



**Ơi**

VIETNAM

FEBRUARY 2015

**DEATH BECOMES HIM**

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Reasons Why You Should  
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The Tet Issue

Lending a hand to a cause is just as important  
as raising a hand in class.



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## This Month's Cover

Image: **Ngoc Tran**

Model: **Actress Le Thuy**

Make-up Artist: **Tieu Tinh**

Location: **ToTT, Windsor Plaza**

Dress: **Thuy House Design**

## ƠI VIỆT NAM

### NHÀ XUẤT BẢN THANH NIÊN

*Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản:*

Giám đốc - Tổng biên tập: **Đoàn Minh Tuấn**

*Chịu trách nhiệm nội dung:*

Phó giám đốc - Phó tổng biên tập:

**Nguyễn Trường**

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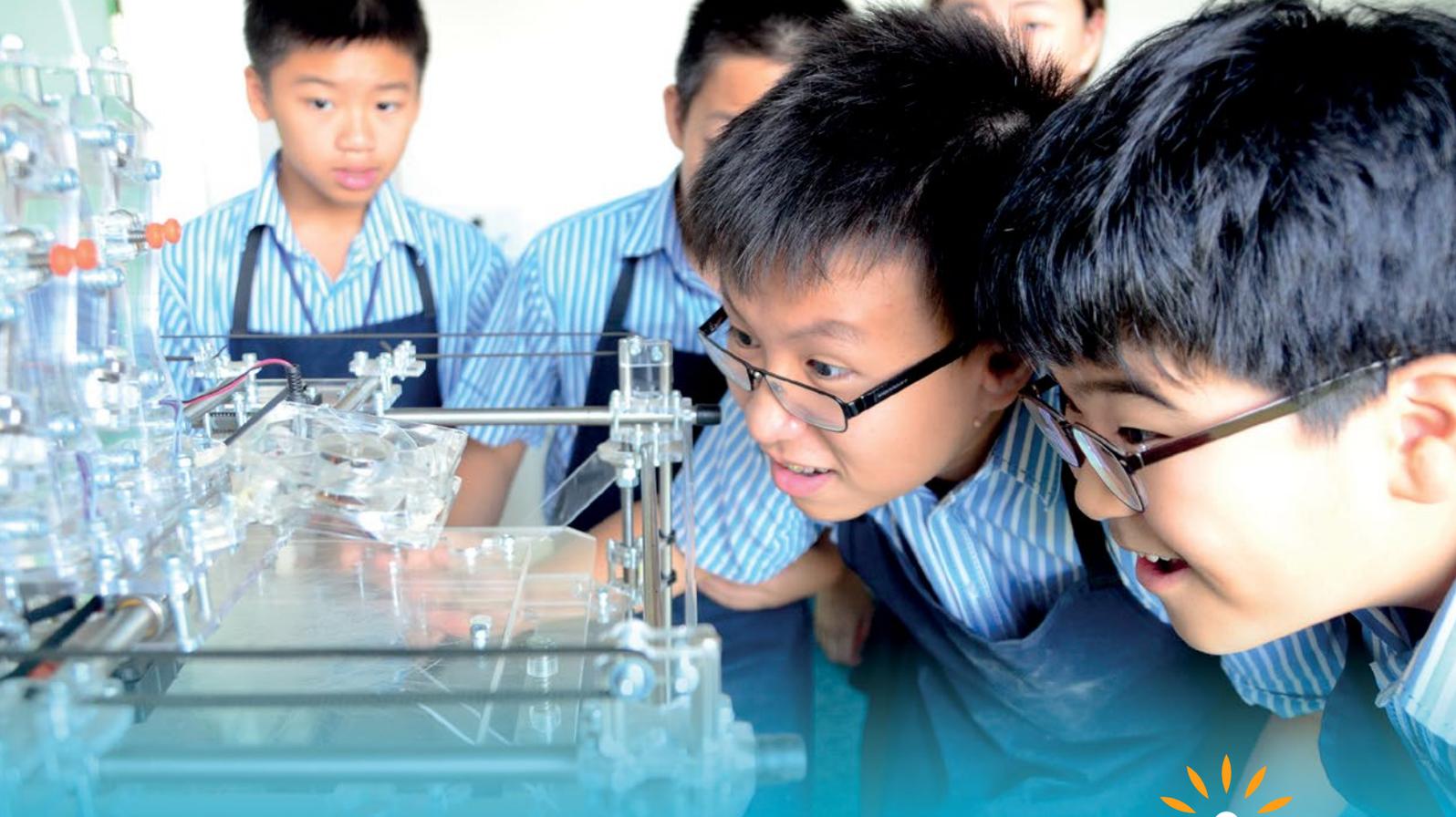
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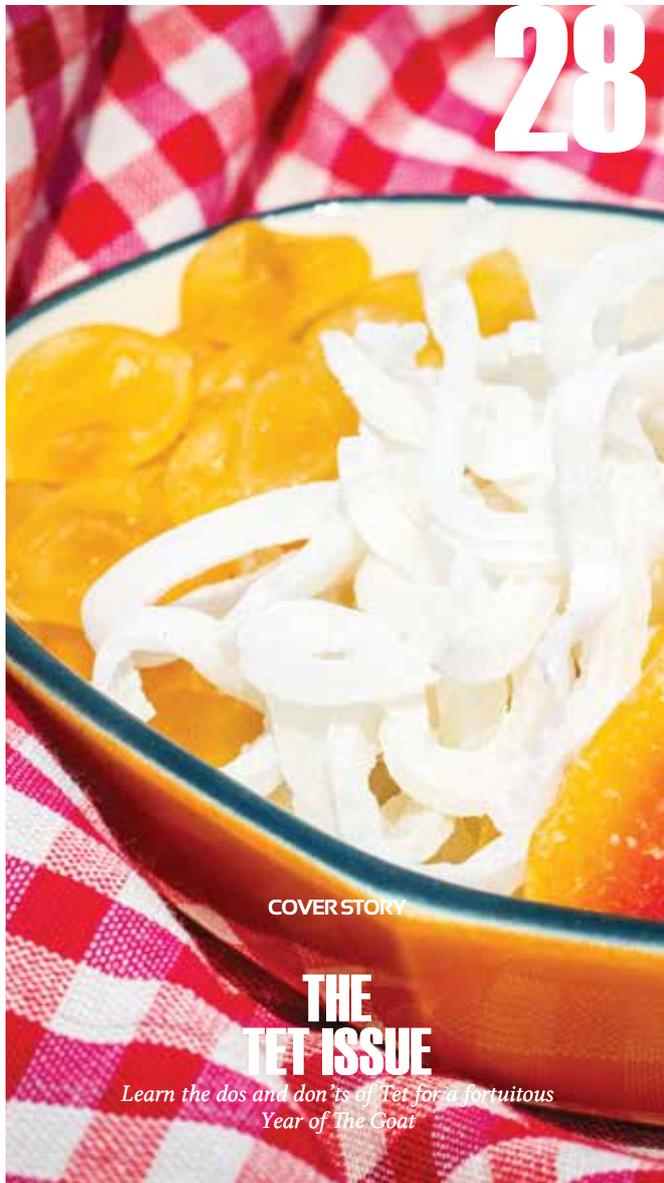
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Website [www.havanahotel.vn](http://www.havanahotel.vn)

# Datebook

What's on this month...

## FEBRUARY 6 & 7

**What:** 2015 Fun Cup  
**Where:** Muine Bay  
**About:** Windsurf free riders and racers descend once again to Muine Bay for this year's premier windsurfing event in Vietnam. The Vietnam Fun Cup brings over 30 professional and amateur competitors from around the world, competing for the children of Ham Tan Orphanage and School for Blind and Disabled Children. Joining them will be some of the best local Vietnamese racers who will display high speed turns through a grueling course all while being challenged by the East Sea's always unpredictable waves.  
**Contact:** Email office@ahivietnam.com for more info



FEB 7 & 8

**What:** Tet Shopping Fair  
**Where:** Cung Van Hoa Lao Dong (55B Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1); 8am – 10pm  
**About:** There will be 120 vendors selling clothing, accessories, ceramics, and Tet related products like cakes, cookies and flower arrangements, as well as a lucky draw contest. A Filipino band will play from 6:30pm – 9:30pm  
**Contact:** Email hoichotet2015@gmail.com for more info

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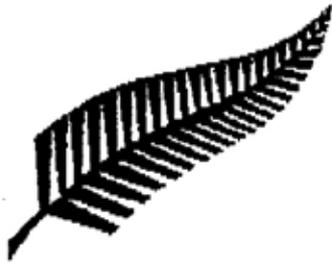
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**Website:** www.stamfordskin.com - **Email:** info@stamfordskin.com

FEB 7



**What:** Snow White and the Seven Nguyens  
**Where:** Vista Walk (P2 level, 628C Xa Lo Ha Noi, D2); VND200,000  
**About:** If you missed this original British-style panto written by actor/directors Emily Huckson and Heather Robinson last December, now is your second chance to see it. It's their take on the famous story of Snow White but with a Vietnamese twist. Join Snow White as she tries to elude her evil stepmother's plans and meets the quirky yet lovable seven Nguyens who help her each step of the way.  
**Contact:** Email saigonplayers@gmail.com for more info



**FEB 7**

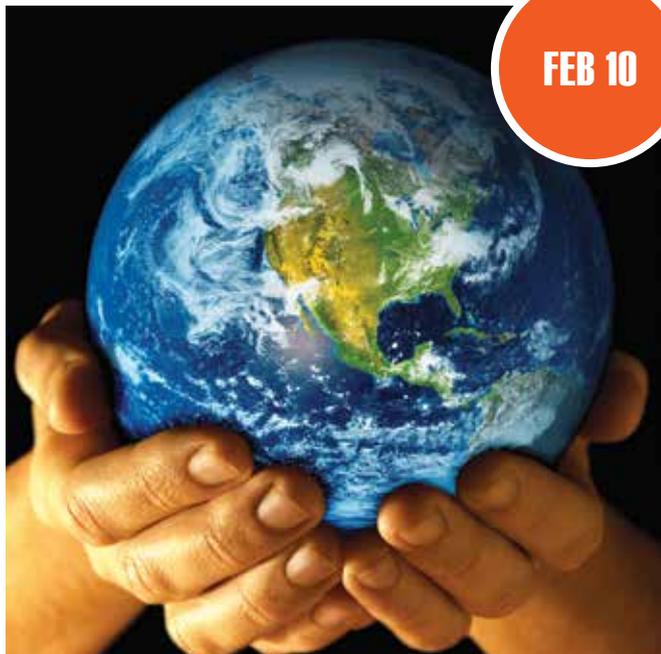
**What: Wine & Food New Zealand**

**Where:** RMIT (702 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); VND1.6 million; 4pm – 10pm

**About:** After a short hiatus, Wine & Food New Zealand 2015 is back to provide the good folk of Saigon with gourmet cuisine, fabulous wines (and not forgetting the beer) plus entertainment from both here and abroad. Eat Drink Give is the theme with the “Give” raising funds and awareness to help continue the work being carried out by the Ba Chieu Girls’ Shelter who has a strong Kiwi connection since its founding in 1996 by Celia Caughey, former New Zealand Consul General in HCMC.

The event will double as the official kick off in HCMC for New Zealand and Vietnam celebrating 40 years of friendship and diplomatic relations which will see a year-long program of events throughout the country.

**Contact:** Visit Facebook: “wineandfoodnewzealandhcmc” for more info



**FEB 10**

**What: Global Youth Summit**

**Where:** Crescent Plaza (105 Ton Dat Tien, D7); 4pm - 8pm

**About:** Global Youth Summit unites 200 plus presidents of AIESEC from 124 countries to discuss youth leadership and empowerment. Global Youth Summit 2015 is a unique and active platform for Vietnamese youth to learn and exchange knowledge and experiences on what it takes to be an international youth and business leaders.

**Contact:** Visit [www.gys.aiesec.vn/global-youth-summit](http://www.gys.aiesec.vn/global-youth-summit) for more info

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FEB  
15 - 18



**What:** Ta Lai Tet Holiday Camp; VND6.9 million

**Where:** Ta Lai Longhouse

**About:** An overnight camping and adventure holiday for kids that include kayaking, trekking, swimming, cooking, farming and more.

**Contact:** Visit [www.talai-adventure.vn](http://www.talai-adventure.vn) for more info

## FEBRUARY 11

**What:** M2 – Marketing and Media Network

**Where:** Hard Rock Café (39 Le Duan, D1); 5:30pm – 8:30pm

**About:** For people interested in advertising, digital, marketing and media. The event will include speakers who are experts in their industries who will each speak for 15 – 20 minutes, with a moderated question and answer session. There will be networking with drinks and food before the presentations and additional networking and drinks after. Tickets are 250,000 VND per person for pre-event registration and payment or VND350,000 at the door.

**Contact:** Visit Facebook: “M2Event” for more info



## Chuc Mung Nam Moi

We all should try to spend more time with our friends and families. There is no better place to celebrate this year TET holiday than at the hugely anticipated festive parties at the Chit Chat and Orientica seafood restaurant.

**Tet Buffet** Buffet parties throughout 02 February till 20 February priced at just **VND798,000++ per person** at Chit Chat.

**Valentine's Buffet** A buffet dinner available from 18:30 until 22:30 features all the delicacies you can dream of at Chit Chat. Priced at a mere **VND940,000++ per person**.

**Top Notch Dim Sum** 'All you can eat' Dim Sum food fest every Saturday and Sunday lunch-time at the Orientica Seafood Restaurant. Lunch priced at just **VND338,000++ per person**.

**Seafood Buffet** Seafood extravaganza buffet at only **VND840,000++per person** every Saturday night.

**Tet Hamper** Tet hampers and take-away menu are available from 02 January till 19 February.

There are more fantastic parties at hotel Equatorial during this Tet holiday. Check [www.equatorial.com/hcm](http://www.equatorial.com/hcm) and click on Exciting Promotions for the latest updates.

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**Terms & Conditions:**

- Applies to group from 02 people.
- Valid from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 to February 28<sup>th</sup> 2015.
- Soft Rock Combo applies for Zone AAH! in A O Show.
- Alternative Rock Combo applies for Zone OOH! in A O Show.
- Seats are arranged by A O's organizer based on each show's availability.
- Applies to first 20 customers of Hard Rock Cafe.
- Cannot combine with other promotions of Hard Rock Cafe & A O Show.

