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VIETNAM

JANUARY 2015

sky high

SAIGON FROM ABOVE

AIM HIGH

Saigon's Newest
Shooting Range

PAGE 27

LOVE TO EAT

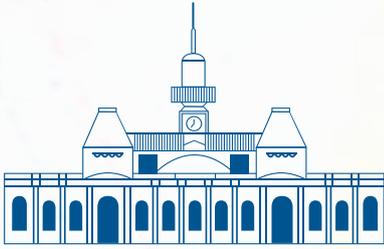
Mediterranean Food
Meets Italian Flair

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ENDLESS RUINS

The Temples of
Siem Reap at Their Best

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Model: **Jen Nguyen**

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Datebook

What's on this month...

JANUARY 7

What: M2 - Marketing & Media Network

Where: Hard Rock Café (39 Le Duan, D1); VND250,000 pre-registration (includes presentations, drinks and finger food)

About: For people interested in advertising, digital, marketing and media. The event will include experts in their industries who will each speak for 15 – 20 minutes, with a moderated question and answer session.

Contact: Visit www.vietnambusiness.tv for more info

JANUARY 8

What: New Year Resolutions Series

Where: Cyril and You Sport Center (49A Xa Lo Ha Noi, D2)

About: Join certified health coach and yoga teacher Chiara Squinzi's talk and learn what foods, drinks and habits to choose in order to find your best shape and optimal weight. The 75-minute talk includes coverage of the topic, personalized daily calorie need calculation, useful meal planning suggestions, fitness ideas and a Q&A session.

Contact: Visit www.laholista.com for more info

JAN 9-11



ILLUSTRATION BY HOANG TRUNG

What: Standpoint Theories - Vietnam Edition

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4)

About: A collaborative project focused on building a graphic novel of six Vietnamese legendary myths (Au Co, Son Tinh, Ong Dong, Chu Dong Tu, Princess Lieu Hanh and Ba Chua Xu) by using the means of dance, Vietnamese text, live visual art, 3D mapping and live electronic music fused with traditional Vietnamese music.

Contact: Visit www.gemdartiste32.wix.com/standpointtheoriesvn for more info

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JANUARY 11

What: Saigon Urban Flea Market

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

About: An open-air shopping and gathering place where all kinds of people come to buy and sell new and used stuff. You will find a mish-mash of secondhand, vintage and retro clothing, collectibles and antiques, as well as a tightly curated selection of jewelry, art and crafts by local artisans and designers.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "saigonurbanfleamarket" for more info

JAN 11



What: Super Brunch

Where: InterContinental Asiana Saigon (Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1); 10am – 6pm; VND2,750,000++/ person

About: Make sure you reserve a table for the ultimate Sunday brunch experience. The hotel's team will create a delicious journey, covering three distinct culinary zones across two floors. Spend eight hours savoring 15 live stations while indulging in a signature selection of cocktails and free flow Veuve Ciltquot champagne. Reservations are recommended.

Contact: For more info or to make a reservation, 3520 9099 or email dine@ic.asianasaiagon.com



JAN 15

What: Network Girls

Where: Sorae (24th - 25th Floor, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1); 6:30pm – 9pm

About: In 2006, Kim Moore and Robin Austin established Network Girls to give expats and local female working professionals in Saigon a channel to meet each other and exchange ideas on life in HCMC, employment and business. Since then, a coordinating committee continues to organize monthly events at venues around the city. Members of Network Girls meet on the last Thursday of every month for breakfast (7:30am-9:00am) or cocktails & canapés (6:30pm-9:00pm). Network Girls expects anywhere from 20 to 60 women in attendance per gathering.

Contact: Visit Facebook: "NetworkGirlsHCMC" for more info

JANUARY 15

What: HCMC Run

Where: Crescent Plaza (105 Nguyễn Khắc Viện, PMH, D7); 4:30am

About: Set yourself a new challenge this year to run one of the following divisions: 21km, 10km or 5km. This year there will be a Sport & Tourism Expo on related sport services, products, talks and activities. The expo is right on the site of the Start/Finish line on race day.

Contact: Visit www.hcmcrun.com for more info

JANUARY 16

What: Toby Tobias

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND150,000 (includes a drink)

About: Ever since first catching the bug back in the breakdance days of the 80s, Toby has been a steady and consistent collector of many forms of music. DJing at after-hours clubs in London in the 90s, he honed his sound and ear while amassing a small hillock of equipment. During the mid-00s his distinctive and unique productions played a major part in reviving interest in disco and electrofunk styled music amongst the party goers of the UK and further afield, and he has become known for consistently pushing the envelope in both his DJ sets and his productions.

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

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JAN 16-17



What: Contemporary Jazz Fusion Workshop
Where: Dancenter (53 Nguyen Dang Giai, Thao Dien, D2); VND100,000 for professional dancers and performing art students; VND250,000 for those 14 and older
About: Mylene Riou is a choreographer, performer, stage director and a professor in jazz and contemporary dance. Mylene trained at the Alvin Ailey school of New York at the age of 18. She has worked for the Rick Odums Jazz Ballet of Paris and as assistant to Redha in several productions, including Romeo & Juliet. Mylene will start the workshop with a warm-up consisting of the floor work techniques that she developed in combination with the Limón technique. The main part of the workshop will focus on choreographic work.
Contact: Visit www.dancentervn.com for more info

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JAN 19

What: Book Club
Where: Decibel (79/2/5 Phan Ke Binh, D1); 7pm
About: The book they've chosen is 'The New York Times Bestseller *This is Your Brain on music* (Rocker-turned-neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin explores the connection between music – its performance, its composition, how we listen to it, why we enjoy it – and the human brain. The author draws on the latest research and on musical examples ranging from Mozart to Duke Ellington to Van Halen.) For a printed copy of the book drop a comment on their event page and they will leave a copy for you to pick up.
Contact: Visit Facebook: "dbhcmc" for more info

JAN 20

JANUARY 22



What: Mac DeMarco

Where: Cargo Bar (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 8pm; VND350,000 advance, VND450,000 at the door

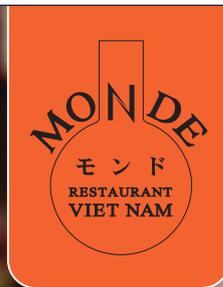
About: Canadian multi-instrumentalist and multimedia artist Mac DeMarco first emerged from complete obscurity under the moniker Makeout Videotape. The band quickly gained regional recognition, signing to Unfamiliar Records and going on tour with labelmates Japandroids in the fall of 2009. DeMarco also began assembling a bevy of strangely psychedelic videos in this time, all baffling and some even pertaining to the band. His live shows have gained notoriety for often involving nudity, jokes and a lot of improvisation.

Contact: Tickets available at www.ticketbox.vn and Asian Kitchen (185/22 Pham Ngu Lao, D1)

What: NY
Resolution Series
Where: The Loop (49 Thao Dien, D2); VND190,00 (includes talk, Q&A session, 10 percent off health coaching program booked on the day and a healthy dinner)
About: Join certified health coach Chiara Squinzi's talk and learn how sugar affects your brain and your health and what foods, drinks and habits to choose in order to quit it once and for all. The 75-minute talk includes explanation of sugar types and sugar hiding places, reasons and dangers of sugar addiction, a four-step process to quit it and a Q&A session.
Contact: Email Chiara@laholista.com for more info



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UNTIL JANUARY 23

What: San Art Laboratory: Session 7 Open Call

Where: 3 Me Linh, Binh Thanh

About: San Art Laboratory, Vietnam's first studio/residency program, will continue to open to visual artists from Southeast Asia - three artists, under 35 years old, will be chosen for Session 7 to take place from June 1 until December 1, 2015. The chosen participants will become full-time residents of San Art Laboratory, provided with accommodation, studio, production funds of USD1,000 and a small living allowance. The residency period will be concluded with a group exhibition and an artist's talk.

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



JAN 30

What: Pablo Valentino

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND150,000 (includes a drink)

About: Founder of FACES and MCDE, Pablo is one half of Creative Swing Alliance and has produced alongside good friend Danilo Plessow under the alias Hipster Wonkaz. Drawing from a wide range of musical influences, Pablo manages to incorporate jazz, hip hop, house and techno into his music. He's been DJ'ing since '97 and spins anything that has soul, may it be jazz, funk, boogie, disco, house, techno soul or hip hop - always trying to explode and explore the boundaries between all creating patterns past, present and future.

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

JAN 29



What: Canvas & Wine

Where: VinSpace Art Studio (6 Le Van Mien, D2); 6:30pm - 9pm

About: A fun and creative class for everyone no matter your painting level. This class will center on collage - a special technique using an assemblage of different forms to create a new piece. Artist in focus will be Sammy Slabbinck where he cuts up vintage photographs, redistributed with contemporary compositional styles.

Contact: Visit www.vin-space.com for more info



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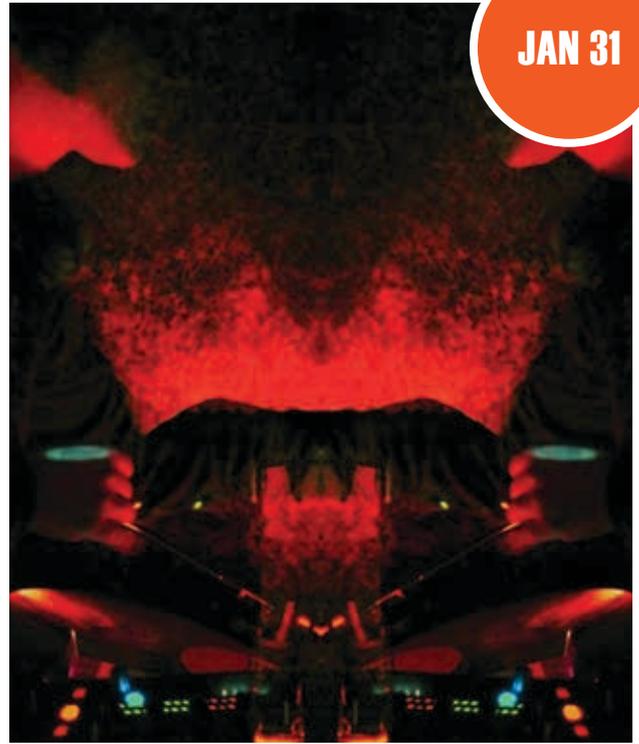
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JAN 31



What: Cliche Records Night with Ocean Lam, Amadei & Hibiya Line

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); VND100,000 (includes a drink)

About: The Cliché team is flying over from Hong Kong to unite with their Saigon-based counterpart and Observatory resident Hibiya Line. Get a taste of the sounds emerging from one of Asia's foremost underground labels and agencies.

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

JAN 30



What: Interchain

Where: McSorley's (4 Thao Dien, D2); 7pm

About: Interchain is a new Moscow punk-techno duo inspired by Detroit classics, early Bunker Records recordings, early '80s European underground, anarcho-punk and dark synthpop. According to Andrew Lee and Evgeny Gorbunov, Moscow has become too consumed with sweet and cheerful music, overly proper and well-groomed, to expect revelations of it, meaning that Interchain aren't so much in a position of protest as they are effectively kicking a relaxed listener up the backside.

Contact: Call 0126 902 6006 for more info



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The country in numbers

OVER 80%

of wastewater released into the Dong Nai River is untreated. The river runs through 11 localities that discharge a total of 2.5 million cubic meters of wastewater into the river, of which only 400,000 cubic meters are treated in accordance with current regulations on wastewater treatment. These 11 localities are Ho Chi Minh City and

ten provinces: Dak Nong, Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Lam Dong, Long An, Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Binh Phuoc.

VND30 MILLION

was offered for a giant chicken. A farmer in Hung Yen Province has grown what he hopes will be an award-winning seven kilo giant chicken, and has refused offers to sell it. Han Minh is from Dong Tao Commune – an area renowned for breeding giant chickens, which can have legs bigger than a man’s arm. “Some people offered me over VND30 million but I want to sign it up for the upcoming chicken fair,” he said. Dong Tao’s chickens, which take up to two years to grow to full size, are much sought after for their unique appearance and as a status symbol during Tet. The chickens usually fetch between VND300,000 to VND400,000 per kilo.



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71-YEAR-OLD

Vietnamese-Australian woman was found with three kilos of heroin. Customs officers at Tan Son Nhat International Airport caught her carrying heroin camouflaged as 36 pieces of soap in her checked luggage. Each bar of ‘soap’ was packed in a paper box with the brand name Shinzu’l on it. The total value of the heroin is estimated at VND10 billion.

11

gas stations in central Vietnam used chips to scam customers. Police in Nghe An have arrested four members of a ring that produced, traded and installed electronic chips at gas stations to make the volume of fuel flowing into tanks four to eleven percent less than actually displayed on the machines. The culprits used integrated circuits and were discovered during random examinations by the local Department of Science and Technology police.

USD569 MILLION

road-bridge project in Thu Thiem is scheduled to be completed in a few years. The Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee has signed a Build-Transfer contract with an investor for building four roads and 12 bridges in the Thu Thiem New Urban Area in District 2. The four roads, including an arc avenue, a lakeside road, a Saigon riverside road and a flyover, will stretch 11.9 km. Upon completion, the four roads will play a significant role in the development of the new urban area, linking it with main traffic works in the city like the Thu Thiem Bridge, the Vo Van Kiet Highway and the Saigon River Tunnel.

USD7,614

per square meter is the highest nationwide residential land prices in special urban areas in the Hong (Red) River in northern Vietnam and the southeastern region of Vietnam set by the government as of late December 2014. According to a new land price frame under Decree 44 dated May 15, 2014, the highest price of USD7,614 per square meter will be applied from December 29, 2014, the effective date of the decree. Meanwhile, the lowest price of urban residential land is USD1.88 per square meter; which is applied to urban land with a Grade V in the north central region. As for commercial and service land in urban areas, the southeastern region, and the Red River delta, the prices range from USD5.64 and USD6,091 per square meter, depending on the area. The new land price frame serves as a legal basis for local authorities in centrally-run provinces and cities to set out their own land price lists, the decree said.

USD 470

will be awarded to corruption whistleblowers in Quang Ngai. The Party Committee has issued a regulation to reward those with information

related to corruption in the province. The regulation was announced as a new move to boost the efficiency of the anti-corruption fight in the province, said Vo Thai Nguyen, head of the Internal Affairs Commission of the local Party Committee. Whistleblowers can submit evidence such as documents, materials, videotapes, recordings, etc. directly at the office of the commission or by post, email or fax. They can also call (055) 3821237 and 091 342 8304. Reports of anti-corruption information must be correct, complete and verifiable, and all details will be kept confidential.

USD4 BILLION

casino project in Quang Nam is currently in discussion. Chow Tai Fook, controlled by the family of Hong Kong's fourth richest man, Cheng Yu-Tung, is looking to tap a boom in gaming demand as

more Chinese travel overseas. Vietnamese policy makers are seeking to replicate the success of Singapore and Macau in attracting gaming resorts and tourism. VinaCapital Group, Vietnam's largest fund manager, is developing the Quang Nam project.



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The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



MAISON MIKIO PROMOTION

To celebrate 2015, Maison Mikio Boutique Salon (8 Ton Dat Tien Street in the Garden Plaza 2 Complex, Phu My Hung) is offering 30 percent off on scalp clinics, manicures, pedicures, foot spa/massages, 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](#) for more info.



TET BUFFET AT HOTEL EQUATORIAL

Tet is a time for family and friends and there is no better place to celebrate this auspicious occasion than at the hugely anticipated festive parties at Chit Chat (Hotel Equatorial, 242 Tran Binh Trong, D5; info@hcm.equatorial.com). Chit Chat is offering buffet parties between January 10 and February 20, priced at just VND798,000++/person.

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Visit the Victoria resort on Sam Mountain in Chau Doc from February 9 to March 15, 2015 to enjoy a special rate of VND1,108,000 net/room night along with a 20 percent discount at their food and beverage outlets. For those who prefer the chilly weather of Sapa where a glass of hot mulled wine can be sipped beside a cozy fireplace, Victoria Sapa Resort & Spa is offering a special rate of VND2,109,000++/room night, valid from February 14 to March 1, 2015. For further info, visit www.victoriahotels.asia.



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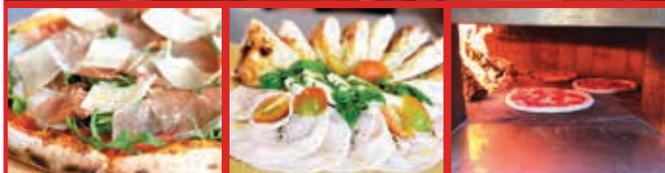
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Recently opened, Alma Oasis Long Hai is a short distance from Ho Chi Minh City. Villas and bungalows scattered over the undulating hill slopes offer a range of accommodation with patios or balconies for lounging outdoors while enjoying the garden and ocean view. Alma Oasis Long Hai, with its beautiful gardens and pathways that lead you down to quiet white sandy beaches, is an idyllic resort. Historically a site for the private residence of Bao Dai, Vietnam's last emperor, the resort is all about discovering yourself. Alma Oasis Long Hai will start taking bookings on January 1, 2015. For reservations, email reservations@almaoasislonghai.com.



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Wildlife At Risk (WAR) is a non-profit organisation based in Ho Chi Minh City
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NINH CHU BAY BEACH CLUB & BAR OPENS

Set on 400 meters of private beach, the newly opened Ninh Chu Bay Beach Club & Bar features day-use cabanas, beach chairs and umbrellas, and beach-side massages. “We were inspired by how The Sailing Club helped make Nha Trang a top beach destination 20 years ago, and have made it our mission to do the same for Ninh Chu Bay,” said Mark Gwyther, the Managing Director of the project. As the evening approaches, customers can enjoy their signature Ninh Chu Bay Sangria or a cold draught beer on the terrace, which has amazing views of the sun setting behind the Central Highlands and fishing boats slowly passing by. Sip the private label Ninh Chu Bay Vodka - plain or infused with fresh local fruits. Dining specialties include local seafood grilled on an outdoor barbecue. Ninh Chu Bay is adjacent to Phan Rang, one hour south from the Cam Ranh Airport or 10 minutes from the Thap Cham Train Station. For more info, visit www.ninhchubay.com.

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My Life as... a construction worker

INTERVIEWED BY MAI NGUYEN, TRUONG MINH GIANG, CAROL NGUYEN,
JOHN TRAN, AND DO THU HUONG

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

MY NAME'S QUANG and I'm 42 years old. I grew up in Hung Yen, and I've been doing this job for five years already. My first job was working as a motorbike taxi driver in Hanoi, but I changed to construction because there were too many motorbike taxi drivers already. Nowadays, people have their own cars and use taxis more than motorbikes. And besides, with the streets so dirty, nobody wants to ride a motorbike if they don't have to.

We work in a team of five, and we're a lot like a family. I'm responsible for managing the team, but it's still like we're all relatives. All of us are from Hung Yen, and each of us gets the same salary. No one is better or worse than anyone else, and I still get the same salary as everyone else, because at the end of the day we all have to do the same work. And even though I'm the leader, I still have to call some of my team members "uncle" because they're the younger brothers of my mom or my dad (a reference to the family-based terms of address in Vietnamese).

In an average day we work nine or 10 hours. I start work at five in the morning and work through to noon. Then in the afternoon I work from two in the afternoon to 8pm. On some days we work only until seven at night. But on other days we have to work later. It's a hard job. We live on the job site, so we relocate often. The longest we ever stayed anywhere was half a month. Typically, though, we stay at a work site for about 10 days. Our clients don't provide us with room or board, so we use a tent. Me and the members of my team have to care for ourselves and cook our own meals. Every day the team spends about VND100,000 to VND150,000 on expenses. And each

person gets a salary of VND100,000 a day. So in a month, everyone gets about VND3 million. If I lived in the countryside, VND3 million would be enough for the whole family. But in Hanoi that kind of money just isn't enough.

Heavy Load

Clients contact me by phone. We'll meet, discuss the work, and draw up a contract. And when we finish building one house, the client's got my number and they can recommend me to their friends. Clients these days ask for a lot of different things, but the more work we do the more experience we have. And as clients get to know us, they start to see us as family.

Basically, this job isn't difficult. We have to know how to use the measuring equipment, and we need a certain technical knowledge. If a client asks me a question, I have to know. But that said, I've never had any formal training. I just learned on the job and through sharing experiences with the people I worked with.

The main thing we have to focus on while we're working is to avoid having something heavy fall on us. We're supposed to wear protective equipment, but it's hot and uncomfortable. The government says we're supposed to buy insurance for 10 years. But it costs VND5 million a year, and that's just too much with the kind of money we're making. And me, I'm only doing this for a few more years, so it just doesn't make sense to buy insurance for 10 years. If something happens, then the client will have to take responsibility for us. There's no other solution.

My wife stays at home and works on the farm. And my oldest son has already

gone to work at a factory back in Hung Yen. In one month he gets about VND1 million or VND2 million, which is enough to help out his mom only. Before he graduated from high school, I encouraged him to study construction because some of our relatives were in the business. But he was sure he would pass the university entrance exam and he thought that learning a trade would just be a waste of money. When he didn't pass the exam, he decided to go work in the factory. My daughter is in the eighth grade now. After high school, if she wants to take the university entrance exam or go to college then I'll try my hardest to support her education. I want her to study and become a kindergarten teacher because it's an easy job and it won't wear her down like other jobs.

