



**VIETNAM**

**OCTOBER 2015**

**THE BOMB SAWYERS**

Vietnam's Deadliest Job

**PAGE 18**

**MR. GENUINE BEAN**

The Delicious Taste of Real Coffee

**PAGE 28**

**MEAT ON SWORDS**

Feast on Brazilian-Style BBQ

**PAGE 52**

**COLORFUL COLORADO**

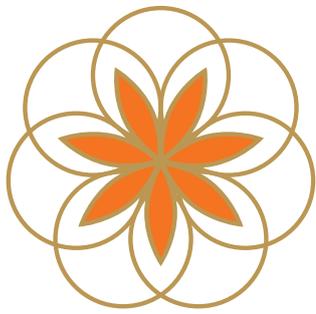
Explore America's Wild West

**PAGE 78**

**HEAR  
THE MUSIC**



**NHÀ XUẤT BẢN THANH NIÊN**



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## This Month's Cover

Dancer: **Vu Ngoc Khai**  
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Léman Luxury Apartments



Unique sky pool on the rooftop of the building

LÉMAN LUXURY APARTMENT is located in a prime location coveted by high-class Europeans and Japanese. Since June, foreign customers have begun to take interest in our project, especially since the Housing Act officially went into effect. The reason for this special attraction is our strong commitment towards Léman Luxury Apartments - they completely meet the high demand of a truly classy residence for those who have experienced life in Japan or Europe. After finding their ideal home, they want to share with others who have similar interest. The apartment is known as the most advanced residential community with state-of-the-art facilities. The gorgeous design and layout is refined to the smallest details with a full European interior package. This is a valuable gift that C.T Group dedicates to those who are devoted to HCM City in particular, and Vietnam in general.

A unique sky pool on the rooftop of the building, with two clear views of Truong Dinh and Nguyen Dinh Chieu, the ground floor will be connected to form a high-end commercial center for shopping, dining, entertainment and relaxation. Léman is like a miniature Switzerland, the introduction of this building has added a unique and luxurious architecture to the area, but still very harmonious with nature and the surrounding landscape. In Léman there will be hanging garden in front of each apartment, and a cloud-base pool on the rooftop of the building.

Now through the end of 31st October 2015, customers who purchase Léman Luxury Apartments will get a discount of 2% on the value of the apartment. On top of that you will be given an honored membership card at Léman Golf Club, and a luxurious trip to Europe (Switzerland and Portugal). When customers pick a pay plans through one of our payment options described in the contract will be awarded an interest rate of 12.6% / year on the value of pre-payment. This program aims to express gratitude to customers purchasing the last apartments of the project to celebrate its important event - the handover ceremony for the fourth-quarter in 2015.

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 Website: [www.lemanluxury.com](http://www.lemanluxury.com)

# Contents

WINE & DINE

## RESTAURANT REVIEWS

*This month we feast on delicious Greek food and bite into steaks and meats at a grillhouse and a Brazilian churrascaria, respectively*



IMAGE BY NGOCTRAN

### FEATURES

#### **P10 DATEBOOK**

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

#### **P14 THE BULLETIN**

*Checking out the latest promotions and openings*

#### **P16 TROI OI**

*Find out why drunk driving, new businesses and transgender people made it into our list*

#### **P18 THE BOMB SAWYERS**

*Vietnam's deadliest job*

#### **P20 THE ASIAN FACE OF TENNIS**

*The roadmap to creating the next champion*

#### **P24 THE DISCIPLES**

*A secret society of foodies and chefs*

#### **P26 ZERO TO HERO**

*Meet 2015 Vietnam Idol winner Vietnamese-German Trong Hieu*

#### **P28 MR. GENUINE BEAN**

*A German entrepreneur's ambition to change Vietnam's coffee industry*

#### **P30 MO' BETTER BLUES**

*Vietnamese-Australian designer Tiana Van's dresses make bold fashion statements*