**SCHEDULE & TICKET INQUIRIES**  
 Ticket Box Saigon Opera House, 07 Cong Truong Lam Son, Dist.1, HCMC.  
 reservation@aoshowsaigon.com | (84) (0) 1245 18 11 88 | www.aoshowsaigon.com.

tripadvisor A O Show | saigon.AOshow | AOshowsaigon

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# The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



## 1880 SAIGON MONOPOLY BOARD GAME

"We wanted to take it a step further and create something more interesting and artistic and what better than to do an illustrated vintage version and share some of the city's history along the way," says the creator behind 1880 Saigon Monopoly (VND700,000). "We wanted to create something that looked more like a piece of art than a board game, and I think we achieved that by incorporating an old 1881 map of Saigon with some traditional Vietnamese art in to the game design and gave it an antique feel, even down to the fonts used."

Although the game is called 1880 Saigon Monopoly it is actually set between the late 19th century to early 1900s and all photo illustrations are from this period including most of the city's famous architectural landmarks such as the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Post Office, the People's Committee Building and the Opera House. The board displays both the original street names around that time and the current street names for reference, and the Community Chest and Chance cards are all illustrated to incorporate some of old Saigon's history and pastimes.

Email [1880saigonmonopoly@gmail.com](mailto:1880saigonmonopoly@gmail.com) for free delivery within Saigon.



## CAM RANH RIVIERA BEACH RESORT & SPA DEBUTS

Located on 10-hectares of prime real estate and overlooking a 200 meter wide private beach on the Pacific Ocean, Cam Ranh Riviera Beach Resort & Spa ([www.rivieraresortspa.com](http://www.rivieraresortspa.com)) had a soft opening last month. The resort, in the first phase, features 70 pool villas and rooms designed and furnished in a contemporary style with elegant touches. Their signature Rosone Restaurant, along with Adora Bar & Lounge, swim up Pool Bar and Rinata Oasis Spa together with a vast array of water and land sport activities will make Cam Ranh Riviera Beach Resort & Spa a great beach holiday resort for travelers searching for relaxation and rejuvenation.

## VALENTINE'S DAY BBQ

Celebrate Valentine's Day with an all-you-can-eat Brazilian style barbecue at Au Lac do Brazil ([www.aulacdobrazil.com](http://www.aulacdobrazil.com)). There will be live music, special cocktails promotions and gifts for the ladies.



## SOMERSET CENTRAL TD HAI PHONG CITY OPENS

The Ascott has opened its first Somerset ([www.somerset.com](http://www.somerset.com)) serviced residence in Hai Phong. The 132-unit Somerset Central TD Hai Phong City is located on a prime urban area in the city's new central business district. The new property is the first international branded serviced residence in Hai Phong and reinforces Ascott's presence as the largest international serviced residence owner-operator in Vietnam. Ascott currently has over 2,000 apartment units in 13 properties across four cities in the country - Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong and Danang. To celebrate the opening, Ascott is offering special introductory rates starting from VND1,650,000++ per night or VND30,450,000++ per month for a Studio Executive from now until April 30.

## PROMOTIONS AT HOTEL EQUATORIAL

### Valentine's Buffet

The Chit Chat restaurant offers a buffet dinner featuring all the delicacies you can dream of. Live entertainment with special gifts for ladies, priced at VND940,000++/ person.

### Valentine's Dinner

Oriente restaurant will offer a romantic Valentine's set Dinner Menu. All ladies will receive a free gift with our compliments. Priced at VND1,298,000++ for two people.

### Valentine's Night Live Special

Valentine's Day diners will be invited to a special evening at Flo, the Lounge where the Funky Haven band will perform romantic songs. Specially created cupid cocktails are priced at VND110,000++ for the all couples. Email: [dine@hcm.equatorial.com](mailto:dine@hcm.equatorial.com)



## ALTITUDE REOPENS

After three months of renovation, Altitude, a rooftop bar located on the 28th floor of Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa ([www.sheratonnhatrang.com](http://www.sheratonnhatrang.com)), has reopened. The new look combines low seating with communal areas so couples or groups can relax and soak up the sounds and sights of Nha Trang. The amazing views are a major attraction – with fantastic 270 degree panoramic vistas of the adjacent coastline.

## MAISON MIKIO PROMOTION

Maison Mikio Boutique Salon (8 Ton Dat Tien Street in the Garden Plaza 2 Complex, Phu My Hung) is offering 20 percent off on hair coloring, perm, waxing and all skin care services. The salon and spa offers clients a spacious yet intimate setting for salon and beauty services such as hair styling, coloring, manicures, pedicures, skincare and waxing. Call 5412 4773 or visit Facebook: [maisonmikio](https://www.facebook.com/maisonmikio) for more info.



## STAMFORD SKIN CENTRE PROMOTION

Stamford Skin Centre (99 Suong Nguyet Anh, D1; [www.stamfordskin.com](http://www.stamfordskin.com)) is having a Tet promotion as a token of their appreciation to customers by offering a 15 percent discount on skin rejuvenation services like Botox, Dysport, Restylane and Juvederm from now until February 17. Only 15 minutes for non-surgical treatments to help reduce deep lines and wrinkles to achieve younger-looking skin with virtually no pain and no down time. Stamford Skin Centre has highly qualified dermatologists providing accurate diagnosis and safe, effective treatments.

## HOTEL NIKKO SAIGON TET PROMOTION

Embark on the Year of the Goat with Tet dining experiences at Hotel Nikko Saigon. At Ming Court a Prosperous Dinner set menu is priced at VND1,100,000++ per person, a Ming Court Peaceful Dinner set menu (Vegetarian set menu) is priced at VND800,000++ per person, and a Dim Sum Brunch is priced at VND650,000++ per person. Available from February 18 – 22.

## INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG ART EVENT

At InterContinental Nha Trang, the Culin'Art exhibition represents a desire to engage travelers with the beauty of Khanh Hoa Province. Photographer Thiery Beyne will collaborate with the IHG Culinary Ambassadors Program. Together, they will marry colors, flavors and emotions to create an exhibition of portrait and travel photos complemented by a menu of exclusive signature dishes designed by celebrity chefs from around the world and culinary talents at InterContinental Nha Trang. Thiery Beyne was born in France on 1955. He is a freelance photographer and a member of AVEED (Amis Du Vietnam Enfance En Danger) based in Nha Trang. The culinary and photo event is on from now until February 24.



## Authentic Japanese Kobe Beef



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11:30 am - 2 pm  
6 pm - 11 pm



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## INTERCONTINENTAL ASIANA SAIGON TET PROMOTION

Yu Chu

Yee-Sang Salad, or Prosperity Toss, is a popular dish believed to bring luck. Guests can enjoy this colorful raw fish salad from VND288,000++ (serves up to 2 people), VND388,000 VND++ (serves up to 6 people) and VND688,000 VND++ (serves up to 10 people).

Private dining rooms at Yu Chu are also available with Tet set menus that include a variety of lucky and happy dishes. The menus are priced from VND888,000++ per person. Available from February 18 to March 5.

Market 39

Enjoy a traditional Tet buffet at Market 39 with international and local delicacies that include Vietnamese caramelized pork with egg, Tet sticky rice cakes and many more. Buffet lunch priced from VND498,000++ per person including free flow of tea and coffee.

Buffet dinner priced from VND899,000++ per person including free flow of selected house wines, Tiger draught beer, soft drinks and signature cocktails. Sunday Brunch is priced at VND1,488,000++ per person including free flow of Veuve Clicquot champagne, house wines, Tiger draught beer, cocktails and soft drinks. Available from February 18 - 22. Email [dine@icasianasaigon.com](mailto:dine@icasianasaigon.com) for more info.

## MOEVENPICK HOTEL SAIGON FOOD PROMOTION

Vietnam Art Gallery has teamed up with the hotel this month to display contemporary paintings of Vietnamese artists from February 6 to 20. The exhibition, located at the hotel, will be inaugurated with an auction to sell the artworks. All proceeds from the auction will be donated to Operation Smile – a non-governmental organization that helps to bring the smile back to Vietnamese underprivileged children. Vietnamese month is part of a series of “Taste the World” experiences at Café Saigon restaurant where each month, cuisine from a different country is showcased. A buffet is served to keep with the theme, priced at VND799,000++ per person. For more info email [Hotel.saigon@moevenpick.com](mailto:Hotel.saigon@moevenpick.com).



## BOUTIQUE HOI AN RESORT PROMOTION

The Boutique Hoi An Resort is running a promotion that gives travelers who book a room for at least three consecutive nights via their website [www.boutiquehoianresort.com](http://www.boutiquehoianresort.com) a discount of up to 30 percent. This discount applies for new bookings from now until April 30 for all room categories and is non-refundable. Room rates include buffet breakfast for two, free shuttle bus to Hoi An ancient town and bicycle rentals.

LIVE LIFE TO  
DISCOVER



## Sky BBQ

Escape the hustle and bustle of the city and enjoy the BBQ with Renaissance's panoramic view across the river.

January 1 – March 31, 2015

### POOLSIDE

Every Friday & Saturday | 18:00 - 22:00  
(excluding February 20; 21; 27 & 28, 2015)

BBQ Buffet Dinner **VND 590,000++/person**  
(Free flow of draught beer for 02 hours)

- \* A 24h prior reservation for a group of minimum 25 guests for alternative days is required
- \* Dining voucher is accepted with a surcharge.
- \* 20% Club Marriot discount is applicable
- \* BBQ is subject to weather conditions

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# Home Improvement

What the new real estate law means for foreigners



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

**Dear Hadrien and Marijn,**

**I'm an expat who's been living here for the last seven years. My wife is Vietnamese-American, born in Vietnam but moved to the US at the age of five. As we find our life in Vietnam very comfortable, it has been our long-cherished dream to purchase a house in Ho Chi Minh City and to settle down. The fact that foreigners were, at least until recently, not allowed to buy real estate in Vietnam has unfortunately discouraged us from pursuing our plans. We've recently heard about a new law and are very curious to hear from you whether anything will change for our situation.**

WE CAN TOTALLY imagine that you and your wife enjoy living in Vietnam and you are absolutely right to raise a question about the new Law on Housing - a hot topic now.

Under the current legal regime, unless you are a Vietnamese citizen living in Vietnam, it is indeed very difficult, often even impossible, to own residential property here. The new Law on Housing, which was approved by the National Assembly on November 25, 2014, is both intended and expected to open up Vietnam's real estate market to foreign investment.

Among several other changes, what is most relevant to your situation is that the new law will broaden the opportunities for two categories of individuals to own residential property in Vietnam: foreigners and so-called "overseas Vietnamese."

To start with the latter category, "overseas Vietnamese" include Vietnamese citizens and persons of Vietnamese origin who are permanently living and residing overseas but who no longer hold Vietnamese citizenship. Under the new law, effective July 1, 2015, people

in this category will be entitled to own apartments and houses. Ownership may be realized through purchase, purchase-lease, by way of gift or inheritance, and through the transfer of land use rights in specified housing projects.

Apart from foreign investors who are active in housing development projects in Vietnam, under the new law all other foreigners who are legally allowed to enter into Vietnam will be entitled to residential housing ownership. Foreign individuals may acquire ownership of residential housing through purchase, purchase-lease, and by way of gift or inheritance.

Not surprisingly, some conditions will apply to the above. For example, the new law will put a cap on the foreign ownership of residential housing. With regard to apartments, the number of apartments under foreign ownership must not exceed 30 percent of the total number of apartments in one apartment building, whereas the number of houses owned by foreigners must not exceed 250 residential houses in a "ward" (that is a term used in Vietnam for an urban sub-district).

Another issue to keep in mind is that the

duration of foreign ownership, which shall be agreed by the parties in the contract, will be limited to an extendable period of 50 years from the date of issuance of the ownership certificate. However, here is some good news for you: when you are married to a Vietnamese citizen or an overseas Vietnamese, under the new law you will be entitled to long-term ownership and you will have the same ownership rights as a Vietnamese citizen.

As is often the case, it may take some time before the government will issue further legislation to implement the new law. So to answer your question, we recommend you keep an eye on the latest developments. These are very interesting times to consider buying property in Vietnam and we wish you and your wife all the best in realizing your dreams!

*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](mailto:legal@oivietnam.com). ■*

# Troi Oi

## The country in numbers

**USD1** electric bus tour of downtown HCMC will roll out at the end of April. The buses will be running every half an hour through major destinations in District 1 including Ben Thanh Market, the Opera House, the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Saigon Central Post Office, the Reunification Palace, the Saigon Zoo, the War Remnants Museum, the Ho Chi Minh Campaign Museum, and the Vietnam History Museum. Each tram can carry eight people and runs at below 40 kilometers per hour, according to the transport department's proposal which has been submitted to the city hall for approval. The buses will operate from 8am until 5:30pm on a daily basis. A group of customers can book a bus for up to three hours for VND600,000.

# USD21,400

is the highest Tet bonus in Ho Chi Minh City reported so far at a private business, the city labor department announced. The municipal Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs on Thursday released information on bonus payments from 900 businesses that employ over 310,000 employees in the city. The rate is equal only to 64.4 percent of last year's highest Tet bonus rate of VND709 million, paid by a foreign-invested enterprise, the department said. Meanwhile, the lowest Tet bonus this year is reportedly VND2.86 million so far. The average Tet bonus of State-owned enterprises is VND5.4 million, while for private businesses and foreign-invested enterprises are VND4.7 million and VND5.5 million respectively.

**1** year flight ban was given to a man who issued a false bomb threat when he was being escorted as a criminal on a flight from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City last month. Effective January 15, 2015 to January 15, 2016, all domestic and foreign airlines that operate in Vietnam are not allowed to provide flight services to Duc during that period. When the plane was taxiing at the airport to the runway, Duc, who was handcuffed and seated between two police officers, suddenly stood up and said there was a bomb on the plane. The pilot took the plane back to its parking area so that the police officers could escort Duc off the plane. All 246 passengers were taken back to the terminal and had to undergo a security check again. Security inspected the plane as well as Duc's checked luggage for bombs but found none. Under Article 30 of Government Decree 147 on administrative penalties applied to the field of civil aviation, Duc's act is subject to a fine ranging from VND30 million to VND40 million.

