. Bean

Building a food dream on a bean

TEXT BY NPD KHANH
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

With the rise of successful Vietnamese entrepreneurs like Dong Nguyen and his Flappy Bird, and Nguyen Hai Ninh's Urban Station café chain, a new Vietnamese dream has emerged.

Thousands of 8x and 9x ("8x" and "9x" is local slang for those born in the 1980s and 1990s respectively) are following suit, and Vuong Nam Phung is no exception. At 26, Phung already has two food brands under her belt.

After graduating from university, Phung initially took an office job, while at the same time planned for the launch of her café concept. "I had a dream to open The Bean Store since my last year at university. It was from all my travels, observations and inspired conversations with some of my friends who already succeeded in the food and beverage business. At the time I knew this was what I truly wanted instead of a full-time job but I didn't really have a chance to make it happen until 2012." She soon realized sitting in an office wasn't for her so decided to quit to concentrate on her dream.

The Bean Store stems from Phung's many trips to Singapore. There were not many soybean desserts in Saigon back then and what was available was only from soymilk market stalls and ginger syrup bean curd street vendors. This was one of the reasons why she wanted to open the café. "I think soybean had been underrated here. It is healthy food but served in low quality as well as in an unhygienic environment. I want to offer quality, healthy soy products in a clean, friendly environment and therefore bring a new experience for our customers." However, the concept was met with resistance from family and friends.

Far from giving up, she experimented with soybean ingredients and finally found the perfect recipes. With the major obstacle completed she eventually convinced a friend to join her in opening a food business. "An entrepreneur has to be passionate about what he or she does, but passion must walk hand-in-hand with consistency or you will never be taken seriously." The first six months of opening was essentially the young entrepreneur's crash course in the pitfalls of running

a business.

"I failed more times than I cared to count, but it has been an exciting journey of lessons," she shares. "I fail and I learn and it doesn't get easier each time, but I try to learn something each time I fail."

Fast forward almost three years and The Bean Store is a new favorite amongst foodies. She attributes The Bean Store's careful design and branding to its success. Not only does it have a healthy following on Facebook and other social sites, it has also appeared on TV and in the Vietnamese press. They've also had the opportunity to welcome not only Vietnamese but international guests. And at the point where many would slow down to consolidate and build on their brand, Phung, on the other hand, recently unveiled her second brainchild - Co Thanh Noodles - a trendy restaurant boasting more than 10 varieties of Vietnamese noodles from various provinces, officially opened for business in February 2015.

"In a way, building a business is like building a machine, a system. You have an idea. You build a concept. You look around to find funds and a partner and create a blueprint for your operations. Once you've got how it works, you can apply the same principles to other businesses."

Both The Bean Store and Co Thanh Noodles are founded under The Flavor

Connection, a holding corporation under Phung's name. Phung's ambition is to have as many flavors in her 'collection' as possible. The birth of Co Thanh marks only the second addition. "Most Vietnamese restaurants specialize in a handful of noodles from the same province. But Vietnam has so many noodle varieties and from so many provinces, not just Saigon or Hanoi or Hue." Though there are no official records, Vietnam has an estimated 200 distinct noodle dishes. "Co Thanh concept is a place where you can try many noodle dishes from many different Vietnamese provinces. We have only 14 different types of noodles on our menu now but the long term goal is to have them all here.

"At the end of the day, I like to create tangible things that our customers can enjoy," she adds. "I want to create a brand, an identity, something that our customers will remember and hopefully, enjoy and want to come back. That's why we are constantly trying to improve where we can, based on our customer's feedback. I think anyone starting a business will agree, it's not easy at all and it shouldn't be about being an owner, but the focus should be about the value your business can bring and the best way to learn this is by doing, and learning how to improve together as a team."



Jurassic Bark

Unearthing the beauty of underwater wood

TEXT BY MORAY HEATHER



Certain materials are precious because of the unique combination of factors that lead to their existence. The crushing pressure and intense heat that form diamonds, for example; or the layers upon layers of nacre that coat a grain of sand, turning it onto a pearl.

Ho Chi Minh City-based Justin Ephraim, the founder of **Redux Wood** (www.reduxwood.com), is on a mission to add underwater wood to that list. This uniquely beautiful material comes from rare tropical hardwood species that grew in forests, flooded during the creation of man-made

freshwater lakes in Central America. After the trees themselves died, they remained submerged for decades. Long seen as simply navigational hazards, the trees are finally being appreciated for the treasures they are. And with the combination of water and time, the trees have evolved their own distinct characteristics in shape, grain and texture. Harvested by local divers then dried and cut into large slabs billed as live-edge wood (meaning timber that retains its natural edge or visible bark as opposed to wood cut into symmetrical planks), the result is a handsome, ethically sourced product that is unlike anything

obtainable from live growth.

"It's amazing! You see a tiny dry twig sticking out of the water, but when you dive down you find an amazing 30 meter tall tree," Justin explains. When pressed on his favorite wood, Justin names white mahogany for its two-toned grain. "My family calls it 'pearl wood' because its appearance reminds them of pearls - with the lights and darks making the wood appear almost iridescent."

Starting out in forestry as a land surveyor on the North Shore Mountains of Vancouver, Canada some two decades ago, Justin later moved into wood



construction, which led to a stint in real estate where he discovered his knack as a salesman. Combining his two passions, he joined a lumber distributor and wholesaler in Canada. Along the way, he met and married his wife who has family in Vietnam. When the recession struck, they decided to move to Vietnam, as they knew of the demand for lumber and wood products here. Initially, he worked for a lumber distributor but later, inspired by the growing local and regional economy, he opened his own lumber distribution company, Redux Wood. Justin sources his wood ethically and legally from around the world, ensuring all his products have CITES approval before importing to Vietnam. He learned the ins and outs of import regulations from his family here, who owns a large logistics and trading company. (The rice and sugar trade part of that company was turned over to Justin and his wife resulting in her gaining the title "Queen of Rice.")

While Redux deals with many kinds of live-edge woods, most of Justin's stock is underwater wood. From the start, Justin has felt an affinity for this special material, which needs to be handcrafted to truly honor the beauty and uniqueness of each piece. The work is time-intensive. Underwater wood takes about two years

"YOU HAVE TO HAVE AN EYE FOR IT. YOU LOOK AT A ROUGH SLAB AND SENSE THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL THERE. THEN YOU START SANDING AND THE FULL BEAUTY IS REVEALED"

to dry. During that time it has to be warehoused carefully, and only after that can it be finished and traded. Because he first acquired underwater wood stock two and a half years ago, it has only recently become ready for finishing and marketing.

While his main business is distribution, Justin does make custom pieces for clients. Like an artist, he lets the wood tell him what it should become and works to reveal the natural beauty of the piece before adding legs to create a one-of-a-kind product. As he puts it: "You have to have an eye for it. You look at a rough slab and sense there is something special there. Then you start sanding and the full beauty

is revealed."

He takes as long as necessary to produce the best results, with a single table taking anywhere from one to six months to complete. Even though he has a team to do the initial work to his specifications, Justin finishes all the pieces himself.

Because many of the wood species Justin deals with are new to the Vietnamese market, some designers are initially unsure of how to use the wood. If he has one piece of advice for any retailer or designer interested in his pieces, it would be to simply "just try one." It is just this approach that has paid off for him and inspired designers to give new life to old wood.

Literally Speaking

Starting an English language center

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTINE VAN

IMAGE BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

Before opening an English language center in Saigon, Paul Blake owned and published Columbia City Paper in South Carolina from 2005 to 2011. Shortly after the publication closed, he relocated to Asia to continue in the media industry at an English-language newspaper while simultaneously teaching Business English to executives at Vincom Center.

In 2012, Paul realized teaching English was far more rewarding than journalism and moved to Seoul, Korea to earn his teaching credentials. In Korea, he taught secondary school students News & Debate at a private *hagwon* (academy) and participated in weekend English clubs. The following year Paul returned to Vietnam because he missed the Vietnamese culture, which he describes as a “family first” society.

In 2014, he established Blake Academy (www.baenglish.com) in District 9 with the simple idea of small class sizes and making English lessons affordable in rural areas. *Oi* speaks to Paul about his new business.

Is it easy to get rich in the English teaching industry in Vietnam? Why did you choose District 9 to open Blake Academy?

It is a huge money making industry and while much of the market is saturated downtown, there are huge business opportunities in the rural areas if one views education as a business opportunity. I don't think of it as an industry; I think of it as a service. However, there is no easy way to make money. Teaching is a job that requires hard work, planning and dedication.

What is needed to start an English center?

A passion for sharing my culture and language with others. Also, all of the skills I've built up over a career in journalism, media and publishing.

Is opening an English center easier if

you have white skin?

I know of so many centers out of homes serving huge class sizes with all Vietnamese staff. There are huge opportunities for English-speaking Vietnamese, especially in teaching young learners and beginners. A huge fallacy is that it is somehow easy for a white person to move 9,000 miles away from their family and adjust to an income at a fraction of their home country. I am unapologetic in being a native speaker of English because I work hard to be the best teacher I can be. I am currently taking Vietnamese lessons from a smug Brit, loud Canadian or a pasty Finnish man for obvious reasons. That said, the enormous amount of privileges and advantages a White man receives in the world, and does not deserve, is something most White men deny the existence of while benefiting from it.

How do you figure out the pricing for your courses?

I didn't base it on anything other than trying to keep it under USD5 per hour, per student in group classes because I thought that's what parents would be willing to pay in District 9. Business English lessons tend to be the more profitable area and keep me busy during the week.

How do you build trust with parents and students to get them to re-enroll?

Most of my new students are from referrals. I send parents the curriculum covered and teach in an open and observable space. I pay for a Vietnamese teacher to be present and they translate parents' concerns and so far we have retained all students, and have added 15 in the past month. We limit each class size to ten students. This allows every student to have more attention and be corrected more than they can at a large McEnglish chain class of 40+ students.

Employee or employer?

I prefer working for myself. Most people want to be their own boss but don't understand the time and effort involved in running their own business. They look at entrepreneurs as lucky people who just stumbled upon or inherited success, which often couldn't be further from the truth.

How do you plan to compete with English centers like ILA, VUS and Cleverlearn?

This is not a business to me, it is a service. If parents can find a native speaker with years of experience and at a fraction of the cost, it ends up being a simple choice. Often my students continue to learn at other centers and it is the collaborative versus competitive approach to education that benefits all students.

What has been the hardest part of getting Blake Academy running?

At the previous location, I had a nice cafe setup next to the school and it was a huge disappointment to have to move locations and close the cafe portion due to landlord greed. I now have the tutoring space at a new location a few blocks away, and added 15 new students since the move. I'm grateful and happy to have success with Blake Academy and the new space feels more like part of the community.

Has the government been involved at all?

We are a tutoring center versus a school that would be required to be registered with the government. We are a practice center and not a replacement for an accredited educational institution. We offer no degrees and no certifications. For example, one of my students is a high school English teacher in Thu Duc. As a teacher in the public school system, the Ministry of Education requires her to achieve a certain IELTS score for her to transfer to the high school in District 9. She



***"I DON'T THINK
OF IT AS AN
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THINK OF IT AS
A SERVICE"***

spends half her month's salary to practice for the IELTS test with our center, knowing that we can't administer the official test. We have a huge responsibility in focusing on results. We would lose all credibility if we were like the hundreds of tutoring centers that pretend to be affiliated with Cambridge, administer tests, and essentially award fraudulent certifications.