I figure I'll keep at this for two more years. This job requires a lot of physical labor. If you're talking about construction work, it doesn't get any harder. People over the age of 40 really shouldn't do it. The lightest loads we carry are about 10 kg, and they can go as high as 450 kg. For now I still have the strength, but I know it can't last forever. When the day comes, I'll go back to working in the field with my wife. My kids will have their own families by then, and it'll just be me and my wife. If we need to, we'll find jobs that are light and easy. ■

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







Aim High

Saigon's newest air gun club

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



“WAR TAUGHT ME how to handle a gun and shoot. It has saved my life many times. But this is peacetime now and I don’t want people to think only of war and bloodshed when they see a gun. I want people to look at it and see more than what TV shows and movies show them. I want them to see the discipline, the skill, the patience and the knowledge required to handle one,” shares Le Hai Vu, a veteran of the American War and co-founder of Saigon Sniper Club (25 Nguyen Binh Khiem, D1; Nguyen Binh Khiem Sport Club; Facebook: *saigon sniper club*).

Along with Vietnamese national shooting champion Nguyen Thi Kieu (who also happens to be his niece) and Dieu Linh, the three own Saigon Sniper – an indoor shooting range that offers classes, rents out space, air guns and pellets for anyone interested in shooting or developing their marksmanship.

“In Vietnam, when people think of guns and shooting, they think of the military or the police. They don’t think it’s possible for an average person to ever hold a gun, learn to shoot it, or enjoy it as a sport. This is something that we want to change,” says Linh. Not an easy task considering the heavy restrictions the government enforces on the use, ownership and circulation of guns within

the country.

“The first step, of course, is to dispel the misconception that you have to be either a professional athlete or in the military to learn how to shoot,” Linh continues. “We do this by offering both skill classes and rental services. If you just want to check us out, maybe try a couple of shots, it costs only VND20,000 to rent an air gun and a couple of pellets. If you are a little more serious, we have classes and fixed schedules that are inexpensive. Going professional is a choice and you don’t have to if you don’t want to. The point is to be available and accessible to people.” The range is 100 percent privately owned and is open to both locals and foreigners.

Vu adds: “There are actually no laws expressly forbidding the establishment of private shooting ranges. The real obstacles are the paperwork required and getting the supply.” And even with his outstanding service and awards for serving his country, and his contacts in the Ministry of National Defense and the Shooting Sport Department, it still took Saigon Sniper two years to get approval and secure a supply line of air rifles and revolvers, ammunition and other accessories from the government. By the time this article is published, Saigon Sniper will have celebrated its fifth month in

business.

“We have many limitations still,” says Kim Oanh, chief trainer at Saigon Sniper, pointing out the shooting range’s fairly limited facility. The range is housed within the state-owned and run Nguyen Binh Khiem Sport Club in District 1. Practice space is a row of seven firing stalls 10 meters apart. The air guns available are all used, older models.

The name Saigon Sniper is less a statement of what’s available and more a goal to aim for. “Sniping is the pinnacle of one’s shooting skill,” adds Kim Oanh. “Getting to that level takes enormous skill, patience and years and years of practice. We aim to equip our members with the space to practice. Though many of our members now are on a casual basis, we do have channels and contacts to bring anyone interested to a professional tournament level and we hope to be able to do so in the future.”

“We will improve,” Vu insists. “We also hope that people will understand and wait for us as we gradually expand.” In the near future, he hopes to hold Saigon Sniper’s first shooting competition, organize outdoor training facilities and trips, plan for more shooting varieties and styles, and upgrade their supplies. ■



Flashbacks

An art exhibition 10 years in the making

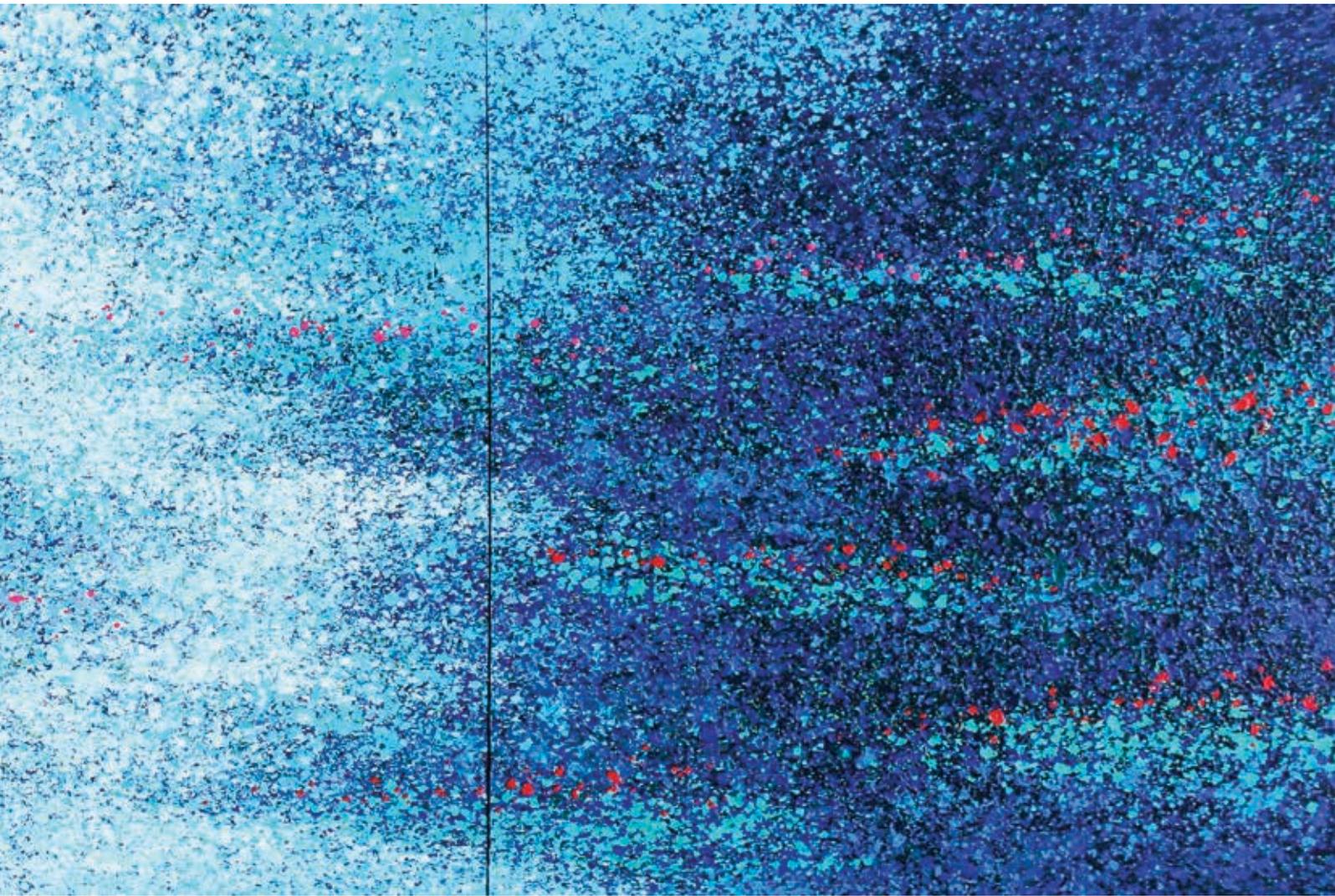
TEXT BY CRAIG THOMAS
IMAGES BY LIEU NGUYEN HUONG DUONG

BORN IN TRA Vinh Province in 1975, Saigon-based painter Lieu Nguyen Huong Duong is preparing to mark the completion of his first decade as an artist with an exhibition of new works created over the last year. “I have chosen the title of this solo exhibition of my work to be *Memory*,” says Duong. “The reason is that I want the paintings of the collection to bring together all the memories of the first 10 years of my artistic career. I want to transmit to the viewers all of the flavors of life that I have experienced through a series of paintings that are alive with color.”

A 2001 alumnus of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University, Duong spent the first few years following his graduation experimenting with different forms and styles before ultimately gravitating in 2004 to a practice in which one can clearly see the influence of the *action painting* school pioneered by 20th century American artists such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Acknowledging an affinity for the *action painting* school, he demurs, however, that his influences are multiple and his current practice is the result of an ongoing process that has taken him increasingly down his own unique path as his confidence and abilities have grown.

In terms of composition, Duong’s completed work to date is most naturally divided between landscapes – verdant forests, rocky beaches, cherry blossoms – and a style of portraiture that ranges from the distinctly figurative to the more abstract works of his ongoing *Alone* series. In the two *Alone* paintings included in the present collection, Duong uses a glossy enamel paint most typically used industrially on cars and houses. His trademark landscapes are primarily done in acrylics.

Slightly reticent when asked to speak about creating his work, Duong relies greatly on feeling and a type of inspiration that borders on the spiritual as he describes it. He does not paint daily but



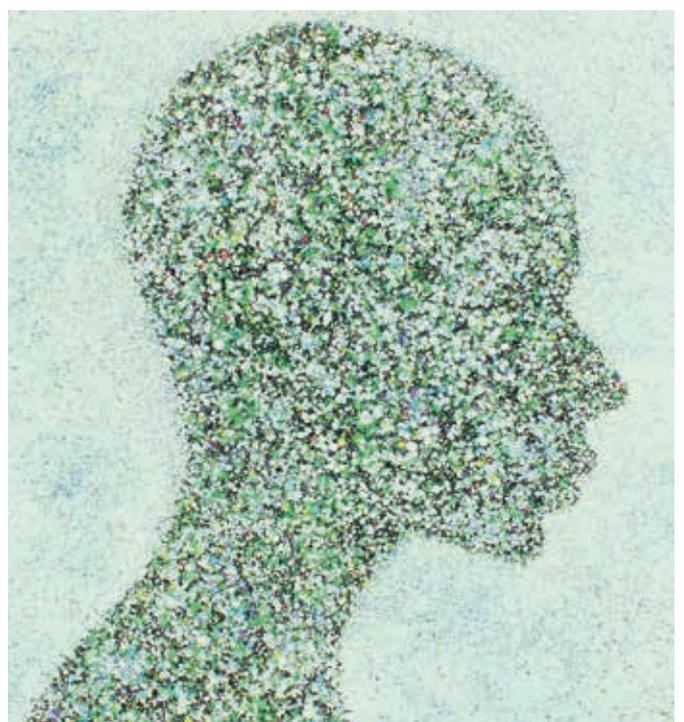
TOP: Hoa Sen (Acrylic on Canvas);
BOTTOM: Memory I

rather in spurts as the urge seizes him. Duong works in a large studio in which lying distributed on the floor are typically several large and small canvases in various states of completion. As classical music plays in the background, Duong works on becoming himself a piece of art as he inevitably ends up covered in paint from his ministrations above the canvases. The paintings resulting from this process have a flowing, lyrical quality that is more suggestive of poetry than of prose. He is telling us stories of life and of himself but always doing so elliptically leaving us to ponder on the exact meaning of his work and where he stands in relation to it.

In Duong's debutant exhibition entitled *Where Is He Going?* in 2005 and his 2010 solo exhibition *Dream of Humanity*, his figurative work featured full human figures though often abstracted to the point that features and even gender were indeterminate. With *Memory*, Duong has turned his hand fully to portraiture, and, in the case of *Memory I*, self-portraiture. What is apparent is that he has achieved a greater mastery of his own practice and is moving from a more inchoate state in his work to a more contained and more evolved style that closely resembles the person he has become.

"Of course it is only when we believe in what we are creating that we can progress and that is certainly the case with an artistic practice," he says. "Having painted these past 10 years I have started to feel my confidence growing, not least because my works have been well favored by collectors in Vietnam and abroad. During this time each of my works has its own line of feeling and its own life. So I think that I have to do whatever I can to maintain those feelings and to develop and make them stronger."

The opening reception for Lieu Nguyen Huong Duong's Memory will take place on January 23, 2015 from 6pm to 9pm at Craig Thomas Gallery (27i Tran Nhat Duat, D1). ■





Murder Most Fun

A real-life whodunit comes to HCMC

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

I WAS A bit of a mystery nerd as a kid. While my contemporaries were playing Little League, I was curled up in a corner reading the latest adventures of the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew. I shook my head in disbelief every time Sherlock Holmes pulled off one of his cheeky disguises, making *Mission Impossible* seem like child’s play. My high school French came in handy trying to keep up with Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot. So when I heard of The Escape Hunt Experience (www.escapehunt.com) opening up in Saigon (Level 2, 60-62 Cach Mang Thang 8, D3, above The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf), I knew I had to try it.

Based on the *Escape the Room* online games so popular in Japan, The Escape Hunt Experience takes it one step further. Not only must your group of two to five players use clues to open up locks and hidden rooms leading to more clues to escape the room, there’s a story line to follow in order to identify the guilty suspect. The first Escape Hunt Experience was founded in Bangkok in July 2013 by businessman Paul Bart, utilizing his background in psychology, IQ testing and statistics/data analysis. Since then, The Escape Hunt Experience has opened 18 other branches in places like Singapore, Sydney, London and Jakarta, with ambitions to have deals signed for a staggering 300 locations by the end of 2015.

In anticipation of the game, I gathered my brains trust together, albeit one that had no experience with escape room strategy: a chef, a housewife, a university math geek, a graphics designer and myself, covering all bases of logical and creative thinking, or so we thought. Making our way to the second floor, we passed by old world maps and hieroglyphics, a harbinger of the mental gymnastics ahead. The hallway opened up to a plush lounge that had elements of 221B Baker Street with its heavy damask curtains, vintage clocks and period pieces. We had three scenarios to choose from: Murder in the Palace Room (inspired by Saigon’s Independence Palace), Kidnapping at the Opera Room (a nod to the city’s Opera House) and Blackmail in the Bar Room (modeled after the American War journalists’ haunt in the Caravelle Hotel). Naturally, we went all in and chose the murder room (which only later were we told was slightly more difficult than the other two).

After a quick introduction by the games master (each room has its own), we were locked into the Palace Room and left to our own devices which included frantically searching for clues and trying to make sense of the various locks and objects scattered around the small space (and some, very well hidden — consider yourself warned). “Some are clues, some are for decoration and some

are misdirections,” our games master told us. Online reviews said that groups would need to ask the games master for help along the way (each time incurring a one-minute penalty), but we were determined not to press the little button that summoned her in. When the angry red clock in the corner signaled that nearly 20 of our 60 minutes had gone by with us no closer to opening the first lock, we reluctantly called the games master who nudged us in the right direction, helping us find the missing objects we needed. I can’t help but wonder what sort of anthropological study The Escape Hunt Experience could provide, seeing how different genders, ages, personality types and nationalities deal with the pressure of solving puzzles under a time constraint. “Local Vietnamese would rather let the time run out and try to figure things out on their own,” Branch Manager Trang Do told me later. “Tourists and foreigners are more into having fun. Not only will they call the games master in frequently, sometimes they’ll ask him or her to just stay there and join in!”

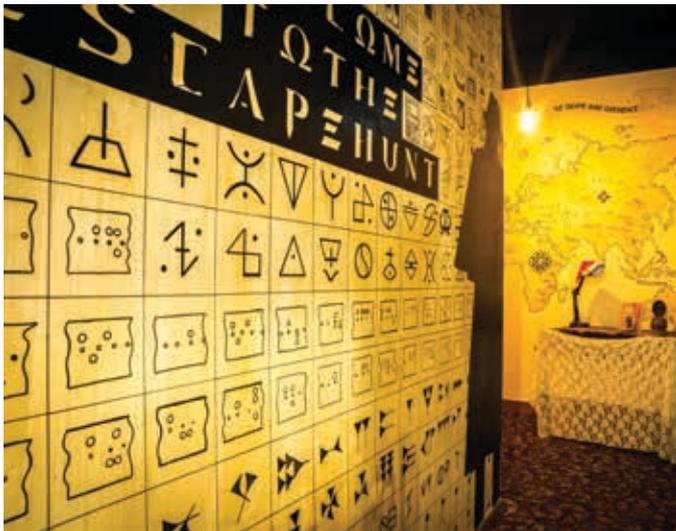
Time’s Up

In order to give participants the full experience in all its hair-pulling, I-can’t-believe-we-missed-that glory, games masters will only come in when called (although there’s also a camera monitoring the room in case of emergency) and even then, will try to give minimal assistance with leading questions like: “How many clues did you find?” and “Where have you looked?” to help move the game along.

Back in the room, the time has flown by and our preconceived strategies have long been discarded in an all-out, frantic attempt to propel ourselves closer to the solution. We’ve now assigned one member to permanently be the button-pusher to call for help. Our downfall comes by trying to solve puzzles with either not enough clues found or by having too much information and not seeing the pattern needed to weed the valid clues from the misdirections.

The experience done, we sip tea in the lounge and gleefully rehash the last hour while posing for pictures with the clothing and props. A Wall of Fame features photos of all the groups who have successfully finished the game in less than 60 minutes. Trang says that the average is actually 58 minutes, making the Ho Chi Minh City game slightly more difficult than the Bangkok (50 minutes) and Singapore (53 minutes) versions, each location with completely different scenarios, strategies and décor, vetted by the global game design team based in Bangkok. We’re thankful there’s no Wall of Shame as we giggle, finger-point and head-scratch our way to failure, but desperate to take advantage of the 10 percent returning customer discount to try out the other two scenarios.

Seeing the popularity of The Escape Hunt Experience around the world and now experiencing it for ourselves, there’s something to be said for reality games that don’t require screens, technology or special effects — just good, old fashioned smarts, bringing friends, co-workers and families together for a fast-paced hour of great fun. ■





Seeing a Man about a Dog

Meet Wayne Capriotti, publisher of Vietnam's first (and possibly only) online bilingual pet magazine

INTERVIEWED BY **CHRISTINE VAN** IMAGES BY **NEIL FEATHERSTONE**

THE INSPIRATION FOR *Me Thu Cung* (*petmagazine.vn*) began several years ago when Wayne and his wife decided to add a dog to their family. They visited a handful of pet shops (very few existed in 2010) and were shocked by the unsanitary conditions - the animals look sickly and underfed. Eventually they bought a Maltese mix female from a shop on Le Hong Phong Street in District 10. The owner said the puppy had received vaccinations but couldn't produce a receipt or a 'healthcare passport.' Wayne pointed out the lack of documentation, but was told it was standard practice, unaware of the notorious reputation this "pet street" had and still has today.

The days were numbered for their puppy. She became sick immediately, showing symptoms of canine parvovirus, a potentially fatal disease that renders an agonizing death on a puppy that does not receive proper vaccinations. They looked for a veterinarian, first trying a government clinic but the vet there had more experience with pigs and water buffalos than with dogs and cats. Fortunately, at the same time they were in

the process of buying a cat from a breeder who recommended a qualified veterinarian. If they hadn't found this vet, their puppy would not have survived.

The desperate feeling of not knowing where to find pet services for a dying dog left an indelible mark on Wayne and he vowed to make a change.

Oi speaks to Wayne about Vietnam's growing pet culture and redefining the role of pets in society.

The Vietnamese are now starting to view dogs and cats as pets rather than food. What do you think is causing this shift?

In the last five years, the quantity and quality of pet ownership in Vietnam has increased, driven by a pet social phenomenon, observed in developed countries called 'pet humanization.' To create a mature pet culture, greater amounts of disposable income from an emerging middle class is spent on pets, raising the status of a pet from a pragmatic position within the household into becoming

a family member.

Little by little in Vietnam, a pet's status is reaching the privilege of family member or even as a child of the family. The marketing ramifications of this is that the more the pet is considered family, the more money is spent on the pet, creating premium pet product and service markets, thereby creating a thriving pet culture.

Can this shift also be attributed to pets as status symbols?

The vaulted status of the ownership of pedigree dogs, or cats, is highly regarded anywhere in the world. Vietnam is no different. It really depends on the individual and their maturity and experience of pet ownership. There are those who love a particular pedigree and are deeply interested in helping the status of the breeds in Vietnam and will show their dog(s) in public. Then there are those who showcase their expensive dogs in public much like they would an expensive electronic device or a brand new car. Pedigree dogs or cats, no matter in what



country, are very expensive and carry social status.

I am quite the same, but in a slightly different way. I am very interested in the local native Phu Quoc Ridgeback dog and the establishment and preservation of this breed. So, if I owned a VND40 million to VND60 million Ridgeback dog, with dynamic black and orange brindle patterning that makes the dog look like a fierce tiger, with proven pedigree (three bloodlines), I too would prance around in public, saying, “Look at me, look at me.” Shameful, I am, but it is for the sake of the breed!

You're campaigning to ban dog meat here. Is this not culturally insensitive considering eating dog meat is part of the local culture?

We are not about banning anything. We are in favor of using education in developing socially responsible pet ownership in Vietnam that may reduce this culinary act to a simple footnote. We would like people to seriously consider the origins of this practice and ask why they eat dog or cat meat. Eating dog meat is considered an elevated social status where those with newfound wealth can afford the relatively expensive dog meat.