#### **P74 JOURNEY TO JAFFNA**

*Sri Lanka's must-see destination*

#### **P78 COLORFUL COLORADO**

*America's Wild West can still be found here*



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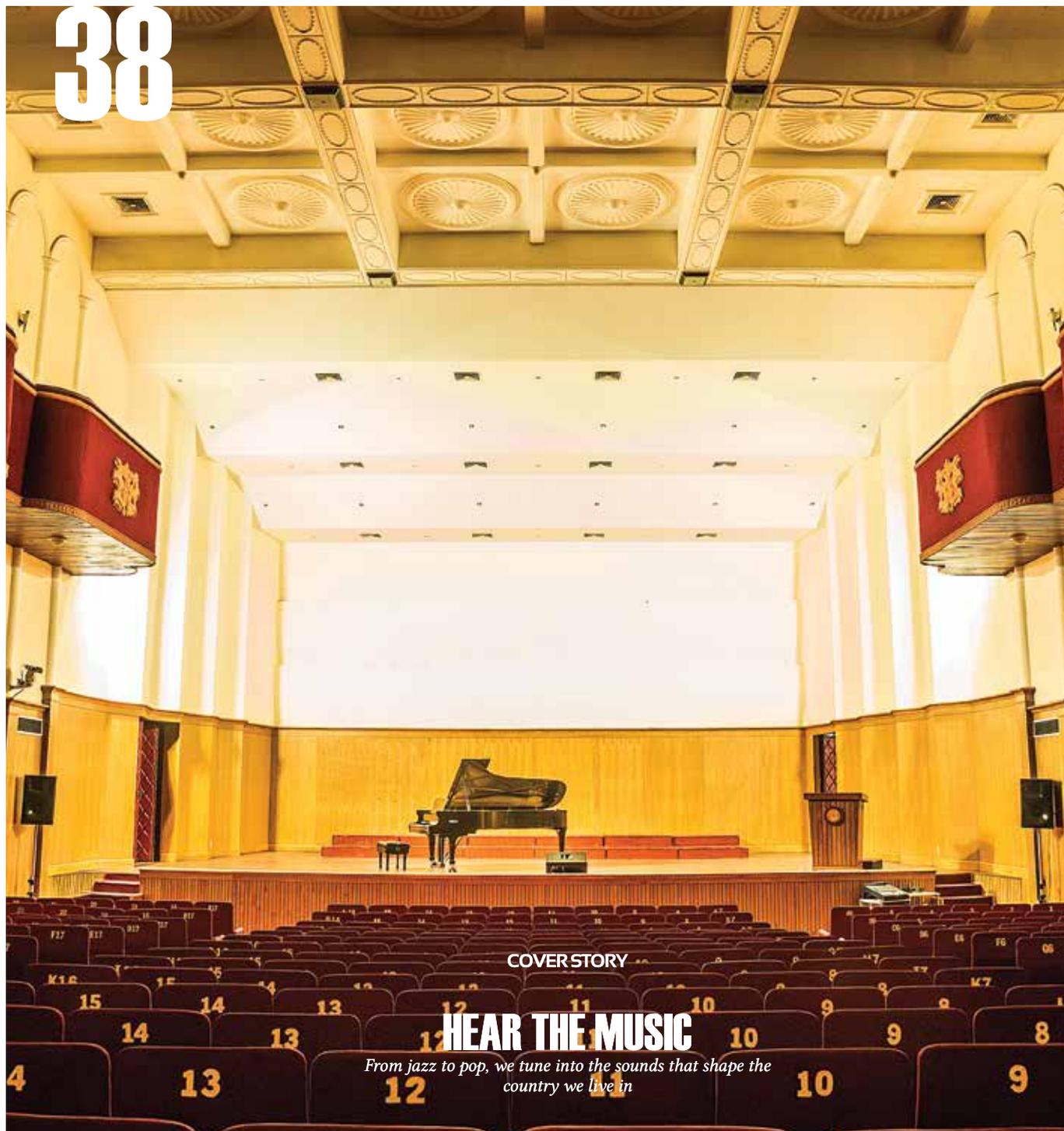
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COVER STORY

## HEAR THE MUSIC

From jazz to pop, we tune into the sounds that shape the country we live in

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

### **P90 DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL**

The complexity of a father-daughter relationship as the daughter grows older

#### COLUMNS

### **P33 LEGAL EASE**

The employer-employee relationship

### **P34 FOUND 404**

A new platform bridging freelance mobile app developers with clients

### **P36 HOME, SWEET, HOME**

Fusion is what's trending in interior design this month

### **P37 MONEY TALK**

Taking care of your employees in case of injury

### **P58 CHEERS!**

New wine shop Shiraz reviewed

### **P59 CHUC AN NGON!**

Creative ways to make eating healthier more fun for kids

### **P82 LIFE'S A TRIP**

Behaving badly while traveling

### **P92 THE SYLLABUS**

Balancing self-confidence in children

### **P94 TAIL TALE SIGNS**

Dos and don'ts when traveling with pets

### **P95 HIGHER LEARNING**

Two mindsets on learning



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# Datebook

What's on this month...