What marketing have you done?

I have flyers in Vietnamese.

Do you have a Vietnamese partner?

No, I don't believe in business partners.

How do you want to see your business grow in the next five years? Stay small or go big?

Parents keep asking me about weekday classes so I'll be adding more classes. In June, I'll have a second teacher who I know I can trust. Maybe one or two teachers will manage their own classes, but I have no aspirations to be a chain center. ILA and VUS both do an incredible job in selecting teachers, curriculum and maintaining a high standard. I feel busy enough trying to maintain and improve my own teaching methods.

Wanna Be On Top?

Jumping headfirst into Vietnam's modeling industry

TEXT BY RACHEL CABAKOFF
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



As one of the fastest growing countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam is a drawing board for inspired entrepreneurs - whether it's launching a new business, fulfilling a dream or pursuing that one nagging idea - it can be done here. Quang Dang, or Canton, as he's professional known, believes he has done just that. He left a successful career in mechanical engineering and immigration law in the US to launch his own model management company in Saigon.

When asked how he made the seemingly odd transition, Canton laughs and explains, "It's two different worlds. Since I was little I was interested in fashion and style. My parents influenced me to go to school and get a good job, so I took their advice. But after so many years of work I just thought, 'I've got to fulfill my passion.'"

Of Vietnamese and Chinese descent, Canton and his nine siblings were born in Vietnam and migrated to the US on boats while their parents stayed behind. He spent most of his time in North Carolina and later Los Angeles. After his first trip to Vietnam in 1991, Canton recognized the huge potential and opportunities here and couldn't stay away, making repeated trips every summer until he made a permanent move in 2003.

When he arrived in Vietnam, Canton met a woman that would become crucial to his success - Pham Thuy Linh - a famous Vietnamese singer and TV show host. Through her he became enthralled in the fashion and modeling scene, meeting various movers and shakers in the industry where he built a large network.

"She invited me to see all her events and shows and I was able to make connections with her and her model friends. One day the manager of Napoly Bar asked me to do a promotional show," Canton recalls. "I already had experience from being around all the models at the events so I was able to direct the show and it turned out



very well. After the first show I decided to start my own company. Many of my friends had asked me if I would open up an agency. I had enough connections I felt it was time for me to do it and everything was ready, so why not?"

I'M GOING TO BE BIG

Elegant Model Agency officially opened in 2012. Aside from getting the license (which became easy in 2007 when Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization), the hardest part for him was instilling trust in his clients and models. "Gaining trust was a big challenge. I'm in the middle; how can I make them trust me so that I can get what they want and get the job done? When I first started I was willing to work for free."

He started with 10 models at his first showcase, inviting potential models and clients to prove his talent and it paid off - he received bookings from it. His models have been featured in designer shows for labels including Mango, Warehouse, Bebe, Charles & Keith, Christian Louboutin and Topshop. Not only was Canton making an impact in the fashion industry but also for various ad/cosmetic campaigns and promotional shows for brands such as Petro, Kawasaki, Shiseido Skincare and Heineken. Depending on their experience and how well-known they are, models can

earn from USD100 to almost USD2,000 per show in Vietnam. Canton now has nearly 500 models on his book.

He scouts for new talent at social events around town. Looks may vary from tall, short, slim to athletic or a unique face - you name it. "There is a demand for all different types of models. Vietnam is catching up internationally so it has to be a mixture of Western, European and Vietnamese now."

***"WITHOUT THE
PASSION, I
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THINGS DONE"***

Although Elegant Model Agency does not provide training, Canton is present throughout most of the preparation process whether it is helping out with music selection or directing models on the catwalk. He strives to build strong relationships with his models outside of work by hosting meetings and social

events. "As a model manager, you have to love the work in order to get through all of the difficulties. Without the passion, I don't think you could get things done. I love being around beautiful models. I love the beauty. I feel so happy every time I do a show. I feel that it is me."

Welcoming its first International Fashion Week last fall, fashion is gradually gaining a presence throughout Vietnam but it still has a long way to go, Canton explains. With his experience in the US, he brings an international appeal and advantage that most local agencies here don't have yet.

"I'm lucky that I was trained and educated in America and that I am from America. I happened to be born here but everything about me is American. I had the opportunity to learn so much from America and I like that I can bring that to Vietnam. If I meet a foreigner or someone who is not Vietnamese, my chances of closing a contract are higher than the local companies or agencies here."

With newly-opened offices in District 11 and a growing network, Canton has high hopes for the future. "I'm not bragging but if you ask me how I feel about all of this and where I will be in the future, I feel that I'm going to be big. To me, making money at this point is not important anymore."

Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN





Swiss House



Fondue with cubed bread

Cheese, Please!

The lone defender of Swiss cuisine in Saigon

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WATCHES, CHOCOLATE, CHEESE, beautiful mountains, Roger Federer — the tiny country of Switzerland is known for having the best of the best. However, not many people would think to include cuisine on that list. “Unlike French food, Swiss food isn’t big on presentation, but it’s value for money,” says Jack Legler, chef/owner of Swiss House Saigon. “It’s a lot of meat and potatoes and cheese, similar to the cuisines of [neighboring] Germany and Austria.”

The only Swiss restaurant left standing in Saigon, Legler’s *Swiss House* (54 Le Thanh Ton, D1) has served up authentic Swiss food for just about a year. Legler brings with him a lifetime of hospitality experience, growing up in a small family-run butcher shop cum hotel outside of Zurich before attending Swiss Hotel Management School and apprenticing as a cook in one of Switzerland’s top hotels. In Saigon, he’s had leading roles in various luxe hotels and restaurants as well as owned an Italian and a German restaurant. For

Legler and his Vietnamese wife, Swiss House represents a coming home of sorts. “It’s the closest to my heart,” he says. “With our other restaurants, we didn’t want to destroy what we took over but this time we started from scratch.”

The décor of the small two-story restaurant can best be described as chalet chic, with exposed brick and beams, heavy wood furniture and the requisite pictures of mountain goats. The straightforward menu is also decidedly Swiss with raclette and fondue being the featured dishes. Traditionally a big wheel of semi-firm cheese that’s heated in front of a fire or a special machine, the melted raclette is then scraped onto a plate to be eaten with small potatoes, pickles and cold cuts. The Swiss House fondue is a bubbling pot of cheesy goodness, loaded with Swiss Gruyere and two other types of cheese (the exact types and proportions of which Chef Legler keeps a family secret) as well as white wine and garlic. While normally both raclette

and fondue are meant to be shared in groups, here, they’re available in single portions (VND420,000 and VND400,000 respectively), but are certainly generous enough for two, the fondue accompanied by a large basket of cubed bread for dipping.

A Bourgeois Experience

With four official languages and 26 cantons (similar to states), Switzerland has surprising diversity given it is just about the size of greater Shanghai. Swiss House’s menu aims to take diners along a culinary tour starting with raclette and fondue which claim their beginnings in the French-speaking alpine region where villagers found a use for leftover bread and cheese during colder months when fresh produce was scarce. The wonderfully hearty Barley soup (VND100,000) loaded with root vegetables, flavored with air-dried beef and thickened with cream hails from Grisons, home to famed St. Moritz. It’s not difficult to picture this surprisingly light soup as a warming après-ski meal, nicely sopped up with Swiss House’s assortment of baguette, Northlander and rye breads. Also from Grisons is the Swiss chard wrapped dumplings (VND150,000), a simple spätzle-like dough made from eggs, flour, salt with a bit of milk, flavored with salami and *landjäger* sausage and a dash of nutmeg. The dumplings are mealy but helped along by a creamy cheese sauce.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jack Legler, chef/owner; Barley soup; Swiss chard wrapped dumplings; Veal sausage in onion sauce; and Dark chocolate mousse



We also tapped St. Gallen in eastern Switzerland for our Veal sausage in onion sauce (VND275,000). Traditionally the recipe only calls for the finest veal, a little bacon and fresh milk. The Swiss House's version is made right here in Saigon, by a Swiss butcher, and is served with steamed vegetables and a crispy *rösti*, a coarsely grated then fried potato cake. The slow roasted onions lend a tantalizing sweetness to the dish tempered by a dash of white wine. Completely sated, we finished with a chilled Dark chocolate mousse (VND90,000) that signaled a creamy end to a filling meal.

Swiss food on the whole is a bourgeois experience. Where it lacks the wow factor of Japanese or the fine presentation of French, it makes up for in being simply good food, well-prepared using the best ingredients. The dishes themselves are time-consuming to make and are meant to be time-consuming to eat, enjoyed with friends between sips of wine to cut through the heaviness of the cheese and potatoes.

"Swiss food is simply different from other cuisines. You can train someone to charbroil a steak in a short amount of time, but to make real Swiss food, you have to be Swiss. We're really a niche, especially with the cheeses we use, most of which are imported from Switzerland. It's definitely high quality." From a country that is known for being the finest in everything, I would expect nothing less. ■



Pardon My French

Dining out Parisian style

TEXT BY ROBERT OI IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

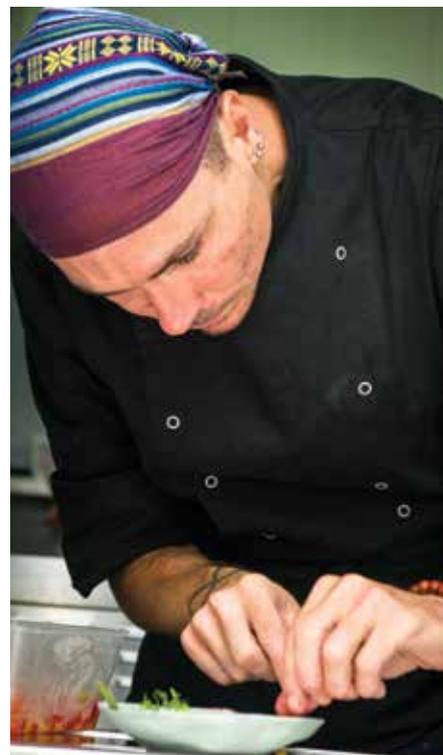
A VIETNAMESE WOMAN and a Kiwi bloke walk into a trendy fashion boutique in Saigon. Nearly two hours later they emerge back into the night satiated with delicious French food, but no new stitches - not this visit, anyway. Such is the unique concept of *The Mach House* (75 Pasteur, D1), a warm, modern French cafe hidden away above a delightful fashion store fronting the street. But the lack of street frontage has not stopped this new entrant on Ho Chi Minh City's restaurant circuit from gaining fans. The week after our visit, guests included Thanh Hoa, the first winner of Vietnam MasterChef.

The Mach House offers predominantly French cuisine - with some Vietnamese influence and dishes as well - and an impressive, by Vietnam standards, French anchored wine list. Owner Benjamin and French chef of 15 years Alexandre, ensure the French influence is authentic and memorable in one. By day the restaurant serves espresso coffee, cakes and mouthwatering French desserts and pastries, for lunch and dinner meals including charcuterie with fresh baked breads. The menu changes regularly, in part due to the owner's belief that food should be served fresh and natural. While basic staples may be constant, each visit you can expect something new.