I've spoken to many older Vietnamese and some refuse to call the act 'culture.' Even my mother-in-law would not call it a 'culture' as her own mother told her to never eat cat or dog because you would become poor for generations to come. Translation: no more kittens or puppies to take over the job of being 'mousers' and protectors of house and property.

Yes, there was period of starvation after the war that led many to eat anything, including cats and dogs. And yes, there is a habit that

cat meat should be eaten at the beginning of the lunar month and dog at the end to bring good luck. There are also unsubstantiated rumors of dog and cat meat that act as aphrodisiacs. And the most unpleasant ritual surrounding the eating of dog or cat is the bizarre notion that the brutal torture of the dog and cat will release the 'animal spirits' into the meat and when consumed, the diner will be fortified. They also say that dog and cat have more protein than beef or chicken per kilogram. No one has really clearly supported this with scientific evidence.

Dognapping has increased rapidly in the past year. Why and what are the thieves doing with their victims?

The increase in dognapping is from a reaction to the control of stolen dogs from Thailand into Vietnam. These kidnapped dogs are shipped by truck through Northern Thailand, across Laos, and into Vietnam en route to Hanoi and China. This clampdown has reduced the supply of dogs.

It is a lucrative trade, the price of dog meat is three times the price of pork and thieves earn up to VND250,000 to VND500,000 per dog. The stolen dogs are sold to slaughterhouses or restaurants throughout Vietnam.

The other motive is ransom. The thieves determine whether the dog is worth more alive and then held for ransom.

More cats than any other animals are abandoned. Why?

An endemic problem as any local animal rescue shelter will tell you. One reason, the sound of “mèo” (cat) sounds similar to “nghèo” (to be poor). Cats are quite noisy during their

heat cycle. The unneutered male and female cats also urinate marking territory, outside the litter box. The frequency and pitch of the female cat in heat is irritating in close quarters. And, if there is an unwanted litter found, even more dire consequences.

This raises the awareness of the sterilization of cats. Many Vietnamese cat owners are unaware that a kitten over the age of three months can have a litter. More education is required on cats' reproductive cycles and sterilization to end this problem.

If I want to buy a dog or cat, where should I go to guarantee they have been legally obtained and are in good health?

I recommend dog breeders with a Vietnam Kennel Association certification endorsed by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale. For cats, there are many breeders with similar recognized certifications.

A word of caution: Never buy a dog or cat from street traders, no matter how cute the animal looks; they are the walking dead, kept alive by medication.

There are good pet shops that deal with good breeders. Do your research and ask questions. Unless you know them, avoid home breeders. Most cut corners in breeding to improve margins.

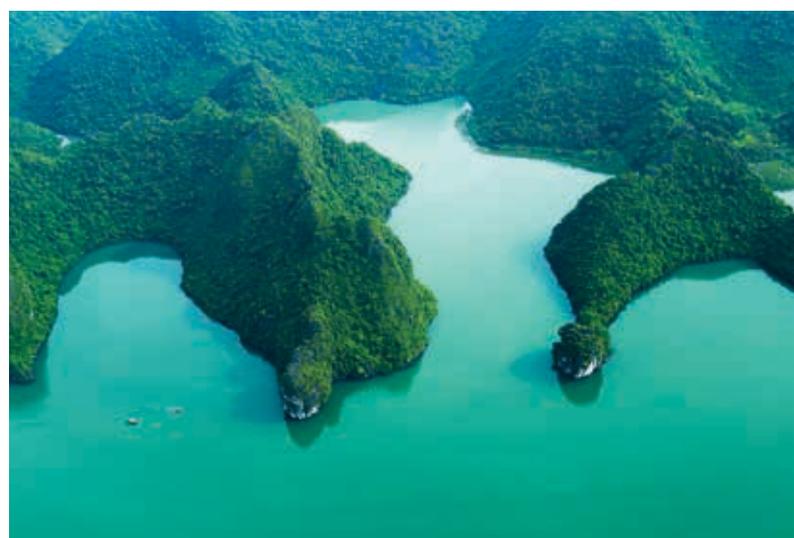
What about adoption options?

We also promote the adoption of pets for people who cherish the idea of helping a pet recover their dignity. Many rescues need experienced owners, able to handle behavioral issues from abuse. An inexperienced pet owner may not be able to handle a rescue and may also not receive commitment from family. ■

Bay from Above

Viewed from above, Halong Bay resembles a geographic work of art. From the air, you can see parts of the bay not visible from the cruise boats - sculpted valleys, hidden lakes and deep craters, all carpeted in an iridescent green which looks beautiful in the late afternoon sun. The forms of the islands change depending on the angle of the light and from where the islands are viewed. ■

IMAGES COURTESY OF HAI AU AVIATION



Copy Cat

How to deal with a backstabbing friend who stole your idea



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 am a freelance software developer specializing in mobile phone applications for Apple and Android devices. Last month, I told my best friend (well, my former best friend) about an idea for a new edutainment app. We talked about it extensively, and I shared with him my intention to further develop and market the app. Yesterday, I found out that the f# b& has developed an app based exactly on my idea and that he sold it to an IT company taking all the credit and money for my concept! I am furious like an Angry Bird now. This is the Social Network all over again... What are my options in this situation?

Dear Binh,

We understand your frustration and it must be painful to see someone else taking all the credit for your hard work. When we talk about protecting the rights of an author on so-called “intellectual assets,” we are talking about intellectual property rights or simply “IPR.” As a software developer, we are sure that you have heard of this concept before.

In Vietnam, the most important legal document relating to your question is the Intellectual Property Law of 2005, which was amended in 2009 (the “Vietnamese IP Law”). This law broadly divides intellectual property rights into three categories: copyright and related rights, industrial property rights, and rights to plant varieties.

Your question regarding a mobile phone app touches upon a relatively new field of IP rights, and the Vietnamese IP Law does not (yet) explicitly mention this topic. In practice, however, a mobile phone app itself being a computer program, as well as its script and its graphic design can be protected by copyright. Copyright arises at the moment a work is created and fixed in a certain material form, irrespective of its content, quality, form, mode and language and regardless of whether or not such work has been published or registered with the competent authorities.

Copyright can protect persons who

have directly created a work, whereas other copyright holders may include an employer in case the work is created in the course of employment, a co-author and/or a person to which a copyright is assigned.

Vietnamese law provides copyright holders with several measures to protect them from infringements. Among those measures is the right to request an infringing party to terminate his or her actions, to request a public apology or a rectification, and/or to request the payment of the actual material and spiritual damages that a copyright holder has suffered as a result of the infringement. Furthermore, copyright holders can request the competent Vietnamese authorities to deal with the act(s) of infringement, and they can also initiate a civil lawsuit to protect their legitimate interests.

It is important to note that in infringement cases, it is up to the acclaimed holder of a copyright to prove both the existence of such copyright and the actual infringement of it. And especially for these cases, it is advisable to register your copyrights with the Copyright Office of Vietnam.

Turning to your specific situation, we should first determine whether a copyright has actually arisen on your mobile phone app. As mentioned before, under Vietnamese law a copyright shall arise at the moment a work is created and

fixed in a certain material form. This is so important, because the Vietnamese IP Law does not protect mere ideas that have not been fixed in a certain medium yet. To give you some practical examples, a copyright may be established when music is recorded on a CD, or when a script is written on a piece of paper.

With regard to your edutainment app, if what you had developed at the time you shared it with your friend was merely an idea without it being fixed in a material form, you may not be able to prove that you are the author of the app and that your former friend has infringed the copyright that you would hold. However, if you believe you can prove that your friend’s app is a copy, at least partially, of something that you have developed and fixed at an earlier stage, it may be worth considering one of the legal remedies that we described above.

On the other hand, considering the time and money that such remedies may cost, trying to find an amicable solution with your friend would be an advisable first step. And next time you meet him, perhaps you can bring some Angry Birds along!

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 ■



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sky high

The beautiful Saigon skyline is not always on view when you're wandering its streets, so for the best vistas you need to rise above the construction and climb to sky-high perches to take in the enormity of this metropolis. For your viewing pleasure, we've included a bit of everything – from the dashboard of a drone flying above and life as a high-rise window washer to an uninterrupted 360 degree rooftop restaurant. This month we're experiencing life at the top.



District 7

GOD'S- EYE VIEW

Using drone imagery to see Vietnam from above

TEXT BY **JAMES PHAM**
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **ASIA FLYCAM**

IF "SELFIE" WAS the word of the year in 2013, the "dronie," made popular by none other than Captain Jean-Luc Picard himself, Patrick Stewart, brought drone technology out of science fiction and into popular consciousness in 2014 when he tweeted a selfie taken from a drone in Cannes. No longer relegated to spy novels and military operations, drones now allow even the common man to possess superhero-like powers, traversing the boundaries of space and gravity to see everything, to be everywhere.

With drones retailing for less than USD100 (including a built-in camera), almost everyone can play God, or at least see what He sees. Not only have the materials come down in price, but we all have in our pocket almost everything needed to make unmanned flight a reality — the GPS capabilities, cameras,



sensors and computer processors located within our smartphones. Another model costing USD157 comes with a remote transmitter with a built-in screen so that you can see exactly what the drone sees in real time. For just a hundred more, you can secure a drone that travels upwards of 45 miles an hour. For those more interested in stunning photography than piloting (and willing to plunk down a cool grand), the Lehmann LA100 can be programmed to fly where you want it to go and then come back to where it was launched, landing completely on its own.

Cheaper than helicopters and more flexible than cable-suspended camera systems, in the past year alone, drones have been used to bring us images previously out of reach — everything from a new perspective on Olympic skiing and a bird's eye view of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and

Hawaii's migrating whales to going places too dangerous for people, like into a volcano in the South Pacific or straight into a fireworks display in Florida. They've been used to locate missing people, spruce up real estate listings and survey disaster areas. Hollywood movies can't be far behind.

Drone technology has moved so fast in recent years that laws regulating their use haven't been able to catch up. More than a model airplane but less than light aircraft, drones occupy a grey area. What prevents someone from piloting a drone to film you from outside your 10th story window? Or what happens when a drone interferes with a commercial aircraft's flight path as is happening with increased frequency?

Whatever the case, drone technology looks like it's here to stay, allowing us to see the world from a vantage point before known

only to birds...

In the Cockpit

Jan-Mathieu Donnier, drone pilot and CEO of GlobalVision Communication, a company specializing in visual communication and 360° imagery with offices in Geneva and Ho Chi Minh City, talks to *Oi* about aerial imaging in Vietnam.

"Like everyone else, the first time I saw a drone was in the news, something to do with military and defense-related matters. Later, when I saw one flying overhead in real life, I thought it was just so awesome. In my mind, I thought there would be a big market for something like this because it allows us to see life and the city from a different angle.

"It's funny, but my background has nothing to do with drones. The technology is so new that there is no training for this.



Thu Thiem Tunnel

But I've always had a creative mind. When I was 15 years old, my brother and I acquired a one megapixel camera. It seems like a million years ago! We took photos of bars, restaurants and hotels in Geneva. One Christmas, we were looking at an ornament when we noticed that if you looked at it from below, you could see everything in the room. Naturally, it led us to think about 360 degree imaging. We did our own coding to create visual tools and our company started growing very quickly. Then we thought: If we can do this with photos, why not with video? At the time, there was just one company in Japan and one in the US who were doing 360° video. We had a eureka moment, an idea that would take over the next 10 years of my life, including working with Firefox and Google Business Views.

"We remained focused on R&D, always searching for the next big thing, and that was drone imaging. But at that time, the cost was really high. It was a professional machine for wealthy individuals who could spend USD1,000 on a toy. I immediately thought: 'How could I integrate this [new technology]

into my professional world?' Our first drone was a quadcopter with only four propellers. It was really stressful because the components were made by different manufacturers and it didn't even come with a manual. You had to figure it all out on your own – what to do with a propeller, a screw and an arm. Now you have the Phantom, an easy to use drone where you just screw on the propeller out of the box and it's ready to use.

"In those early days, it wasn't about learning how to fly the drone. The actual flying is well-assisted. There are physical tools to help it stay flat so you don't have to worry about balance. But we had to figure out what was going to be the best camera and the best settings to use. Our first drone used a GoPro but we soon realized our customers were into high-end broadcasting, cinema and tourism so the GoPro wasn't the way to go.

"After getting my second Master degree in Communication and Media Science [my first is in International Relations], I was looking to expand our business. I came to Vietnam a few times as a traveler, backpacking my way

on motorbike. It was the thrill of my life to discover the country on my own. I was so touched by the people and the landscape. I remember crying on the plane on the way back to Switzerland. I said to myself that I would come back one day, and come back with a purpose. I didn't know how, but I would find a way. Five years later, we opened our office in Vietnam. At that time, I called Vietnam "the forgotten economy". The West was focused on China and Singapore, different "tigers." But I thought Vietnam was at the beginning of the curve, going up. We wanted to bring Western standards to Vietnam. Now, we're working mostly for industries and national-scale tourism applications and other big projects like television.

"There are so many beautiful places in Vietnam, like around the Mekong Delta. Our work covers both natural and man-made areas. I always tell my colleagues that when we're shooting images, we're capturing history. What we're doing now is recording Saigon from the past. It's changed so much in the last five years and will change so much in the next



District 5



An Phu, District 2

"What we're doing now is recording Saigon from the past. There's still some greenery now, but they're going to build."

five to 10 years. There's still some greenery now, but they're going to build. It will never go back to its original state. I want to document those changes. In 5-10 years, when people look for pictures of Saigon, they can go to our platform and enjoy the views of what it used to look like. While we work for man-made facilities most of the time, I love nature, too, and preserving nature. It's good to see things from another angle, to help people not to think from a selfish ground-based perspective but from a higher view. That's my wishful thinking.

"The drones themselves can go as high as I want, but it's a matter of security. I care about the people around. I would prefer to come back for a project than to cause harm or damage. You have to plan for enough time and battery to land the drone smoothly, so our working altitude is between 80-150 meters, where you can show the aerial perspective while keeping the details. We fly with two batteries, a main and a backup. Swiss people are very safety-minded. We have five machines [including hexacopter and octocopter models] and have

never crashed any.

"Of course people are very curious. I try my best to satisfy that curiosity. When we arrive on site, I explain what we're doing. People are familiar with helicopters, but they haven't seen drones so they look with big eyes. Already in Vietnam, people look at foreigners with big eyes, but when one comes with a drone, people look at you like you're an extraterrestrial! But really, I pride myself for being very respectful. We won't go close to a monastery without asking for permission. If I show something belonging to someone, we'll ask if we can film. It's lucky that I speak a few words of Vietnamese, so I can tell them it's a "may bay."

"When I was a kid, I wanted to be a helicopter pilot. When I was older, I wanted to become a journalist, to help people see the world in a different way, to travel the world. I've had to change my dreams, or more accurately, my dreams have evolved. Now I'm a drone pilot for a communications agency so I've been able to combine my two childhood dreams to make it my perfect life."

VANTAGE POINT

Savor the five-star panoramic view

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Beef *la lot*, Italian Vegetable Soup, Beef Short Ribs, Mushroom Risotto

PROBABLY THE BIGGEST surprise about this season's hot restaurant tip is that it's not a new venue in the slightest – it's one that's been around for a very long time, managing to stay quietly under the radar while flashier inner-city rooftop bistros have come and gone around it. It's time, however, for the veil to come firmly off **Top of the Town** (Level 25 Windsor Plaza Hotel, 18 An Duong Vuong, D5). Few eateries in this city can match its grace and almost none have as exceptional a view.

The key to a good rooftop venue is the sense of distance you get when you look out over the city, and by virtue of being one of the highest of its category here (based on the 25th floor of the Windsor Plaza Hotel, just several minutes away from the inner city by taxi) the sense of perspective available to diners is second to none. From Top of the Town (ToTT), Saigon's chaotic labyrinth is reduced to neat rows of dominoes, and the smoky bikes seem as distant flocks of birds.

While it's about time for it to become



Its split-purpose design lends it very well to evening soirées

known as a dining venue proper, the restaurant has enjoyed some popularity as a functions venue – its split-purpose design lends it very well to evening soirées with a large outdoor terrace bar and dining area as well as a plush carpeted interior, both divisions styled after classical forms. The terrace in particular seems particularly Grecian, with its white columns and arches adorned with ivy and exotic flowers. A little gazebo sits politely in the far corner where you might expect to see a string quartet or an opera singer going over her arias. A good number of events have been successfully staged here, and it's in high demand during New Year's and for Tet – it's about the only place in the city that has a clear view of all three major fireworks displays.

We start our evening out here, sitting close to the bar, vibrantly lit from below – while enjoying the fresh breeze that blows freely above the metropolitan structures far beneath us. A couple of classy cocktails slip down nicely: the Windsor Special (VND110,000) is a smooth pineapple juice based midori and gin that's light and not too sweet, while the P/S I Love You (VND120,000) is a creamier drink with a few blended liqueurs and grenadine. If you're not ready for alcohol, try the Mayo Tango (VND90,000), an orange, mango and pineapple smoothie with a dash of honey. It's a fine place to be spending the evening, even if you're not dining – I've put it on my list of

go-tos for a quiet drink or afternoon coffee (a latte is VND75,000).

Inner City of Lights

The time comes to move indoors and our view continues uninterrupted – the restaurant proper is surrounded by broad windows that frame the lights of the inner city for every table. It's a truly international restaurant, with a menu presided over by Chef Fabrizio Valdetara, who moonlights between here and WMC's Italian offering in Times Square. The cuisine at ToTT is more Asian/Western grill with favorites from across the spectrum – as expected for a venue in a hotel where guests typically hail from all over the globe. What keeps the menu from getting lost in please-all fusion mediocrity is the strong European tradition that informs all dishes, with much attention given to fine plating and quality ingredients.

We put this to the test by ordering a Vietnamese starter, the popular beef *la lot* (VND148,000). It's clean and extremely tender, served on a base of rice noodles and set off by slices of raw starfruit and banana, with a tangy pineapple and fish 'salsa' on the side. We balance this with an Italian vegetable soup (VND118,000), a classic minestrone served in a bowl encrusted in pastry like an English pie. It's served with zesty baby tomatoes and a pesto dip. Both appetizers are striking for their fresh, hearty flavors with strong herbal flourishes.

For our mains, we enjoy a warm mushroom risotto (VND188,000), served as a disc topped with shaved parmesan, which gives it a creamy texture, while the rice is served *al dente* like a good pasta. The star dish of the evening, however, is a rich beef short ribs (VND398,000) served off the bone with a side of roasted vegetables and drenched in an intense, aromatic gravy. It's a gorgeous set piece, moist and soft from its hours-long preparation in a mushroom and red wine stew. It's balanced with slices of crisp capsicum that serve to refresh the palate and it's easily the finest European dish on the menu.

ToTT's mains pair well with the Windsor's classic Kromacher German beer – although we selected a Santa Helena Chilean cabernet, which couples perfectly with the short rib. For a five-star venue, the restaurant's wine list is remarkably forgiving in terms of price considering the quality of the selection.

We polished off the meal rather extravagantly with some exquisite chocolate lava cakes (VND98,000), which remain soft and creamy inside despite being served at room temperature. It's doused in a lavish caramel sauce and served on raspberry and passion fruit syrups that counterbalance the 90 percent cacao chocolate crisp-shelled casing. This one's strictly for those who truly believe they deserve it, so be on your best behavior before you visit lest you miss out.

I've lived in Saigon for years without visiting this venue, and I regret not making the effort earlier. Perhaps its District 5 location makes it seem farther out than it really is – ToTT is actually closer to the inner city than any District 2 or 7 venue and its exceptional view alone makes it worth a look, the excellent menu notwithstanding. Don't leave it too long before checking it out – you may find it becoming one of your favorite regular dining spots.



HANGING HIGH

Life at the top, washing windows

TEXT BY **JOE NICHOLS** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**

AT 7AM BAO rides the freight elevator to the top of one of Saigon's newest high-rises and unlocks the door to the rooftop. His partner is already there setting up the rig - stringing thick ropes around a pulley then across a wooden board, looping and double looping. After 20 minutes of checking and rechecking knots, they lift the rig, with Bao squatting slightly above the board, from the roof and over the building's parapet, 28 stories above ground. Finally secured and anchored in position, he dips his squeegee in a bucket of dish soap and water mixture and begins to wash the windows. Bao's tools are basic, reflecting the infancy of his profession where roughly 10 years ago the city's skyline was uninterrupted blue skies, not the steel and glass monoliths that dominate it today.

As he continues to scale down the building a gust of wind sweeps by, gently swaying Bao to and fro, but he barely reacts, keeping in stride with his orchestrated up, down, left and right swiping hand motions. The wind, which blows capriciously around high-rise buildings, can make cleaning awkward. Updrafts and eddies that create uncanny microclimatic effects - a narrow tunnel of visibility from the roof to the street on an otherwise foggy day, rain falling upward against the palm of the hand - will drive the water sideways or even up across the glass, ruining work that has already been completed. "You try to hold

your wand underneath the squeegee to keep the water from shooting all over the place. But there's really not much you can do," he shrugs.