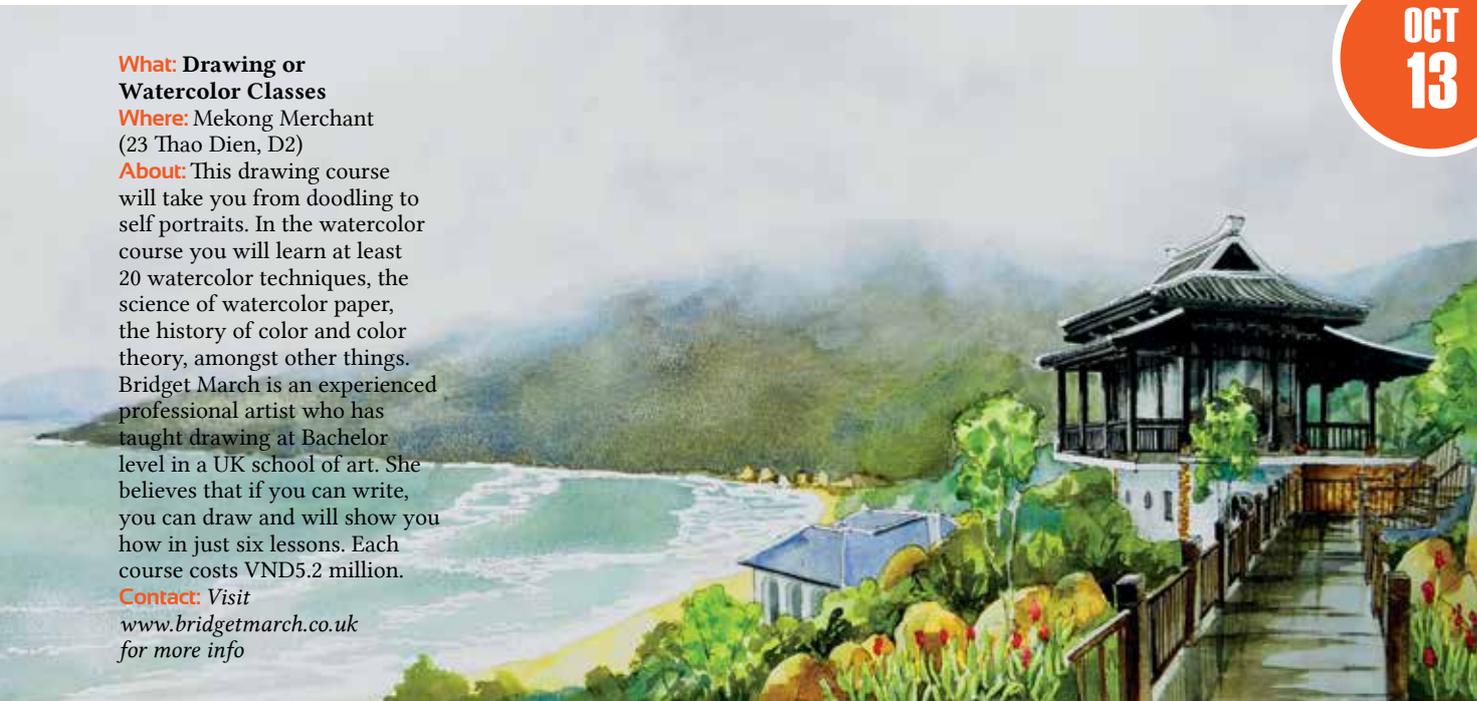
OCT  
13

**What: Drawing or Watercolor Classes**

**Where:** Mekong Merchant (23 Thao Dien, D2)

**About:** This drawing course will take you from doodling to self portraits. In the watercolor course you will learn at least 20 watercolor techniques, the science of watercolor paper, the history of color and color theory, amongst other things. Bridget March is an experienced professional artist who has taught drawing at Bachelor level in a UK school of art. She believes that if you can write, you can draw and will show you how in just six lessons. Each course costs VND5.2 million.