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# USD1.57 BILLION

was spent on importing 72,000 foreign cars last year, a 103.8 percent and 117.3 percent increase in volume and value, respectively, compared to 2013, according to the General Statistics Office. According to Nikkei Asian Review, though car sales are booming in Vietnam, local manufacturers face growing competition from imports ahead of the planned scrapping in 2018 of import tariffs on cars from other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

**12** volcanic caves are undergoing UNESCO recognition procedures. Authorities from Dak Nong Province are conceiving a project to build a geological park (geopark) that will house 12 volcanic caves recently discovered in Vietnam, with a view to obtaining UNESCO recognition as a global geopark in the future. The discovery was made in Krong No

District of Dak Nong by experts from the general department and the Japan Caving Association (JCA) after seven years of research. One of the three is 1,055 meters long and the Japanese scientists said it is the longest volcanic cave in Southeast Asia, adding that some parts of this cave cover thousands of square meters. UNESCO defines a geopark as an area containing geological heritage sites of particular importance. Many geoparks promote awareness of geological hazards, including volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis and many help prepare disaster mitigation strategies among local communities.

**10** Uber taxis were fined in HCMC. The cars were operating at Tan Son Nhat International Airport. Drivers who operated individually were fined VND3.5 million each, while those that worked for a business were fined VND7 million. The inspectors said the drivers provided a taxi service without a transportation license and a badge, and failed to show a transportation contract between car owners and passengers. During the first crackdown that started on November 28 last year, municipal traffic inspectors fined 11 drivers, many of whom said they were using Uber. While the controversies about the operation of Uber taxis in Vietnam are still ongoing, recently the Ministry of Transport ordered Uber Technologies Inc. to sign contracts only with transport companies that have been licensed by Vietnamese authorities and comply with the country's operational standards. It also ordered transportation companies that have or will sign contracts with Uber to comply with Vietnamese laws on cars and drivers. The ministry said random inspections will be launched to periodically check the operations of these transportation companies, and if the companies fail to meet the requirements, they, and Uber as well, will face penalties.



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AT AROUND 10:30PM last night, the body of Dr. Lam was discovered on the floor of his apartment in central Cholon. He was most certainly murdered in a strange, ritualistic fashion – and while the police do have a number of people in custody, they remain baffled. Their best chance at solving the case is somewhat unorthodox: bring in a group of tourists, equip them with a compass, map and magnifying glass, and send them out into the streets of Chinatown in search of clues. Find the murderer, and they may be on their way to uncovering an ancient mystery that has lain hidden in the shadows of the old Chinese city for centuries.

Such is the premise of Ubiquest's ([www.ubi-quest.com](http://www.ubi-quest.com); regularly VND1.1m/person but only VND950,000 before February 19th) intriguing new tour game *Urban Tales*, a mashup of role-playing and *The Amazing Race* that lends a measure of fun and mystique to the exploration of a fascinating part of town – an area which has been difficult for the tourist industry to crack. According to the venture's CEO Nicolas Plesse, both tourists and those of us who live here rarely get to see the best that Cholon (one of the oldest developed parts of Ho Chi Minh City, and originally a Chinese city unto itself) has going for it. "Most of the tours take people out to Binh Tay market – which isn't even the original one – and then bring them back again," says Nicolas, whose interest in the region stems from his several years of working in the local tourism industry. "They miss out on all the more historical parts of town, which are mostly hidden away. The idea of the game is to give people a reason to go and take a look."

Players meet at Notre Dame early in the morning and get whisked out to the Chinese city in classic old cars, which immediately conjure up the atmosphere of a long-gone era. Part of the chemistry of the tour, however, is that it's not really an attempt to transport visitors into a Cholon of the past – the story is set very much in the present, although the character of the Chinese area is brushed over with an antique pen. Dr. Lam's apartment (installed in a genuine old-style block that offers a rare chance for non-Vietnamese to see how the locals live) is decked out in early 20th-century fashion, and the plot draws players through parts of town that hint at an exotic, timeless Chinese culture – through traditional medicine shops, old temples, the silk markets and period architecture that has yet survived the wrecking ball – and delves into ancient Chinese legend in a twist that serves to impart some genuine historical information.

#### Time to 'fess Up

Nicolas, who himself is very active in the local French improv acting community, plays the chief of police, and while he doesn't walk players through the game – everyone is divided into self-guided teams, following clues and notes discovered at the scene of the crime – he's never far behind. Each team is handed a cheap Nokia mobile (eliminating the need to whip out your own smartphone

# Death Becomes Him

Step into a murder mystery that will take you across the city, exploring every dark corner for clues

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE



in the street and risk having it snatched) with which they can contact the police for extra guidance at any time – most especially when they believe they’ve identified the killer. By finding and speaking with the role-playing actors along the way and solving the murder by a certain time, you’ll unlock a second objective that explores the esoteric world of superstitions upon which the game is based. Neither task is terribly easy to solve without paying close attention to the guidebook you receive as you set out on your investigations – but by following the clues and sticking to the trail (gently guided by Nicolas whenever required) you’ll

emerge with all the answers, having seen a fascinating part of the city through the eyes of its residents.

Ubiquist has the formula just right – the game is complex enough to provide a challenge, but the players are given sufficient time to follow at their own pace. With a certain stamina and the determination to win, players can run through the scenario on foot, covering every stop along the way – while more casual players can take their time to inspect the clues at their leisure, hop between locations by taxi, take selfies in the old temples and follow little diversions of a more traditional touristy nature. The game

finishes with a ride by cyclo to a nearby restaurant serving genuine north Chinese delicacies, and then a journey back to the cathedral by vintage car, sweeping you back into the real Saigon with a deeper sense of its concealed cultures.

And while we’re not giving away any clues, if you do want to take the game seriously, you might want to pay careful attention to the details gathered by the police from those who were first on the scene – they might just match up with an even older case that remains unsolved to this day. Solid evidence, as any detective worth their salt will tell you, is everything. ■



# Facial Recognition

The stories behind the portraits by Hoi An-based photographer Réhahn Croquevielle

INTERVIEWED BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES COURTESY OF REHAHN CROQUEVIELLE

IT'S GOOD TO be Réhahn Croquevielle. This time last year, the Hoi An-based portrait photographer had about 6,000 Facebook fans. Thanks to a slew of press from the *LA Times* to *National Geographic Online* to dozens of Vietnamese TV appearances, magazines in Thailand, France and beyond and countless photography websites, he now has over 162,000 fans the world over. A popular art/photography website even included Réhahn on a list of the top 10 most famous portrait photographers in the world, alongside the likes of Steve McCurry and Lee Jeffries. *Oi* uncovers how this self-taught photographic storyteller burst onto the scene.

**Success has come quickly for you considering you really only got into photography seriously three years ago.**

**RC:** Yes. I've had more than 70 interviews in the *LA Times*, *National Geographic* and many newspaper and magazines in Vietnam. I think I've been on national TV here 24 times already and have more appearances coming up. So, it's good. I'm lucky.

When I look at photos from even four years ago, none of them could be in a gallery now. I really started to take photos when I moved to Vietnam three years ago. And to be honest, when my book [*Vietnam, Mosaic of*

*Contrasts*] was published last January [2014], everything changed. A few days ago, I looked at older photos in my hard drive and thought: "My God! How could I have taken that?" [laughs]

**A series of photos you took of a young M'Nong girl near Buon Ma Thuot with her pet elephant also garnered worldwide attention recently. How did that happen?**

**RC:** I really believe in karma. Three years ago, I took a photo of a young Ede girl with big eyes that sold well. I came back to meet her and give her a book and some money for her family. On the third and last day, I found someone who knew her. I was very touched when I saw her mother put the money on the table, instead focusing on the book. To her, it was more important than the money. All the neighbors and family were excited to see the book, too. As we took a boat to the other side of the lake on the way back, I saw an elephant with a young girl and her younger brother. I tried not to make any noise, but the younger brother saw me and ran off, so I have no good photos of him. But the girl, when she saw me, she went close to the elephant and put her hand on it. A big animal with a little girl. We found her house close by. When we got there, the elephant was in the



M'Nong girl near Buon Ma Thuot with her pet elephant

garden and we talked with her mother. I felt this photo was something special.

### **Once you've chosen a destination, what is your research process?**

**RC:** My last big trip was India last May. I typed "India" on Google Images to look for inspiration. I also check forums and specialized photography websites to see what I like, to get a feel about the country. For example, with India, I saw many people with beards, with green eyes, a country perfect for portraits. When I travel, I usually just book my first hotel and travel light. Not quite backpacker but almost. Sometimes you have difficult moments, like when a train gets canceled at 2am and you have to sleep in a very hot train station with many people. But it's part of the experience. Photographers are like writers and painters. We need inspiration, need to feel, need to be free in your mind. We need these kinds of experiences to make good photos.

### **Is there a secret to portrait photography?**

**RC:** Always try to make them smile. It's not always possible, but the smile, the smile in

the eyes is important, even if they're covering their mouth. I like very old people with wrinkles and a beard that takes 30 years to grow. When you see a [photo of a] smile, you can't explain the story behind it but you know something happened between the photographer and the model. You know that it's not just a snapshot. I like that, when there's emotion in the photo. It's more important than technical settings. For that, I'm not a "real" photographer, maybe. I'm self-taught, never had any training. What is a professional photographer? I don't really know. Sometimes I don't want to call myself a professional photographer because if it means talking all day about technical things, I don't want to be one. I just want to make people happy and feel something when they look at my photo. There are much better photographers than me, but if there are good settings but no emotion, no story, it's not a good photo. Emotion is the first thing. If people feel something when they look at your photo, that's what's important.

### **You share your photos pretty generously on your Facebook page. And they're not watermarked...**

**RC:** I had a marketing background in France

so that's a big difference between me and other photographers. They are very good artists but don't want to post too much online because of copyright. But we're in the 21st century now. It's hard to keep copyrights, so for me, I post on Facebook every day. Some photos get 26,000 likes. If each of those people had 50 friends, it's a million people seeing that photo in 24 hours. A Saigon travel agency used my photo without asking me. I contacted them and told them it was all right as long as they credited me, and they were very happy. In the end, no one wants to share online. They're very good but no one knows them.

### **We're all inundated with images now thanks to Instagram, Facebook and the web in general. Is that a good or bad thing?**

**RC:** Well, just an example for Vietnam. When I searched online for Vietnam in 2007, I only saw photos about the war. But now when I look at Google Images, I see very beautiful photos of Ha Long Bay. I guess it's like that for many countries. There's a big choice for photography and it's very inspiring for me. Things go viral very quickly, too. Many people post and it's good exposure

for the photographer.

### How has life in Vietnam changed you?

**RC:** I first came to Vietnam in 2007 to spend three weeks with some children we were sponsoring. They lost their father a long time ago. I promised to come back every year. Every time, it became more and more difficult to leave. When I told my friends that I wanted to be a photographer, an artist, and move to Vietnam, they said: "Pshaw, Réhahn, don't show off. You're crazy. Why would you go there?"

French people are like that. They're scared of everything. If I had listened to them, I would've stayed in France [where Réhahn had a printing business]. But I believe in myself. My wife believes in me. I recently sold three prints for USD10,000. I noticed that my friends [in France] didn't comment at all on it. But in life, you shouldn't listen too much to people. There are two kinds of people – losers and winners. Many people around us will always be afraid to do something. But if you believe in yourself,

you can do it, and do it for a reason other than money.

Now, I'm very happy. I'm happy every day when I'm in Vietnam. I didn't feel like that in France. I felt sick every Sunday night just thinking that I had to go to work on Monday. When I moved here it was a dangerous choice because my son was only one month old. But I'm so happy with my choice. I was born again three years ago as a photographer. Every day, I take my motorbike across the rice fields for the 4 km from the beach to the city. My brother and father have joined me here. I have no more reason to go back to France.

I didn't come to Vietnam to be rich, but for a lifestyle change. Now I'm lucky; everything is going well for the photos, for the gallery. [Réhahn also owns a restaurant and a homestay in Hoi An.] I feel like when you make your hobby a job, it's very dangerous. You can lose your passion because when you need to earn money, you do things you don't like and at the end of the day, aren't motivated to take photos for yourself, to be inspired. I want to be a free photographer.

### Out of your thousands of portraits, is there any one subject that has stayed with you?

**RC:** It's difficult to say. Maybe Xong, the 76-year-old woman on the cover of my book. She rows boats for tourists. In fact, from the window in the restaurant where I'm talking to you, I can see her boat from here. She's still very happy to do that and doesn't want to stop. That's such a good lesson to learn about life. She's 76 years old, still working, very poor, very old, but happy. The photo I took of her three years ago was one of my first sellable photos, so very special to me. Last June, I bought her a boat. She deserves more than that. I sold many books thanks to her. I still see her every day. She always hugs me, touches me, touches my hair. She's like a grandmother for me. She's my very good friend now.

*Selected photos from Réhahn will be exhibited at VinGallery (6 Le Van Mien, D2) from March 2-21, 2015. ■*



# Don't Trip at Home

Balance in design is very much like balance in life



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

IT'S A BIT of a cliché, but I can't possibly begin without mentioning the staggering feats of equilibrium we see every day: a mound of teetering boxes minimally fastened by a bit of rope to a motorbike that carries them; huge panes of glass standing vertically on the back of the bike, held in place by the passenger; boxes stacked so precariously high you'd be forgiven for wondering where the driver fits. Balance is something we know to be crucial in our lives, and it's similarly imperative in our living environments.

All of the components of design we've discussed in previous columns have visual weight. The general rule is that larger, darker and bolder pieces are visually "heavier". In interior design, these elements are generally balanced either symmetrically, mirrored exactly along a center line, or asymmetrically distributed in such a way that considers the visual weight of individual elements. As with many other design concepts, the easier route is also the more traditional one — symmetry is found in the human form, and is therefore calming and comfortable. It can also feel static and boring. Asymmetrical balance is more exciting, can be downright dramatic, but is also harder to achieve successfully.

## Balancing Act

The Anne Hepfer designed living room is a beautifully subtle example of asymmetrical balance. The center of the space is anchored by perfect symmetry — a large square coffee table, mantle and decorative mirror with a pair of sconces and a pair of ottomans to round it out. As your eyes continue towards the outside of the room, you'll notice that the form of the sofa is reflected by two generously scaled purple armchairs, which are balanced in color by the agate lamps opposite. And the oversized mirror on the left is really a stroke of genius — it beautifully echoes the floor-to-ceiling windows on the right side, creating an illusion of symmetry. A well-chosen piece of art could have



Ann Hepfer

balanced the visual weight of the window and drapery, but mimicking the material and light in this way is even smarter.