Outside or inside, the technique used to wash a window is the same: once the glass has been wetted down with a sponge or a wand, the water is wiped away with a squeegee, without leaving a smear. This is more difficult than it sounds. This movement requires a light touch and a smooth, serpentine glide - to chase the water across and down without the rubber edge of the blade leaving the glass, followed by a final motion of the wrist to flick dirt, water and squeegee off the window.

One day's work on average takes around four hours; given good weather, it takes a month to clean the whole tower from top to bottom. Work on larger skyscrapers in the city takes much longer: a single cleaning cycle on a building like the Bitexco Financial Tower can take six men four months. "Years ago, it was just straight up and down, flat glass, easy. Now everything they're building is all angles. Look at Bitexco. It is very complicated with the curves. Also the washers have to make sure the windows on the observation deck floor are perfectly clean for customers because they pay money to look through the glass and see the city," says Bao.

"The windows on my buildings stay pretty

clean during the dry season, you know. You might have bird droppings, which you have to scrub. It's the rainy season that's more difficult because the rain leaves spots on the glass and the wind blows dirt around. And for me, it's more dangerous to work in those conditions. Sometimes heavy downpours happen when I'm halfway up the building and I can't do anything because it's too slippery so I sit and wait for it to stop," he adds.

Looking back through the windows he witnesses everyday office life at its most mundane. "I'd say on six out of 10 computers that face the windows Facebook is on the screen. Women tend to look at fashion sites a lot and everyone is always on the phone either texting or talking. Sitting at a desk all day staring at a computer for eight hours inside a box, it's not for me."

He usually works in the early mornings if he can to avoid disturbing the tenants and because temperature on black glass can rise to a hundred degrees Fahrenheit by one in the afternoon, and to limit exposure to the heat of the sun which can cause heat stroke if he's not careful.

It's now 11am and Bao finally reaches the ground. He unhooks his rig and shakes his legs, somewhat unbalanced, as if walking for the first time. Uncomfortable with being on two feet - the daredevil spirit in him is already looking forward to his next climb.



ELEVATED EXPECTATIONS

Serving French bistronomy 30 stories above Saigon

TEXT BY **JAMES PHAM** IMAGES BY **NGOC TRAN**



THE DISPLAY CASE of motorcycle helmets that greets guests at **Cobalt Restaurant and Bar** (Floors 30 and 31, Pullman Saigon Centre, 148 Tran Hung Dao, D1) signal that you're in Vietnam. That some are gold-leafed or covered entirely in pink sequins or silver studs and chains with an Ed Hardy-esque flair indicates that you're in for an unexpected experience.

Based on the concept of "bistronomy," a blend of the complicated, technical aspects of fine French gastronomic cuisine set in the casual, affordable confines of a neighborhood bistro, Cobalt aims to serve up "*cuisine de maman*" (mother's food), that is, if your mother just so happens to work in a Michelin-star kitchen.

Much like the rules of bistronomy are hard to pin down (most simply agreeing that there are no rules, with highly trained chefs trying out highly innovative dishes

without worrying about impressing stuffy patrons), Cobalt is unconventional. The space is surprisingly simple for a fine dining venue – stark, polished silvery-blue concrete floors meets tables set with purposely mismatched chairs made of teak and aluminum (recycled from old motorcycles by Vietnam-based contemporary furniture designer John Reeves) and a soundtrack that favors upbeat Mariah Carey classics over traditional classical or jazz. The Pullman brand skews towards the hip, cool crowd, and Cobalt Restaurant with its floor to ceiling windows on the 30th floor and the newly opened Cobalt rooftop bar (one floor above, the highest in Saigon) is the place to see and be seen. With no tall buildings in the vicinity, there's clear line of sight straight to the Bitexco Financial Tower and beyond.

Cobalt's Chef Amine Lakhdari hails from Bordeaux, France (which my French dining

companion from Alsace conceded was home to some of France's finest food) and between his classical French training at three Michelin-starred restaurants including Paris' La Truffe Noire and Apicius, and his forays into experimenting with Asian products (coming from Bangkok's Sofitel So), he's well-equipped to take on the bistronomy challenge.

Cloud of Vapor

While the creamy lobster bisque (VND210,000) leaned towards the traditional, the cognac foam was a pleasant departure from the regular sherry, as was the side of clam toast with a dollop of ruddy, saffrony *rouille*. And the starter simply labeled "Salmon" on the menu (VND200,000) belied the complexity of flavors encompassed in a meaty steak of salmon *mi cuit*, half-cooked by a salt, sugar and honey rub and topped with Chantilly cream



Lamb Shank



with an almost imperceptible tinge of wasabi, and an earthy green vegetable puree pitted against the tartness of a tangerine zest and the playful sweetness of orange caviar.

The mains exhibited that same dichotomy of traditional versus innovative. Whenever I order lamb shank (VND560,000), I know exactly what I want – flavorsome lamb slow-braised in wine, perched atop a hearty mash with a vegetable side. Some comfort foods should not be messed with, and are meant to be simply executed with perfection. Here, it’s done just right, the only nod to *terroir* being *bok choy* substituting for a more traditional side. Local products pop up in some unexpected places at Cobalt, speaking to Chef Amine’s newfound

infatuation with Vietnamese ingredients, many of which he declares on par with what he worked with in France. Locally produced Marou chocolate makes an appearance in the Duck Pithivier (VND500,000), a succulent duck breast brushed in a dark chocolate *gastrique* before being baked in a buttery crust.

The dessert course was also a lesson in the unexpected. While the *millefeuille* (VND180,000) was impossibly flaky as all good “thousand layer” desserts should be, the result of folding pastry dough over butter over and over, the filling was tiny, perfectly cylindrical balls of apple, lightly cooked with butter and sugar, along with a squeeze of caramel *crème pâtissière*. Cobalt’s signature dessert, though —

liquid nitrogen ice cream (VND250,000) — is as much alchemy as it is gastronomy, hinting perhaps at its place on the table of elements. The most delicious of science experiments in less than three minutes from start to finish, the ingredients are mixed at the table, producing instant ice cream in a cloud of vapor, the rapid freezing largely responsible for a remarkably creamy, dense texture.

Bistronomy at Cobalt is all about appealing to the senses, where the finest ingredients are prepared with complex techniques and artfully presented in a relaxed, playful setting. Add to that the wrap-around views high above the city, and you’ll swear you’re in heaven... or at least well on your way there.



LOFTY PURSUITS

TEXT AND IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

MOST AFTERNOONS AROUND 4:30pm they begin to gather. Parents with young children, singles and old people, boyfriends with their girlfriends, they come.

Some participate while others simply spectate, but they all share a common passion and a common perspective as they gaze skywards, oohing and ahing, a unifying passion to go fly a kite.

The Thu Thiem location is a one-stop shop with roadside kite sellers doing a busy trade.

They not only sell kites, they also assemble and instruct before sending their clients off to try their hand.

Almost as one, whether pilots or passengers, they gaze towards the heavens. A happy, friendly and inclusive group with apparently not a care in the world.

The kites range from cheap and cheerful everyman birds to elaborate racing creations that almost lifts their owner off the ground. One enthusiast even turns up with a USD2,000

drone that he can fly two kilometers from his position, guided by GPS from nine satellites that are apparently overhead.

Not an organized group, but simply a gathering of like-minded people of all ages and stations in life who enjoy the feeling of freedom, as they watch their kites soar to the heavens.

By 5:30pm, as twilight falls, they start to come back to earth, and by 6pm the field of dreams is empty again, until tomorrow.



Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN





Seafood Carbonara
Loveat Restaurant



IMAGE PROVIDED BY FAN CLUB

Team Spirit

Sports fans find a new place to call home in Saigon

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NEIL FEATHERSTONE

THERE'S SOMETHING TO be said about being able to walk into any sports bar in the world, root for the local team, and instantly be surrounded by new friends. Sure, Kaka's defense-splitting pass for a game-winning goal and Roger Federer's glorious down-the-line backhand look exactly the same on your screen at home, but it's tough to beat the camaraderie that sports engender, together sharing euphoric wins as well as soul-crushing defeats with equal amounts of passion.

According to researchers, the "insanely but divinely inspired" *fanaticus* experiences real effects from watching sports, both physiological and emotional (including having higher self-esteem, are less depressed, less alienated and less lonely). Perhaps it's the sense of community and belonging that comes with sharing intense experiences. Fandom also affects how we eat, with studies, perhaps not surprisingly, showing that sports fans consume foods higher in fat more often, eat more fast food and less vegetables and drink more alcoholic

beverages on the days we choose to drink than do non-sports fans. We are who we are, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Since opening just over six months ago, **The Fan Club** (located at The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, D2) is out to meet the adrenaline (and nutritional) needs of sports fans with its 12 large screens (nine 55-inch and three 2-meter projection) and extensive menu featuring classic Asian and Western comfort foods in a decidedly posh space.

Who Knows?

Tearing a page out of Nike's hugely successful "Bo Knows" campaign (featuring Bo Jackson who played professional baseball and football in the same year), The Fan Club *knows* entertainment. Owned by DTD Entertainment and set up by Director Barry Winters whose list of accomplishments include Creative Director for *Dancing With the Stars* (Thailand) and Chief Designer for an interior design company, The Fan Club brings sports entertainment to a new league, from the Vegas-inspired custom feature

wall sporting more than 8,500 angled wood bricks to the hand-painted portraits of dozens of entertainment icons spanning the decades ranging from Serena Williams and Larry Bird to Dita Von Teese and Frank Sinatra.

Upmarket venue aside, to make the cut, any self-respecting sports bar needs to have live sports and lots of it, accompanied by great, reasonably priced food and great beer, also in copious amounts. The Fan Club delivers on all those counts. Whatever your passion, expect to see almost every televised sport known to television available, live-streamed on massive screens lining the walls. "When we set up, we called in FPT and got four fiber optic lines direct to The Fan Club," says Barry. "When most people break down for bad weather, we're fine. Every TV shows internet television and we can stream every single sport here. We've bought links to the NFL, AFL, you name it. The three big screens are connected to their own PCs and an enclosed outdoor garden area will also soon have its own projection TV."



Set up as a bar and a lounge, the bar area features darts and billiards with wooden tables and comfortable stools, spaced within back-slapping, high-fiving distance. The more family-friendly lounge with its tufted sofas and plush armchairs is great for a casual night out. (The Vista even has its own supervised playground for the kiddies.) Wherever you choose to sit, a TV screen is within line of sight, and a great selection of drinks awaits, including Tiger, Heineken and Magners Cider on draft to accompany 17 bottled beers as well as shooters, cocktails, spirits and shisha. The newly expanded menu covers all the Asian and Western favorites with finger foods like the homemade seafood *cha gio*, surprisingly hearty and stuffed with prawn, squid and crab meat (VND110,000) and the Sriracha Hot Wings (VND140,000), an absolute

standout, lightly crispy with a spicy house Sriracha sauce that begs to be washed down with a refreshing Irish cider. They're so good you'll find yourself guarding them closer than Manuel Neuer and tempted to order a couple more plates to make a proper meal out of them. Generously-portioned mains supply energy for late night celebrating. The signature Fan Club Inside Out Burger (VND170,000) sports bacon and cheese inside the patty, sealing in the juices, topped with honey caramelized onions on a toasted English muffin (baked in-house) with a side of thick cut sweet potato fries. The huge portion of Traditional Battered Fish and Chips (VND170,000) and the large selection of pizzas including the Meat Lovers (VND190,000) loaded with chili con carne, chicken, pepperoni, chorizo and bacon strips, were also a hit with our group.

CLOCKWISE: Sports Bar with Pool Table; Sriracha Hot Wings; Fan Club Inside Out Burger; Meat Lovers Pizza; Midori tini; and Fan Club cheesecake

If The Fan Club had a creed, it might be a take on the Olympics' after whose rings its logo is modeled: "The important thing in life is not the triumph, but the fight; the essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought (and ate and drank) well." For the latest promotions, check out [The Fan Club at Facebook.com/thefanclub.vn](https://www.facebook.com/thefanclub.vn) ■

Mom, What's for Dinner?

Sharing plates and family-style dining
in a rustic garden setting

TEXT BY **CHRISTINE VAN** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **SECRET GARDEN**



Grilled lemongrass pork rolls

IN THIS AGE of complete disclosure, where just about everything imaginable is revealed through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, and good old reliable print, it's nothing short of a miracle that a restaurant as charming as **Secret Garden** (Rooftop, 158 Pasteur, D1; serves lunch and dinner) and open for a year still remains unknown.

Here on the rooftop of a five-story tenement down an alley, away from the noise of the city and with views of high-rises from a distance, is a quaint countryside inspired garden eatery that takes a different approach to Vietnamese homecooking by blending fresh herbs, tangy sauces and other local ingredients with traditional techniques. The garden in the middle of the open air dining space lends support to the restaurant's name and its theme, while scattered bric-a-brac, wooden shutters, rustic furniture and colorful draperies add a touch of shabby chic to the ambiance. This all comes together in a quiet, simply attractive restaurant with few airs or pretensions.

Secret Garden expands the conventional dinner service of appetizer and main course. "We wanted to create a family-style food-sharing experience that's common in the countryside. You can't find an ambiance like this in any other restaurant in the city," says manager Huy. "Half of our clientele are Vietnamese who aren't native to Saigon so we wanted them to feel at home when they dine here, like eating together with their family." Their menu is conveniently grouped into various staples – salad, protein, rice, vegetables and soup – found at every family meal.

After assigning Huy as head of our family for dinner, leaving the ordering to him, we cooled down with a refreshing glass of Lemongrass lemonade (VND25,000). The hint of lemongrass added depth to this simple drink, giving it an herbal, tart finish. Our food soon arrived – six plates in total. A well-known adage among chefs is "you eat with your eyes first," and was evident here when all the dishes were laid out in front of us – luscious greens from the fresh herbs, dark browns from the sauces, vibrant oranges and whites from the pickled vegetables – it was a rainbow made of food.



CLOCKWISE: Open-air garden dining area;
Fried spring rolls; Deep fried sticky rice;
Fried prawn and sesame; and
Soaked beef with fish sauce

Foodie's Delight

We dove first towards the Grilled lemongrass pork rolls (VND85,000), which were gorgeous to look at – the pork rolls were tucked into semi-shredded lemongrass stalks then grilled, keeping the meat juicy and tender while also giving it a smoky citrus flavor. The dish was accompanied by a pureed sauce made from coriander, chili and salt that complemented it perfectly. The Stir-fried morning glory with garlic (VND65,000) and Fried spring rolls (VND85,000) were crunchy and crispy, respectively. Most restaurants tend to keep the leaves when stir frying morning glory, giving the dish a chewy, soft texture, however the chef at Secret Garden uses only the stalks, which allows it to remain crunchy.

At the center of the table were tapas-like portions of Fried prawn and sesame (VND85,000) and Deep fried sticky rice

(VND65,000). Four large shrimps coated in sesame seeds and a thin layer of minced pork fanned out over a plate, the surf and turf fried mix could've been overpowering but was saved by the sesame seeds and the chili sauce dip that helped balance the meatiness of the dish. The latter dish is a reinterpretation of a common local street snack. Here, the sticky rice was formed into a crispy wafer topped with pork floss, shrimp bits, tree ear mushrooms, minced pork and garnished with *mo hanh* (scallion oil) and a dab of chili sauce.

Perhaps the most brilliant dish, a Tet favorite, was the Soaked beef with fish sauce (VND125,000) served with pickled scallion bulbs. Similar to curing, the dish takes several days to prepare, starting with boiling the beef shank until completely cooked, then cutting it into thin slices and then fermenting the

meat in a sealed jar at room temperature filled with sugar and fish sauce (the saltiness from the fish sauce acts as the curing agent) for four to five days, depending on the thickness of the cuts. The result was divine – the beef had a nutty, earthy flavor leaving just a hint of fish sauce on the tongue. And like pickled ginger when eating sushi, the pickled scallion bulbs are meant to cleanse the palate for the next bite. Earlier in the evening, we opted to cancel our order of fried rice, not wanting to fill up on carbs and to ensure we had room to empty all the plates on our dinner table, which we did with gluttonous abandon.

While some secrets are meant to be kept – your unspoken crush at the office, your secret stash of cash at home or those confidential state files - Secret Garden is not one of them. ■



The Lady Awaits

Indulge your appetite while soaking up views of the city along the Saigon River

TEXT BY JIMMY DAU IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

THE WORD “CRUISE” can conjure up images of wild boat parties on “booze cruises” with deafening karaoke, horrific dance floor moves and belligerent behavior. Lucky for us, our evening cruising along the Saigon River was just the opposite aboard The Historic Lady Hau - a beautifully restored rice barge from the Mekong Delta that was originally used to ferry goods to and from floating markets. Named after the Hau River tributary passing through the Mekong port of Can Tho, the barge was built in Tien Giang Province and with a maximum capacity of 43 guests, this intimate experience is a far cry from the standard tourist dinner cruise.

Upon arriving, we were greeted by friendly smiles, a pair of violinists performing popular classical songs and waitresses offering flutes of sparkling wine. As the sun disappeared over the horizon, we set off on a 2.5-hour cruise along the Saigon River leaving behind a purple painted twilight sky. We glided past

the colonial architecture of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Transportation, followed by the Ba Son Shipyard.

There are three distinct sections to The Historic Lady Hau. At the bow, patrons can lounge around and enjoy forward facing panoramic views of the Saigon River while the middle is where the majority of the seating is. My dining companion and I chose to sit at the rear, a more intimate section with fewer people. But it wasn’t to bask in the romantic ambience; it positioned us in full view of the barbecue. For somebody who once owned three grills, this was prime spot.

BBQ Ahoy!

As we cruised under the Thu Thiem Bridge, the waitress took our drinks order and gave us time to decide on the a la carte barbecue menu, an addition to the buffet meal. They also have a cigar menu for those wanting to so indulge with after-dinner drinks. It had

been a while since I had *bo la lot* (grilled beef with wild betel leaves) so we immediately ordered a couple of servings as well as grilled scallops. I was feeling in a slightly decadent mood, so ordered an additional serving of sea bass wrapped in banana leaves and vegetable kebabs. Imported sirloin steaks and pork ribs were also on the menu.

As we waited for our BBQ mains, we headed over to the East meets West buffet where chili lemongrass chicken, *banh cuon*, egg noodles, stir fried vegetables with shiitake mushrooms, sautéed seafood, papaya salad and *banh beo* complemented Western dishes such as whole baked potatoes and pesto pasta salad. Without realizing it, an impressive mountain of food had accumulated on my plate on one hand and two shot glasses of prawn cocktail and a tuna ceviche were cupped in the other.

As we returned to our table, the boat was now well into District 2 with views of the

Upon arriving, we were greeted by friendly smiles, a pair of violinists performing popular classical songs and waitresses offering flutes of sparkling wine.

picturesque Thao Dien area with its waterfront villas, restaurants and bars, all decorated in fairy lights. Along the port side, there were views of Thanh Da Island and its green patches of farmland.

Han, the head maitre d' came to greet us as she did every passenger. She welcomed us on board and talked about the menu and the effort that went into preparing the boat for its October launch last year. She told us the head chef has 12 years' experience in five star restaurants and oversees a total of six chefs who assist in the preparation of the entire menu on board.

Everything was perfectly cooked from the fresh and crunchy textures of the vegetable stir fry, to the temperature of the tender lemongrass chili chicken and the overall attention to detail in the presentation. As soon as the barbecued dishes came out, every item we ordered was cooked perfectly - it's no easy feat cooking every individual dish made-to-order on a grill. The *bo la lot* was juicy, with a hint of smoke and no signs of burning on the leaves. The scallops were smaller than I'm used to, but came out nice and firm, with a drizzle of chive oil that left a moorish feeling on the palate. I left the sea bass in banana leaves until last as I was still tackling the remains of the buffet. Despite the wait, it was still tender and juicy and infused with a mild smoky scent from the banana without overpowering the delicate flavor of the fish.

Given that The Historic Lady Hau has only been in operation for two months (at the time of writing), everything seemed to run like clockwork. They provided top notch service from beginning to end and kudos to the chef and his team for the delicious food. And the views of the city skyline were amazing. It's a great option for anyone seeking a unique dining experience.

The cruise route is approximately 24km (2.5 hours): setting off from Bach Dang Pier in District 1 in a north-easterly direction up to Thanh Da, Thao Dien. The cruise sets sail daily for lunch (12:30pm - 2pm, boarding time between 12pm - 12:30, VND595,000 net) and dinner (7pm - 9:30pm, boarding time between 6:30pm - 7pm, VND895,000 net); 50 percent off for children aged six to 12; those under six are free. For reservations call (08) 6294 7048 or email ladyhau.sgn@emmhoteles.com; www.emmhoteles.com ■





Love to Eat

Mediterranean food meets Italian flair

TEXT BY **ROBERT OI**
IMAGES BY **MARCO COL AND NGOC TRAN**

THE BEST THING about the breadth of Italian cuisine is that no matter how many restaurants open, they can all maintain a point of difference. **Loveat**, (29 Hai Trieu, D1), located directly opposite the main entrance to Bitexco Tower, positions itself as “Mediterranean with an Italian twist.” But there’s no hiding a distinctly Italian flair to the menu, perhaps due to the Turinese origins of the son-and-father team who have created the venue: Andrea and Marco Col.