Despite the restaurant's 'hidden away' nature, it's easy to find. Look for the bold white boutique on Pasteur Street, across the road from the Rex Hotel's side entrance a few meters down from Starbucks. The signage is bold, above the shop entrance and below a huge glass window where you'll likely spot diners enjoying the view over the busy street from comfortable armchairs. It was one of these window seats we chose for our visit, eschewing the more conventional table - traffic watching, if not people watching, is, after all, one of the addictive pleasures one never seems to tire of when in Saigon.

Somehow, sharing our food over a coffee table gave the experience a homely feel, which the chef matched with a decidedly home-cooked style. Ignore the crush of motorcycles below for a moment, and you could have been in the back streets of old Paris.

The lunch and dinner menu is not extensive - but it doesn't need to be, because all the food groups are covered. There are soups - a chilled Gazpacho with diced vegetables, croutons and grated parmesan at VND80,000, the most eye-catching - or a hot lentil soup with mushroom flan. Cold starters including marinated boar pate, raw Mahi



FROM LEFT: Benjamin and Alexandre

Mahi fish, three salads (a traditional farmer's salad with bacon, ham cured ham, potato and poached egg definitely on the short list for our next visit), three quiches and a cheese tart.

Platters of cold cuts, cheeses or a mixture of both were also tempting, but given my dining companion's love of fish, we opted to share the Trio of cold fish platter for a starter (VND230,000), which turned out to be a meal in itself. If you prefer food slanted more to Vietnamese than French, the menu offers three "Signature Vietnamese" courses - Chicken curry (VND145,000), Duck in broth (VND160,000) and Beef ragout (VND150,000). Turn to the signature main courses page of the menu and the biggest surprise is the price. The Mach House is a stylish venue with a modern designer apartment feel to it: polished concrete floors, walls a crisp white and a mixture of easy chairs and sofas - or more formal wood dining tables for those who prefer. So if you're on a budget, you will feel you are getting a lot of value for your money here when you discover the most expensive main course is VND220,000 (for the classic French dish, Duck confit).

The Food

For mains, my companion chose the Salmon fish with homemade pasta sauce (VND145,000) and I opted for the Mach honey duck breast with sweet spices. The trio of fish turned out to be three generous servings of three distinctly different delicacies and we tortured ourselves for a good 30 minutes trying to pick our favorite: there was a ceviche style tartare, fish pate and marinated salmon. It arrived with piping hot, fresh white bread rolls, fluffy inside and clearly only hours old. The tartare was divine, close in style to a Polynesian-style ceviche: raw fish cubes marinated instead of cooked, mixed with a delightful thick creamy sauce, slightly sweet, slightly citrusy all in one. Seriously addictive! The salmon was a very generous portion, with a distinctive wood smoke flavor, soft and fresh and served with lemon wedges.

The fish pate was sinfully sweet and indulgent, a generous thick slice served in a pool of sweet sauce with diced peppers. The pate was white and creamy and came with chunks of soft carrot embedded which added to the smoothness and gave the dish a more complex flavor as well as a curious look.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Trio of cold fish platter; Salmon with homemade pasta in cream sauce; Salmon with fettuccine pasta and cream sauce; Honey duck breast with sweet spices; and Creme Brulee

In the end we called a draw on the best of the three - the pate and the tartare were both excellent and it seemed unfair to relegate the salmon to third spot. So by mains time we were already enjoying our meal. Could it get any better? Yes!

Duck is a notoriously easy dish to get wrong, even in some of the better restaurants I've dined in around Asia. So it has become a bellwether for me in determining the skills of a French chef. All too often I've been served tough, chewy, undercooked duck, which is, well, not a meat best served raw. On other occasions it's been overly fatty, leaving an almost glutinous, furry mouth feel that no amount of red wine seems capable of expunging. Alexandre excelled. The duck breast was served with perfect tenderness, not the slightest bit chewy, and medium (as duck should be served, although I accept that's a subjective opinion) - not too raw, and not overcooked to reduce the distinctive duck meat flavor. The spices gave it a unique slightly sweet flavor - these are European spices, not the hot Asian style of spice. It was served in portions with cubed new potatoes tossed in herbs and a generous helping of salad. It was one of the best duck dishes I've eaten in Saigon.

My partner's salmon was equally rewarding, the serving larger than she could handle due to the large portion of fettuccine pasta in cream sauce. A large fillet baked to perfection, golden brown on the outside and soft and pink inside. Salmon, in contrast to duck, is possibly the most difficult meat to ruin in a kitchen - let's face it, undercooked it remains entirely edible, provided it's fresh. But here it was cooked to the center yet still moist, soft and full of flavor. The cream sauce in which it rested was decidedly French; thick with butter but delightfully moorish and decadent, balancing salty fish flavor with sweetness and adding to the smoothness on the palate.

Despite feeling well nourished and satisfied, we knew we couldn't leave a French restaurant without sampling desserts. So we accepted the waitress' recommendation and chose the Crème brulee (VND80,000) and Fine apple tart (VND90,000). The tart was delightfully Parisian yet served with a smile-inducing zigzag of berry coulis with twin slices of star fruit at its head, a cute Vietnamese touch. The apple was thinly sliced over the pastry and again cooked to perfection: moist - not dried out - and flavorsome and as fresh as one could expect.

But the Crème brulee was the *pièce de résistance*: served in a deep ceramic bowl, with a slice of star fruit and a fresh raspberry on top, the sugar surface slightly charred, it looked as delicious as it tasted. Crack the brittle surface and we were rewarded with soft, sweet, rich custard beneath.

As a hybrid venue, The Mach House mixes fashion and fine food at affordable prices given the modern decor, central downtown location and impeccably prepared food. ■



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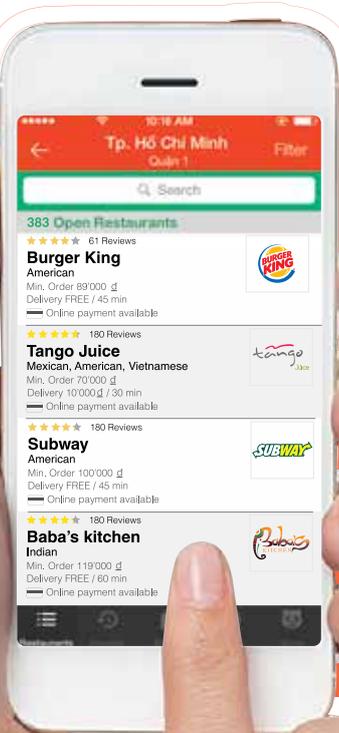


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How to enjoy drinking wine



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



HTTP://WWW.DINEBIRMINGHAM.CO.UK

DRINKING WINE CAN be one of the easiest things to do but at the same time one of the most complicated things to do right. How can I make the most of a glass of wine from the moment I pour it until I drink it while simultaneously involving four of my five senses?

We want wine to be mysterious and at the same time easy to understand; we want to choose what we like, but at the same time we don't want to be embarrassed by saying we don't like a wine highly rated by experts, or that we love a wine that everyone thinks is below standard. Is this a lose-lose situation? Not at all.

If you're just discovering wine, I am going to share a few easy tips to maximize your enjoyment with every glass. If you are a connoisseur you already know what you like and likely to already know most of my tips, however maybe you might have missed one or two of them.

Let's start with serving temperature. Each wine is unique and we have hundreds of thousands available, so let me generalize with this tip - white wines should be

served around seven to eight degrees Celsius for light white wines, and closer to 10 degrees for full bodied whites. If you serve wine too cold you will be missing out on some of its aromas. As for red wines, you will enjoy them the most if served between 15 and 18 degrees. A red wine served too cold misses on aromas, while if served too hot, the alcohol may take over the scents and tastes.

How to taste? After taking a moment to enjoy the color of the wine, swirl it. This will expose the wine to oxygen helping it to open up, or in other words, waking the wine up from months or even years it has been resting in a cellar, hence bringing back the best of its aromas and flavors.

Next, smell it. What do you get? And apart from alcohol (if you are a beginner don't despair, you will get better with time), there are many aromas that wine can bring, from vanilla, black currant and pepper in red wines, to lemons, pineapple or even petrol on white wines. Smell it again after a few minutes, and you may get more intense aromas or even new ones.

Take a sip, but before you swallow try to move the wine around your mouth, from roof to back, to tongue, as different flavor sensors are placed in different parts of our mouth. Note that flavor (sweet, bitter, salty, sour or savory) and taste (honey, sugarcane, molasses) is not the same thing: a wine may taste sweet but its flavors may be honey, caramel, raisins, etc.

How does it feel in your mouth? Tannic (makes the walls of your mouth dry), light, silky or velvety? What about after you swallow? Too alcoholic, giving your throat a burning sensation? How long after you drink do the flavors in your mouth last? The longer the better, as you can enjoy the wine even longer.

Finally, how was the overall experience? Did you enjoy the wine? We are different, we like different things, so try to find what you really like, and enjoy it rather than drinking what experts say; quite often I prefer the not so expensive wines from a famous winery rather than the most expensive from the most famous ones, but that's just me. ■

>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Cavern Pub

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



The Fan Club

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

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



Chu Bar

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



Ice Blue Bar

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



Blanchy's Tash

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

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



Last Call

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

59 Dong Du, D1
3823 3122

Also Try...

Chill Skybar

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

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

Game On

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

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

Monkey Bar

A new open air, but well cooled bar in the heart of Bui Vien on the site of the once popular

Stellar cafe. A cut above the regular backpacker haunts in style and offer. Downstairs is a modern bar with flat screen TVs showing sports, a huge circular bar and tables, and outdoor seating for people watching. Upstairs are air conditioned rooms, pool table and outdoor deck. Serves a wide variety of liquors, including wines by the glass or bottle.

119 Bui Vien, D1

The Observatory

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

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

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop Bar provides views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas.

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866

Purple Jade

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

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

Red Bar

RED offers one of the longest Happy Hours in Saigon, from 9am - 9pm,

with live music available from Monday-Saturday. This multi-level bar has a non-smoking floor and a function room along with a top quality pool table and soft-tip dart machines. A menu of Eastern and Western dishes includes wood-fired pizzas.

70-72 Ng Duc Ke, D1
2229 7017

Saigon Saigon Bar

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

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

CAFÉS



Hatvala

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

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



Guanabana Smoothies

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



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



Cafe RuNam

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

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



The Library

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

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



Les Saigonais

Les Saigonais houses a

LES SAIGONAIS
 by dieuANH

boutique, cafe and artist space in a charming mix of colonial flavor and contemporary settings. Visitors can check out Designer Dieu Anh's chic modern fashion line for men and women, along with accessories. There is also a quaint balcony where you can enjoy an afternoon coffee while watching the world go by.

1st Floor, 77-79 Ly Tu Trong, D1
Facebook: "LES SAIGONAIS"

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Also Try...

AQ Coffee

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

32 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3
3829 8344

Caffe Bene

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

58 Dong Khoi, D1
3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Cafe

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

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1
3823 1130

L'Usine

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

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

CHINESE



Dragon Court

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

11-13 Lam Son Square, D1
3827 2566



Dynasty

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

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



Kabin

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

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



Li Bai

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

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



Ming Court

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

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



Ming Dynasty

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

23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7



Also Try...

Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

20 Le Anh Xuan, D1
3822 2673

Ocean Palace

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

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

Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

12 Duong 26, D6

3755 1577
www.7kyquan.com

Shang Palace

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

is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.