**Contact:** Visit [www.bridgetmarch.co.uk](http://www.bridgetmarch.co.uk) for more info



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## OCTOBER 16

**What: DJ Graz**

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND100,000 after)

**About:** From humble beginnings, Australian DJ Graz is now one of the hottest names circling the global fashion and music elite. For the last five years, Graz has been living between Los Angeles, New York City, Hong Kong and Sydney supporting international heavyweights like Chromeo, DJAM, DJ Medhi, Norman Jay, Who Made Who, and Busy P. Graz has graced some of the biggest festivals including V Festival, Good Times and Good Vibrations.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

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OCT  
17



**What:** Jerome Reuter - 10th Anniversary World Tour

**Where:** Saigon Ranger (5/7 Nguyen Sieu, D1); 8pm; VND100,000 in advance, VND150,000 at the door

**About:** Luxembourgish singer-songwriter Jerome Reuter founded ROME in 2005 and has since recorded and released groundbreaking albums in the underground folk and post-industrial music world at a breathtaking pace. ROME's musical and lyrical world is genuinely unique, blending traditional songwriting

craftsmanship, unusual arrangements and fine poetry into one monstrous and intimate musical output that combines chanson, dark ambient, apocalyptic folk, pop, acoustic rock, martial industrial, cold wave - all rolled into one impressive avant garde package. Over a series of remarkable concept albums, he has developed a unique 'poetry of longing' which rings out from the dark melancholic mist of rootlessness and which gives expression to a comprehensive feeling of modern forlornness.

**Contact:** Call or SMS 090 712 1568 for more info

## OCTOBER 23

**What:** Mark Gergis

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND100,000 after)

**About:** Porest (aka Mark Gergis) is a composer, performer, producer and international audio/visual archivist. In the past 20 years, Porest has released several solo and group efforts incorporating agitprop sound art, tilted pop songs and surrealist radio dramas. Live solo and group performances slip between heady multi-instrumentation and "absurdist" dirty bombs. Mark was a co-founder of the long-running experimental San Francisco music and performance collective Mono Pause - as well as its offshoot Neung Phak, performing inspired renditions of Southeast Asian music. Since 2003, with the Sublime Frequencies label, an ethnographic music and film collective out of Seattle, Washington - and more recently, with his own record label - Sham Palace, Mark has shared decades of research and countless hours of archived international music, film footage and sound recordings acquired during extensive travels in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info

## OCTOBER 24

**What:** The 2nd Annual Saigon Melbourne Cup Carnival Dinner

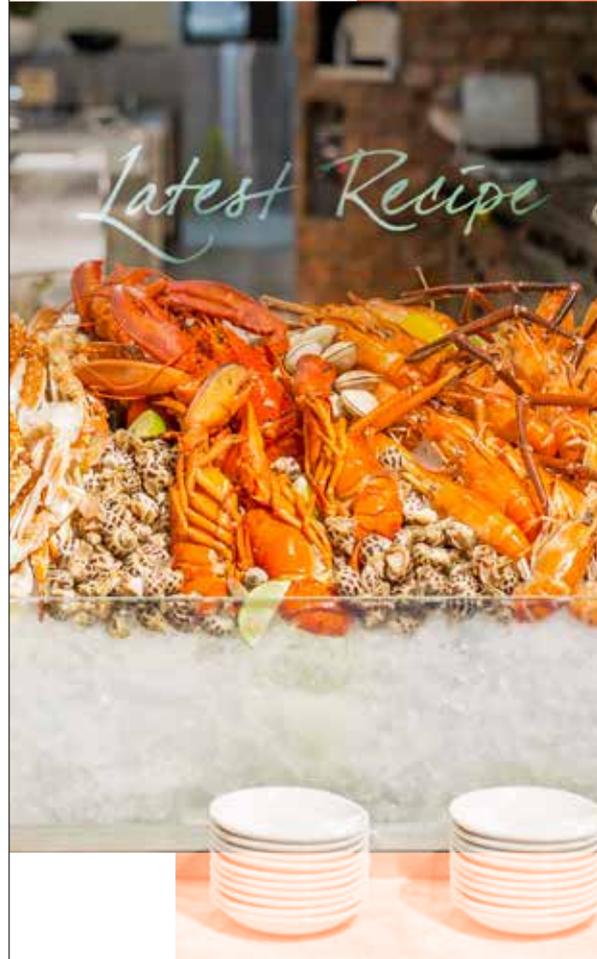
**Where:** The Reverie Hotel (22-36 Nguyen Hue, D1); 6:30pm - 11:30pm

**About:** The event celebrates Australia, with a Vietnamese twist. It brings together Australian food and wine, captains of industry, people from the fashion industry and some of the 70,000 Vietnamese who have achieved academic qualifications in Australia. There will be a fashion show featuring headwear designed by Kan Kanemura and dresses by Ho Tran Da Thao, followed by a lighthearted catwalk from attendees to crown the best dressed man or woman. All cash raised during the event will be donated to charity Water Safety.