While Loveat stands opposite the city’s most remarkable piece of modern architecture, the restaurant itself stands out as the most modern and eye-catching construction in a line of decrepit suburban shophouses, which makes it easy to find. The interior is creative and unique with an eclectic collection of custom-made wall art - check out the cooking utensils mounted in a frame on the third floor - and vintage-style light bulbs in all shapes and sizes, a talking piece in themselves. There are no white or checkered tablecloths here and nor should there be: this is a modern, brasserie-style venue, cool and hip, not somewhere to eat traditional Italian fare served in a 100-year-old villa.

On the upper level you’ll discover what is soon to become its most unique point of difference: an open deck stretching out over the street, affording a surprisingly intriguing

bird’s eye view over the Bitexco Tower, Times Square and their built-in light shows, and the busy road below. Wrapped entirely in glass, it may not be for those who suffer from acrophobia - the effect is a little like stepping out onto those glass floors where you can see hundreds of meters below. But from this month the deck will be a cocktail bar with light finger food served, all enjoyed to a background of live music. A new altitudinal venue, albeit just four stories up, sure to attract the city’s ‘in crowd.’

Our Meal

From the moment we arrived and were seated until the time we farewelled Andrea who personally went off to locate our motorcycle, the service experience was flawless. Attentive staff always seemed to be on hand with whatever we needed, observing from a distance, never intruding and always easy to attract the attention of.

Oi invited Andrea to recommend our dishes and we were subsequently swamped with an array of almost entirely seafood creations, which we spent more than three hours lingering over, departing impossibly but satisfyingly full. Loveat’s menu is extensive - and now into its second generation since opening, enhanced after early customer feedback, and with some

pricing modifications. It starts with hot and cold bar snacks, salads and a range of lunch pastas. We skipped that page and moved on to the appetizers, from which Andrea selected Costa del Sol grilled octopus (VND230,000), grilled spicy octopus served on black beans with spring onions, and Provence zucchini flan (VND150,000) served with béchamel sauce. The octopus was chewy without being rubbery, smoky yet not too salty, and full of flavor. The black beans were soft without being mushy and a uniquely curious accompaniment that matched extremely well. The serving size was very generous for an appetizer and we’d certainly order that dish again. The Zucchini flan was a revelation: possibly the most unique vegetarian dish I can recall, and enormously challenging to describe in words. Imagine a soft sponge cake without the sweetness, served with a slightly salty cheese sauce rather than cream. And, of course, with the taste of zucchini. Absolutely moorish; so much so you get a sense you should be feeling guilty, because surely something this smooth and delicious should be bad for you.

CLOCKWISE: Costa del Sol grilled octopus, Zucchini flan, Moules & frites



CLOCKWISE: Seafood carbonara, Grilled fish, Tiramisu and Strawberry pannacotta

From here we progressed to *Moules & frites*, (VND175,000 to VND330,000 depending on the size and origin), mussels served Belgian style, in a pan with bruschetta bread and french fries. Loveat offers a selection of seasonings including white wine with cream, marinara and *impepata* (with black pepper). But we chose the martini and saffron for the combination of flavor and color, and were far from disappointed.

Loveat serves New Zealand imported mussels or local ones and despite one of this reviewer's ancestry, we took the recommendation to try the local shellfish. They proved smaller, for sure, but fresh and flavorsome, tender and fleshy. If we had to find fault with this dish, perhaps the fries could have been a little crispier, but they weren't the main attraction of the dish in any case.

Next on the table was the Atene seafood carbonara (VND240,000), linguine pasta in a carbonara sauce tossed with fresh fish and seafood. This is the perfect Italian-style dish for pasta and seafood lovers with scallops, octopus, prawns and salmon aplenty in a pasta which was prepared perfectly al dente, and a smooth creamy sauce. The dish was moist without excessive cream, peppery rather than salty, and so the entire dish felt light and summery and fresh, not heavy or

overly filling.

Andrea was eager for us to try another house specialty - the King royal grilled fish plate (VND370,000) - a long narrow plate with pieces of lightly grilled grouper, tuna, squid and prawns. This was a deceptively big dish and we opted to share each fillet one at a time to compare notes on the flavors and freshness. Again, we were not disappointed. All the fish were grilled to perfection, without charring or dehydration. The squid was the standout, my Vietnamese co-reviewer observing they reminded her of "one sun squid" a local dish using squid dried in the sun for a single day so as to be not too dry and not too moist and tender in the mouth. The prawns were very fleshy and tender.

Between each morsel of fish were whole grilled baby tomatoes: eaten whole, these were like little explosions of sweetness and juice, almost worthy of a place on the menu in their own right.

Throughout the appetizers and main courses, we enjoyed a bottle of Chilean Root 1 Sauvignon Blanc from the Casablanca Valley, a superb example of just why New Zealand, as the global master of the varietal, should be increasingly worried about competition from South America. Fruity, zesty, citrusy and very fresh on the palate, a

rewarding indulgence at VND750,000.

After such an enormous delicious meal, dessert seemed to be an excess which would lead to a doubling of gym time the next morning. But we knew we owed it to our readers to complete the assignment, so diets were shelved in favor of further indulgence. Again we took the advice of our host and were served two of the house specialties to share: The Loveat tiramisu and the Strawberry panna cotta (both VND140,000).

The panna cotta was served in a bowl, with the strawberry a thick sauce served alongside in a little jug; you pour the sauce over the little white pudding for the combined effect. We found the panna cotta a little firmer than we are accustomed to, but the sauce was rich and fruity - good enough to be bottled and sold. The tiramisu was simply delicious. Cutely served in a little glass storage jar, it was soft, full of flavor and moist - and with a heavenly dose of alcohol to blend with the cream, coffee, sponge and the dusting of tart cocoa powder. It was a truly delicious way to end a fulfilling meal. ■



TOP: Phil with Jeff Noble, owner of VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill (90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phat My Hung, D7); BOTTOM: Phil Veinott



Mr. Voucher

A man on a mission to feed the city's hungry one voucher at a time

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

FOR THE LAST several weeks, Phil Veinott has been giving away stuff to complete strangers on Facebook, from vouchers for free sangrias to complimentary dinners for two. But why the sudden act of philanthropy, you ask?

"Because I want to connect people: food and people, new places and people," he explains. In November 2014, Phil created *Slapdish* (www.slapdish.vn; Facebook: *goslapdish*) to challenge people to try new

food and go to new places. "It's really easy for expats, for people in general to fall into a rut. You tend to stick with the safe choices, eat only what you know is okay, drink only the familiar drinks, and that really doesn't make sense, especially for an expat because, hey, you are in a completely new place. Why would you want to stick with safe and boring?"

According to Phil, *Slapdish*, a mashup of the words "slapdash" and "dish", was

created first as an excuse to simply post amazing photos of food on Facebook, but then evolved into a self-challenge to go beyond photo sharing. *Slapdish* expanded to draw others in on the challenge. "I woke up one day with the idea. What's a better way to get people to get out of their apartments and try something new than giving the meal away for free? I didn't know whether it was going to work but I happen to know the people at *WoknRoll* and they gave me a couple of vouchers for free food at their place. I thought, well let's try this out, and made a small giveaway post on Facebook expat groups. If it works, it's fun and free food for me and a couple of people, and decent promotion for *WoknRoll*. Everybody wins, right?"

His first voucher giveaway post on Facebook, with support from *Expats in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)* Facebook group, stirred such a good response from members that by the fourth week *Slapdish* had given away VND6 million worth of vouchers, connected with six partners, including *Lucky Dog* and *Emergency Room*, and amassed more than 1,000 followers.

"The model is really simple," Phil explains. "I go to a new restaurant. If they are in, they give me something free or discounted - a meal or a drink - in voucher form. I take these and post a giveaway on Facebook. Members see the giveaway, they apply, get it and go try out the free food. The restaurant or bar is promoted and so they are happy. And I am happy because it means *Slapdish* just got somebody to try out new things or go to a new place. No money is involved, and though the winners aren't guaranteed to spend more of their own cash at the place, at the very least they go to check out the place."

This model requires no money, which means Phil stands to make nothing, but it also means that he doesn't have to pay out of his own pocket for the average VND1.5 million in vouchers he gives away every week either. "That is precisely why it works so well, because it doesn't cost anyone anything and because this city is full of these small, indie restaurants and bars who can't afford a hefty marketing paycheck. To them, *Slapdish* is great because it gets people to check out their places for next to nothing."

Phil has few plans for *Slapdish* beyond seizing the day (and the deal). "I'm a simple English teacher who just happened to have a great idea. All kinds of organizations have to think about monetizing sooner or later, but I can't worry about that right now. For now, I just want to enjoy the ride and see where it will take me." ■

The Long and Wining Road

The magic of Burgundy

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER you're a wine expert or not, it's likely you've heard, and even tasted, some of the great wines of Bordeaux (France), a region known for producing some of the most famous wines in the world. St Emilion, St Stephe, Pomerol or Pauillac are just a few of the many subareas within Bordeaux that most wine aficionados are familiar with.

However, Burgundy wines, possessing similar and sometimes better quality wines than Bordeaux, are not as widespread or have the global reach. Burgundy is a wine province, extending from Lyon to the northwest of Dijon, which has around 100 different *appellations d'origine contrôlée* (origin controlled appellations), with Chablis probably the most famous.

Due to historic reasons, Burgundy's land was partitioned so you cannot find big vineyards there as you would in other parts of France. Even the smallest growers have parcels in two or more vineyards. For this very reason over half of the Burgundy wines are bought in barrel

from the growers and then blended by *negociants* (French term for a wine merchant who assembles the produce of smaller growers and winemakers and sells the result under its own name) to achieve volumes suitable for commercialization.

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are the most common grapes in Burgundy, and you will find most of the top wines from this region are almost exclusively made with these two star grapes. An example of this are the wines from two well-known Burgundy producers - Domain Chanson and Domain Chanzy - the main stars of a gorgeous wine pairing dinner organized by Lubu, Tan Khoa (importer of D. Chanson) and Wine Embassy (importer of D. Chanzy). The event was a unique opportunity to try a selection of eight delicious wines from the region, including two premier crus, complemented by delicate and charming dishes like *caille au vin* (quail braised in red wine) and seared Tasmanian lamb, which paired perfectly with the flavors and aromas of the Burgundy Pinot Noirs.



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.

The wines, available in Vietnam from Wine Embassy and Vino, were divine.

It is unusual to have a selection of eight wines from this region together at the same dinner table and for all of them to be exceptional - another great characteristic of Burgundy wines.

Within Burgundy, the area of Chablis is internationally recognized for producing some of the best white wines in the world, and definitely some of my favorites. Nothing beats a glass of good Chablis with seafood, however the whites from Burgundy's Macon-Villages or Volnay, another two of my favorites, are also exceptional.

As for reds, you will be spoiled for choice in Burgundy, as long as you like Pinot Noir. Santenay, Beaume and Mercurey are examples of amazing red wines from Burgundy, which you can now find in Vietnam. So, if you want to try something different and delicious, start looking for Burgundy wines! ■



>>The List

Wine & Dine

BARS



Cavern Pub

Stylish venue in one of the classier inner-city locales, Cavern entertains locals and expats alike with a live band every night, sports channels on a large TV screen, and a great atmosphere. Happy hour is from 6pm to

9:30pm (buy 2 beers – get 1 free). Live music is from 9:30pm-1am.

**19 Dong Du, D1
090 826 5691**



The Fan Club

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

**The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2
www.dtdentertainment.com**

Facebook: The Fan Club



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**



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 glitterazi like to be seen; rooftop an open bar with more chilled style music. In between a new Vietnamese dining concept.

**95 Hai Ba Trung, D1
090 902 82 93**

www.blanchystash.com



Last Call

Saigon's ring 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...

Cargo Bar

Cargo Bar is a dedicated music and arts venue designed and committed to delivering diverse entertainment, along with a good drink menu.

7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4

Chill Skybar

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

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

Game On

Opened in July 2013, Game On is one of Saigon's biggest sports bar, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The bar also has an extensive drinks menu including

coffees, juices, beers, wines, vodkas, and more. Game On also boasts a function room for corporate meetings or private parties.

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

The Hideaway

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).

**4 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4
www.theobservatory-hcmc.com**

onTop Bar

Located on the 20th floor of Novotel Saigon Center, onTop Bar provides views over Saigon from an expansive outdoor terrace. The venue offers a menu with over 20 cheeses, cured

meats and both Vietnamese and international-inspired tapas.

**167 Hai Ba Trung, D3
3822 4866**

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**

CAFÉS



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



Hatvala

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

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



Guanabana Smoothies

This Californian smoothie bar specializes in healthy all-natural smoothies using fresh fruits and vegetables from locally-sourced farms, with no condensed milk or artificial sweeteners added. Their smoothies can be enhanced with nutritional supplements such as green superfood, whey protein, and spirulina.

Best sellers include their Special Blends and veggie smoothies. Fresh roasted coffee, hot panini's and pastries are also available, along with speedy Wi-Fi.

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



L'Usine

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

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



Café RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local café consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Café 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.caferuam.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

Also Try...

Cafe Terrace

A local interpretation of a European cafe concept, Cafe Terrace has become a popular destination for the local middle class taking a respite from shopping in the chic Saigon Centre. The main cafe street-side facing onto Pasteur is always busy with a mix of locals and expats sipping coffee or enjoying a light lunch or early dinner. Upstairs is a smaller cafe amidst fashion stores, dimly lit and cool. The menu includes savoury and sweet crepes, cakes, juices, shakes and some Vietnamese favourites.

Saigon Centre, 65 Le Loi, D1
3914 4958

Caffe Bene

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

58 Dong Khoi, D1

3822 4012
caffebenevietnam.com

Ciao Café

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

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1
3823 1130

Du Mien Garden Coffee

A 30 minute taxi ride from downtown, but worth the effort, this unique cafe is renowned for its 'treehouse' feel. Set in lush gardens, it's a world away from the chaos of Ho Chi Minh City. A destination in itself, it offers much more than coffee; open from 7am until 11pm, it attracts workers, travellers and romancers alike. The locals love it (20,000 likes on Facebook!) for the coffee, the meals and most of all the gardens.

7 Phan Van Tri Phuong 10, Go Vap.
3894 5555

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

Masstige

Another newcomer to the Vietnam cafe scene, Korean-based chain Masstige offers European style coffee at competitive prices (40,000 VND for a mug of hot Cafe Latte) and accompanying light snacks. For something truly original, try the Avocado coffee or their alcohol-free chilled mojito cocktails. The name Masstige is a blend of mass and prestige, meaning 'premium but obtainable'.

125 Ho Tung Mau, D1 (behind Sunwah Tower).
www.facebook.com/masstigecoffee

Mojo Cafe

This modern, chic café, restaurant and

bar offers freshly baked homemade cakes, pastries, wood fired pizzas, light fare and superb coffee and smoothies for dine in or take away.

88 Dong Khoi, D1
08 3827 2828
www.mojosaigon.com

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.saijon.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.libaisaijon.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.7ryquan.com

Shang Palace

Designed very much after the fashion of modern upscale restaurants in China itself, Shang Palace specializes in Cantonese seafood dishes and excels in catering to large groups. A superb choice for dim sum brunches with authenticity guaranteed.

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/saijon

SPANISH



El Camino

El Camino has the lively spirit of a party on the Mediterranean with the fun and friendliness of a good family venue. Affordable selection of Spanish & French wines.

Nguyen Duc Canh, D7
www.facebook.com/elcaminovietnam



La Habana

Cuban venue with fine Spanish cuisine, Cuban cigars and German beer. A wide range of tapas and cocktails. Great bar atmosphere and late night entertainment.

6 Cao Ba Quat, D1
www.lahabana-saigon.com



Olé

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

129B Le Thanh Ton, D1
012 6529 1711



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



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 VND6,000/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



American Chinese Food

Full Menu

www.woknroll.vn

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Gyoza



Salad & Stir Fry



Beef Fried Rice



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

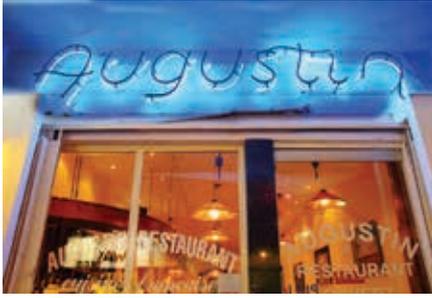
Halal & vegetarian dishes

Of course we can cater!

order online at vietnammm.com & 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



La Creperie

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

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



La Fourchette

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

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



Le 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
 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



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

Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

Trois Gourmands

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

18 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
3744 4585



INDIAN



Bollywood

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



Baba's Kitchen

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



Ganesh

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



Ashoka

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



Saigon Indian

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

Also Try...

Bombay Indian Restaurant

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

Curry Leaf

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

The Punjabi

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



ITALIAN



Ciao Bella **👉** Oi's Pick

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

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

Ciao Bella



La Bettola

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

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

La Bettola
ITALIAN RESTAURANT



Da Vinci's

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

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



La Cucina

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

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



La Hostaria

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

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



Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1.

Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
3824 4286

Pendolasco

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

87 Nguyen Hue, D1
3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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

Pomodoro

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

79 Hai Ba Trung
3823 8998



JAPANESE



Blanchy Street O!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



Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



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 Nashi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Hung, 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.sushidiningaoi.com

Yoshino

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

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



KOREAN



Galbi Brothers

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

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



Kang Nam Ga

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

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



Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086



Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Bui, D1
3829 4297



Won's Cuisine

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

49 Mac Thi Bui
3820 4085



THAI



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 Bui 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 Bui, D1
090 879 14 12

STEAKHOUSE



Au Lac Do Brazil

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

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



El Gaucho

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

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



Indaba

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

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



New York Steakhouse

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

25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1



Samba Brazilian Steakhouse

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

10C Thai Van Lung, D1
3822 0079



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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
cornieusaigon27@yahoo.com
cornieusaigon.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 Hanoi-style 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 ambience 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 48358



XichLoBBQ

XichLoBBQ is located on Bui Vien - the heart of the backpacking area. The restaurant serves Vietnamese staples alongside Western dishes with a specialty in barbecued pork, beef, chicken and seafood. XichLoBBQ restaurant is themed on the classic Vietnamese transport, with an actual life size of the three-wheeled vehicle hanging on the wall. Food here is reasonably priced.

37 Bui Vien, D1



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...

Boomarang Bistro

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

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

Chit Chat

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

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

The Deck

Located on the banks of the Saigon River, this restaurant offers great international and Vietnamese fare along with some fine cocktails. Best way to arrive is by private speed boat managed by the venue.

38 Nguyen U Di, D2
www.thedecksaigon.com

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

Tucked away on the quiet café street of Ngo Thoi Nhiem in District 3, Khoi Thom has evolved into an authentic Mexican-style cantina serving home-style dishes, many from the Mexican chef's family. With bright colors, a large breezy outdoor deck with an open bar and a long street frontage, Khoi Thom has earned respect for its adventurous hues and style since opening.

29 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3
www.khoithom.com

La Fenetre Soleil

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

glass tables). Serves a range of cocktails, imported beer, coffee and smoothies together with a Japanese-Vietnamese fusion menu.

4 Ly Tu Trong, D1

La Fiesta

A new restaurant of Scott Marquis, of Scott & Binh's fame, La Fiesta offers mainly Mexican food like tacos and enchiladas. Also features liqueur coffees and cocktails.

33 Dang Thi Nhu, D1
www.facebook.com/lafiestavietnam

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.

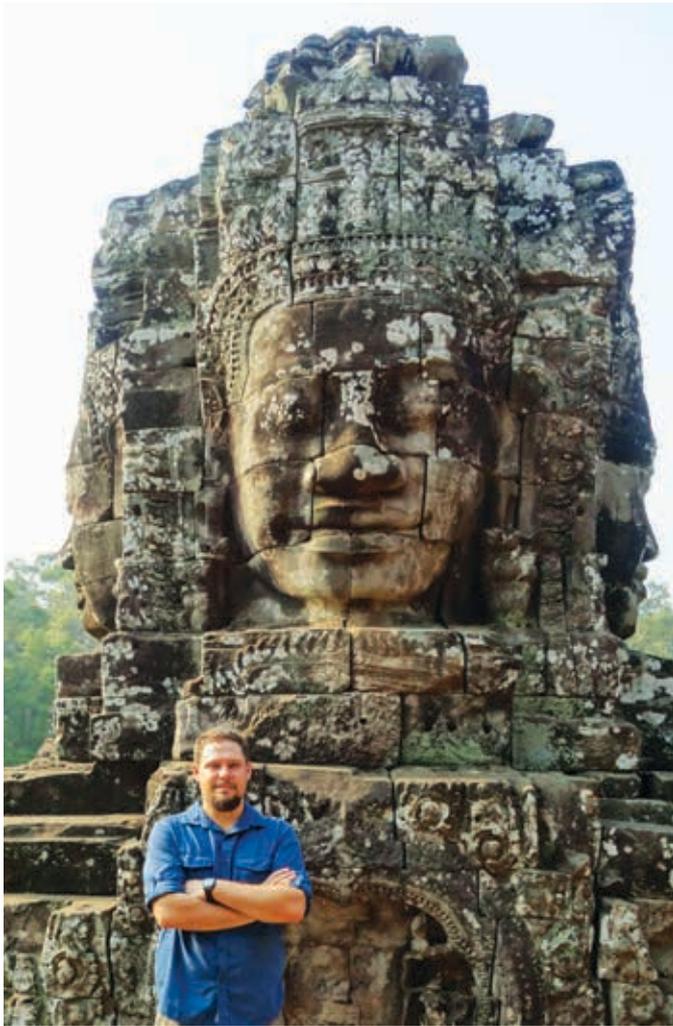
15-17 Cao Trieu Phat, D7

Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY ANDREW AND LAURA LECKIE







CLOCKWISE: Bayon; Angkor Wat

Endless Ruins

Crossing the amazing temples of Angkor Wat off the bucket list

TEXT BY **ANDREW LECKIE** IMAGES BY **ANDREW AND LAURA LECKIE**

Last year, 4 million tourists from over 100 nations holidayed in the Kingdom of Cambodia. More than 800,000 of these were Vietnamese. Why do so many people from all over the globe come to a country ranked as one of the world's poorest? A country whose violent past resides in the recent memories of so many?