Imagine some alternate decisions Hepfer might have made, and how they would affect the overall look. The fireplace mantle's simple lines are appointed in a soft, creamy marble with minimal veining, so that it nearly fades into the wall color. How would the room feel different if it had been done in a darker material, or a more visually obtrusive design? The same applies to the rug, with its soft white color and subtle, consistent texture. Keeping these two elements understated allows the visually heavier pieces in the room to really sing. The lone accent table next to the sofa has no exact match on the other side of the room, but it works because of its petite size, and the visually strong accessories on the console at left, made

even heavier visually by their reflection in the mirror. Would the space work as well if the designer had used a more traditional full-sized end table?

A great way to play with balance and visual weight in your own home is by working with smaller vignettes, the styling of a specific area. A console or credenza placed against a wall is a perfect example. Start with symmetry — a pair of buffet lamps, a mirror or piece of art hung at center, and a small chair on either side. This is a formula that will exude elegance and style and is hard to get wrong. On the other hand, a single stunning lamp on one side can be beautifully balanced by a trio of candlesticks or small vases on the other, offset against the art. Just be sure that you're paying attention to the visual weight of each element. For more examples and inspiration, search Pinterest.com for "hallway vignette". ■



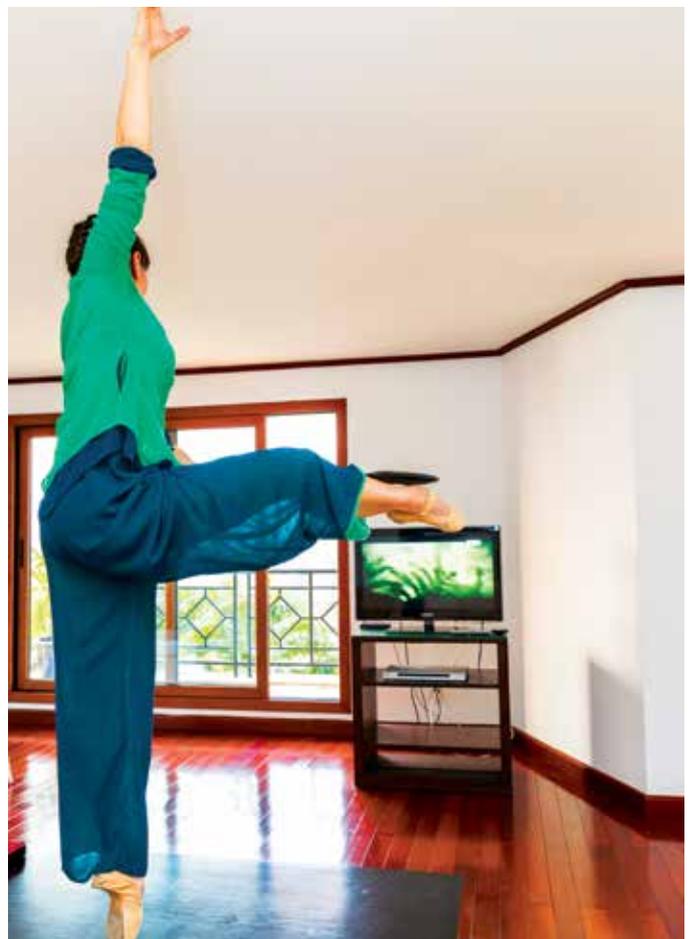
# Life in Dance

IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

Seventy percent of Vietnamese live in rural areas, spending their days tending rice fields, visiting temples and preparing for early morning market. "The Mist" portrays Vietnamese farming life through contemporary dance (select performance dates in 2015). We asked some of the dancers to take their moves from the Saigon Opera House stage to the countryside, the source of the show's inspiration. We then challenged them to express the beauty of daily urban life in dance, with the posh Saigon Domaine Luxury Residences, winner of the 2014 World Luxury Hotel Awards for Luxury Suite Hotel (Vietnam), as the backdrop. What they showed us is that wherever you live, there is beauty in the everyday. ■







# The Tet Issue

As the new year begins and the old year is put to rest, all Vietnamese rejoice in their most important holiday - Tet. The living pay homage to the dead, and younger community members honor their elders. Families are reunified; the coming of spring and the planting season are celebrated. This is a time for relaxation, joy, and hope.

CHUC MUNG NAM MOI!





# My Life as... A Tet Flower Seller

Interviewed by James Pham

Images by Ngoc Tran

MY NAME IS Vuong and I own Bao Anh Apricot Blossoms ([maitetbaoanh.com](http://maitetbaoanh.com)). I'm gearing up for the busiest time of the year, the two weeks before and after Tet. I have more than 1000 trees spread across six nurseries in Thu Duc, just outside the city. All year long, we take care of these trees to make sure they bloom just in time for the New Year. Vietnamese believe that when they blossom fully at Tet, it means your family will be joyous, prosperous and lucky in business.

I remember as a kid, my mother put a few apricot branches in a vase. Somehow, on New Year's Eve, the fan blew all the blossoms onto the floor. That year, our house got robbed so many times! I remember not even having clothes to wear to school. Then there was the time three years ago, when our apricot tree was stolen from right in front of our house. I had an accident that year. Last year's tree, though, bloomed from top to bottom. I never saw so many flowers! Am I superstitious? Maybe. But last year was my best year for business ever. I was able to buy four new

trucks for my [year-round] transport business and two more are on the way.

Around Tet, people sell these apricot trees everywhere. But most people who visit these pop-up places go only to look. Out of 100 people, maybe only one or two will buy. Serious buyers go to the apricot gardens. There, out of 100, maybe 98 or 99 will buy. I hear that in the West, some people might buy an ugly Christmas tree because they feel sorry for it. Not here. You can take pity on almost anything, but not a Tet tree. Because it represents someone's fortune for the whole year, you have to pick a good one. People see a reflection of themselves in it – prosperous, vibrant, happy. Of course, you can't always tell. Sometimes a tree looks great on the lot, but when someone takes it home, it may not blossom very much or the flowers aren't pretty. Then there are others that surprise you. Sometimes my workers will ask if they can have one of the trees that doesn't sell, an ugly one or a weak-looking one. But for some reason, on Tet, it takes on new life and

becomes breathtakingly beautiful. What can you do?

Then there are the renters. Most of my business comes from people who rent trees which means we'll deliver these trees to their houses and go back to pick them up after Tet. It's cheaper, about 30 percent of the cost of buying the tree outright. They might not have space in their house to keep the tree or they might not know how to take care of it. Other people buy the trees as an investment and after Tet, we'll pick them up and take care of them for the whole year, just in time for the next Tet.

There's no money in being an apricot tree gardener, though. Yes, I have some valuable trees — my most prized one being worth VND1 billion. A few years ago, someone offered me VND700 million for it, but I wouldn't sell it. It's now over 80 years old and it comes from strong stock. The roots are solid. We spend the year taking care of the trees very well: watering, pruning and fertilizing at the right times. Sometimes, though, trees die. It's nature. But because customers only pay when they get the tree, that means all our efforts during the year will have gone down the drain if something happens to it. And we can't switch them out because people have pictures of their tree from the year before, so they'll know if it's not theirs. Or sometimes, when they party, someone will pour beer or even discarded tea grounds into the pot and the trees will die. The trees are quite sensitive, you know.

Like I said, there's not much profit in this business. I only do it because it reminds me of my childhood. It brings joy to both the buyer and the seller. It's also tradition. It's what our ancestors have left behind for us. The Japanese have their cherry blossoms. We have apricot blossoms. Even if your house is small and crowded, seeing a few branches of yellow blossoms at Tet brightens up the whole house. It simply wouldn't be Tet without them.



# Tet Mathbuster Special

## FOLLOW THESE RULES TO GUARANTEE A GOOD YEAR AHEAD

Text by NPD Khanh

Images by Ngoc Tran

LIKE MANY SOUTHEAST Asians, the Vietnamese would not consider making a major decision, whether it involved marriage or building a house, without considering the lunar calendar and consulting an astrologer, psychic or fortune teller. This is pragmatism to them, not superstition: Abiding by these forces of nature is how one finds harmony with one's surroundings and is in turn rewarded with good luck and a happy life.

Vietnam's folkloric beliefs - three people, for instance, will never pose together in a photograph because the one in the middle will be struck by ill fortune - are a mixture of Buddhism, Confucian ideology, local tradition, paganism and ancestor worship. Out of this nourishment for the soul comes the belief that one's destiny is determined by the time, day and year of birth.

### **Is it true that you shouldn't be the first person to visit someone's house on the first day of Lunar New Year?**

Generally, this is true. Vietnamese people believe that the first person to visit their house on the first day of Tet will dictate the family's fortune for the entire year. To ensure year-round good fortune, they practice a ritual called *xong dat* or *dap dat* on the first day of Tet. Instead of leaving things to chance, each family will carefully choose a designated first

visitor. This person is typically someone who is renowned for their fortune, has had a great year, and is born on a compatible Zodiac sign with the host family. A well-chosen visitor ensures good fortune for the visited family.

Anyone (whether Vietnamese or a foreigner) who unknowingly disrupts this rite by visiting a Vietnamese family before the designated first visitor arrives may end up with very angry hosts as a result, so be sure to call ahead before visiting anyone. This 'first visitor' ritual is also practiced at offices and shops in the hope of increased profitability for the future.

### **Is it true you should eat all the food in the fridge before the first day of Tet?**

No, not true. Before Tet, Vietnamese will clear all the old food out of their fridge. Whether the food is eaten or thrown out is up to the individuals. Similar to other beliefs and practices concerning luck and misfortune around and during Tet time, old or spoiled food is seen as impure elements that attract misfortune and need to be cleaned out before the New Year. And since the majority of the markets and supermarkets are closed for Tet, fridges are stocked in the days leading up to it to last the entire holiday with fresh food and items that can keep for a long time.

### **Is it true that employers should tip**

### **employees one month's salary as a Tet bonus?**

There are no clear answers to this question. The Tet bonus is a popular topic and is covered by the local press before and after Tet every year, and countless news articles have been written on the etiquette and peculiarities of the Tet bonus.

Tet bonuses increase or decrease depending on the economy and the financial status of individual companies. It is also seen as a commentary on the employee's performance. On average, most companies pay out a bonus of one to three months of their employee's salary, however this is not set in stone. Struggling companies have been reported to pay their employees in overstock products or other items.

As a rule of thumb though, if you can afford it, pay your workers the average rate. And if you can't and have to opt for a non-monetary bonus, as many struggling companies have done before, then it is important that you make sure your employees know they are appreciated.

### **Is it true that companies try to pay off their debts before Tet?**

Yes, this is true. The Vietnamese believe that having debt at the beginning of the New Year makes for very bad luck and will jinx their

financial fortune for the coming year. So as a result, most companies will try to clear off their debts and refrain from incurring new ones in the last month of the old year and the first month of the new one. This belief also extends to the reverse in that outstanding loans from last year or at the beginning of the new one will also jinx their financial fortune. This in turn has made the ending of a year the peak debt collecting season in Vietnam where most companies aggressively attempt to collect on outstanding loans and ensure no new ones occur during the first month of the New Year.

### **Is it true you shouldn't sweep your house during Tet because it symbolizes sweeping away good fortune?**

Yes, this is true. Vietnamese believe that if you sweep your house on the first three days of Tet you will also sweep away the family's fortune. House cleaning is a task reserved for the week before Tet where families hold extensive cleaning sessions similar to Western spring cleaning. The days after the first three days aren't considered as important however, and whether the practice is still maintained after the first day depends on individual families.

### **What is the origin of the name 'Tet' and what is its meaning?**

The name Tet comes from the old Nom (the language preceding the current Vietnamese) name "Tiet Nguyen Dan" or "Nguyen Dan Tiet." "Tiet" means "the moment." "Nguyen" means "primordial beginning" and "Dan" means "dawn". Combined, the original name for "Tet" translates to "the moment of primordial

beginning at dawn." The name currently used, Tet, is the shortened version spoken in the modern Vietnamese language.

### **Why do northern Vietnamese keep peach trees in their houses while southern Vietnamese keep apricot trees? Do they have a meaning?**

Yes, the different flower varieties do have a meaning. Northern Vietnamese keep red peach trees because of Chinese influence and peach blossoms are believed to have the power to ward off evil spirits and ill fortune. Southern and central Vietnamese families on the other hand keep the yellow apricot trees because they believe the color yellow symbolizes glory and royalty. Yellow is also the color of the Earth element, the element of growth and prosperity in the Vietnamese Five Basic Elements system.

### **Is it true that when visiting someone's house during Tet, bringing oranges is good because oranges represent good luck?**

This is a tricky one. When it comes to oranges, Vietnamese are divided in opinions. To northern Vietnamese, oranges are considered lucky due to their bright color and its root name being similar to the Han Viet word for "gold". If you are visiting a family in northern Vietnam, oranges make for a nice Tet gift as long as they are not given in bunches of four as four sounds similar to the Han Viet word for "death".

To southerners, however, oranges can be seen as a sign of bad luck because of the proverb "Quýt lam cam chiu" ("The oranges

take the fall for the mandarin's crime"). Watermelons with red flesh make for better Tet gifts when visiting homes in the south.

### **What are some other dos and don'ts on the first day of Tet?**

Dos and don'ts around and during Tet all revolve around one simple principle: protect your fortunes and ward off all misfortunes.

#### **Don't:**

- Lend or borrow money.
- Lend or borrow anything period - especially if the items are red, as this is seen as taking or giving away luck.
- Decline food or drink when visiting a Vietnamese family. Even if you are full, eat or drink something, even in small amounts.
- Wear white or black. Both are colors of mourning in Vietnam.
- Eat prawns, dog, dory fish, squid or duck. Some people think ducks are stupid and the dark ink from squid is seen as dirty. Similarly, don't offer a Vietnamese any of these food items as they are seen as unlucky during Tet.
- Argue, fight, gossip, badmouth others or create disputes of any kind.

#### **Do:**

- Wear new clothes on the first day of Tet. New things are lucky.
- Wear bold, happy colors.
- Forgive past disputes. Tet is a very popular time for Vietnamese to make peace with each other since it is seen as the time to clean out all 'old hurts' and turn over a new leaf. During this time, even lifelong enemies are willing to (temporarily) set aside their grievances for the joyous occasion.