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

Yu Chu

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

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

SPANISH



Tapas Saigon

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



La Habana

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



Olé

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



VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.
90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7, HCMC
08 5410 6721
 Facebook: "VIVATapasBar.PMH"



Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant, Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba Trung. Spread over four floors, it offers a casual bar, two floors of dining (one which becomes a destination for live Spanish music late at night) and a rooftop terrace. Features an extensive menu of tapas, main courses, sangria and wines.
97 Hai Ba Trung Street, D1
090 399 25 39



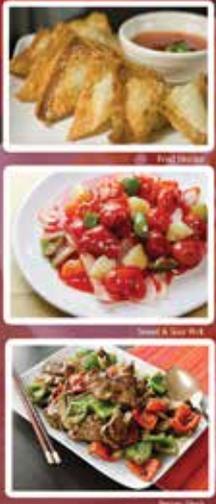


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49D Xa Lo Hanoi, District 2

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FRENCH



Augustin

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

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1
www.augustinrestaurant.com



La Creperie

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

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



La Fourchette

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

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



Le Bacoulos

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

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



Le 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 on the ground floor.

30 Thai Van Lung, 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...

L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1
0948 415 646

La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton
2229 8882

La Nicoise

A traditional 'neighbourhood' French restaurant, La Nicoise serves simple, filling French fare at exceptional value in the shadow of the Bitexco tower. Most popular for its steak dishes, the restaurant has an extensive menu which belies its compact size.

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1
3821 3056

La Villa

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

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

Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.lebouchondesaignon.com

Trois Gourmands

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

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Bollywood

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



Baba's Kitchen

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



Ganesh

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



Ashoka

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



Saigon Indian

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



Also Try...

Bombay Indian Restaurant

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

Curry Leaf

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

The Punjabi

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

ITALIAN



Ciao Bella Ovi's Pick

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

11 Dong Du, D1
3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.saigonrestaurantgroup.com/ciao

Ciao Bella



La Bettola

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

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

La Bettola
 ITALIAN RESTAURANT



Da Vinci's

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

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



La Cucina

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

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



La Hostaria

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

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



Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Blanchy Street

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

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



Achaya Café

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

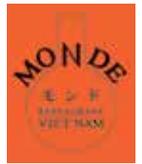
90 Le Loi, D1
093 897 2050
 11am - 10:30pm



Mondo

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



Ebisu

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

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



Gyumaru

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

8/3 Le Thanh Ton
3827 1618
gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com



Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn

Also Try...

K Cafe

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

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

Chisana Hashi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
6683 5308

Osaka Ramen

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

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

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

Robata Dining An

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

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

Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture.

With its typical Japanese-style decor – the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms – it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm.

53-55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3
3930 0039
www.sushidingaioi.com

Yoshino

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

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



KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Kang Nam Ga

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
3829 4297



Won's Cuisine

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

49 Mac Thi Buoi
3820 4085



THAI



Baan Thai

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

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

Koh Thai

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

Kumho Linh, Hai Ba Trung, D1
3823 4423

Lac Thai

Hidden away down a narrow alley in the heart of downtown this unique Thai restaurant boasts authentic flavours and surprising character. Eat downstairs at tables in a cosy, themed environment - or be brave and climb the narrow

spiral staircase to the attic and crouch on cushions in true Thai style while attentive staff serve plates to share.

71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St. D1
3823 7506

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

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

The Racha Room

Brand new fine & funky Thai venue with kooky styling and a great attitude – and some of the most finely-presented signature Thai cuisine you'll see in this city, much of it authentically spicy. Long Live the King! Reservations recommended.

12-14 Mac Thi Buoi, D1
090 879 14 12

STEAKHOUSE



Au Lac Do Brazil

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

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



El Gaucho

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

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



Indaba

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

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



New York Steakhouse

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

25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



Samba Brazilian Steakhouse

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

10C Thai Van Lung, D1
3822 0079

CHITCHAT
at the café
Lobby Floor

Seafood Extravaganza

On a Saturday night there is only one destination in town to satisfy your seafood cravings. Chit Chat restaurant offers an enviable **selection of seafood** with all your favorites **freshly-prepared** such as **lobster, slipper, scampi, etc.**

- Every Saturday night
- 18:30 to 22:00
- VND940,000++/person
(Including free flow of wine, beer and soft drinks)
- Gold card member promotion applies.

Book now: (+84) 8 3839 7777, ext 8000



 **Hotel Equatorial**
HO CHI MINH CITY

242 Tran Binh Trong, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam | info@hcm.equatorial.com | www.equatorial.com

VIETNAMESE



Com Nieu

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

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3
3932 6363
comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com
comnieusaigon.com.vn



Frangipani Hoa Su

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

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



Quan Na - Vegishouse

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

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



Quan Bui

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

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1
3829 1515



Hoa Tuc

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

74/7 Hai Ba Trung, D1
3825 1676



Papaya

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

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

Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
3848 0144

Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3
www.highway4.com

Hum

Hum is a vegetarian restaurant where food are prepared on site from various fresh beans, nuts, vegetables, flowers, and fruits. Food are complemented with special drinks mixed from fresh fruits and vegetables.

2 Thi Sach, D1
3823 8920
www.hum-vegetarian.vn

May

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

3/5 Hoang Sa
3910 1277

Temple Club

Named after the old-style Chinese temple in which the venue is located, the ancient stylings of this impressive restaurant make for an unforgettable evening spent somewhere in Saigon's colonial past. Beautiful oriental art that will please all diners and great local cuisine.

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1
3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

Nha Hang Ngon

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

French-style mansion.

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

Thanh Nien

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

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

Propaganda Bistro

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

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

INTERNATIONAL



Boathouse

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

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



Portofino

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

15 Dong Du, D1



MAY Restaurant and Bar

We have over 20 years experience in hospitality business in Vietnam with some famous Brand such as Shadow Bar & Café and MAY Restaurant & Bar. MAY- short for 'Me and You', it is all in one premium casual kitchen & bar downtown. Located centrally on the historic Dong Khoi street with a fusion of Western and Asian cuisine and pride themselves in their wine list and international standard of service. Happy Hour from 3pm to 7pm. You can even receive a 10% discount by calling 091 711 1921 or make reservation at www.mayrestaurant.com.vn

19 -21 Dong Khoi, D1 / 8am - 1am
6291 3686 / 0917 111 921
may.restaurant19@gmail.com
Facebook: "may.restaurant.bar"



Saffron

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

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1
382 48358



Zombie BBQ

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

4 Thao Dien, D2
6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139
4pm - 11pm
Facebook: ZombieBarbequesaigon



TnT BBQ

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

0166 666 7858
11am - 10pm
facebook.com/tnbbqvietnam



Also Try...

Boomarang Bistro

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

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

Chit Chat

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

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

Corso Steakhouse & Bar

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

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

Deutsches Eck / German Corner

The restaurant is fast becoming known for its sausage, beers, and their Schweins Haxe or pork knuckles (served with white cabbage and mashed potatoes). A number of German beers to select from including Konig Pilsener, Bitburger, Koestritzer Black Beer, Benediktiner Weisse, HB-Hofbrau Weisse, Schwarzbrau Exquisit, and Schwarzbrau Weisse. A001 Nguyen Van Linh St., Phu My Hung, D7
54106695

Hog's Breath

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

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

Khoi Thom

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

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
www.khoithom.com

La Fenetre Soleil

Literally 'window to the sun', LFS showcases a fusion of old-world fittings (exposed bricks, antique furniture and chandeliers) with new-

world elements (fur cushions, mosaic tiles and glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese-Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

Market 39

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

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

Scott & Binh's

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

15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY SARAH CHAMBERLAIN

হাটখোলা ডিলক থেকে
বিভিন্ন প্রকারের বেলাবসী ডিলক
আড়া এবা কল্লি স্নাড়া





FULL MOON
REGINA OF INDIA
LAKSHMI
MAY 2011

Holy man in Varanasi
India

Soul Trek

How travel and spirituality can intersect

TEXT AND IMAGES BY SARAH CHAMBERLAIN

I WHIP MY hand away from the boat's splintered wooden edge as another vessel gently collides with it, jostling for space on the river. Before us on the banks of the Ganges, the evening *Aarti* ceremony is taking place in a haze of thick, billowing incense. This ancient ritual offers respect and, thanks to the holy river, is the most sacred pilgrimage site in the world for Hindus and Jains.

The jangle of bells rings out across the water as performers raise multi-tiered candelabras above their heads in synchronized patterns. The flames of hundreds of tiny candles flicker like ecstatic dancers in the evening breeze.

Moments before, as we glided along the river toward the ceremony, our boat rower, Raju, told us the story of the Ganges with wide-eyed reverence. He spoke of Lord Shiva, the Creator of the whole universe, and of the river being the hair of the Almighty One.

Raju, a short, stocky man with dark eyes and red betel nut-stained teeth, told us that we could ask the Mother Ganga for anything and if it were right, she would provide. I closed my eyes, searching within myself for what I wanted.

'Meaning' was the answer that came from a place deep within me, surprising me by the clarity with which I knew, in that moment, was the one thing missing from my life.

I had traveled to India with my boyfriend to celebrate my 30th birthday in the holy city of Varanasi, a place synonymous with death and dying because of the cremations that take place on the banks of the river. While some people had thought it a strange destination to celebrate a milestone, I found it a fitting place to farewell my 20s.

Drawn to the forward motion of zigzagging the globe, I'd worked as a flight attendant for an Australian airline since I graduated university, but a decade of jetlag, night shifts

and the hedonistic lifestyle of partying around the world had eventually taken its toll, leading me to reassess my choices.

I was blessed in many ways, but felt like I was waiting for my life to truly begin. I was constantly striving toward the next thing but had begun to feel unfulfilled by my high-paced lifestyle. I wasn't enjoying my job with the airline anymore and it seemed I was just working to pay my mortgage without ever stopping to ask myself what I actually wanted.

We walk along the *ghats* by the river the following morning as men in loincloths perform religious acts of *puja* and female pilgrims excitedly dunk themselves in the blessed river, draped in elaborate, brightly colored saris. Morning yoga instruction blares through a loud speaker from an *ashram*, encouraging its devotees to follow along.

Dhobis twist purple sheets high above their heads, bringing them down on large flat stones with a loud "whack!" to remove the grime.

Watching these people go about their morning rituals in one of the oldest, continually inhabited cities in the world gives me a humbling sense of being a tiny speck in the grand scheme of life.

"Varanasi is the most alive place I've ever been," I think, watching as a body wrapped in white cloth is placed on a pile of tawny wood and slowly engulfed by flames.



IMAGE BY MARISOL PALEAZ-LEONG

Aarti Ceremony, Varanasi



IMAGE BY MARISOL PALEAZ-LEONG

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Bathing in the Ganges; Varanasi boats; morning puja; Varanasi dhobis; and crossing Varanasi riverbank



“I am filled with the trepidation of stepping into the unknown, but also a sense of freedom of which I have never experienced before.”

Sleeping While Awake

Six months later, I am on retreat at a secluded resort on the Indonesian island of Bali. For five days we meditate and practice light yoga in tropical gardens overlooking the North Bali Sea. I find it challenging to sit with my thoughts for so long.

One evening, our group gathers in the meditation hall to share what we are discovering as a result of our practice. Chanting from a religious ceremony in a nearby village serenades the intimate gathering. They are deep, soulful words I don't understand but somehow recognize. The melodious songs that drift into the resort every evening after dark remind me I'm not the only one seeking spiritual renewal.