Ask more than half of those 4 million and the answer is clear - the unforgettable ancient temples of Angkor. Long on our own bucket list, we boarded a Bangkok bus headed for Siem Reap to witness the renowned majesty of Angkor for ourselves.

Within an hour of setting out, the bus journey had already become an adventure for some. One young American tourist had disembarked after failing to understand that a passport would be needed to cross the border into Cambodia. Meanwhile, a Thai grandmother had paid a fee to the conductor

to lock her in the toilet, since she, too, knowingly lacked the necessary paperwork for a border crossing. It was all quite exciting. We were no longer just travelers, but accomplice smugglers.

Some six hours later the endless rice paddies gave way to the sprawling mass of Siem Reap. The city whose name translates as "Defeat of Siam," owes its moniker to a 16th century battle in which the Khmer people staged a decisive victory against their invading Siamese neighbors. With all forms of conflict long since over in the region, Siem Reap has become an incredibly prosperous outpost. With a wide range of hotels, luxury resorts, budget guesthouses, bars and restaurants, it is possible for tourists on any budget to enjoy the gateway to Angkor.

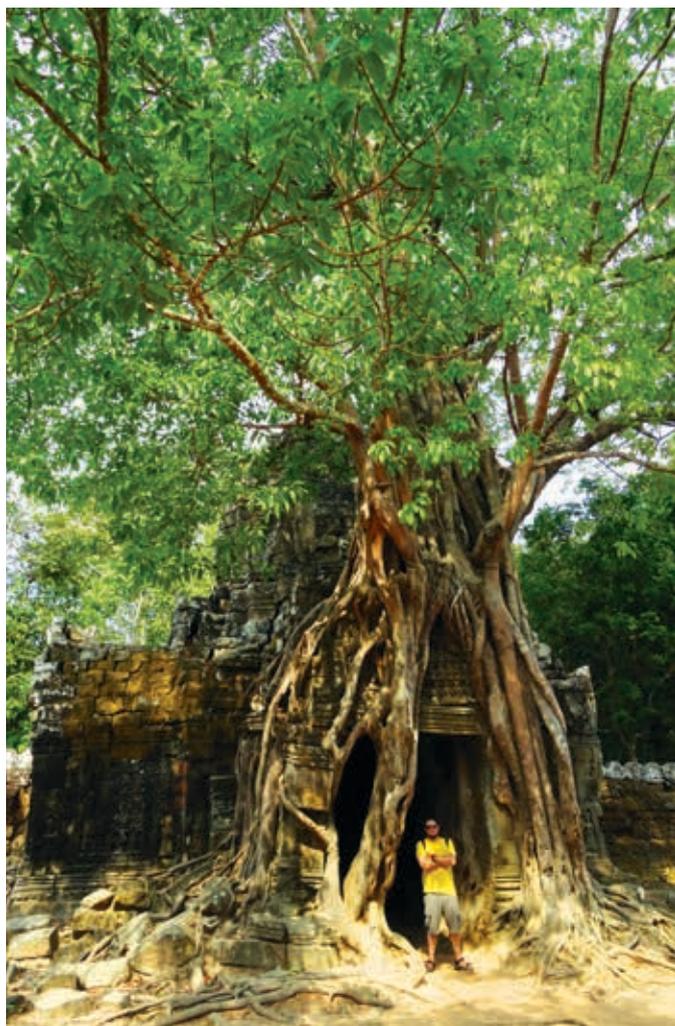
Most sources say the best introduction to the region is to begin your day witnessing the sunrise over the country's most famous

temple: Angkor Wat. At nearly 1,000 years old, Angkor Wat is one of the finest examples of classical Khmer architecture still in existence. Despite the ever-increasing tourist numbers making the sunrise experience a little less personal these days, it was definitely a sight to behold. Then, once the sun has risen, it is time to explore. With almost 1,000 sqm of bas-reliefs depicting both Hindu and Buddhist stories, it took us quite some time to take it all in - monkeys, elephants, griffins, unicorns, celestial Apsara dancers, dragon-drawn chariots and fierce armed warriors so expertly carved into stone.

A hurried *tuk tuk* ride through the jungle past wild-eyed monkeys and tourists on elephantback whisked us to the second not-to-be-missed Angkorian temple, the Bayon. Staring up at the multitude of stone faces protruding from all sides, we could not help but smile, mirroring their peacefully content expressions. As the temperature soared and the cicada chorus approached a deafening roar, we ascended a few more temples in the Angkor Thom complex before calling it a day. After all, Siem Reap's infamous Pub Street was calling our names.

Seeing Past the Tourists

Whether you desire a taste of home, traditional Khmer cuisine, pizzas topped with illicit substances or 50 cent beers to wash down barbecued tarantulas, the area around



Pub Street has something for everyone. While many Khmer dishes here seem to have been altered for foreign taste buds, you can still find a fairly faithful *amok* (curried fish) in many restaurants. We couldn't resist the barbecued frogs and snakes, both delicious. Once the main course is taken care of, simply pull up a stool at one of the plethora of pubs and bars along the strip and enjoy the party. Many bars have live music and things tend to get quite rowdy as the night wears on. Alternatively, if the atmosphere of Pub Street gets too much, the Night Market is a short stroll away where you can shop for souvenirs and trinkets, or even kick your feet up for a relaxing foot massage.

Deciding we hadn't seen enough of Angkor's seemingly endless ruins, we set out the following morning to see Ta Prohm (of *Tomb Raider* fame) along with some temples at less visited sites. Expecting to be blown away by Ta Prohm's naturally reclaimed state, unfortunately we were not. We'd seen so many images of the monstrous silk cotton trees warping and consuming the ruins creating an incredible 'lost world' atmosphere we were ecstatic to be able to finally see them with our own eyes. However, the reality is that we could barely see past the throngs of tourists crowding the new walkways and barriers to really feel anything. Our disappointment quickly faded, though, as we continued to the temple of Ta Som which offered the same experience without crowds

or modern barricades. Things only got better when we reached Preah Khan, a huge site which has seen much less restoration work and draws a lot fewer people. If you've ever wanted to feel like Indiana Jones, this is your temple. It felt as though we were discovering a place no others had ever seen as we climbed through crumbling walkways and across piles of rubble.

On our final day in Siem Reap we decided we'd seen enough temples to be braving 38 degree Celsius heat. Despite staying in a budget guesthouse and thus forgoing the luxury of a swimming pool, there are many hotels in Siem Reap which will allow you to use theirs for a small fee. As we floated around in the cool water trying to decide which temple ruin we liked the most, conversation quickly turned to the matter of deciding in which bar that night's Pub Street adventure would begin. The temples of Angkor proved to be some of the most amazingly impressive man-made structures in all of Southeast Asia, but the thriving city of Siem Reap made our visit even more worthwhile.

BIO: *Andrew Leckie is one half of www.quitjobtravelworld.com - the blog of a Melbourne and a Brisbane who met when they became Londoners. After six years of living in the UK, and less than 12 months until they turn 30, they decided to quit their jobs and travel the world.* ■

CLOCKWISE: Pub Street; Temple of Ta Som, Khmer barbecued frogs

IF YOU GO

Vietnam Airlines flies daily from Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi direct to Siem Reap. You can also take coaches from Ho Chi Minh City, which terminate at Siem Reap.

ANGKOR TEMPLE PASS

Passes are sold in one day (USD20), three day (USD40) and seven day (USD60) blocks that must be used on consecutive days. We opted for the three-day option but found two days were enough for us. Visiting hours are 5am to 6pm.

GUESTHOUSE

We stayed at the Happy Angkor Guesthouse (www.happyangkorguesthouse.com). This family-run guesthouse is perfect for those on a budget. Clean, air conditioned rooms and incredibly friendly staff who speak Khmer, Vietnamese, French and English. We arranged all tours through the guesthouse, and they can direct you to a swimming pool less than a minute's walk away.



The Pearl of the Andaman

What to do and where to do it when visiting Phuket

TEXT BY **SCOTT JAMES ROXAS** IMAGES PROVIDED BY **LIMESTONE ADVENTURES**

THERE'S NEVER QUITE enough time to do everything as something exciting is always happening on the island. And with a land area of 540 square kilometers, Phuket is Thailand's largest island, making it an exotic and expansive playground. So with this in mind, it is recommended to arrange transportation services in advance. The attractions are located in different portions of the island and taxis are not always readily available, so having a ride whenever and wherever your curiosity takes you is a luxury not to take for granted.

While Phuket itself is a beautiful island, the smaller gems that surround it are also worth visiting. There's a reason some of them made it on the silver screen as locations of unforgettable movies. These magnificent havens, strewn across the sea, are striking marvels that represent everything that's wonderful about beach holidays. From majestic limestone formations to priceless interactions with locals, not only does venturing further afield showcase more alluring visual splendor, but also exposes touching stories that otherwise would never have been discovered.

Koh Phi Phi, which gained tremendous popularity after being featured in *The Beach*, has become iconic. The place tends to get a little too crowded at times but it's a splendid area nonetheless. Phang Nga Bay, with its towering limestone cliffs and caves, is another popular option. It was named James Bond Island after it appeared in *The Man with the Golden Gun* and up to now, continues to mesmerize visitors with its unique form. Make sure to drop by Ko Panyi, an entire community on stilts, and observe the unique lives of the locals.

For the vacationer who likes to take it slow, Mai Khao Beach is the perfect base. This area is removed from the crowd so the stretch of its golden shores is often deserted. The waves can get a little wild so swimming is not always a good idea. Nonetheless, it has many wonderful spots to commune with the Andaman Sea. Pine trees fringe the coastline of Mai Khao Beach, making for some dramatic scenery. The sand is fine and perfect for lying down while taking in the rays to achieve that coveted golden complexion.

One of the most scenic spots in Phuket is Layan, where the beach is hardly populated

With a land area of 540 square kilometers, Phuket is Thailand's largest island, making it an exotic and expansive playground.

and the waves are gentler, beckoning everyone for a dip. The presence of Koh Kala, a small island on the northern portion, creates a sort of lagoon with calmer waters, so swimming and other water activities are perfect for this area. Rent a kayak from one of the few resorts here and make your way around Koh Kala to take in the beautiful vistas. The most exquisite haven in the area is Anantara Phuket Layan, a breathtaking resort that opened only this year, boasting



luxurious villas that allow guests to sleep a few steps from the shoreline.

Koh Hong and Koh Khai are nearby destinations that are just as alluring but not as frequented by tourists. Rent a traditional long-tail boat or select from a fleet of boats from Limestone Adventures and explore the islands in comfort and style.

Shop and Party

Whether it's for traditional souvenirs or trendy fashion finds, Phuket Town has a variety of retail hubs that offer keepsakes. The biggest shopping center in this part of town is Central Festival, which hosts both international and homegrown brands. This is where everyone converges to momentarily break away from the shores and have a taste of the burgeoning local mall culture. If you're looking for bargains, Supercheap, which is essentially a huge warehouse with a wide assortment of merchandise, fits the bill. Jim Thompson, renowned purveyor of Thai silk, has a great selection of products to remember any Phuket trip by. It has several stores on the island, including one in Central Festival, but the Courtyard factory outlet in the Muang District offers the best deals on hand-woven creations.

The center of tourist activity, Patong is a chaotic melting pot that brings locals and tourists together. During the day, the beach is lined with beach chairs and umbrellas with countless tourists frolicking under the heat of the sun. It's a great place for socializing and entertainment, and that's exactly what people

come here for. The activities continue well into the night, giving Patong a reputation of having the wildest nightlife the island has to offer. Bangla Road is the site of Phuket's hottest parties, from the wholesome to the type no one would want their mom to know about.

Ladyboys and Muay Thai

Thailand is known for its fabulous ladyboys and these beautiful performers put up some of the most unforgettable spectacles. Aphrodite is the go-to spot on the island to catch some of the most elaborate cabaret productions. Besides the glamorous appeal of the shows' stars, it's the world-class comedy, song and dance numbers that entertain tourists to no end. Different languages, including English, Thai, Chinese and Japanese, are used in the performances to cater to an international audience.

One unique way of experiencing Thailand's local culture is to train for it - or simply watch from the stands. The country's national sport, Muay Thai, is alive and kicking in Phuket based on the ubiquitous training camps on the island. The Rawai and Patong areas have the most to offer with a range of training classes. Whether you're looking to train for an hour, a day, a week, a month, or simply intend to watch one of the matches, delving into Thai boxing promises to be a highlight. The subtle intricacies of the sport, the rituals involved, and the values of dedication and hard work make the experience a truly worthwhile foray into this

aspect of Thai culture.

Eat & Big Buddha

No Phuket trip is complete without spending a few poignant moments amidst some of its meaningful monuments. One of the most iconic and spectacular is the Big Buddha that hovers above Chalong. This 45-meter structure, made of white Burmese marble, can be seen from several points in Phuket because of its size, but nothing compares to admiring it up close. Right next to the Big Buddha is a smaller version made of brass. Besides the massive Buddha itself, the sweeping views from this site make the hike worth the time and effort. This is a spot that will get anyone snapping away after a few minutes of reflection.

Thai is a cuisine celebrated in many parts of the world and for good reason - the spicy, sweet and sour flavors hit just the right spot. The island has an array of food choices, ranging from hole-in-the-wall eateries to upscale restaurants. The Phuket Weekend Market is the best way to dive into the local palate, with its overwhelming assortment of food. The favorites in the local restaurant scene, including Joe's Downstairs, Baba, Mom Tri's Kitchen and Breeze at Cape Yamu, are definitely worth a visit but know better than to overlook the unassuming food stalls along the streets, often manned by friendly local families.

This tropical gem reserves a kilometer list of experiences fit for travelers of all persuasions. ■





Call of the Wild

Finding blissful seclusion in Nha Trang

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES PROVIDED BY WILD BEACH RESORT

IN THE WIRED, fast-paced world we live in, sometimes it feels like a luxury to simply disconnect and get away from it all. That's my goal as I find myself heading north on Highway 1, the friendly vibes of Nha Trang fading behind me. Within minutes, the towering hotels of the strip are replaced by lush rice fields and banana plantations. Herds of buffalo out for a morning walk constitute a traffic jam. As we get closer to our destination and turn off the main road, fish and shrimp ponds and the occasional lotus field line both sides of the road.

The area north of Nha Trang, with its many sparsely populated bays, have long been the home to luxe properties offering the lure of seclusion and tranquility. **Wild Beach Resort & Spa** shares the same real estate facing Van Phong Bay, an hour north of Nha Trang, but without the accompanying price tag. Set just shy of the sleepy fishing village of Ninh Van where the road literally ends at the sea, the resort enjoys some of the trappings of civilization like its own tennis court, spa and sauna, games room with foosball and billiards, restaurant and Jacuzzi, but eschews others, namely a glitzy lobby, raucous nightclub or even swanky rooms. Instead, what awaits is a one kilometer-long stretch of pristine beach, dotted with rustic, low-lying brick and terra cotta bungalows set amidst dense green jungle. Stone pathways edged with giant boulders and

piles of improbably balanced rocks wind their way throughout the property, adding to its "back to nature" concept. Beach lovers will enjoy the huge window featured in the Sea View rooms and Ocean Suites looking out to the water so tantalizingly close that you half expect the surf to come rolling into the room – a more stunning vista to wake up to is difficult to imagine.

While any guest would be perfectly happy to laze around the pool or beach, adventure seekers need only hop in the resort's war-era Jeep for the short trip down the road to the resort's own beach club that is set up for camping, fishing, kayaking and diving. Dung, the resident diving instructor, takes us through our paces, helping us get suited up, showing us hand signals and having us practice our underwater breathing. Soon, we're ready for our discovery dive, exploring the colorful reef just meters from shore. Shallow water makes it ideal for kids and beginners, whereas more experienced divers can arrange a boat out to Red Island just off the coast. Our dive over, we set off to explore the area, the coast road overlooking a series of photogenic bays leading us to the tiny village of Ninh Van whose claim to fame is the "No Number Pier," a picturesque memorial to a weapons delivery ship that sank off its coast in 1968 (but heroically, not before delivering its payload). Other than that, "sleepy" is an overstatement for this

charming town featuring a quilted landscape of onion patches and a single coffee shop that sits on its own deserted little cove.

We arrive back at the resort just in time for dinner. With few dining choices in close proximity other than a handful of cafés a bicycle ride away in the neighboring town of Ninh Phuoc, most guests go for the resort's value-priced meal packages (Asian or Western options). Fortunately, the kitchen delivers a hearty, home-cooked meal of spring rolls, fried fish file, caramelized shrimp, garlic-fried morning glory and a flavorsome spinach soup. An extensive a la carte menu is also available. With the sun setting and the sound of the waves just beyond the trees, we find ourselves happily settling into a rhythm, not dictated by electronic beeps and chirps, but by Mother Nature herself, appointing the Sun, the Moon and the tides as timekeepers on this blissful stretch of wild beach.

Wild Beach Resort & Spa offers four room categories: Sea Rock (Mountain View), Sea View, Ocean Suite and Beach Pool Bungalow, all featuring exposed brick walls, bamboo lamps and traditional furnishings. Doubles start at USD60. For more, including all-inclusive packages that cover room, transportation, food and diving, see www.wildbeachresort.com ■

The Year in Travel

Lessons learned from travel stories in 2014

TRAVEL NEVER GETS tiring. Or does it? Putting yourself literally “out there,” out of your comfort zone, and into the planes, trains, tuktuks and cyclos of the world is bound to lead to trouble. Here are some of my favorite travel stories from 2014 along with the lessons to be learned.



The Double-Edged Tweet

I love social media when it comes to travel. Would I rather be on hold for 45 minutes on a long-distance call to a call center somewhere or bypass it with a quick tweet that’s promptly responded to? Many travel brands have their own social media team to look after online complaints, dedicated to making sure customers are (visibly) happy, thereby avoiding public backlash. It’s worked for me on a few occasions. While it’ll only be a matter of time before social media complaints lose steam and companies get overwhelmed, much like the present phone lines, for now at least, it’s still new enough to be effective.

But be judicious about how you use it, as a quick look at someone’s profile can reveal if they’re a serial complainer. Or ask Duff Watson, a Southwest Airlines (US) passenger who tweeted about a terse confrontation with a gate agent (including her first name and last initial and gate number). He and his children were promptly kicked off the flight until he deleted the tweet. Similarly, last month a popular YouTube personality got upset about a fee for changing his JetBlue (US) ticket and threatened to sic his 154,000 Twitter followers on the airline. Unfortunately, he did it in the middle of his trip, and when he went

to board his JetBlue flight home, he found his business was no longer welcome.

Social media has also become a place to passive-aggressively vent. Ticked off at your seatmate who’s propped their naked feet up as if the plane was their personal living room? Or maybe that couple the next row over who doesn’t notice you glaring at them watching a movie on their laptop with no headphones? Snap a photo and post it to Passengershaming.com, a hilarious, non-confrontational site meant to expose rude travel behavior.

Companies are using the social media scene to enhance their service as well. New technology created by a company called Luminoso is a learning algorithm that understands words contextually, rather than relying solely on their dictionary definitions, and sorts them by their meaning. This means companies can sort through large amounts of tweets (“hate” + “delays” or “love” + “wifi”) to see what kind of overall feedback they’re getting. However, putting things into the cybersphere means it’s there for all to see. So PR fails get attention, too. You never know when a tweet or a video is going to go viral. Malaysia Airlines got called out twice last year for their tweets, once for asking people to name their “bucket list” destinations (ie. places to go before you die) and then again by asking “Want to go somewhere, but don’t know where?” as Flight 370 remains missing and Flight 17 went down over the Ukraine.

So, whether you’re a consumer or a business, the lesson is to embrace social media when it comes to travel, but with discretion.