# How Sweet It Is...

## A GUIDE TO THE LUNAR NEW YEAR CANDY TRAY

Text by Nancy Bao

Images by Ngoc Tran

“EAT SWEET THINGS and think sweet thoughts to ensure a fabulous year lies ahead” is a popular Vietnamese adage that locals live by, especially during Tet. Visit any Vietnamese home during the holiday and a colorful tray full of candies sits in the middle of the living room table. The candy trays are also used as offerings at the altars to ancestors and deities, little snacks for children, tea confections for adults and vegan treats for those who refrain from eating meat at the year’s beginning. These candied fruits are unique to Tet but despite its ubiquity, the *mứt Tết* can look a little confusing between the dusty swirls, wrapped colored sticks and miniature dried fruits.

A *mứt Tết* tray consists of candied fruits, candied vegetables, custard candy, seeds of different varieties and candied nuts. Generally, preparation for each *mứt Tết* candy is similar and simple. Fruits and vegetables, like coconut and ginger, are boiled, quickly preserved, and

cooked with oil and sweetening agents such as pectin, sugar and honey – sometimes all three ingredients.

*Mứt* can be divided into two types: wet and dry. Visit any beef jerky (*khô bò*) and salted plums (*xí muội*) stalls at any market during the holiday and you’ll see a swarm of *mứt* in glass jars, the wet kinds wrapped in crunchy paper and the dry kind laying bare. The two most common wet *mứt* are tamarind (*mé*) and soursop (*mãng cầu*). The former is kept in its scrawny form, with a few rope-like fibrous strings along the fruit’s length, which is to be discarded when eating, of course. Tamarind *mứt* should be amber brown, chewy, and a little more sour than sweet. Tamarind is notorious for its medicinal effect, so be careful not to consume too many sticks at once. A similar chewy wet *mứt* is the soursop, but it’s always milkish white, doesn’t retain the fruit’s shape, and people tend to put too much sugar

in the churning process.

On the dry side you can find some 20 common kinds, spanning both fruits and non-fruits (nuts and roots): coconut, persimmon, lotus seed, tomato, sliced ginger, carrot, winter melon, apple, lemon, guava, water chestnut, etc. I’m particularly fond of the crunchy, aromatic coconut ribbons which as a kid I liked to hold in my mouth for hours to melt off all but the coconut itself; but this year I refrained from buying them to try the other kinds instead.

If you don’t want to look confused the next time you’re in a Vietnamese house, we’ve got you covered, from the candied coconut to the sugar-glazed peanuts.

### Candied Veggies

*Sweet Potato, Ginger, Potato*

Combining veggies with sugar sounds like an





*“Eat sweet things and think sweet thoughts to ensure a fabulous year lies ahead”*

awful idea, but when boiled and cooked with sweetening agents, the end products are pretty damn good. Among the entire tray, the candied veggies offer the greatest elements of surprise. Candied sweet potatoes are sweet potatoes that are even sweeter than sweet. Candied ginger actually makes ginger look really good. And, in the case of candied potatoes, we get to witness potatoes trying real hard to become sweet potatoes.

**Candied Nuts**  
*Peanuts, Water Chestnuts*

Unlike candied vegetables, candied nuts offer the least elements of surprise: they are just as good as they sound. Sugar-glazed peanuts, which taste a lot like Cracker Jack, are blocks of peanuts bonded together with sugar. Candied water chestnuts are similar to candied fruits and vegetables, except that when you bite into them, you get a softer, moister texture.

**Custard Candy**  
*Tamarind Candy, Custard Apple*

Custard tamarind candy and custard apple candy are sweet, chewy candies with a consistency similar to Gushers. Each custard candy tastes respectively close to the fruits they were made with. Unwrap a custard candy and you will notice immediately that they're bodiless: without their wrappers, they're so gushy they lose form. But that's all part of the fun. Be careful, because they can be kind of sticky. But they're oh so good.

**Candied Fruits**  
*Coconut, Flower-Shaped Candied Kumquat*

Candied coconut comes in white, light green and light pink varieties and tastes like dried, sweetened coconut (surprise!). The candied kumquat, on the other hand, is simultaneously bitter and sweet, with a tart-citrusy flavor

and hints of sugar from the coating. Candied kumquat is usually shaped into a flower for Tet, reflecting the traditional usage of flowers as decoration for the New Year.

**Seeds**  
*Candied Lotus Seeds, Melon Seeds, Pumpkin Seeds*

It may be because seeds represent growth that they make an appearance in *mứt Tết*. Whatever the significance though, one thing is for sure: start with one or two and you will be addicted soon enough. Both melon seeds and pumpkin seeds taste like you would expect, but candied lotus seeds, because of their texture and coats of sugar, taste more like a candied fruit or vegetable than anything else.

To even out the sweetness, take *mứt Tết* with either black or green tea.

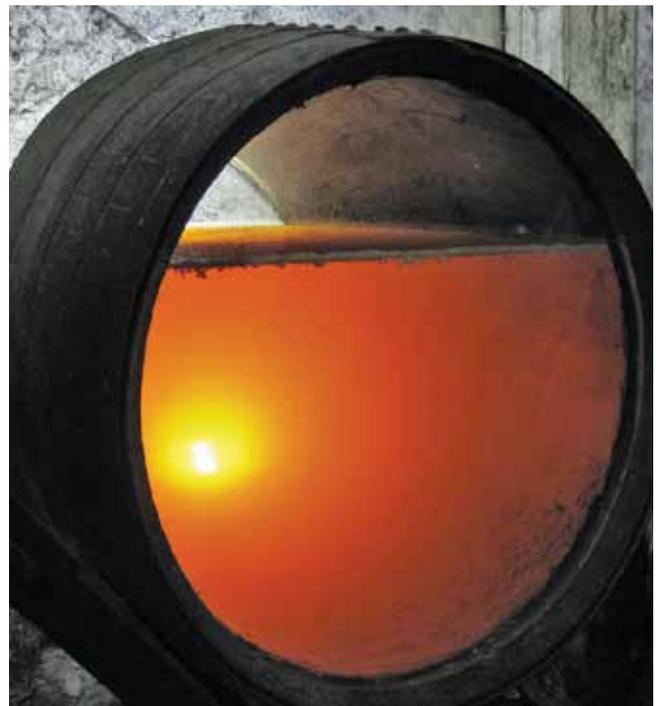
*Chúc mừng năm mới* and happy eating!

# The Sweet Stuff

Understanding sherry wines



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.wineinvietnam.com).



SHERRY IS AN Anglicization that comes from the name of the Spanish city of “Jerez de la Frontera,” which is how these wines are named in Spain. Sherry is produced in a very small region of southern Spain. Sherry is considered a fortified wine, meaning it is stronger in alcohol volume than normal grape wines, because as part of the production process alcohol is added to the must (“must” is the juice from crushed grapes, usually before it has been fermented or while it is fermenting; once fully fermented, must becomes wine) to increase the alcohol level, originally as a means to preserve the wine.

Essential to the production of sherry is the growth of a layer of film forming yeast on the top of the wine. This is known as the flor, and it forms spontaneously from yeast that is abundant in the winery environment when the casks are left not completely filled. The growth of the flor protects the developing wine from oxidation and contributes a distinctive flavor to the wine through metabolizing alcohol to the nutty, distinctive organic acetaldehyde scent and

taste compounds. To keep the flor healthy, casks are periodically topped up with fresh wine to maintain the nutrients that the yeast needs to survive.

At the end of the year when fermentation is complete and the wine is still on its lees, it is classified and then fortified. This classification determines the destiny of the wine. The oenologist will taste through the casks with a view to separating out the lighter, more elegant wines to become fino, and the heavier, darker wines to become olorosos. Fino wines will then be fortified to 15 ° alcohol, and olorosos to 17 or 18 °.

There are many ways to skin a cat, and there are many ways to classify sherry wines, so I will give you the most common classification: Generosos and Generoso Liqueur wines. The former is most common in Spain and offers the more interesting wines while Generoso Liqueur is more often seen in the UK, and is the extra sweet wine that your grandma might love.

Also important to the flavor of sherry is the solera system. This is a rather complex

arrangement of barrels where wine travels from one to another in a precise order during its maturation and aging. The lowest level of butts is known as the solera, which is the name also used for the entire system. This is the final stage in the maturation process and this is where the wine leaves the system. Up to one third of the wine may be withdrawn each year from these barrels, but the amount typically taken is just 10 percent.

Fino and Manzanilla are the most delicate types of sherries and should be drunk soon after opening. Amontillados and Olorosos will keep for longer, while sweeter versions such as PX and blended cream sherries are able to last several weeks or even months after opening, since the sugar content acts as a preservative.

In Vietnam you can enjoy sherry wines in restaurants like Shri and Lubu, or you can buy your own bottles at The Warehouse and Red Apron. My favorite so far is Armada from Sandeman - it is absolutely gorgeous. ■

# Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



*Wood baked mac and cheese; Buttermilk corn bread; Mexican street corn; and Caesar Salad  
Zombie BBQ*



TOP: Caesar salad  
BOTTOM: Mexican street corn; Buttermilk corn bread; and Wood-baked mac and cheese



# To Die For

Zombie BBQ emerges as Saigon's newest American BBQ joint

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

ZOMBIES ARE SO hot right now. Nicholas Hoult played a sexy one in *Warm Bodies*. Brad Pitt scrambled for a cure in *World War Z*. And *The Walking Dead* garnered 17.3 million viewers for its latest season premiere, making it the most-watched drama series telecast in US basic cable history. So it probably shouldn't come as a surprise that Saigon carnivores are chomping at the bit over the opening of **Zombie BBQ** (4 Thao Dien, D2, also soon to be on [vietnammm.com](http://vietnammm.com)), the latest endeavor by chef and restaurateur Geoffrey Deetz.

Set in an expansive villa with a huge courtyard for outdoor seating hidden behind an exterior wall on busy Thao Dien, the smell of grilled meats, the sparkling lights and the low-key background music transports diners to Anytown, USA. Deetz, who has

something of a penchant for the macabre (his other restaurant is HCMC mainstay, Black Cat) is trying to reanimate the restaurant graveyard that has been 4 Thao Dien which in former lives has been a tapas place, a French restaurant, and most recently McSorley's Ale House (who are still manning the bar). With the recent openings of other successful BBQ joints around town, Deetz is betting that this is the right time and place for unpretentious American BBQ in D2.

"There's been an explosion of businesses in 'Thao Dien,'" he says, "but not many are addressing everyday working families going out to eat. BBQ brings people together. This is a place to go after work and grab a beer and enjoy good American BBQ." Deetz also theorizes that the internet has brought food trends to Vietnam much faster now, meaning

people are ready to try new things. "Ten years ago, you'd have to wait five to six years before people would even try something new, but with social media taking off, people have heard of things like fried okra and fried pickles and they want to try it. That gives me the ability to put new and exciting things on the menu. It's great living in a city with a food culture that has matured to an international level."

Deetz is looking to parlay his 30-plus years of cooking experience, 14 of those in Vietnam partnering or consulting in over 20 restaurants, into another winning concept. That kitchen experience together with his long-standing network of suppliers means that diners benefit from culinary windfalls — a case of Sriracha gets made into a Los Angeles chili sauce and 50 kgs of jalapeños from Dalat gets smoked for chipotle, jalapeño sate or stuffed with bacon, onions and cream cheese for poppers. "We have the experience, space and sources to really listen to what our customers want. I'm going to bring in peri peri from Portugal, then go off to Hawaii to do a kalua pig before heading to Jamaica for a jerk chicken. New American BBQ is embracing all those BBQ trends around the world," says Deetz.

## Eat Your Heart Out

Playing off the zombie theme, **Zombie BBQ's** cheeky menu tells a story. Starters are listed under "In the Beginning There Was." Our Beer-battered Onion Rings (VND75,000) were crunchy goodness, dusted with sea salt that had been smoked for four hours. In keeping with the Southern motto that deep-frying makes everything better, the Fried Dill Pickles (VND35,000) were zesty and sweet, freshly made on site before getting breaded and, of course, deep fried.

While zombies aren't known for gnawing on salad, there is a Grounds Keeper section of the menu for vegetable side dishes, except these are wonderfully and unapologetically the kind that the reanimated would go for. Case in point, the Caesar Salad (VND50,000) replaces croutons, chicken and bacon with straight up fried pork skins. Other sides include a hearty Wood-baked Mac and Cheese (VND50,000), each individually cooked in its own clay pot, sealing in the rich cheesiness, and Buttermilk Corn Bread (VND30,000), finished on the grill and slathered with sweet butter and honey. The menu even ventures south of the border with Mexican Street Corn (VND30,000) served up with dollops of tapatio hot sauce and sour cream.

If you've made it to the mains with your heart and arteries intact, expect more of the same, keeping true to the way people cook in the South — meat-heavy with few vegetables. "Out of the Ashes" features ribs and chicken smoked over beech, a mild wood that imparts a delicate smoke flavor. The "to die for" ribs (VND230,000 for a 400g



half rack, VND460,000 for a full rack) are exceptionally meaty, coming off the bone clean but still with a little bounce to it. BBQ sauce is applied to the meat while it smokes, so expect some caramelization as the sugars burn off. There are six BBQ sauces to choose from, including sugar-free and the “flame thrower.” Our ribs were slathered in Kansas City sauce, a tangy combination of coriander seed, chili powder, paprika, Mexican spices and cumin and served with a side of giardiniera, a host of pickled vegetables to cut through the richness, including sweet dill pickles, pickled watermelon rind, lotus root and carrots. Zombie’s BBQ philosophy is to marinate the meat for 24-36 hours before smoking for another seven to eight hours in the case of ribs and two to three hours for chicken. Our Half Chicken (VND288,000) was juicy from soaking in a brine of brown sugar, salt and Mexican spices before being smoked with a glaze of sweet and sour Hawaiian sauce, drawing its flavor from pineapple, soya sauce and ginger.

While zombie movies rarely have a sweet ending, here they do. We heartily embraced a decadent death with the very rich, very sweet Rice Crispy S’mores (VND80,000), a campfire favorite of rice crispy treats smothered in chocolate sauce and marshmallows, finished on the open grill.