Even though the retreat has been challenging for me, I am relishing the new experience and can feel a change stirring within me. I know there is more to life than working a job that no longer fulfills me in order to pay my bills. I have created a life I thought would make me happy, but has left me feeling empty. I want more experiences like this, where I can develop a relationship with my soul.

Our group sits in a circle around a fuchsia and gold floral mandala complete with flickering tea light candles. I stare into the mandala and search for the words to sum up how I feel. I suddenly blurt out, “I feel like I've been asleep and have woken up in someone else's life.”

Several months later, the universe answers my call for change. The company I work for offers voluntary redundancies in an attempt to cut back staff. My boyfriend and I decide it is time to follow our hearts and embark on a journey of long-term travel. We've both lived the sort of life society deems successful with steady jobs, cars and a mortgage but neither of us feel like we are living the life we're meant to.

While I don't know exactly what I want, I dream of a life filled with connection, creativity and adventure. We both love to travel and in fact, our times abroad have always been our happiest. While it seems like a pipe dream to create a life on the road, we want to try.

We save as much as we can by working overtime and taking on extra jobs. We sell our home, our cars and almost all our

FROM TOP: Offering Bali; Buddha statue in Thailand; and Tibetan temple



FROM TOP: Sarah in Oaxaca, Mexico; yoga and meditation

possessions, save for a few sentimental objects. The monumental task of unloading that which tethers us to one place, is more stressful than I anticipate and fear pervades my every move. The day we board a plane to Phnom Penh with a one-way ticket each and a small backpack filled with clothes, a laptop and a camera, I have to pinch myself that it is finally happening.

I am filled with the trepidation of stepping into the unknown, but also a sense of freedom of which I have never experienced before.

Risk Versus Bliss

That day was three years ago. Since then, I've studied meditation with monks in northern Thailand, visited Tibetan Buddhist temples in Western China, and witnessed Shamanic

rituals in Guatemala.

We've lived in Playa del Carmen, Mexico – a vibrant town on the Caribbean coast where I learned to slow down due to its laid back, 'manana' lifestyle. The Riviera Maya plays host to an array of yoga classes, meditation workshops and other healing modalities. Adding to that, its proximity to ancient Mayan sites and some of the most beautiful beaches in the world make it a popular destination for spiritual seekers. In Mexico I've skydived, snorkelled with whale sharks and volunteered in the local community – things I would never have experienced had I not taken the risk to follow my bliss.

Over the course of this journey I have learned to balance 'doing' with 'being' and have developed a regular meditation practice

TIPS

FOR STAYING CONNECTED TO YOUR SOUL WHILE TRAVELING

1. Research yoga, meditation, tai chi and chi gong classes at your destination so you can plan your stay around attending a class.
2. Build a meditation or yoga retreat into your vacation plans. Rather than burning out, you will return home revived and rejuvenated.
3. Do some simple breathing exercises such as counting your breaths, breathing deeply into your belly or yogic breathing to cultivate a connection with the present moment.
4. Take a mindful walk in nature and attempt to observe your experience through your senses of sight, smell, taste, sound and touch without judgment.
5. As soon as you wake up, take five minutes to be still. Close your eyes and check in with yourself, write in a journal or listen to a guided meditation. Just five minutes per day of stillness is one of the best gifts you can ever give yourself.

which helps me stay present and connected.

Cultivating a connection with my true self, rather than trying to fit the mold of what society expects has now become paramount for me. I am no longer waiting for my life to start because I finally feel like it is a true expression of who I am.

I now try to encourage others to 'travel within' and connect with themselves as a path to fulfilment. In August I'm returning to Bali to coordinate a meditation and yoga retreat at the same resort I experienced my moment of clarity over four years ago.

I truly believe there is no limit to the extraordinary life we can create when we listen to what our soul desires. My hope is that more people will connect with their true selves and live a life that is an expression of who they really are, utilizing their unique talents and gifts.

My boyfriend and I are still happily nomadic with no plans of stopping, and yet, I have discovered a sense of stillness within the motion. While international exploration still fuels me, self-discovery continues to lead me home.

BIO: Sarah Chamberlain is a nomadic writer, traveler and dreamer from Perth, Western Australia. She lives a 'free range life,' traveling the globe slowly and mindfully, encouraging others to discover the beauty of their imperfect journey and to connect with their true selves. Find details on her Return to Wholeness meditation retreat in Bali, August 23-29, and follow her travels at www.sarahsomewhere.com ■

Live for Family Fun

This Year in Breathtaking Central Vietnam at Angsana Lang Co

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY **ANGSANA LANG CO**

Nestled in the foothills of Truong Son Mountains in Central Vietnam, Angsana Lăng Cô looks out over a magnificent 3 km private sandy beach on a crescent bay, creating an inviting and exhilarating location for that perfect vacation. With the *Live for Family Fun* offer, look forward to fun in the sun with your loved ones with an extensive list of exciting sports, cool activities and dining experiences to remember.

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Sun, Sand and Sea

Embark on an aquatic adventure at the sports centre and engage in a thrilling snorkeling, parasailing or windsurfing session. Choose to kayak, jetski, waterski or pick from other water sport options for a fun-filled afternoon. Feel the thrill on the waters or enjoy a heart-thumping ride as you race the family on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) set amidst the lush tropical greenery and rugged mountain scapes.

Explore an Adventure

Jump on a bicycle from the resort and ride up the Hai Van Pass, an old highway that meanders over the mountains between Da Nang and Lang Co, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the sea and countryside. Take a family boat ride down the Perfume River that winds through Hue and step into the seven-storey Thien Mu Pagoda, where monks go about their daily activities. Explore the cultural wonders of Central Vietnam on an excursion to the fascinating UNESCO heritage towns of Hoi An and Hue, with daily complimentary shuttle services available to and from the resort.

The *Live for Family Fun* offer at Angsana Lăng Cô includes complimentary daily breakfast at The Market Place, daily in-room snack including non-alcohol minibar, one family picnic per stay, Angsana Kids Club access, unlimited non-motorized activities as well as choice of two fun motorized activities daily (ATV, Jet Ski, Flying Fish or Banana Boat) for up to 4 persons aged 15 and above. Kids aged 12 and below dine for free from Kids Menu (food only) for every paying adult at Angsana Lang Co. This is valid with a minimum two night stay from 8,000,000VND++/night. Book before 29 October 2015 to enjoy this promotion valid till 31 October 2015. ■

For more information, visit www.angsana.com/en/ap-vietnam-lang-co or email reservations-langco@angsana.com.



FROM TOP: Angsana exterior; Kids club; and guests room

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The Many Faces of Chau Doc

Stories from the gateway to the Mekong Delta

TEXT BY **JAMES PHAM**
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **TMG**



MANY KNOW THE border town of Chau Doc simply as a waypoint on the river route from Saigon to Phnom Penh. Weary travelers arrive late in the day, only to leave on an early boat the next morning, never really having seen this town of a little over 150,000 inhabitants. However, from holy pilgrimage sites and floating markets to a stunning bird sanctuary and lovely mosques and pagodas, Chau Doc deserves to be a destination into itself. These are the stories of Chau Doc as told by its people.

Water World

Near where the Chau Doc River merges with the Hau River (a branch of the Mekong River), barges congregate into a floating market, their produce conveniently advertised on long poles. Along the banks, houses also float, many doubling as fish farms.

Oanh lifts up a plank from the floor of her houseboat, tossing in a handful of food pellets, sending the fish into a frenzy. “We buy each fish for VND2,500 and after eight to 10 months, we can sell them for about VND 35,000 per kilo. They eat about 2.5-3kgs of food each, meaning we need to put out about VND 2.5b per season to raise 150,000 fish,” she says shrewdly of the fish that inhabit the 1,000 cubic meters of space under their two boats.

Traditionally, these floating houses were buoyed by large rafts of bamboo, but have since been replaced by PVC piping or plastic drums. “We have cool breezes all day. It’s clean, not dusty like on land,” says Oanh. She pulls an electric line from the road, helped along by bamboo poles every few meters. A pump supplies their water needs.

The lives of her family are closely connected to the fish who swim beneath her home. “Sometimes we hear them thrashing at night. That means they’re not getting enough oxygen because the river isn’t flowing fast enough. We’ll have to get up, angle our motorboat in the right direction and turn on the motor to create a current for them. Other times, we’ll even make food for them out of sea fish, rice and potatoes. It’s a hard life and I’d rather not have my children do it. On the other hand, because we live right here above the fish, our family is always together. Whatever we lack in money, we make up for in love.”



Oanh and Floating Fish Farm

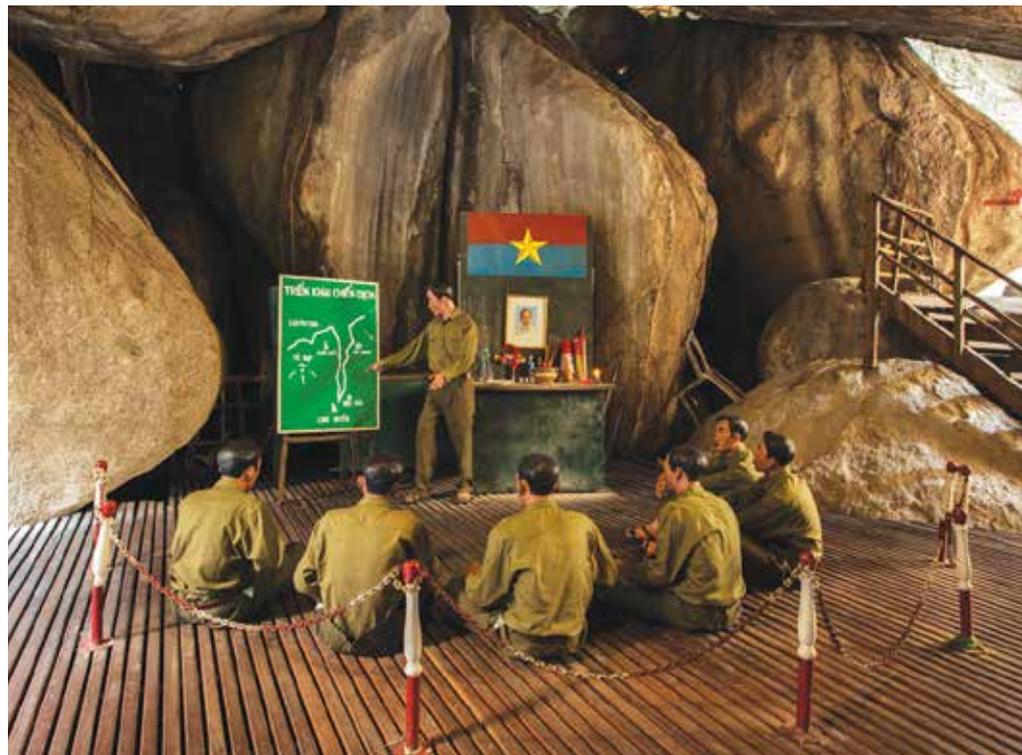
From holy pilgrimage sites and floating markets to a stunning bird sanctuary and lovely mosques and pagodas, Chau Doc deserves to be a destination into itself

The Two Million Dollar Man

Less than an hour's drive southwest of Chau Doc lies Tuc Dup Hill. Standing 216m high, this outcrop of large, smooth boulders conceals a network of connecting caves, explaining why it became a strategic base of operations for the Northern Vietnamese during the American War. For 128 days in 1968-9, it was the site of an intense battle, earning its nickname of 'Two Million Dollar Hill,' the amount of money the US purportedly spent on bombs in an unsuccessful attempt to take the hill.