Words on a Plane

Frequent flyers know never to say words like “bomb,” “terrorist” or “crash” on a plane, even in jest. In 2014, the word “ebola” was added to the list. In October, a passenger from Philadelphia (US) sneezed and then said, “I have ebola, you are all screwed.” In the end, the man said he was joking, but that didn’t stop a hazmat-clad crew from entering the plane and removing the passenger, called



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

an “idiot” by a flight attendant while explaining what was happening to the bewildered passengers. That same month, researchers at the Federal Aviation Administration Center of Excellence at Purdue University (US), created a simulation of a how a sneeze gets spread around a plane (view the video called “How Sneeze Particles Travel Inside An Airplane” on YouTube). The long and short of it is that the ventilated air (including overhead air conditioning nozzles and the currents created by flight attendants’ carts) spreads the particles throughout the cabin, but with the greatest initial concentration in the air above those seated on either side of the sneezing passenger. So until better technology comes into place (eg. pathogen tracking through sensors and contamination mitigation), for the sake of everyone else, please cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze!

The Unfriendly Skies

Put a couple hundred people in an enclosed metal tube while systematically reducing their personal space by making seats narrower and closer together, eliminating amenities they used to get and charging them more for things like checked luggage (or even carry on, nowadays) and it understandably makes for a cauldron of stress and plain grumpiness. Passengers are starting to take back what they think is theirs, most notably with an incident in August where a passenger used a Knee Defender to make it so the person in front of him couldn’t recline. The woman notified the flight attendant, but the man refused to budge. She ended up throwing a glass of water in his face and both got ejected after the plane had to divert.

Most passengers will fall passionately into one of two categories: people who believe reclining is a right, since it’s part of the seat that you purchased, and a second group that feels equally as strongly that reclining basically constitutes passenger-on-passenger crime. While I usually try not to recline on flights of less than two hours, I will on longer flights, with a quick peek behind me to make sure the person isn’t unusually tall or using their tray table for something. I’ve been on the receiving end of a sudden recline almost damaging an open laptop,



too. While the Knee Defender comes with a “courtesy card” that you can print out and give the person in front of you, I think it’s a recipe for disaster. Most major US airlines, along with Qantas, Virgin and JetStar have banned its use (although there is a way to rig a water bottle to do the same thing), while others are locking all their seats so that they can’t recline or are installing seats that recline in their own space. Until the industry can get its act together and treat all passengers humanely, it’s up to us as individuals to be considerate to each other. Travel is stressful enough as it is without adding new terms like “recline rage” to the mix.

Bad Reviews Not Welcome!

Everyone knows to take user-generated reviews on sites like TripAdvisor or Yelp with a grain of salt. While I do check before booking a hotel, I know that I have to weed through the serial complainers, the friends of the owner and the inexperienced travelers. TripAdvisor has long prohibited giving incentives for good reviews (drawings or raffles, discounts or special treatment) but they weren’t prepared for a Blackpool (UK) hotel which had a policy of fining disgruntled guests £100 for negative reviews. In November, a retired couple called the Broadway Hotel a ‘filthy, dirty rotten stinking hovel’ only to find

the fine levied to their credit card two days later. After public uproar, the budget hotel capitulated, refunding the money and scrapping their policy. But it does go to show how susceptible user-generated reviews are to being manipulated. The takeaway is to be reasonable about what you expect, taking into consideration price, occupancy levels and willingness of management to solve any legitimate complaints. If you do have a bad stay, it’s better to try to work out a resolution of some type when you’re on-site rather than waiting to get home to vent.

Happy travels in 2015 everyone! ■





Keeping Up Appearances

Rest and relaxation for the skin and body

TEXT BY **LIDIA GALLARDO**

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

SPENDING A DAY at a spa is one of the best activities this city has to offer but with thousands of choices, finding a nice and quiet place that has the latest beauty treatments coupled with professional customer service is not easy. And for these reasons, my visit to Orient Skincare and Laser Center was an unforgettable experience. Upon entering, the professional staff consulted with me on a regime that was specific to my skin type.

Since 2006 Orient has opened four facilities in Ho Chi Minh City; the newest one has four floors, centrally located in District 1. The center cooperates with doctors in Thailand to bring the latest in advanced laser techniques and other non surgery beauty treatments to Vietnam. The dermatologists at the center are trained to solve skin problem that are related either

to stress or diseases. All the products used are certified organic and everything is imported from Australia.

This company knows what is trending and that's why they've adopted the revolutionary methods like lasering for permanent hair removal, radio frequency for rejuvenation, VelaShape to clear cellulite, CO2 methods for perfect skin, as well as Botox and liposuction.

But it's not all about beauty treatments here. Orient has spa services to relax the body - full body massage, foot massage or a combined package. I chose to have a full body massage that included a foot massage. The masseuse started off working on my neck and shoulders. My goodness it hurt, but in a good way. Then she worked on my back. I was surprised how strong she was, being able to work

out my kinks and knots. It was so relaxing that I even fell asleep. The session ended with a foot message that helped to relieve the pain of walking on concrete all day. I really enjoyed the natural oil essences and organic body cream they used for my massage. I explained to the doctor that I had a permanent pain in my back so they focused on that and I felt much better after it. I followed the massage with a facial cleansing treatment that the doctor recommended, and I can say that I felt the effects for several days later. They used a hydratant organic cream to enrich the moisture of my dry skin along with natural oils, absorbed through the pores, giving my skin a completely healthier appearance.

In addition to the spa service, I also met with a dermatologist and asked for advice

on my skin. The dermatologist pointed out my skin problem. I knew my skin was a bit dry and dull, dehydrated due to frequent work in air conditioning and exposure to the sun. After the consultation I signed up for the skin pack treatment. I was surprised by the number of skin treatment services available, using famous brands such as Syneron, Thermage, Ulthera and Fotona, and at a lower cost than in the West.

Popular services for foreigners here include wrinkle removal, skin tightening, acne treatment, oil control, pigmentation augmenting treatment, anti-cellulite and slimming treatment, and permanent hair removal. Orient says that most of their foreign clients choose the non-invasive Thermage or Ultherapy procedure that tightens skin, renews facial contours and promotes healthier collagen in only one treatment; Botox or Filler; permanent hair removal and massage. Prices at Orient are lower than those overseas but with the same high standard and quality.

With additional reporting by Tuyet Nguyen

Orient Skincare and Laser Center:

945 Cach Mang Thang 8, Tan Binh;

3970 3674

3 Phung Khac Khoan, D1; 3824 4650

64D Truong Dinh, D3; 3932 5781

244A Cong Quynh, D1;

3926 0561/62/63/64

www.orientskin.com ■



BOTOX COSMETIC SERVICE

You may have read about Botox Cosmetic in advertisements, blogs and celebrity gossip magazines, or heard about it from your friends. As we age, skin loses its elasticity, and dynamic wrinkles begin to form. Botox is an effective skin treatment for subtly tackling the appearance of deep lines and wrinkles. It also prevents new lines forming by relaxing the facial muscles and reducing excessive facial movements. Lines and wrinkles will be smoothed out and you'll be left with a youthful, glowing appearance. Botox is used cosmetically as a muscle relaxing injection for the treatment of wrinkles.

Botox is used for three main purposes: muscle spasm control, severe underarm sweating and cosmetic improvement (temporary smoothing of frown lines, which are the lines between your eyebrows that can make you look tired, unhappy or angry). However, it is often used off-label for horizontal forehead lines, crow's feet, marionette lines at the corners of the mouth and smoker's lines around the lips. Orient Skincare and Laser Center can consult and help you decide what's best for you.

Hotel Equatorial Ho Chi Minh City

The best choice for business and leisure travelers

TEXT AND IMAGES PROVIDED BY HOTEL EQUATORIAL HO CHI MINH CITY



HOTEL EQUATORIAL HO CHI MINH CITY (HCMC) (www.equatorial.com; 242 Tran Binh Trong, D5) is an international five-star hotel located where the borders of the city's four main districts intersect, hence in the heart and true center of HCMC. Tan Son Nhat International Airport is a 35 minute drive to the hotel whilst the CBD located in District 1 is eight minutes away.

The hotel features 333 beautifully designed guest rooms and suites including 72 renovated guest rooms located on the exclusive **Club Floor**. The **Club Room** is a modern haven yet functional with a hip/playful feel and caters to the savvy business and leisure traveler featuring amenities at par with other 5-star hotels in the Asia Pacific region. Amenities range from iPod docking stations, 32" LCD televisions, Zen showers, pillow menu and wide range of guest services.

State-of-the-art **Meeting and Conference** facilities for up to 1,250 people, and a world-class **Recreational Center** with a swim-up bar, gym, spa and massage services are also available.

Hotel facilities include seven Food & Beverage restaurants and bars with signature restaurants **Orientica Seafood** restaurant & bar and **Chit Chat** restaurant. **Orientica** is a fine dining and award-winning restaurant that features the finest of Asian and World cuisine. It brought the concept of "fire, ice and water" to Vietnam. This innovation which revolves around the idea of letting guests choose their preferred cooking method of selected dishes, involving one of the elements of fire, ice or water (and preparing the dishes live and right in front of them), has set the benchmark for fine dining in Vietnam. Chit Chat restaurant is a beautiful and modern culinary oasis with a large selection of local and international buffet and a la carte varieties and live cooking action stations.

The etc... is a combination of a business center and a coffee lounge where you can enjoy a full range of beverages including coffee from Saeco and Italian premium brand, refreshing smoothies and frappes.

Flo lounge brings with it a premium lounge experience, combining a vibrant contemporary interior design, premier drink service and live music performance into a venue. **Flo** is an ideal venue for local and international guests who are seeking a premium place to relax in a tranquil and elegant atmosphere, listening to music for a brief escape from the daily hustle and bustle. In addition, **Flo** has a display area in the center and facilities to be a unique venue for launching events or small scale meetings in style. Hotel Equatorial HCMC with its world class facilities and services is the ideal choice for business and leisure travelers while visiting Vietnam's most vibrant and exciting city. ■



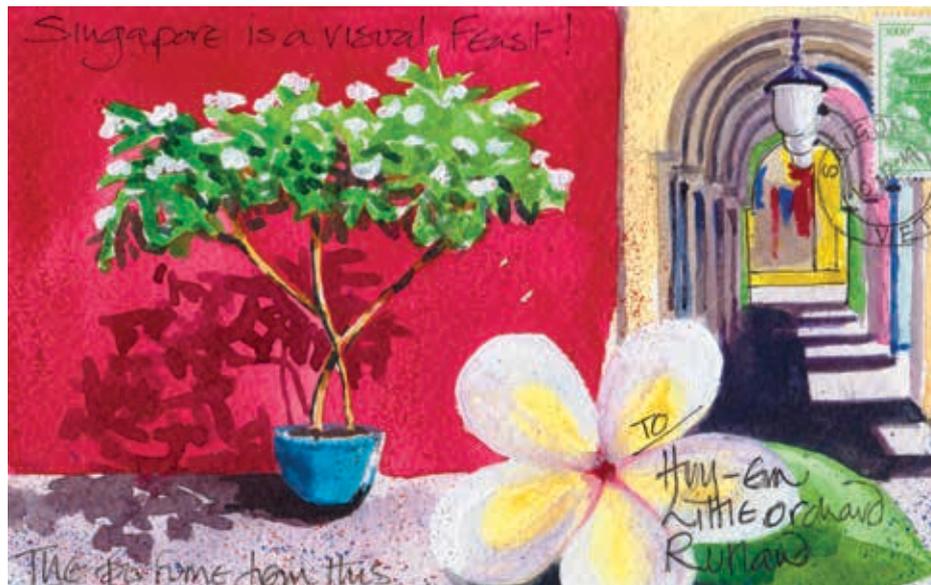
FROM TOP: Exterior of Hotel Equatorial; Orientica Seafood Restaurant & Bar; Chit Chat Restaurant

Human Touch

An artist gets her kicks in Singapore



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



Visiting Singapore after two years in Vietnam is such a treat for an artist like me. It was the annual Affordable Art Fair in the exhibition halls near the Singapore wheel. I was dazzled by the array of contemporary art on offer from galleries who had travelled to be there from all over Asia, the US and the UK.

I was inspired by the beautiful brush work of contemporary Chinese ink creations. There is something alluring about the proportions and compositions of these works. I am always left wonderstruck by the poise it takes to load the brush with ink, put that brush to paper and make one single flowing mark to create an image that touches something deep within us. We talk about pictures speaking a thousand words but Chinese calligraphy can speak a thousand prayers and poems when the artist is as one with his materials.

My next treat was to spend 45 minutes amid the beautiful art supplies at The Straits Art Company. The smell of turpentine, mahogany and graphite is intoxicating to an artist. There are stacks of cotton paper, and a shelf filled with every watercolor pad and block made by the lovely French paper maker, Arches.

I buy three tubes of frighteningly

expensive acrylic paints in the colors I saw in Chinatown the day before. Like a child, I can hardly wait to get them back to Saigon and smear them across a virgin canvas using the huge new brush I bought as well.

As I leave the art store, a rain shower brings out the hues of the colorful shophouses and I wish I had more time to simply sit and stare. Next I jump in a taxi to the Ritz Carlton to admire their art collection. They have two installations of Chihuly glass, a massive suspended sculpture by Frank Stella, commissioned artworks by David Hockney, Rainer Gross and even pieces by Andy Warhol and Henry Moore. It is a hidden diamond in Southeast Asia.

My favorite things in Singapore are the old-style covered pavements hung with glass lamps, fans and bird cages. I seemed to have been walking for ages when I was brought to a halt by the perfume of frangipani. And there it was; a perfect potted specimen of fresh green with white blooms beside a wall of deep Chinese lacquer red - too beautiful to describe - its shadow casting a hard outline on the baking sidewalk.

I love the old pagoda of Pagoda Street. It has all the opulence, exuberance and

unabashed confidence of its Indian homeland and I enjoy the peace of the mosque on Temple Street with its quiet cloisters, subdued colors and spotless floors. Both cultures have contributed to the style and color of the melting pot that defines the old Singapore we see preserved today. It is eclectic, it is full of life and personality and it is so, so welcoming.

By contrast, the concrete and glass of the new, high rise hotel district with its wall-to-wall air conditioning, indoor streets and empty pavements is so inhuman - so self-conscious. Where is the human touch, the individual style, the clutter and laughter? It's a cold contrast to the old houses.

My thoughts go to Saigon and the huge changes taking place in the heart of that beautiful old city. But the charm of the old shophouses could so easily disappear and the city will lose its character entirely if the developers have their way. The city planners could learn a lot from the way Singapore has conserved the old while morphing into a 21st century city. It would not be considered one of the best cities in the world if it had trashed its heritage. Let's hope Saigon can follow in its footsteps. ■



happy
lunar
new year
YEAR OF THE GOAT

>> The List Travel



An Lam Villas I 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 I Dalat

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

www.anamandara-resort.com



Princess d'Annam I Phan Thiet

The Princess is an exquisite resort with an almost celestial atmosphere that is hard to find anywhere else in Vietnam. The look of the resort is classical, bright and impeccably clean and private. The two Empress Suites are the very pinnacle of luxury accommodation in Vietnam – they are mini millionaire's mansions in themselves, fully-equipped, bright and spacious, and possessing of the same ethereal design quality that pervades this whole resort. Set in the remote Ke Ga Bay – wordlessly beautiful.

www.princessannam.com



Fusion Maia I Danang

A unique and exciting fusion of resort and spa where spa treatments are inclusive and a part of daily living in this beach resort. It's the first all pool villa style resort in the destination and offers 87 pool suites, spa villas and beach villas each with modern, open-plan living and private courtyard with swimming pool. 'Freedom' options such as spa treatments and breakfast available at multiple locations are a few of the surprising offers in store.

maidanang.fusion-resorts.com



HIS Travel

With 178 branches in 122 countries, HIS Travel is with you around the world. A strong global network means HIS has the latest travel info enabling smooth arrangement of air and land travel, accommodation, local tours and attractions. Whether you are seeking safe, reliable travel within Vietnam, personal or business travel within Asia or internationally HIS's experienced, English-speaking staff can custom build an itinerary to suit your needs and budget. Specializes in Japan Rail Pass.

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www.histravel.com.vn / www.facebook.com/histravel



Jasmine Court

Located on a peaceful and beautiful side street off Nguyen Van Troi Boulevard, only 5 minutes from the Tan Son Nhat International Airport and 15 minutes to the city centre, this boutique property with only 12 apartments is comprised of one and two-bedroom suites of various sizes. All apartments are designed in a fresh contemporary style and finished in a pleasing neutral colour scheme. With personalized service, our warm and attentive staff will make your stay with us a pleasant and enjoyable experience.

307/29 Nguyen Van Troi, Tan Binh
3844 6639 - 092 669 9033
www.jasminecourt.com.vn



InterContinental Nha Trang

InterContinental Nha Trang is a luxurious modern beachfront hotel where an enriching urban retreat harmonized beautifully with its surroundings. Right in the heart of Nha Trang, a 40-minute scenic drive from Cam Ranh International Airport, experience the perfect blend of local charm and nature.

32 - 34 Tran Phu, Nha Trang
(058) 388 7777
www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com



La Veranda I Phu Quoc

The most distinguished of Phu Quoc Island's hotels and guesthouses, La Veranda sports paddle fans, butter-yellow exteriors, whitewashed louvers, and tropical gardens recalling a colonial plantation. Freestanding deluxe villas are notable for their sea-facing porches, spacious bathrooms, and cathedral-like ceilings. This is the resort of choice for guests taking advantage of this unspoiled remote tropical island destination.

www.laverandaresorts.com



Novela Muine Resort & Spa

A 150-meter beach resort that offers luxurious accommodations, countless modern facilities and amenities with attentive services. A private and unique space in the heart of resort, Novela restaurant serves a daily breakfast, lunch, dinner and any other banquet with Asian and European cuisine. With two floors, guests can enjoy dining and view the beautiful beach and sand hill.

96A Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Ham Tien Mui Ne, Phan Thiet
www.novelaresort.vn
(62) 374 3456



>> The List

Health & Beauty

DENTAL



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08 3925 7527
nhahoadrhung@gmail.com
www.drhung01.com



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Elite Dental Group

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57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3

European Dental Clinic

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and supreme quality, this dentistry is truly dedicated to their patients.

17-17A Le Van Mien, D2
www.europeandentalclinic-asia.com

German International Dentistry

German International Dentistry offers excellent consultation services from experienced, international dentists so that you can make informed decisions about your dental care.

1489 Nguyen Van Linh, D7

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96 Tran Nao, D2
6674 4255
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Smile Dental Center

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services. Japanese equipment and techniques.

173 Ton Dat Tien, D7

Starlight Dental Clinic

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2 Bis Cong Truong Quoc Te, D3

Westcoast International Dental Clinic

Large, international team of dentists and support staff from Canada, Australia, Japan, France, Italy, Thailand, and Vietnam. The clinic regularly hosts visiting dentists from many other countries.

27 Nguyen Trung Truc, D1
3825 748

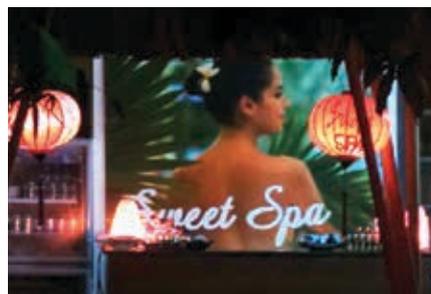
SPA



Maison Mikiu Boutique Salon

District 7's Premium Boutique Salon. Two floors providing full beauty services nestled in a quiet residential area in Phu My Hung's Garden Plaza 2 Complex. Equipped with a café, nail bar, 2 VIP rooms, and a spacious massage room - this boutique salon is like no other in Ho Chi Minh City.

Garden Plaza 2 Complex
8 Tôn Dật Tiên, Quận 7
5412 4773



Sweet Spa

The spa is intimate and beautifully decorated. The staff consists of both highly-skilled men and women. Sweetspa serving you from hand to toe to give real spiritual and physical relaxation.

As well as sport injury therapies. After hours of meetings or full days of working, treat yourself to a relaxing massage or soothing reflexotherapy.

204B / 12 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
www.sweetspa.vn



Moc Hung Spa

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3911 7118



Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa & Laser Center

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54 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2
6264 3388 / Hotline: 090 969 2901
www.villaaesthetica.com
info@villaaesthetica.com



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Orient Skincare & Laser Center

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

244A Cong Quynh, D1
3 926 0561-62-63-64

Kids & Education



Don't Shy Away

Parenting a sensitive child

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

I REMEMBER BEING a sensitive boy. I was mild, quiet, somewhat aloof and not quite into the rough games other boys my age seemed to enjoy. Unlike others, I was never exactly bullied as such – but let's just say I wasn't quite the alpha male in my school days. While I certainly don't see anything negative about that (if I'd had the choice, I'd have decided to be exactly as I am), growing up from that starting point does present different challenges to quiet boys as they become men. In a sense, the onus is on them to discover for themselves how their role as an adult will differ from the norms. Tough kids have it easier, which is part of the reason why (in most countries) bullying is rarely punished severely by teachers – some researchers have demonstrated that teachers subconsciously side with the strong ones, recognizing (and deferring to) their nascent leadership qualities. Everyone wants to be popular, teachers included.