Deetz’s concept with Zombie BBQ is to recreate the essence of American cuisine — big portions at reasonable prices in an unpretentious setting where taste trumps calorie count. If this is how the ravenous undead are eating, bring on the zombie apocalypse! ■

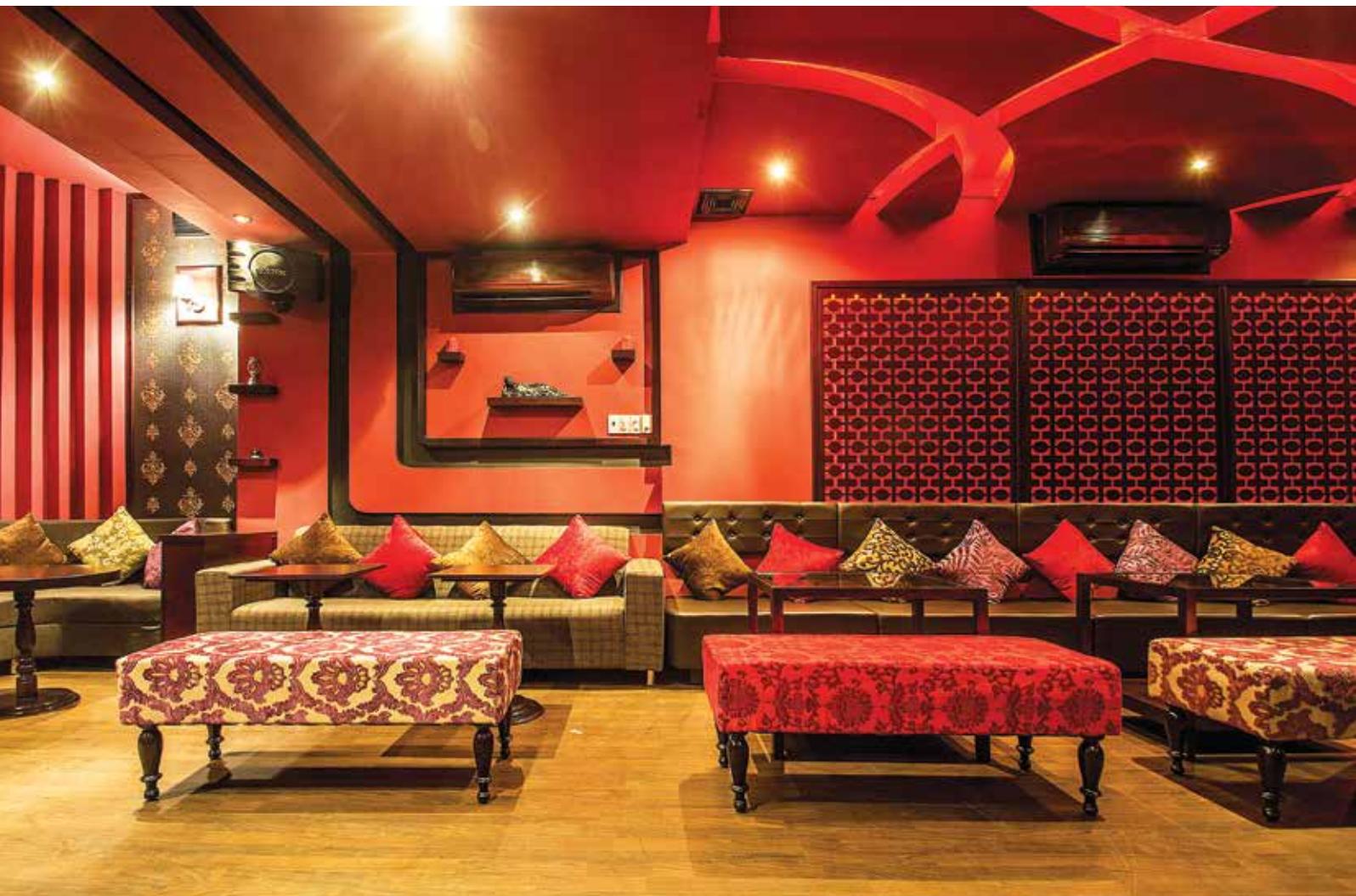


FROM TOP: BBQ slow cooked pork ribs; Half Chicken; Rice Crispy S’mores

# Light Up the Night

Meet the minds behind the latest late-night lounge in Saigon

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



NGO VAN NAM alley, which was once famous for its karaoke clubs designed for Japanese businessmen, has gradually redefined itself as a trendy destination with the addition of a French bistro, a rustic Vietnamese restaurant, a fusion eatery and, new to the scene, **Lit Lounge** (16 Ngo Van Nam, D1). With its vivid red interior, artsy decor and sleek style, Lit adds another dimension to this burgeoning nightlife spot.

Lit is the brainchild of an accountant, a banker and a gaming development/finance consultant - all expats. "This is basically a finance person's idea of a lounge," says investor and co-owner Vincent Petrancosta. "Just looking at how it turned out, you wouldn't believe it, but this ground floor, right here, you know how Travis designed the layout for this floor? He did it on an Excel spreadsheet. Because he's an accountant and that's the one program he knew how to work

with."

"The concept of Lit is a space where people can easily have conversations," adds Travis Miller, investor, co-owner and aforementioned Excel spreadsheet designer. "The investors are all working professionals so when we get off work, we want a nice place where we can sit down, have a drink, have nice conversations with some friends without having to yell over the loud music."

Travis also cites the classic bar experience he grew up with as the inspiration and goal of Lit. "A bar or a lounge is a place where you can share space with absolute strangers, strike up conversations and perhaps make a friend. It's not really like this here in Vietnam where people tend to sit at a table and close their group off to outsiders. We want Lit to be something similar to that classic bar experience. We want it to be open enough so that strangers would feel comfortable enough

**"A place where you can share space with absolute strangers, strike up conversations and perhaps make a friend..."**



Travis Miller

to talk to each other, but also closed enough that people don't have to feel like their privacy is being invaded."

Luxurious but still cozy, Lit has two floors, each with its own distinct vibe. The bar and plush seating on the ground floor provide plenty of space for lounge goers who prefer ample conversations with friends and a quieter atmosphere. The first floor, on the other hand, is a much more vibrant space with a designated dance floor, DJs and club style seating.

### What does the name Lit mean?

**Travis:** I've always thought a bar or lounge name should be simple, a one syllable word that you can pronounce and remember easily. Lit is a name that I've been thinking about for 10 years. Here, it means 'lit up' but not like neon lights or electric bulbs, more like

'candlelit.'

### It must have been difficult for a team of finance people with zero experience in catering to open a lounge?

**Travis:** It has been a learning experience, yes. We had a beach bar down in Vung Tau named Haven but, of course, it doesn't compare to an upscale lounge in downtown Saigon. Recently we had an addition to our team. His name is Truc. He's Vietnamese, a veteran in the catering industry and he has been an invaluable help to us.

### Did you have any problems setting up the bar and opening it?

**Travis:** The paperwork was actually the easiest part. It's the perk of an almost all finance professional team. We know our

paperwork. The difficult part is our lack of experience and contacts in the catering industry, like where to find amazing mixers, bartenders or DJs who can rile the crowd. Little things like that are a lot more difficult than people realize.

### You put the open time from 5pm to late. How late are we talking about here?

**Travis:** Late. It differs on days. We have opened as late as five or six in the morning without problem. If we still have guests in house, we remain open.

### Have you run into problems staying open so late?

**Travis:** Amazingly enough, no. As to the reason why we haven't had problems, I think it has to do with how we run this place. We are on the mindset that we don't want to make any trouble and we hope no trouble finds us. We don't make loud music that disturbs the neighbors. We don't let our waitresses run around the neighborhood. We don't create disturbances, period. When we were running construction in here we gave free drinks to our neighbors as an apology for the noise and dust we caused. We have basically been the nice guys around the neighborhood.

### How and why did you decide on the different vibes upstairs and downstairs for Lit?

**Travis:** One of the initial concerns we had regarding Lit is that we'd focus too much on what works for us to the expense of other things. The different vibes we had for the two floors is our solution to that. Downstairs is what works for us and people who like the same atmosphere we do. Upstairs is more rowdy, probably more fun, and more like the mainstream of the lounge scene in Saigon without detracting too much from the Lit identity. If you want music and dancing you go upstairs. If you want relax time and conversation, you go downstairs.

### Do you have anything interesting planned for Lit in the near future?

**Travis:** Of course! The idea with Lit is that we want to try out many different things. Vincent has been talking forever about having a neighborhood event and build up the 'Ngo Van Nam' street brand, kind of like Pham Ngu Lao. Everybody knows Pham Ngu Lao and what to expect when they go there. We want to make Ngo Van Nam into the street people go to when they don't want to go to Pham Ngu Lao, like a prettier, cleaner, classier cousin. This street has many great places. There are a couple of wine bars at the beginning of the street, a couple of restaurants. We can cordon this part of the block off and make it a fun event. You can walk in, pick up your wine at Le Rendezvous, have your dinner at Urban Kitchen, and when you're down for some late night dancing or conversation, head to Lit. ■

## >>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](http://www.dtdentertainment.com)

Facebook: The Fan Club



### LIT Lounge

LIT Lounge, a new upscale late night spot, has opened in the increasingly hip Ngo Van Nam strip, off Le Thanh Ton. LIT Lounge promises a wide array of affordable cocktails served on two floors, each with its own distinctive vibe. It's a "hidden gem" with a luxurious, cozy feel, modern decor and tasty finger food. It opens at 5pm Monday to Saturday, closing at 2am Monday to Thursday, even later on Fridays and Saturdays. Closed Sundays.

16 Ngo Van Nam, D1  
[www.litsaigon.com](http://www.litsaigon.com)



### 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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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

### 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](http://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](mailto:hatvalavietnam@gmail.com)  
[www.hatvala.com](http://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](http://www.guanabanasmoothies.com)



## Cafe RuNam

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

**96 Mac Thi Bui, D1**  
**3825 8883**  
[www.caferrunam.com](http://www.caferrunam.com)



## The Library

The Library provides a welcoming atmosphere for those in search of tranquility, comfort and great drinks in the heart of Saigon

**Ground floor – InterContinental Asiana Saigon**  
**Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan**  
**3520 9099**  
[www.intercontinental.com/saigon](http://www.intercontinental.com/saigon)

## Also Try...

### AQ Coffee

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

**32 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3**  
**3829 8344**

### Caffe Bene

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

**58 Dong Khoi, D1**  
**3822 4012**  
[caffebenevietnam.com](http://caffebenevietnam.com)

### Ciao Café

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

classic selection of Western cafe and bistro favorites.

**74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1**  
**3823 1130**

### L'Usine

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

**151/1 Dong Khoi, D1**  
**70B Le Loi, D1**  
[www.lusinespace.tumblr.com](http://www.lusinespace.tumblr.com)  
**9am – 9pm**

### LightBox Cafe

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

**179 Hoa Lan, Phu Nhuan**  
**3517 6668**  
[www.lightbox.vn](http://www.lightbox.vn)

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**Open daily from 11:00 AM to 10:00 PM**

[facebook.com/tntbbqvietnam](https://www.facebook.com/tntbbqvietnam)

### Vecchio Cafe

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

**39/3 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3**  
**6683 8618**

### The Workshop

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

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

# CHINESE



## Dragon Court

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

**11-13 Lam Son Square, D1  
3827 2566**



## Dynasty

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

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



## Kabin

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

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



## Li Bai

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

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



## Ming Court

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

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



## Ming Dynasty

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

**23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7**



## Also Try...

### Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

**20 Le Anh Xuan, D1  
3822 2673**

### Ocean Palace

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

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

### Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

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

### Shang Palace

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

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

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

### Yu Chu

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

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

# SPANISH



## Tapas Saigon

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



## La Habana

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



## Ole

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**





**wok n'roll**

**American Chinese Food**



Full Menu

[www.woknroll.vn](http://www.woknroll.vn)

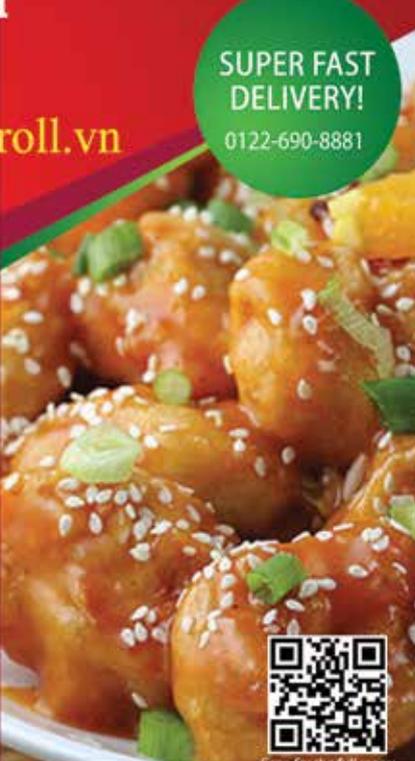
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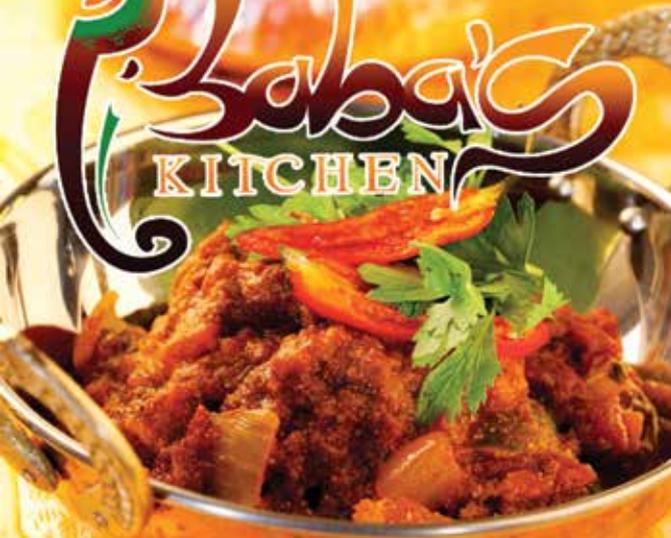




Scan for the full menu

Address: Hung Vuong 1 E006, Phu My Hung, District 7





**Baba's Kitchen**

164 Bui Vien, District 1

49D Xa Lo Hanoi, District 2

Phone: 083-838-6661 & 083-838-6662

Open 11am to 11pm

North & South Indian food

Halal & vegetarian dishes

Of course we can cater!

order online at [vietnammm.com](http://vietnammm.com) & [eat.vn](http://eat.vn)

"Baba brings India to Vietnam"

# 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.lafourchette.com.vn)



## Le Rendez-vous de Saigon

A wine bistro offering a warm and friendly atmosphere. Unwind either in their stylish downstairs bar, or lounge on cozy leather seating in the upstairs section with a balcony overlooking a courtyard in an alley. The venue offers a tasty selection of wines from France to South Africa and a delectable menu of French cuisine.