Convenient walkways and stairwells now make it easy to climb the hill, however, once at the caves, steep descents and extremely narrow natural passageways reveal why the hill was never taken. "The bombs were so loud," remembers Le Thanh Cu, 82, one of the oldest surviving members of the resistance fighters, permanent hearing loss a result of those difficult times. Leaving home at 16 to join the army, first fighting the French and then the Americans, Cu recalls the emotions that led this otherwise peaceful man into a life of war. "The French burned our house many times. It got so we didn't have anywhere to live. Then came the Americans. We have a saying that you bring in a snake to kill the chickens. That's what happened. The South Vietnamese brought in the Americans to kill their own brothers. They wanted war. I wanted peace."

Now Cu lives just down the road from Tuc Dup Hill in a modest home made extraordinary by the dozens of military certificates and awards on display. "Leaves never fall far from the roots," he says by way of explanation for why he settled so close to the site of his proudest victory. "We were 260 people, soldiers and civilians. There were nearly 20 women who fought with us and three or four children were even born during those 128 days, but not a single one was born normal because of the chemicals or malnutrition. We didn't know how long the battle would go on. But the local people supplied us with food. We had water from the natural springs and caught fish. We had very few weapons. I remember actually using a rifle and waiting until the pilots flew very low to fire on them or at the fuselages. My heart has changed since then, though. I know it was the fault of the politicians, not the people. I have no anger left. We were all stupid then. All we knew how to do was pull the trigger."



Mr Hai Cu and Tuc Dup Hill



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Ayesah; Vui and Tra Su Bird Sanctuary

Melting Pot

Chau Doc's geography means it is home to diverse ethnic and religious communities where Cambodians, Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese and Muslim Cham live peacefully side by side. Along the banks of the Chau Doc River lies Phum Soai, a small Cham community. The broad, clean streets feature neat houses, anchored by a town mosque. Descendants of the Champa Kingdom, the community here practices a rustic form of Sunni Islam, most probably introduced by seafaring Muslim traders in the late 10th and early 11th centuries and bolstered by the arrival of Muslim Chams from Cambodia in the mid-19th century.

Eighty-one year old Ayesah welcomes us into her simple wooden home, nimbly laying out mats and an assortment of dates and biscuits. "I'm old. I'm not pretty," she laughs

while covering her two remaining teeth, her face beautifully weathered and cloaked in a delicate shawl. She says something to her daughter in Arabic who soon emerges with a platter of watermelon. Born in nearby Chau Giang, Ayesah proudly shows off her many prayer rugs and fingers a delicate strand of turquoise prayer beads. She speaks of life as a Muslim Cham in Vietnam, surrounded by her three children and 10 grandchildren. "I can read the Koran in Arabic," she says proudly. "The children here study Vietnamese in school and Arabic in the evenings at the mosque. When they get older, they will go off to Saigon for university, but I know they won't forget where they came from." While the community is exclusive (those wishing to marry into it must convert to Islam), they freely intermingle with their Vietnamese and Khmer neighbors. "There used to be prejudice

many years ago, but we've learned to live together."

Enchanted Forest

Just 30km southwest of Chau Doc lies the protected, 850 hectare Tra Su Forest. Home to hundreds of species of plants, birds, animals and reptiles, the eco-diversity is impressive. The area can be explored on foot, along pretty paths lined by cajuput trees with their flaky, spongy bark, by bicycle or most stunningly, by boat.

Vui is one of 11 rowboat ladies who ferry visitors through the flooded mangrove forest. For each 15-minute trip, she earns VND15,000. "I'm happiest when there are lots of tourists, of course," she says as she paddles the sturdy boat through a thick, living carpet of water lettuce, past waterbirds dancing their way over the aquatic vegetation and



Lady Xu Pagoda

storks nesting high in the trees above. The combination of lush greenery and gnarled trees set against a soundtrack of bird calls is mesmerizing. Vui's husband operates one of the motorboats that takes visitors deeper into the forest where a short walk leads to a 25m watchtower for a bird's eye view of the canopy, with Nui Sam in the distance. "The money helps us send our children to school. Being surrounded by nature every day is just a bonus."

Lady Luck

At the base of Nui Sam Mountain, just outside of Chau Doc, is the Lady Xu Temple, one of Vietnam's most holy sites. Legends and oral traditions abound of this sacred, slightly larger than life-sized statue. Some say it's actually a representation of Shiva from the sixth century, possibly by the Oc Eo civilization, while others say it's a Khmer Buddha statue, and painted over by the Vietnamese into a coffee-colored female deity. One legend says it was found 200 years

ago atop Nui Sam and could only be carried down by nine virgins. Whatever its origin, Lady Xu today has a healthy cult of followers, attracting upwards of 2 million pilgrims for her annual festival (usually in May).

"I don't know if it's true, but people say that Lady Xu gets fatter every year. They have to change the measurements of her costumes," says Nghia, one of the temple workers, as he sorts out baskets of fruit and whole roasted pigs brought by the devout who also burn paper costumes and printed prayers in the courtyard. Stacks of rice and other gifts line the inner area of the lotus-shaped temple, and there is an entire showroom of colorful sequined robes and ornate headdresses used as part of the annual ceremony which includes bathing and re-dressing the statue. Bits of cloth from older robes are placed in envelopes as lucky charms for people to take away. "My mother came here to pray for my grandmother's recovery, and it worked. Personally, I'm not sure if I believe, but it never hurts to ask," he smiles. ■



IF YOU GO...

The floating market reaches its peak between 7am - 9am. Boats are available for hire along the promenade adjacent to the Victoria Chau Doc Hotel. The fish farms are private houses and require prior permission to board.

Tuc Dup Hill is located near Tri Ton District. There are buses from Chau Doc for the 45km trip, but the last few kilometers require a motorcycle or taxi.

There are a few mounted maps (all in Vietnamese) explaining what each cave was used for and some of the caves feature life-sized dioramas. Gun enthusiasts can try out the shooting range at the base of the hill (AK-47 bullets cost VND10,000 each).

The Cham village of Phum Soai is accessible by river or road. Visitors should dress modestly. Only Muslims may enter the mosque.

Entrance into the Tra Su Forest works out to about VND60,000 per person (depending on the number in your group), including all boat rides. Tips are appreciated. There are a few huts selling coconuts and snacks, but extend your stay by taking your own picnic lunch. The birds are most active in the early morning and late afternoon hours.

Visiting the Lady Xu Temple is free. Vendors across the street sell baskets of fruit and other offerings. While there, visit the Tay An Temple just down the road for an example of architecture featuring Indian, Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese motifs.

Buffalo Tours (www.buffalotours.com) offers tailor-made excursions to all these destinations, including extra touches like meeting up with a vet at Tuc Dup Hill or boarding a floating fish farm in Chau Doc.

The Victoria Chau Doc Hotel makes a stylish, comfortable base from which to explore the area. Set right on the

Hau River, travelers will appreciate its French colonial architecture and spacious terrace with river views. For stunning panoramic views of the Delta, the boutique Victoria Nui Sam Lodge offers serenity at very reasonable prices.

Doubles start at USD90 and USD52, respectively, including breakfast. Victoria also operates a daily, ultra-comfortable Saigon-Chau Doc coach featuring leather seats, individual tablets and wi-fi. See www.victoriahotels.asia

Cruise Control

Escape the city along the Saigon River

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



SLOW BOAT RIDES along rivers and canals may well be one of the last leisurely modes of transportation. Beyond the inviting languid afternoons that pass by at 5mph, this millennia-old form of cruising along the Saigon River guarantees a taste of the local culture - and an up-close view of gorgeous meandering landscapes studded with villas, bamboo shacks, palm trees and the occasional Heineken billboard.

Our group arrives at the floating dock adjoining Thao Dien Village in District 2 and is introduced to Brutus - a riverboat that is the equivalent of a floating convertible Cadillac. It's a beauty of lacquered wood, upholstered with cushy seating and fitted out with an eight-ball beer tap. Our Captain is Jochem, who tells me Brutus was built in Saigon back in 2010 when he and his

girlfriend, director of Tau Saigon, Hanh, came up with the idea of a boating service as a way for their friends to cruise the backwaters around An Phu and its wetland on the weekends. They would sail around Thanh Da Island and find an inviting place to go ashore for a barbecue and a few "coldies".

We clamber aboard while Jochem readies Brutus for the trip and Hanh pulls us a round of beers. Our route for the day takes us around the curve of Thanh Da Island, under Xa Lo Hanoi and out to the wetlands around An Phu. Also offered are routes to the 18th century floating temple of Phu Chau Mieu, the full circuit of the elephant head-shaped Thanh Da Island, and the gauntlet of Saigon River in District 1, starting from Bach Dang Pier. Each of the routes takes about two hours and catering is also available.

The atmosphere is relaxed in that magical way you usually get only on holiday. Hanh brings out a platter of seafood rice paper rolls and refills our beers. Swallows dart overhead; white cranes lift their necks from the reeds. Out here in the backwaters, noisy Saigon feels far away.

Brutus, though quite young, has already had stints both here in Southeast Asia and in Jochem's native Holland, where it plied the waterways of Amsterdam for a time.

"You sailed it all the way to Holland?" I ask.

"No," he replies matter-of-factly. "It was shipped there." It never occurred to me before that you could *ship* a ship somewhere.

"And what happened after that?"

"I had it shipped back."

Wow.

"What's the most number of people you've



IMAGE BY TAU SAIGON

managed to fit onto this thing?”

“About 60. It was King’s Day in Holland, the biggest holiday of the year, and all the waterways were crammed with boats and people. Nobody cares on King’s Day how many people you fit on your boat. Everybody’s having too much fun. There were people elbowing their way to the beer tap, and the little roof up there was filled with people dancing”.

Spa Boat

Tau Saigon (www.tausaigon.com) is a new service, launched over a month ago after Brutus returned to Saigon’s waterways. The couple’s first vessel before Brutus was a smaller six-person boat, which Jochem now uses for fishing back in his hometown. Then they upgraded to a larger vessel with an

outboard motor.

“That was fun,” he recalls. “We had to have the motor brought over in the plane from Holland because we couldn’t find the right one here.” The image of this amiable Dutchman trying to get an outboard motor through customs I find quite amusing. But Jochem and Hanh wanted something bigger still, something with its own motor and a built-in toilet.

“We discovered it wasn’t exactly practical to have free flow beer on a boat with no toilet,” Hanh says. Enter Brutus.

“What about when it rains?” I ask.

Brutus has a pullover cover for storms and bookings can be cancelled without penalty in the event of bad weather. However, that didn’t stop a group of Vietnamese revelers who, upon encountering a downpour shortly after

embarking, opted to dance in the rain, drinks in hand, to Lady Gaga. (You can plug your own music into Brutus’s speaker system.)

I can’t think of a much better way to spend a Sunday afternoon, cruising Saigon’s hidden backwaters, the tips of apartment towers and pagoda spires peeking above the reeds, past barges and fish farms, a Heineken draught in hand, chill tunes rolling out over the sound system.