Sensitivity can be hard enough on a kid, but being the parent of a sensitive boy can be a painful experience too. We know that boys tend to be aggressive and we expect them to be tough, and while no one wants to see their son become a bully, in some ways we'd worry less if they were dominant rather than submissive in their play. If history has taught us anything, however, it's that you can't reprogram your children to match your expectations. It's difficult not to feel concerned to see your little boy playing alone in a corner while all the other kids are chasing each other in circles, and it's very difficult to know how to deal with it. Do you push your boy into the fracas, or do you watch him develop into one of those awkward, shy kids? How can you even punish him effectively without risking damage to his self-esteem – the one thing you hope he'll develop above everything else?

Probably the first thing parents of such children – girls too – need to understand is that a child's *impressionability* is not necessarily a *vulnerability*. Sensitive children are often extremely astute – they notice subtle changes in their environment, they pay attention to details that others miss and they can, especially with encouragement, take the initiative in dealing with things that bother them. Good parents need to appreciate the possibilities open to children with far subtler appreciations of the world than are available to most: it's better to allow sensitive children to explore their ability to assert control rather than to dismiss their minor irritations as being unimportant. Sensitive boys need to be taken seriously, and they need to feel that the choices they make – even those that seem silly to a parent – will be respected.

Get Over It

Punishing highly sensitive children requires a fine touch. The most difficult part is to get the sense of proportion right. Tough kids can be randomly defiant; they back down when they see punishment coming and spring back quickly, cheeky as ever and ready for another shot at you. Shy children are usually only ever defiant when your interests conflict with theirs and they're unable to see why; they may be absorbed in their play to such a degree that your interference seems unreasonable, even if they know it's well past their time for a meal, nap or wash. Such children can inadvertently become great, unintentional

manipulators – they can quickly learn to give you such valid reasons why, all things considered, it's not actually imperative they go to bed *right now* – and they may well win you over with their reasoning until you finally lose your patience. The danger is that regardless of your method of punishment, a sensitive son will take it far harder than you expect and he may suffer from a sense of shame and anxiety long after the event. Sensitive boys want their parents to be proud of them – and it's difficult for them to interpret parental criticism as being constructive. These boys don't typically grow up to say, "my father was a stern role model, but it made me a



better man,” but rather “my dad was always wild with me and it ultimately pushed me away.”

It’s important that you try to discipline your son’s behavior through a system of encouragement rather than penalty; don’t coddle him, just help him to understand that if he misbehaves, he won’t achieve his goals. Gold stars on charts can work wonders – if your son is misbehaving, explain that he won’t be getting his star today and help him understand how he can earn one tomorrow. It takes time, but you’ll get the results in the end. If you’re concerned about being overprotective, then do give him the opportunity to face the real world by joining in activities with other children, as long as you can choose an environment where you know he’ll feel safe – don’t dump him at the playground with boys with massive fists and expect him to just deal with it. Find what appeals to him and indulge him in his interests at venues where he can experience and share them with others. This will give him the confidence to interact with other people on his own terms. That’s about the

best gift you can give him – self-assurance.

It’s not easy to admit, but discovering that your little boy is shy and sensitive can be immensely disappointing to a parent. The most important step you need to take there is to recognize your disappointment, accept it, and get over it. The more you love your son for who he is, the more his compassion

and intuition will inspire you. It may help to take heed in the fact that quiet strength has been exonerated in this part of the world for centuries and it’s in this age that the advantages of such qualities are being proven in Asia. Encourage and give your full support to your boy’s gentle and yielding nature, and he may grow up to be a lion yet. ■





A - Ă - Â - B - C - D - Đ - E - Ê...

The secret code to learning Vietnamese

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD IMAGES PROVIDED BY VLS

THE YOUNG TEACHER at the head of the classroom wears an *ao dai* to bring a touch of grace to the lesson; she grins cheekily as she hands out copies of the textbook to her new students, all of us enrolled for the VLS 10-week course in Basic Vietnamese Fluency (www.vlstudies.com). We're a diverse lot, with a whole range of reasons for being here – a bored housewife looking for something to do; an elderly salesman keen on making friends with the locals; a Japanese translation professional hoping to pick up an extra language while being posted in Saigon. There's a young Spanish rogue with

wavy blond hair who swears he's not simply seeking an edge in impressing local women, although no one really believes him.

My reason for being here is guilt, or perhaps shame. It's gotten to the point where the people I meet here automatically switch to Vietnamese in conversation with me when they find out how long I've been in the country, only to chuckle in surprise when they find out that I haven't managed to pick up anything of the local lingo other than a few scattered sentences and a number of different ways to order coffee. That's always my cue to offer up my favorite excuse

of the week: "There's just no time in my busy schedule" or "Everyone I know already speaks English." Sometimes, I'll blame the language itself: "The tones are just impossible for a foreigner", "There are too many vowels" and even "The local accent is just too harsh. I'm told it would be easier in Hanoi."

The problem is that these excuses are easily disproved, with the ultimate and most obvious shoot-down to all of the above being that there are plenty of foreigners around this town in all kinds of circumstances who have utterly mastered the language. Take those excuses out of the



equation, however, and I'm left admitting that the real reason I haven't made any progress with Vietnamese is that I'm just too embarrassed. I've seen other foreigners cheerfully murdering basic sentences in broad daylight and the patronizing smiles they get from nodding locals who haven't really understood what they've just been told and I'm essentially too shy to become one of them.

Language Idol

I must confess, however, to holding a certain reverence for people who have become fluent in a second tongue by sheer force of will. I deeply admire those who've made the journey through all the hard hours of grammar practice and vocab memorization – those who've passed that linguistic singularity where it all seems to fall into place, all progress thereafter becoming effortless and enjoyable. Fluency – that gift to be able to speak without thinking or first composing what you want to say – is something I seem to have enough trouble with in my first language, let alone attempting in Vietnamese. But the evidence says otherwise – take a leap of faith, do the homework, and suddenly there you are on a pedestal with all those other language gods

among us, who reel off line after line of flawless *tieng Viet* to the oohs and aahs of all around them.

I know such a language god – a very cheerful Australian fellow who speaks beautiful Vietnamese – and it was he who convinced me to sign up at VLS. "It's not so much the class itself that does it, it's not magic," he says. "But it represents something. It's a vehicle to push you on your way. It gives you a reason to start moving forward. If you're not in a good class, you don't have any reason to prevent yourself from getting distracted or for not doing any practice on any given day."

I asked him how he'd managed to get there himself. "It's actually deceptively simple," he said. "Of all people who study a second language, only five percent ever achieve fluency. The trick is to *make a decision to be among those five percent*. The VLS classes are a way to prove to yourself that you've made that decision. See things that way, and the road ahead is much, much smoother than you'd imagine."

The thing about a decision is that once it's made, everything else follows without too much fuss. The school wasn't particularly difficult to find, the fees weren't outlandish and it was straightforward enough to select

classes that fit around my working hours – I was signed up by the end of the day for two and a half months of twice-weekly evening classes towards my first milestone. Other students were going for more intensive courses and in one room I noticed a particularly serious learner doing a one-on-one. I figured that could be me once I'd mastered the early stages.

Before long, I was sitting in class, thumbing through my new textbook. It was practical stuff, designed for international learners and based on step-by-step conversation builders to encourage students to communicate real information in Vietnamese as early as possible. Self-introductions. Countries and nationalities. Simple questions and answers. No tedious drills or abstruse grammar points. Sure, there were too many vowels and tones to deal with, and I knew I was going to sound silly when I practiced. But my decision was made.

My *ao dai*-clad teacher lifted her whiteboard marker, and my journey began.

Vietnam Language Studies (VLS) has two campuses: 4th floor, CMARD2 Building, 45 Dinh Tien Hoang, D1 and 90 Le Van Thiem, Phu My Hung, D7 ■

Level Up



Video games score education points



Adrian Watts is the Deputy Headmaster and Director of Academic Studies at the International School of Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

A DECADE AGO while introducing a 1:1 laptop program into a school, we created a set of rules that stopped students, especially boys, from using their computers for video gaming. We believed then, as many still do today, that video games waste time, teach students to be violent, socially isolated, morally corrupt, confuse fantasy and reality, while lowering academic performance and contributing to attention deficits in the classroom. Ten years later it is clear that gaming does have an important role to play in education today and in children's development of learning and thinking skills.

There are certainly students who play video games rather than do their homework. There is research that links violent video games to aggressive behavior and shows that some students spend hours on their own. But can we blame gaming for this? Haven't there always been students who are more violent, don't do their homework and prefer their own company to that of others? In fact research does not show that these characteristics have disproportionately increased with the widespread popularity of video gaming.

What is being discovered is that the majority of children do know the difference between fantasy and reality; that they leave the emotions of the game behind when it is over; that gaming does not replace their offline social life; and that being a loner is not the norm for gamers.

The key is to stop and watch children when they are playing video games. Firstly, it never ceases to amaze the speed with which children learn how to play games and deal with all the complex situations that unfold. They're learning how to learn

at every stage of the game. As each new level unfolds they learn to strategize to solve problems. Children are constantly learning about systems through their interaction with the video game. They build a history which they use to shape a virtual world. They are constantly learning to micromanage an array of elements while simultaneously balancing short- and long-term goals. They make lightning fast decisions based on previous experiences they have learned. This idea of transferring and connecting knowledge is a fundamental principle of learning in





education.

So why are so many of the skills that make these games so attractive the same ones cherished in education? The reason is simple: economics and the free market. Gaming is a \$10 billion industry and to be successful the game designers have to teach their customers how to progress in a way that encourages the learning of the necessary skills. In many ways game designers have become the leading experts in understanding how children learn. Games are structured so that each level hovers at the boundary of a student's competence, seeking at every point to be hard enough to be just doable. In cognitive science this is referred to as the "regime of competence" principle, which results in a feeling of simultaneous pleasure and frustration.

Also, good video games incorporate the principle of expertise. They tend to encourage players to achieve total mastery of one level, only to challenge and undo that mastery in the next, forcing children to adapt and evolve. Learning theorists have identified this as the best way to achieve expertise in any field.

When children play games, they don't realize they are learning because they are so focused on what they are doing. However, what they are learning should be the essential ingredients of all education systems and schools as they form the backbone of the skills that we need to access and process information. What children say about playing games is they are having fun; they enjoy collaborating and learning from others; they take risks and learn from mistakes in order to create sustainable strategies; they celebrate when they master a level and reflect and relearn when they fail; they become resilient and more persevering as they see failing as something to learn from, not to be ashamed of; that learning takes time and is sequential and that often they have to go back and fill in gaps before they can proceed and

finally, they are constantly motivated by the challenge of reaching a higher level and mastering the game.

Brain Workout

What neuroscientists and psychologists are discovering is that playing video games gives the brain a real workout.

The skills required to win involve abstract and high level thinking. They start with the need to follow instructions, remember previous actions, be able to multi-task and have a good level of hand and eye coordination, fine motor and spatial skills. They then develop into higher order skills such as planning, resource management, logistics, and creative problem solving combined with quick decision making and accuracy. Personal and social skills are developed through team work, collaboration, perseverance, concentration, goal setting, and response to challenge. Scientific skills are teased out through inductive reasoning, hypothesis testing, reasoned judgment and pattern recognition.

With all these skills being developed, it is no surprise to find psychologists believe playing video games changes the brain in the same way as reading and playing the piano. They believe the combination of concentration and rewarding surges of neurotransmitters, like dopamine, strengthen neural circuits which build the brain. Several sets of research have shown creativity, the highest order of thinking as defined by Bloom's taxonomy, is developed through playing many video games. Research shows experienced gamers make decisions up to six times faster and can pay attention to multiple factors more accurately than the average person.

It is clear there is a long list of skills developed through playing video games which are cherished in the 21st century workplace. To some extent our brains are wired for video games because they act as primal triggers that drive the motivation to play. There are more and

more educational videos being created that are used in schools and are capturing students' imaginations and encouraging metacognition. Metacognition describes an individual's ability to think about his or her own thinking. Among other things, it refers to the ability to self-evaluate a thought process and to iterate based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. For learners, strong metacognitive functions translate into study skills. Strong metacognitive functions mean students have the ability to identify problem areas and seek out the necessary and deliberate practice needed to compensate for weaknesses which is exactly what video games encourage if the player is to be successful.

Unfortunately the educational development towards game-based learning has not been as rapid as predicted by educational and technological commentators. This is because the underlying assumption of many schools and education systems remains focused on test-based assessment, with the belief that content or "subject matter" is what is important. It's true that content still matters but what is essential is it can be made applicable to students' lives to ensure a lasting understanding. It is important the learning is transferable. With game-based learning, students learn how to solve the problems in context. They understand how the content they are learning fits into the world. The question, "Why are we learning this?" is rendered obsolete. It is more than just subject matter, more than just content. There's context. Games should be seen as an organized space for playful exploration and through this, students encounter and form new ideas and concepts, they begin to construct knowledge. If we want children to develop strong metacognitive skills, to become critical thinkers who are motivated to make a difference in the world, then video games and games-based education need to play a part in their intellectual growth. ■

Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

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

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



British International School (BIS)

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

An Phu Primary Campus
225 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
3744 4551
apprimary@bisvietnam.com
An Phu Secondary Campus
246 Nguyen Van Huong, D2
3744 2335
apsecondary@bisvietnam.com
Tu Xuong Primary Campus
43-45 Tu Xuong Street, D3
3932 0210
txprimary@bisvietnam.com
www.bisvietnam.com



Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

Deutsche Schule (IGS) offers a German curriculum from Early Years to Grade 12 which is approved and supported by the German government. IGS is staffed by native German, Vietnamese and English speakers who have many years of teaching experience.

We offer a link between Vietnamese and German culture, an international program with German standards and the immersion of German culture into everyday life.

12, Vo Trung Toan, An Phu
08 37 44 63 44
info@igs-hcmc.de
www.igs-hcmc.de



EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

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

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, District 2, HCMC
www.eishcmc.com



The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

The most established school in Ho Chi Minh City is celebrating 20 years of success in 2013. ISHCMC is the only school in HCMC with full accreditation to teach all three IB programs to students from 2 to 18. ISHCMC is fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), two of the most prestigious international accreditation organisations. ISHCMC has 975 students from over 50 different nationalities enjoying recently upgraded facilities.

28 Vo Trung Toan, D2
www.ishcmc.com



Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British school providing an inclusive curriculum based upon the British curriculum complemented by the International Primary Curriculum and International Baccalaureate. The school has made a conscious decision to limit numbers and keep class sizes small to ensure each student is offered an education tailored to meet his or her individual learning needs. It is a family school providing a stimulating and secure learning environment with first-class facilities including a 350-seat theatre, swimming pool, mini-pool, play-areas, gymnasium, IT labs, music and drama rooms, science labs and an all-weather pitch.

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





Saigon Star International School



Saigon Star is a student focused international primary school offering high quality first class provision. Specializing in the British National Curriculum, all of the class teachers hold international teaching qualification. In the early years program, a Montessori specialist works closely with the main class teachers to ensure a high rate of progress. The school also provides specialists for children requiring extra support with ESL.

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



The American School of Vietnam



THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF VIETNAM

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

177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien ward, D2, HCMC
www.theamericanschool.edu.vn
 08 3519 2223 , 08 3519 2224
info@tasvietnam.edu.vn



The French International School Saint Ange



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

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

Also...



Vietnamese Language Studies (VLS)



Vietnamese Language Studies (VLS) is established as a highly effective and professional Vietnamese language school for foreigners in Vietnam. For 20 years, VLS has focused on making learning Vietnamese an enjoyable, beneficial and meaningful part of life for our students. It is our passion to provide you with the experience of living in Vietnamese, not just learning. Our extensive training experience and serious commitment for excellence will make your "investment" personally rewarding and professionally productive in Vietnam.

093 404 4669 / 091 337 3286
www.vlstudies.com
contact@vlstudies.com

American International School

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

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

APU International School

Operating since 2004, APU International School is a private coeducational international school enrolling students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Instruction is conducted in English, but there is an English Language Development (ELD) program available to students who require it. It is currently a member of the College Board, and is an official SAT testing site.

Elementary (501 Lac Long Quan, D11)
Middle and High School (286 Lanh Binh Thang, D11)
www.apu.edu.vn

Australian International School (AIS)

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

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

APSC Compound
36 Thao Dien, D2
Thu Thiem Campus (Kindergarten, Primary, Middle & Senior School)
East-West Highway, D2
3742 4040
www.aisvietnam.com

Canadian International School

Now in its fifth year of operation with a student population of 700 students in grades K-12, CIS- VN has received approval from the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam and the Department of Education and Training in Ho Chi Minh City to accept both Vietnamese nationals and expatriate nationals. The school's language of instruction is English.

No 86, Road 23, D7
www.cis.edu.vn

Canada Vietnam Kindergarten

According to the average age of each class as well as the physiology and psychology of each age, CVK has deployed a curriculum that ensures the balance between study and playtime, Vietnamese and English learning.

Street 23, Tan Phu, D7
5412 3028
www.cvr.edu.vn

Horizon International Bilingual School

Offers curriculum for kindergarten, primary, secondary and high school. Classes are taught in English and Vietnamese. Offers scholarships for children who achieve excellence in school.

6 - 6A - 8, Street 44, D2
5402 2482
www.hibs.vn

International School Saigon Pearl

ISSP is an elementary school for children 2 to 11 years of age. Offers an academically rigorous American curriculum. The school has several smartboards, projectors and an

independent IT suite that allows students the opportunity to interact with technology to enhance learning.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh
082227788
www.issp.edu.vn

Schools of North America

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

Street 5A, Trung Son Residential Quarter, Binh Chanh
402 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D3
www.sna.edu.vn

Saigon South International School

Founded in 1997, Saigon South International School seeks to accommodate an increasing need for American education for both local residents and expatriate families.

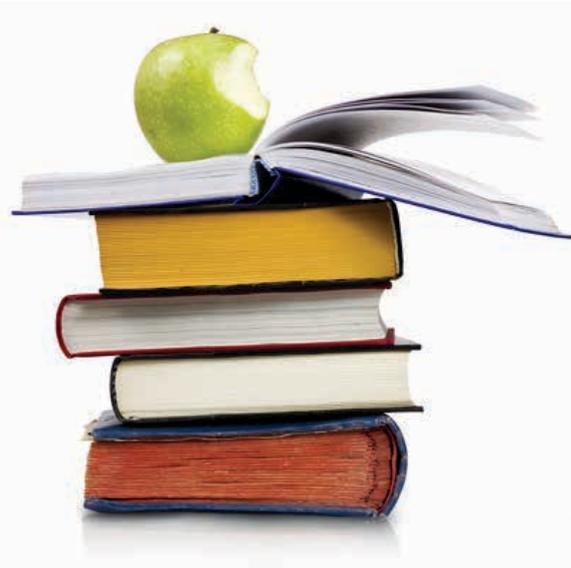
SSIS enrolls over 850 students in Early Childhood – Grade 12 from over thirty-three countries in a spacious six-hectare, well-equipped campus.

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

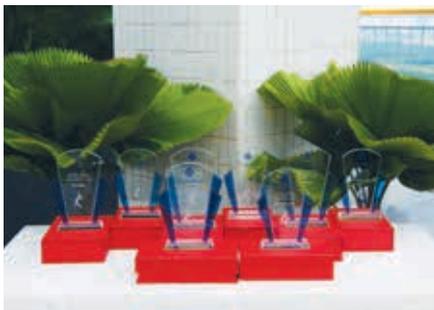
Singapore International School at Saigon South

Commenced operations in August 2008, The Singapore International School at Saigon South (SIS @ SS) is a purpose-built international school campus that has a capacity of 625 students. It operates classes from kindergarten to senior high school.

No 29, Road 3, Trung Son Residential Area, Binh Chanh
www.saigonsouth.sis.edu.vn



Faces & Places



It's a Hit

The 2014 Annual Squash Tournament saw players competing for the title across four divisions: Women's, Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. The final matches were held in November with an after-party of cocktails, canapes and an awards ceremony.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **THE LANDMARK**

Light it Up

Revelers came out in full swing to celebrate the opening of LIT Lounge. The newest nightlife hot spot offers live DJ music and a wide array of cocktails served on two floors, each with its own distinctive vibe.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY **LIT LOUNGE**

Good Libations

Wine Embassy toasted their second anniversary with friends, guests and, of course, plenty of wine. Several lucky winners took home great prizes on the night.

IMAGES BY **TU QUAN VINH**

There can be a lot of drama in secondary school.
We like to take full advantage of that.



Laughter and tears, joy and melancholy. Every teen school experience has them. And it's great if they make it to the stage. Because playing a small part in a production, can often lead to finding a larger role in the big picture.

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Hanoi: www.bishanoi.com

Ho Chi Minh City: www.bisvietnam.com



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www.thelog.com.vn | [/thelogrestaurant](https://www.facebook.com/thelogrestaurant)



Ẩm thực đương đại (Fusion Food)

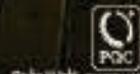
Thực đơn chọn món: 55,000 VND - 780,000 VND

Buffet tối (Thứ 2 - Thứ 6): 800,000VND++/người

Buffet tối (Thứ 7, Chủ Nhật): 1,050,000VND++/người

Thời gian mở cửa: 18h00 - 24h00 mỗi ngày

Đặt chỗ: 0975 00 22 88



(*) Thương hiệu là property dịch.