**9A Ngo Van Nam, D1**  
[www.lerendezvousdesaigon.com](http://www.lerendezvousdesaigon.com)  
 6291 0396



## 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](http://www.bacoulos.com)



## Le Jardin

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

**31D Thai Van Lung, D1**  
**3825 8465**

## 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](http://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.lebouchonsaigon.com](http://www.lebouchonsaigon.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 Buoi, D1



## Also Try...

### Bombay Indian Restaurant

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

### Curry Leaf

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

### The Punjabi

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

# ITALIAN



## Ciao Bella Oi's Pick

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

**11 Dong Du, D1**  
**3822 3329**  
[tonyfox56@hotmail.com](mailto:tonyfox56@hotmail.com)  
[www.saigonrestaurantgroup.com/ciao](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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 Oir's Pick

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

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



## Achaya Café

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

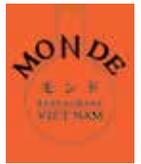
90 Le Loi, D1  
093 897 2050  
11am - 10:30pm



## Mondo

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



## Ebisu

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

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



## Gyumaru

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

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



## Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1  
www.ichibansushi.vn

## Also Try...

### K Cafe

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

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
38245355  
www.yakatabune-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.sushidiningaioi.com

### Yoshino

The decor is straight out of the set of Shogun, with black wood, tatami mats, stenciled 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.

**R1-25 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 Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1**  
3823 4423

## Lac Thai

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

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

**71/2 Mac Thi 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](http://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](http://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](http://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



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# 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  
commnieusaigon27@yahoo.com  
commnieusaigon.com.vn



## Frangipani Hoa Su

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

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



## Quan Na - Vegishouse

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

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



## Quan Bui

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

17a Ngo Van Nam, D1  
3829 1515



## Hoa Tuc

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

74/7 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
3825 1676



## Papaya

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

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

## Also Try...

### 3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1  
3821 1631

### Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

### Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

### Cuc Gach Quan

Deservedly one of the highest ranking Vietnamese restaurants in Saigon on

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

10 Dang Tat, D1  
3848 0144

### Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3  
www.highway4.com

### Hum

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

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

### May

Fine Vietnamese fare served in a

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

3/5 Hoang Sa  
3910 1277

### Temple Club

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

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

### Nha Hang Ngon

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

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

### Thanh Nien

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

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

### Propaganda Bistro

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

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

# INTERNATIONAL



## Au Parc

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

23 Han Thuyen, D1  
3829 2772



## Berru

Berru is a family-run Turkish restaurant offering a variety of Turkish specialties including kebabs, koftas, mezzes and soups. This is one of the few halal restaurants that imports all of their halal meat.

SC 3-1 Nguyen Luong Bang, Nam Khang, D7



## Boathouse

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

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



## Portofino

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

15 Dong Du, D1



## Saffron

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

51 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
382 4838



## 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



## 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



## Also Try...

### Boomerang Bistro

Located in The Crescent by the lake, the spacious Boomerang 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

### Elbow Room

At The Elbow Room, a rustic homage to retro Americana with its exposed brick, black and white vintage photographs, and Nora Jones soundtrack, diners can order classic American breakfasts all day. Live music upstairs on Friday nights is the city's best kept secret.

52 Pasteur, D1  
www.elbowroom.com.vn

### Hog's Breath

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

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

### Khoi Thom

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

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3  
www.rhoithom.com

### La Fenetre Soleil

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

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

### Refinery

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

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

### Scott & 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.

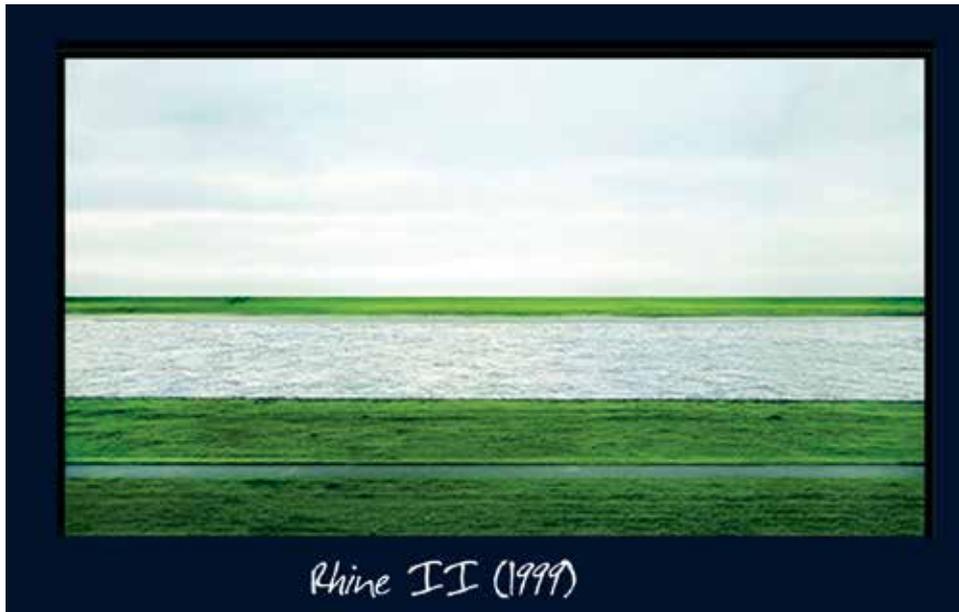
15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

# Snap Decisions

Advice on how to approach collecting photography



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](http://bridgetmarch.co.uk)



RHINE I (1999) BY ANDREAS CURSKY

A QUESTION WAS recently posed to me: “Are photographic prints collectable? Can they be an investment the same way as art?” My answer is absolutely, and right now is a very good time to start collecting, right here in Vietnam.

Across the world, 19th, 20th and 21st century photography have occasionally sold for millions of dollars at Sotheby's and Christie's auction rooms, and interesting prints regularly sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now it's considered to be a very exciting time to invest in Fine Art photography because it's still new. There was a time when Impressionist, Cubist and Expressionist paintings were considered to be offensive and not to be taken seriously but now the works of artists who experimented with these intellectual ideas are amongst the most collectible and expensive in the world.

Which photography or photographer to collect? As with any form of art, choose the subject you enjoy, whether it's landscapes, black and whites, social commentaries, portraits or a time period. Read about the famous and not-so-famous artists and look online for galleries and websites that sell them. The same as with artists, you should ask about their

biography, what their background is, where they work, what kind of photography they specialize in, where they have exhibited and where their works have been published. The more that a photographer is recognized by their peers for the work they do, the more collectable it is likely to become.

You should find out if the image is from a limited edition and how big the edition is. Does the image belong to a particular collection or body of work? What kind of paper or other surface has the image been printed on? How do you look after it? Will you receive a certificate of authenticity signed by the photographer? The smaller the edition, the better the quality or rarity of the paper and the larger the image, the more expensive and more collectable it is likely to be.

In Vietnam, today, there are a number of professional photographers producing excellent work in their different genres. Some are known for their landscapes, portraits, urban scenes and some for their study of everyday life. However, most earn their income from teaching, wedding and commercial photography or photographic tours; few concentrate on making a living solely from their own

photographic projects.

There are some, however, whose work is recognized internationally. The acclaimed Long Thanh has a gallery in Nha Trang where his images can be seen in black and white. Art Vietnam Gallery in Hanoi has shown the work of French photographer Sebastien Laval and Vietnamese artist Phan Quang's photographs were exhibited as part of his installation project at San Art in Saigon. French photographer Rehahn now lives and works in Vietnam. His work about people, customs and costume can be seen at his gallery in Hoi An and his Saigon debut exhibition will be held next month at VinGallery in District 2. The buzz is that there will be one huge photograph on exhibition for USD10,000. Number one of a limited edition of only three, it is printed on Kodak Endura metallic paper which, apparently, has to be seen to be believed.

When the young, well-educated Vietnamese start to take a greater interest in their own cultural heritage and wake up to the fact that it is being undervalued by their parents' generation, the works of the photographers and artists who captured its passing will take on new meaning and acquire greater value. ■

# Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY CAROLINE COUPE



Nyhavn harbor  
Copenhagen, Denmark

# Metamorphosis

From tourist to local in Copenhagen

TEXT AND IMAGES BY CAROLINE COUPE



FROM LEFT: Strøget shopping area, and Amalienborg Palace protected by soldiers

COPENHAGEN IS A city where rich history meets modern innovation, a growing tourist destination, and an emerging force in the culinary world. Millions of visitors flock here every year to tour the palaces, absorb the unique Scandinavian culture, shop for Danish designs and dine on New Nordic cuisine. But there are so many layers to the city that as a visitor it's impossible to do more than scratch the surface. In becoming a local, though, I have discovered more to the city than I ever expected.

Having traveled the world working on cruise ships, many of my travel experiences were brief, just enough to absorb the feel of a place, eat some local food and take some nice photos. I longed to really experience a place, to discover hidden gems and local haunts. I ended up living in Copenhagen by chance, but I knew I would love it. From day one, I was out exploring the city. The first thing I wanted to see, of course, was what all visitors

to Copenhagen want to see: Nyhavn, the colorful row of restaurants and bars lining the canal filled with Tall Ships. Once the city's main harbor, Nyhavn was a seedy area filled with sailors and prostitutes, but today it is the most popular tourist spot in the city. The Little Mermaid and the Strøget shopping area soon followed, both alive with eager tourists.

I made a point of getting to know the history of my new hometown and was fascinated. Settled by Vikings and founded by a warrior bishop, the city survived a plague, two devastating fires and a Nazi occupation. But Copenhagen persevered and rebuilt a city rich in architecture and culture, shaped by palaces, museums, churches and gardens built by the industrious minds of Denmark's past, a constant reminder of its history while looking to the future. What I was most eager to experience were the royal palaces, of which Copenhagen has several. Denmark is one of the oldest monarchies in the world and

there have been many royal residences here. The current one is Amalienborg Palace, a complex of four identical mansions centered on a courtyard, linked by underground passageways. Protected by soldiers in uniforms dating to 1848, the daily Changing of the Guard is a huge draw. I marveled at the fact that I could come and see this regal display whenever I wanted, and I still do. I visited the Parliament and Royal Reception Rooms at Christiansborg, the fifth palace to stand in its location since the first in 1167. My favorite, though, was Rosenborg Castle, originally built by King Christian IV as a summer palace and set in spacious gardens.



FROM TOP: Christiansborg Palace, Rosenborg Castle Treasure Crown, and vibrant Vesterbro

Bursting with stunning frescoes and fascinating artifacts, each room represents a former ruler of Denmark. The Throne Room boasts a throne crafted from narwhal tusk and the Treasury guards Christian's ornate crown among other treasures.

### Branching Out

Having covered the bulk of the main attractions, it was time to venture out of the city center and check out the real Copenhagen. I wandered through residential areas, amazed that there didn't seem to be such a thing as a 'bad' neighborhood. Sure, some areas are more affluent than others, but they are all charming and clean, and even the red light district, with its strip clubs and sex shops, didn't feel unsafe. Each area has its own vibe, from hipster-filled Vesterbro to upscale Frederiksberg to international Nørrebro. The buildings are historic, the streets are filled with cafes and bakeries, and blank spaces come alive with colorful street art. Every borough of Copenhagen has its own green spaces teeming with life, especially when the warm weather appears after the long dark winters. Østerbrofælled has a skate park, water park and dog park, while Frederiksberg Have has a heron colony, a palace, a Chinese pagoda and elephants. There's a viewing area of their enclosure in the Copenhagen Zoo and park visitors can watch the antics of the elephants for free. There's a series of man-made lakes running through three neighborhoods where locals walk, jog and cycle and it boasts the most spectacular sunsets. Nørrebro is home to two unique parks, one of which isn't really a park at all, but a cemetery. Assistens Kirkegård is the resting place of some of Denmark's greatest historical figures, including author Hans Christian Andersen and existentialist Søren Kierkegaard. Far from being the entirely morbid place many would expect of a cemetery, it's actually quite lively and beautiful. The graves are sparsely arranged and decorated with sculptures, lanterns and keepsakes where Copenhageners stroll the grounds and have picnics in the sun - celebrating life. The other is Superkilen - half a mile long with three distinct sections, each with its own defining color and feel. Away from the tourist areas in an ethnically diverse residential neighborhood, the park was designed in collaboration with Nørrebro residents. It contains an odd assortment of items from around the world: a fountain from Morocco, swing chairs from Baghdad, a slide from Chernobyl, even red dirt from Palestine. It's a fascinating example of Danish creativity and ingenuity.

One of my favorite areas of the city is Christianshavn, an island artificially created by King Christian IV in order to fortify Copenhagen against attacks by sea. He hired a Dutch architect and modeled the borough after Amsterdam, complete with its own scenic canal. The most famous area of Christianshavn is Christiania, a freetown created in the 1970s by squatters who took over a military barracks. I was nervous to go inside because of its notorious cannabis trade and political issues but was talked into it and was surprised to find it a unique and interesting place. The residents of the area construct their own homes, run restaurants, hold concerts, build highly sought-after specialty bikes, and live by their own set of rules. It's a fascinating look at an unorthodox way of life.

### Discovering Hygge

I soon became more comfortable in my new city and learned how things work. I got used to waiting for the green light to cross the street even if it's 3am and there's not a car in sight, and to watching out for the many bikes (do NOT stand in the bike lane). I gained insight into Danish culture, how they live and how they view life. The most essential element of Danish life is *hygge*. *Hygge* is something that can't be translated. It's a feeling of coziness and happiness in the company of family and friends, accented with delicious food and glowing candles. This idea gives the outside world a glimpse of the priorities and values of Danish society. It's focused on family, with emphasis on a strong work-life balance. Work hours are shorter, parental leaves are longer and men seem more involved in family life.