Tau Saigon’s tours are already popular with the Thao Dien expat community, but Hanh and Jochem want to expand their operations and fleet further. Though a relatively new enterprise, they’ve had a steady flow of bachelor parties, birthday cruises and baby showers. “But ideally,” says Hanh, “we’d like to get a bigger boat; something with a spa.”

Sounds ideal to me! ■





Antarctica

IMAGES BY JIMMY VAN DER KLOET



TOP:
Humpback Whale Bones, Pleuneau
Island



BOTTOM:
Whaling Ship Wreck in
Bismarck Strait

Antarctic Sea Lion in >
Wilhelmina Bay





Tag It

Graffiti and street art in Vietnam



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



IMAGE BY ADAM ROBERT YOUNG

BACK IN ENGLAND, I lived on a big steel barge in the heart of one of the largest cities in the country. She was moored in the old dock where the vegetable market used to be. At weekends, if the weather was calm, I would take her out for a run down the canal for a picnic to see the countryside roll slowly by.

The inland waterways of northern England are often hidden from view as they wander through fields and woodland and the industrial areas of towns and cities. Because of this, the industrial buildings, bridges and walls are perfect canvasses for

young graffiti artists to vent their creativity when no one is around.

As in many UK cities, our council has set aside some walls in the city center for graffiti artists to use as they wish. The hope is that artists will use these walls to experiment with their work rather than on privately-owned facades. These public spaces also give people the chance to watch artists at work and to learn about their tags and messages.

Of course, the public walls don't completely satisfy the artists' need to produce clandestine creations and to tag

concrete walls to say, "I was here." The quiet concrete canvasses of the canalside buildings are the perfect location for these adventures. So I would look forward to seeing the latest creations under the motorway bridges, inside derelict factories and on lonely walls.

When I came to Vietnam, I never thought I would miss all this urban art, but actually, when I spotted my first piece of tagging in District 1, I felt a kind of relief. Somehow, I felt reassured that young artists are indeed active and practising even in this distant, tropical, urban landscape.

Vietnam has a proud tradition of street art. The government used to commission artists to design and paint huge messages to promote healthy living, career or personal development along with a few inspirational or heroic words to the masses. Since the beginning of time, man has been communicating the greatness of kings, victories in battle, the teachings of prophets and gurus and other historical events and stories through visual arts. The great murals at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and the paintings in the great pyramids of Giza in Egypt are superb examples of this.

So what are the modern-day graffiti artists saying? It's not certain they are saying anything in particular. Their work is like that of most other artists; they do it because they love it and the style of work varies from artist to artist like any other genre. Picasso once said that "an artist is a child who managed to survive into adulthood," and graffiti artists generally have a stronger sense of play and enjoy using more fantasy and imaginary characters than 'traditional' artists - that's for sure.

For my part, I would always support the arrival of more color in our urban landscapes and generally find most graffiti more acceptable than some modern, commercial advertising hoardings which are responsible for most of the visual pollution in our neighborhoods and highways. Graffiti brings a human touch to neglected walls and surely the works are no more offensive or intrusive than all those stencilled telephone numbers we have come to find so endearing. ■

>> The List

Travel



Bhaya Cruises

Bhaya combines oriental style with contemporary luxury to create an unforgettable experience cruising Halong Bay. The Bhaya fleet (Bhaya Classic, Legend Halong and The Au Co) offers a total of 178 luxury cabins and suites accommodating more than 400 passengers for Ha Long Bay cruises or hosted events (weddings, corporate retreats, incentives, meetings, and more).

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www.anamandara-resort.com



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www.princessannam.com



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www.laverandaresorts.com



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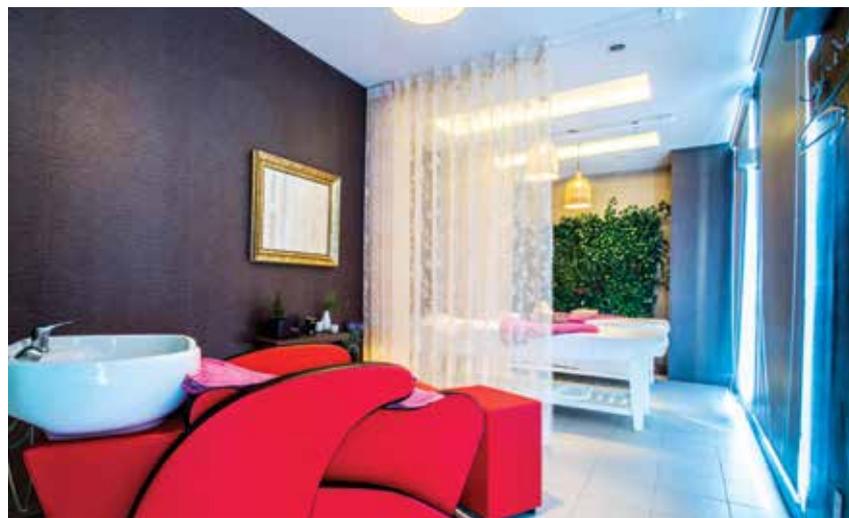
ORIENT IS ONE of the leading skincare and laser centers in Vietnam, but few are aware that it also offers a full range of holistic spa and massage services. At their District 1 branch on 244A Cong Quynh, the spa spans five floors. Originally opened as a private service for clients of their skincare and laser treatments, the Orient Spa is gaining popularity as Saigon's hidden gem for relaxation and pampering.

The spa's design is simple yet modern with white and earthy tones helping to create a tranquil and calm ambiance. Quarters are spacious and separated for specific services such as massages, herbal baths, scrubs and steam rooms. The staff are dressed in clean and smart white therapist uniforms and are very attentive.

Immediately as they come in, clients are offered a glass of iced blue chai. The sweet herbal drink is made by brewing butterfly pea flowers - an Asian plant with many health and beauty benefits for the skin, hair and immune system - with organic brown sugar and fresh lime juice.

Massages are by far the best service at Orient Spa, owing to a solid training program headed by their chief massage therapist Pham Thi Bich Phuong. Phuong is a veteran therapist with 10 years of professional experience and was trained by Japanese massage therapists while working at Saigon Spa in 2005.

Massage styles available at Orient include: Aroma massage (VND450,000/60 minutes), a powerful therapeutic technique that promotes emotional, mental and physical wellbeing; Hot Stone massage (VND550,000/60 minutes), a popular process that combines heat therapy and smooth basalt stones to detoxify the body and induce a positive energy flow; and Indian massage (VND280,000/30 minutes), a rare deep tissue massage technique that works miracles on muscle aches and pain. Orient also has its own signature massage style (VND550,000/60 minutes), which is a high-performing combination of classical Swedish massage and compression and trigger point



technique.

While massages are a must-try at Orient, the spa's other services such as body exfoliation, skin treatment, and steam baths are also worth an indulgence. Orient offers a rich selection of facial treatments for all skin concerns and types. On the 10th floor of the building, next to the body exfoliation section are two steam rooms, one wet and one dry. Body exfoliation and steam baths are offered as one package at VND550,000

per 60-minute session.

Though little known, Orient Spa has been around since the beginning of Orient Center itself. Its location and relatively low business traffic makes it incredibly convenient for clients of Orient, who can smoothly segue from an appointment with their dermatologist to the massage room. The Orient brand and its high quality service and reasonable prices make it a must-try Saigon spa destination. ■



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>> The List

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nhakhoadrhung@gmail.com
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SPA



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5412 4773



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www.sweetspa.vn



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Orient Skincare & Laser Center

Founded in 2005, Orient is currently known as the leading center in laser treatment in Ho Chi Minh city. The center offers non-surgery aesthetic treatments by the certified dermatologists as well as pampering services for any type of problem skin. A variety of treatments includes: wrinkle removal, acne & scar treatment, rejuvenation & pigment augmenting treatment, slimming treatments, permanent hair removal and massage therapy.

244A Cong Quynh, D1
3926 0561-62-63-64

Kids & Education

Who's the Boss?

Maintaining authority as a parent

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

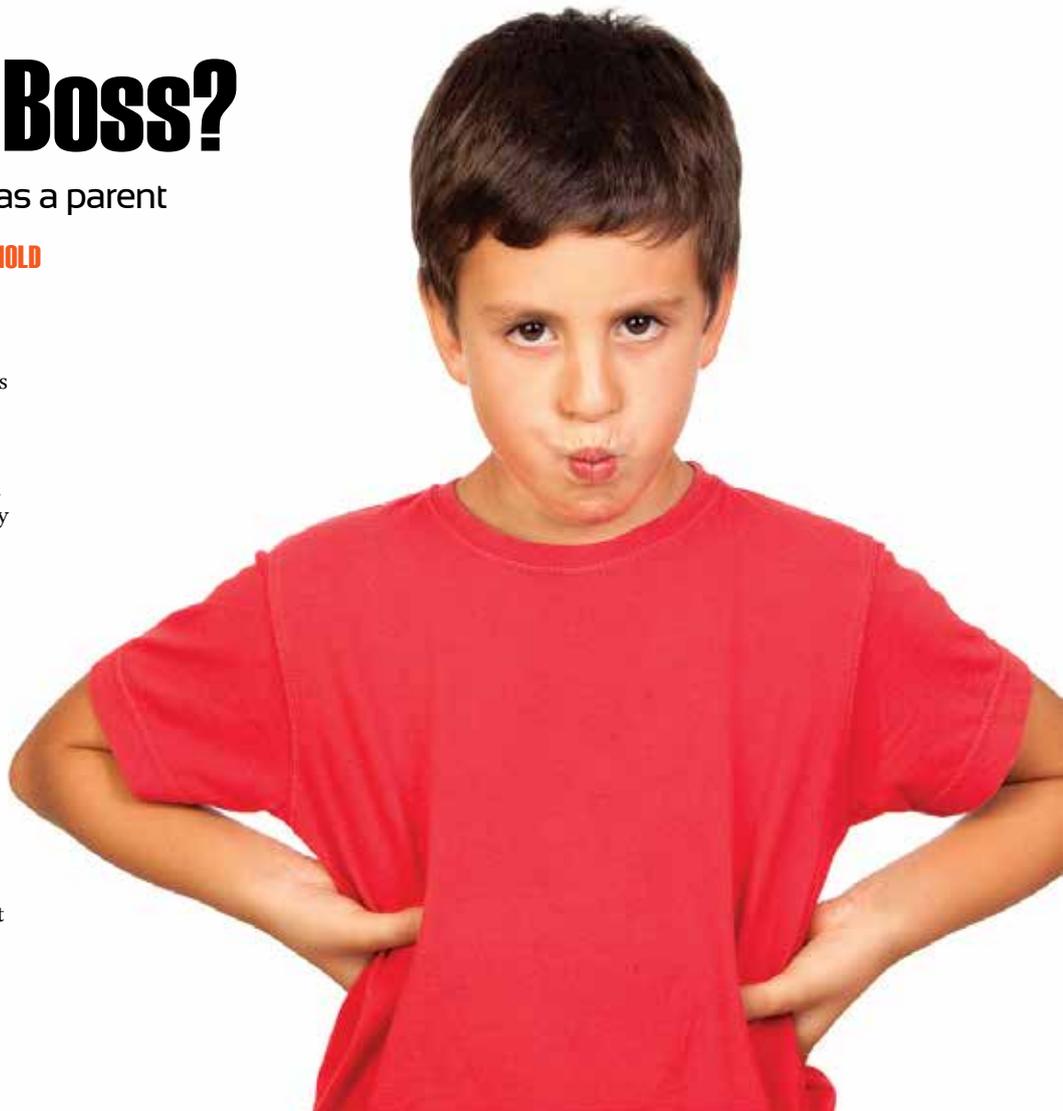
OUR KIDS KNOW we won't hit them. That's a rule we have, and there's no way that's going to change. Sure, the local side of the family tend to subscribe to the wisdom that the occasional short, sharp slap-into-line can be an effective parenting tool. Suffice it to say that we're trying a different way.

That was probably our mistake right there. No, we have no regrets about opting for nonviolent parenting – but it's just not enough to decide what you're *not* going to do as a parent. You have to actually sit down and work out what the *alternative* is going to be. You may have to look through a few parenting guides, and you may have to hold a few frank discussions between you about your respective values as caregivers – but what you should most certainly *shouldn't* do is to wing it.

For the modern mom and dad, winging it usually goes down one way – a swift descent into a constant game of *Who's the Boss?* It starts when you decide to treat your child with the same respect any dignified human being deserves – you congratulate yourself for it at the time – and dissolves into a nightly drama in which you're apologizing profusely for things like not having their milk ready in time for their bedtime story. Somehow, at some point, the baby takes control.

She doesn't want her meal? Fine, you firmly assert your patient, enlightened superiority with a fully-detailed monologue on the importance of a healthy dinner. What does she take away from that? *Mom will negotiate. Mom will listen to reason and respect my point of view. All I have to do is get the hang of this debating thing, and I'll be able to talk my way out of anything.*

Kids are fast learners. Ours are about ready for a career in law by this stage. No matter what we ask of them, there is always a loophole – and by trying to consistently use reason with them in all things, we've inadvertently trained them to spot that loophole without even trying.



There are few ways out of this mess. There's always a good shouting match, but any child of average intelligence will probably see that as a sign that you've lost control – after all, they shout when they lose it, and you always tell them that they need to calm down. So that's exactly what they'll tell you. You can try negotiating, but this is even more a surrender of authority. It's easy enough to say "alright, alright, you can eat marshmallows for breakfast *just this once*" – which will put a short stop to the screaming fit – but kids know instinctively that anything that happens once can happen again. There are now actual marshmallow cereals and spreads on the market for parents who've already lost this battle and need to provide

the 'mallow every single day just to avoid drama.

One thing that a number of parents try is to 'rescue' their kids when the going gets tough. If you've asked them to do something that they feel is too difficult – such as put on a shirt or hold their own milk bottle – it's always much simpler to do it for them than to undergo the ensuing temper tantrum if you refuse. Asian families in particular are known to be superhumanly sympathetic to children who refuse their assigned duties, which is why you'll sometimes see a local nanny following a lanky tweenager around the back yard with a soup spoon. If you're hoping your wee one will develop a little more independence than that, you're going to

have to draw the line a lot earlier.

Always Right, Even When You're Wrong

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but if you want to regain your authority as a parent, you have to take some difficult steps. These are hard things to do because they universally inflict short-term distress on your child, and it is beyond uncomfortable to see your own children suffer. But suffer they must if they're going to learn the basic skills they need to hold their own in the society of other children – and if you can't straighten things out about who calls the shots early on, you're guaranteeing they'll have social issues later in life – sometimes well into their adulthood.

Give up the negotiations. You don't have to convince your children that you're right in the hope that they'll decide to behave because it makes rational sense. You need to be the proverbial McDonald's customer here – always right, even when you're wrong. Your kid needs to understand that, and follow

your lead regardless of whether or not they find it unfair.

Control your temper – it's absolutely, absolutely necessary. If you find yourself getting angry, you can tell them so – you can even say "I'm leaving the room for five minutes to control my temper. We'll talk about this when I'm back." They may scream at you, bawl uncontrollably, roll around on the floor – but you need to always, always be Samuel Jackson cool.

The most important thing of all is the hardest – so hard, it's impossible to pull off 100 percent. But you need to make this happen *most* of the time if you want to be the alpha of your pack rather than the grinning lapdog. That thing is to be *consistent*. To mean what you say and say what you mean. Don't threaten to do things you'd never actually do – "if you don't go to bed, you're sleeping on the street"! My kid always goes to get

the keys to the front door whenever I say that, giddy with excitement at the thought of having a sleep-out. "If you don't do what I say, I'm going to throw one of your toys away," I tried on another occasion. I was going to do it, too – the paper cut-out I'd seen her scribbling on that morning was totally headed for the trash. She pointed at the most expensive item in the plush toy box and glared at me: "TAKE THE BEAR."

Set the rules, and make the consequences clear. If your child misbehaves, make sure you follow through with the stated punishments. It takes planning, a little thinking ahead, and (more than you might think) a lot of courage. There will be tears, and some of them will be yours. But it's music to the ears when you say "clean up your room right now!" and the only response is a cheerful, "OK, Dad." ■



A 21st Century Education

Learning for life in our times



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

DID YOU KNOW the top ten jobs today didn't exist ten years ago? Fast forward another ten years and the world will be a very different place again. That means that many skills learnt in schools today may be obsolete by the time children graduate. For educators, this poses a difficult problem: How do you prepare children for a world that doesn't exist yet?

Change is inevitable. In the natural world, it is not the biggest or strongest species that survive - dinosaurs died out a long time ago. It's those that adapt to changing environments that do. Think of the chameleon for example.

The same can be said about working in the adult world. One-job careers are now almost non-existent. In fact, today's graduates will have between five to 15 jobs in their lifetime. Adaptability, therefore, is key. Those who dislike change, or are unable or unwilling to adapt, will simply lose pace and may be left behind.

Moreover, internationalism is already here; the majority of countries the world over are already greatly interdependent. The clothes we wear, the foods we eat, the technology we use - most of it comes from another country. Travel is also easier and cheaper than ever before. Put the two together and it explains why so many

of us now work in different countries to the one we were born in. International understanding and having respect for other cultures is, therefore, vital. But it needs teaching. We are not born this way.

Taking all this into account, how do parents choose the right school for their child? Well the answer is quite simple. It is finding a school that parents believe will best prepare their child for careers that will likely span many jobs, countries and skill sets.

During their time in school, children need to acquire basic skills in reading, writing and math - that will never change - but what is becoming increasingly important is that children have the right blend of personal skills and attitude. After all, children learn far more than just knowledge during their time at school. The best teachers teach 'ways of being' as a person, as a learner, as a thinker; that will enable them to be successful.

Eight

I was once told that the difference between working in a factory and being the manager of the factory is the difference in personal skills and attitude. There is possibly a lot of truth to that. If we think about our own jobs, we all need a certain level of knowledge and skill to do our job

well, but someone else could easily learn that knowledge and skill. The people who are most successful in their field are those who work well with others, are the most determined, the best at coping with change, the best communicators, etc.

So do children really need to know which year the Battle of Hastings occurred, or is it more important that children have the skills and attitude to be able to find out for themselves? This way of thinking reminds me of that famous proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for one day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

The same philosophy applies to learning. If you tell a child a fact, they might remember it. If you teach a child how to find out facts for themselves, they can find the answer to any question they want. The same goes for learning *skills*. If children learn to give up when they find something difficult, they are likely to give up every time they find something tricky. Whereas, if children learn what it means to be resilient, and to work hard until they overcome difficulties, they learn that they can achieve almost anything - if they try hard enough.

It is essential then that educators also adapt. What and how we teach has to change as well; learning in schools has to keep pace and stay relevant.

We have chosen to deliver the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), which is specifically designed for children growing up in the 21st century. As well as teaching with an international perspective, it places a high degree of focus on developing eight 'desirable' attributes in children: adaptability, cooperation, good communication, enquiry, resilience, thoughtfulness, morality and respect.

All eight are equally important. Next time you go for an interview, you are likely to be competing against people with very similar levels of knowledge, skills and experience. What sets us apart - and what employers really want to know - is how developed are we in these eight areas?

If educators can help children to develop these eight attributes, while also instilling a love of learning, children will become lifelong learners and have the best chance of success. ■



Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

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

Enquiries and Admissions
Tel: 5431 1833/34/35/36
Email: office@theabcis.com
www.theabcis.com



APU International School

APU International School offers K-12 education based on American curriculum to both foreign and local students. APU has a record of sending thousands of students to top-ranking US and world universities. It is also designated as a testing center by the College Board for AP, SAT, and ACT exams.

APU Elementary School (501 Lac Long Quan D11)
APU Middle & High School (286 Lanh Binh Thang D11)
3962 4897 / 3962 4898
Hotline: 0939 886 286
www.apu.edu.vn



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3744 4551
apprimary@bisvietnam.com
An Phu Secondary Campus
246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
3744 2335
apsecondary@bisvietnam.com
Tu Xuong Primary Campus
43-45 Tu Xuong Street, D3
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730 Le Van Mien,
Thao Dien, District 2, HCMC
www.eishcmc.com



The French International School Saint Ange

Saint Ange welcomes children for their Kindergarten and Primary School. The school follows the program of the French Education Ministry, and includes English lessons every day. Activities and subjects such as arts, sports and school trips are also an important part of their curriculum.

188A2, Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC
0120 304 8875
saintange2.vn@gmail.com
www.sa-saigon.com





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www.ishcmc.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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2222 7788 / 99
www.issp.edu.vn



International School



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.

74 Nguyen Thi Thap, D7
3773 3171 ext 120/121/122
www.renaissance.edu.vn



Saigon Star International School

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

Residential Area No.5,
Thanh My Loi Ward, D2
3742 STAR / 3742 7827
www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



The American School

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

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
www.tas.edu.vn
08 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223
admission@tasvietnam.edu.vn



Also...

American International School

Founded in 2006, American International School (AIS) is a private, coeducational, university-preparatory school for students from preschool to grade 12. The language of instruction is English. The school offers standard American curriculum with a complement of performing arts, visual arts, music and sport programs.

Elementary School (102C Nguyen Van Cu, D1)
Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh)
High School (781/CI-C2 Le Hong Phong, D10)

Australian International School (AIS)

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

Xi Campus (Kindergarten)
190 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
Thao Dien Campus (Kindergarten & Primary School)
APSC Compound
36 Thao Dien, D2

Thu Thiem Campus (Kindergarten, Primary, Middle & Senior School)
East-West Highway, D2
3742 4040
www.aivietnam.com

Schools of North America

Offers a dual curriculum - instructing students in a Vietnamese program directed by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in tandem with an American program aligned with the State of California. Students graduate after accumulating 248 credits which is equivalent to high school graduates in the US.
Street 5A, Trung Son Residential Quarter,

Binh Chanh
402 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D3
www.sna.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.

78 Nguyen Duc Canh, D7
www.ssis.edu.vn

Faces & Places



Mystery Solved

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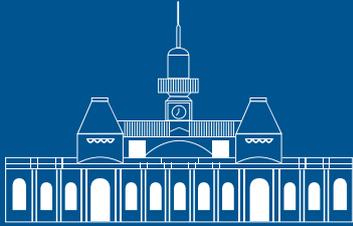
IMAGES PROVIDED BY FRANCOIS CARTEAU



Book and Mother Tongue Week

The Renaissance International School held a successful book fair to promote reading and to acquire new books for their students.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY RENAISSANCE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



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