Then there's the food. New Nordic cuisine is a rising star



in the culinary world, and for good reason. It's a unique concept, using traditional techniques combined with avant garde ideas to create spectacular dishes. The ingredients are fresh and local and sometimes bizarre with quirky components like ants and moss. Copenhagen's Noma is a well-known name in New Nordic, having been designated the best restaurant in the world four of the last five years, and diners pay hundreds of dollars each and wait up to six months just to experience it. Of course, there are many other outstanding places without the wait or the price tag, like Restaurant Radio, Kødbyens Fiskebar, and Manfred's & Vin. There are other must-tries when in Copenhagen, like *smørrebrød*, a tasty open-faced sandwich with a variety of toppings piled high on dark rye bread, and *pølser*, a traditional hot dog sold from stands all over the city. These *pølser* wagons sell about a dozen types of sausage and they make for a great bite on the go. Be sure to ask for my favorite topping, the delicious *risted løg* (crunchy dried roasted onions). The other famous Danish snack and one I'm not as fond of is *lakrids* (black licorice). The Danes put licorice on everything: ice cream, cake, coffee, tea, chocolate, candy, syrup and mustard. You can even take a licorice tasting tour of the city. A great place to explore Danish food is Torvehallerne, a market and food hall in the heart of the city. It's a foodie's paradise with fresh meats, cheeses, produce and seafood, as

well as gourmet coffees, jams, chocolates and spices.

### Becoming Local

It came time to explore outside the city center, and there was something to see in every direction. I went just south to the oceanfront promenade of Amager Strand and explored the tiny fishing village of Dragør. I headed further away, west to the former capital of Roskilde, where I visited the incredible cathedral - a resting place of thousands of years of Danish royalty. Heading north, I visited the oldest amusement park in the world - Bakken, set in a wildlife sanctuary teeming with wild deer. I spent a fantastic day in the seaside town of Helsingør, home to Kronborg Castle, the inspiration for Hamlet's castle in Shakespeare's play. I even went east, across the Øresund Bridge to Malmö, Sweden. The possibilities felt endless.

I've lived here six months, and I'm still discovering. In many ways I still feel like a tourist in the sense that everything feels new, exciting and interesting, and there is always something to explore. But it's a different kind of exploration, into the true colors of the city. Last week, I headed out to a near-empty section of land behind a shopping mall in Sydhavn (South Harbor) to check out an incredible piece of street art I'd heard about - Evolution, a 170m mural illustrating time on Earth from the Big Bang to the Ice Age. I found not only the mural but an entire

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**  
Christianshavn, Torvehallerne Market,  
Tivoli Gardens and Roskilde Cathedral

culture of street art and legal graffiti in a gritty industrial setting, a far cry from the pristine picture-perfect buildings of Nyhavn. At the same time, I still love playing typical tourist: days after my Sydhavn adventure, I headed to the famous Tivoli Gardens for their Alpine Christmas where I browsed the market stalls, drank mulled wine and soaked in the magic of the place. I felt wonderment and a sense of belonging all at once. When entering the park, I saw the ticket seller's demeanor change entirely when we asked about buying a yearly pass rather than a one-time entry. We weren't just passing through. We were locals.

**BIO:** *Caroline is a passionate traveler, photographer and aspiring travel writer. From Canada, she recently settled in Copenhagen, Denmark after spending eight years working on cruise ships and nine months working at a boutique hotel in Edinburgh, Scotland. Caroline has launched a travel blog, LoveLiveTravel, based on her experiences around the world. It can be found at [www.lovelivetravel.co.uk](http://www.lovelivetravel.co.uk), and is also on Twitter at @lovelivetravel. ■*

## >> The List

# Travel



### An Lam Villas | Ninh Van Bay

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

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

An Lam  
VILLAS  
— NINH VAN BAY —



### Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

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

www.anamandara-resort.com



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www.princessannam.com



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maidanang.fusion-resorts.com



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www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



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www.laverandaresorts.com



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Mui Ne, Phan Thiet  
www.novelaresort.vn  
(62) 374 3456



# Eternal Youth

Choosing to stop the clock in its tracks rather than wait to turn back the years

INTERVIEW BY **NPD KHANH**

IMAGE PROVIDED BY **ORIENT SKINCARE AND LASER CENTER**

**Orient Skincare and Laser Center**

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3926 0561/62/63/64  
3 Phung Khac Khoan, District 1; 3824 4650  
64D Truong Dinh, District 3; 3932 5781  
945 Cach Mang Thang 8, Tan Binh District;  
3970 3674  
www.orientskin.com

ONCE UPON A time, having Botox or filler injections to spruce up one's appearance was a luxury reserved only for the rich and famous. With the boom of global medical tourism in Asia, these privileges are becoming increasingly available as well as affordable for both men and women.

Oi speaks to Dr. Ho Xuan Vuong (Medical Practitioner License Number: 10112847 - SCT/BS), a local veteran of the Vietnamese beauty industry with more than 10 years of specialized experience under his belt, to shed light on the Botox scene in Saigon. He is a graduate of the HCMC University of Medicine and Pharmacy, a licensed member of the Laser Association, and of the Medical Aesthetic Academy USA. Dr. Vuong currently serves as one among the core medical team at Orient Skincare and Laser Center.

**How long have Botox and filler treatments been available in Vietnam?**

**Dr. Vuong:** They have been here for at least 10 years, since 2004, but not until 2007 did their popularity start to pick up.

**How long do the treatments take? Are they painful?**

**Dr. Vuong:** Botox and filler injections only take 10 to 15 minutes to complete, then two weeks for the injection to see results. Aside from a pinch you get from the injection, they are completely painless.

**How long does the effect last?**

**Dr. Vuong:** A single injection should last you for at least three to four months, even as long as six months provided the skin condition is good. Afterwards, you will need subsequent injections every four to six

months based on the specific condition of your skin.

**Is there any side effect if the injections are stopped?**

**Dr. Vuong:** Not at all, provided the patient follows our instructions in caring for his or her skin.

**Do the patients need down time after an injection?**

**Dr. Vuong:** No, they don't. The biggest perk of Botox and other quick and painless beauty treatments is their convenience. A patient can pop in for 15 minutes in the morning, have their injection then go on the rest of her day as usual. This is also why Botox and fillers are among the most popular beauty treatments for tourists.

**How does the pricing compare to that in the West?**

**Dr. Vuong:** That is difficult to say for certain. Of course on average the prices in Vietnam are always lower compared to places like America or Europe. But in the Vietnamese industry itself, the variations in price range are huge depending on the quality and reputation of each beauty center. As a rule of thumb though, a high quality treatment in Vietnam costs around a fifth to a third of a treatment of similar quality level in America or Europe.

**Are the quality levels in Vietnamese beauty center different compared to beauty centers in the West?**

**Dr. Vuong:** I think anyone in the local industry would like to say 'no' to that question but the truth is that there are just too many variations in the industry as well as too many people willing to do anything for money for that to be true. That said though, if the doctors in charge of the treatment are trained and licensed



Dr. Vuong

by the same institutes and use the facilities and injection units imported from the same countries then I don't believe there are any causes for a difference in quality level. The doctors at Orient Center are trained in America, Thailand and Singapore and we use medicine and botulinum toxin vials imported from America so I don't believe that there is a significant difference in quality.

**Are there any governing bodies in Vietnam that can certify a doctor for these beauty treatments?**

**Dr. Vuong:** Sadly, there are none, and anyone who tells you otherwise is not being truthful. The industry in Vietnam hasn't grown to the point where we have such authorities yet. Specialized doctors and technicians in Vietnam are mostly trained abroad where there are academies and associations specializing in these new treatments. Popular countries include Thailand, the US and Singapore.

**In that case, how do potential clients distinguish which beauty centers are of high quality and which ones they should avoid?**

**Dr. Vuong:** I have heard of horror stories concerning beauty centers of dubious credentials. For a potential client, there are several ways to ascertain the quality of any beauty center. First is the age of the beauty center and the number of branches. The industry in Vietnam is incredibly competitive. Centers with shoddy quality and reputation do not survive for long. Multiple branches is a definite sign of success and popularity, and the longer the center stays in business, it will gain more experienced and talented doctors.

Second is the medical team. Good doctors have many options and offers and tend to be picky about where they work. Only the best beauty centers manage to keep a stable team throughout the years. If you see a center with many years but with a constantly rotating medical team, then best stay away.

Third is the facilities, or in this case, the brands of botulinum toxin used for injection. In Vietnam right now, there are many brands of varying quality and prices. These brands are mostly imported from America and Korea. And of course, high quality botulinum toxins are much more expensive than those of questionable quality and unknown origin. Here at Orient, we use Allergan, the highest quality brand imported from America.

The fourth way to determine whether a beauty center is good or not, and this is from my personal experience, is the schedule the doctor sets for the patient. At Orient, we have many patients who come to us for Botox injection three or four days before a big event. As a rule, I don't accept these patients.

**What do you mean by that?**

**Dr. Vuong:** As I said above, it takes two weeks for a single injection to have its full effect. So it's a common practice for doctors to have the patients coming in at the end of the two weeks. What we do then is check the results of the first injection and see if a touch-up is necessary. If it is necessary, we do it as part of the treatment itself. If a doctor accepts a patient with a scheduled appearance three to four days after the injection, it's a guarantee that the result is not going to be good because at that time, the toxin is only in the first stage and there's no chance for any touch-up or fixing if the patient's face is not in top shape. Not all doctors refrain from accepting or even warning these patients about this though. It is a sign of a good doctor who is honest and lets his clients know what to expect and when not to have an injection. ■

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# Health & Beauty

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# Kids & Education

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# The Idiot Box

The television generation versus  
the tablet generation

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IN A RECENT article warning parents about the evils of modern technology, an elderly doctor writes about a father who had brought his son in for a check-up. The doctor examined the child and pronounced that he had a chest infection. He was surprised at the boy's reaction – instead of turning to his dad for more information, he leaned into his iPhone and said, "Siri, what is 'chest infection'?" This, scolded the doctor, was symptomatic of the modern condition – an erosion of the relationship between real human beings and its replacement with an overreliance on machines.

I don't know about most people, but I find myself siding with the fairly cool dad

here – partially because I hope my own kids will learn how to do research for themselves whenever they have a question they need clear, authoritative answers to. My main objection, however, is that I recognize this argument, and I don't find it particularly compelling. It's exactly the same complaint that was made about the advent of the World Wide Web, the personal computer, the portable music player, and the television.

The argument against technology is an old Luddite protest born out of a fear of change, and it has a lot to do with the fact that pretty much everyone born within the last century has lived through an era defined by such change. Long gone are the days when

children had the security of growing up in the same environment that their folks were familiar with: the world that we inherit from our own parents is never the same as the one they knew. As parents ourselves, it's not easy to be confident guides for our children born to new technologies – all those things that didn't exist back when our own parents were struggling to guide us through the inventions of their time.

## Siri Is No Human

It was only several decades back that televisions became a feature in every home. As with all such things, parents found themselves wondering whether or not it

was healthy to allow their children to sit in front of the telly instead of letting them play outside. At the time, heavy criticism was made of parents who would (rather guiltily) see the TV as a godsend that could keep their children occupied for up to two or three hours.

Detractors called it the “idiot box” – a technological idol that could jellify the brain and ruin healthy childhoods. Forward-thinking liberals went as far as banning their children from watching any TV at all, so that they’d have more ‘quality family time.’ Looking back, this kind of parenting move seems a little extreme – by switching off the greatest medium of communication of their age, they deprived their children of unprecedented exposure to human drama, stories with actual morals, and information about the outside world, and tended to rear socially awkward youngsters with limited insight into the human condition. The rest of us were watching wacky cartoons that, for all their silliness, still managed to convey what happens when people lie, what happens when they’re jealous, and how to have the

strength to forgive.

Rather less credence is given to the demonization of televisions nowadays. This is largely because (unlike the generations before ours) we grew up with it, and we’re not only comfortable but eager for our kids to enjoy the kind of quality entertainment we remember having back then. If anything, we’re more disappointed that the modern cartoons don’t have the same warmth as they seemed to in those days – I know I’m not alone in having downloaded episodes of fondly-remembered children’s shows in the hope that my kids will enjoy them as much as I did (and generally being disappointed with their lack of interest in the lame storylines that I hadn’t noticed at the time).

I see the same arguments being rolled out about tablets and mobile devices. When the iPad was invented, Steve Jobs – just as much a notorious hippie as he was a tech guru – wouldn’t let his kids play with it, and pretty much for the same reasons as the anti-TV brigade used a generation before him. Despite having unleashed the things on the rest of us, Jobs thought the iPad would rob children of

opportunities for hands-on learning – and given the borderline addictions most of us have with iPad-generation devices, I can see his point.

As a parent, however, I’ve decided not to follow suit. Watching my kids use our devices constructively, I’m proud of the personal developments they’ve made in terms of their creativity, their language skills, their appreciation for music and art. I don’t believe they’re being deprived of human contact while they’re interacting with a device – to say these machines are devoid of humanity is just as ridiculous as saying that there’s nothing to gain from reading a book because a book is not a person. While Siri is no human, she’s a product of human design that serves as a conduit to the largest repository of human knowledge that has ever existed – something I certainly hope my children will be able to use well. At the very least, she seems to have access to far better medical knowledge than I managed to learn by growing up with the TV. ■

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# Education

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246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2  
3744 2335  
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[saintange2.vn@gmail.com](mailto:saintange2.vn@gmail.com)  
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International School



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www.sna.edu.vn

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Founded in 1997, Saigon South International School seeks to accommodate an increasing need for American education for both local residents and expatriate families. SSIS enrolls over 850 students in Early Childhood - Grade 12 from over thirty-three countries in a spacious five-hectare, well-equipped campus.  
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www.ssis.edu.vn

# Faces & Places



## Si Restaurant Opening

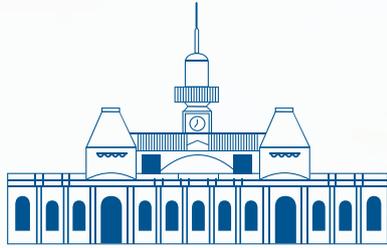
Si, a unique art gallery cum fine dining restaurant opened in January (7A Ngo Van Nam, DI). Guests at the Grand Opening mingled amongst centuries-old antique Asian sculptures and pottery as well as temporary exhibitions by local artists located on both floors.

IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM & SI RESTAURANT

## Grand Re-Opening

An indoor/outdoor restaurant with a stunning 270 degree view of the skyline, Acacia Veranda Dining Restaurant (8th floor, 149-151 Nguyen Du, DI, Compass Parkview Building) held a re-opening to showcase their new five-star look with celebrity chef Jack Lee at the helm.

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



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# Why we love individuality



Samatha, ISHCMC Student  
Grade 6



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