**Contact:** Visit [www.saigoncup.auschamvn.org](http://www.saigoncup.auschamvn.org) for more info

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OCT  
29

**What: Network Girls – Breakfast**

**Where:** Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant (Kumho Asiana Plaza, The Link, Unit 16 (2nd Floor), 39 Le Duan, D1); 7:30am-9am

**About:** Network Girls is a monthly event at venues in Ho Chi Minh City that gives expat and local female working professionals in Saigon a channel to meet each other and

exchange ideas on life in HCMC, employment and business. Members of Network Girls usually meet on the last Thursday of every month for breakfast (7:30am-9am) or cocktails & canapés (6:30pm-9pm).

**Contact:** To attend, RSVP to Van Ly at [networkgirlshcmc@gmail.com](mailto:networkgirlshcmc@gmail.com) or find them on Facebook: [NetworkGirlsHCMC](https://www.facebook.com/NetworkGirlsHCMC)



**What: La Mamie's**

**Where:** The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 10pm (free before 11pm, VND150,000 after)

**About:** La Mamie's first event took place in a family-owned abandoned house in Montrouge, France. The parties were originally just for close friends, but word soon spread. To deal with the increase in numbers, the crew toured the city's bars and venues for a new home, avoiding the capital's overpriced club circuit. In 2011, they crossed paths with a resident at La Ferme du Bonheur, who invited them to play at his next Electro d'Bal. The party was such a success that the owner of La Ferme offered them the opportunity to curate their own summer daytime series. From there, the collective went from strength to strength, welcoming more than a thousand people to each of their Sunday

OCT  
31

sessions, while clocking up bookings at the likes of Rex, Concrete and La Machine du Moulin Rouge. Recently, in partnership with Cracki Records, they launched their own festival, Macki Music.

**Contact:** Visit [www.theobservatory-hcmc.com](http://www.theobservatory-hcmc.com) for more info



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**NOV  
17**

**What: Oddisee**

**Where:** Cargo Back Stage (7 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4); 8pm; VND350,000 at the door, VND300,000 in advance

**About:** Amir Mohamed el Khalifa, better known by his stage name Oddisee, is an American rapper and producer from Washington, D.C. Oddisee's music has taken many forms over the years. On his early compilations—*101*, *Foot in the Door* and *Mental Liberation* - he was the scrappy upstart, his distinct D.C. drawl and heavy drums carrying a unique “golden-era” hip-hop tinge. As leader of the Diamond District with rappers yU and Uptown XO, Oddisee is the mature figurehead. Oddisee's debut album *People Hear What They See* is a culmination of the duality of his life experiences, from DC internal politics to third world struggles, the line between love and selfishness, and the personal conflict between self-sabotage and progress set to a backdrop of intricate drums, lush instrumentation, and soul-stirring harmonies. It has received widespread acclaim at a time when the genre seems to have lost its way among a sea of self-aggrandizing and petty squabbles. The album hit the billboards in both North America and Europe in June 2012 and was supported by large tours taking in over 70 cities.

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# The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



## LE MÉRIDIEN SAIGON UNLOCKED IN VIETNAM

Combining a chic, modern design aesthetic with a passion for culture and cuisine, the new hotel is set to 'unlock' Ho Chi Minh City's distinct flavors and rich heritage through unique programming for both guests and locals alike. Situated on the banks of the Saigon River in District 1, Le Méridien Saigon (3C Ton Duc Thang, D1) offers both panoramic river vistas as well as views of the bustling cityscape. At the heart of the central business district, the hotel offers convenient access to shopping centers, restaurants, pagodas, the Saigon Opera House and more. The Grand Opening ceremony of Le Méridien Saigon was held on September 17 with performances from Thu Minh and French Bossa Nova band Nouvelle Vague together with a fashion show from designer Linda Mai Phung.

## SUPER BRUNCH AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL ASIANA SAIGON IS BACK!

*The Library, Market 39, and Purple Jade:* Mark your calendar on the first Saturday of every month and make sure you reserve a table for the ultimate Saturday Super Brunch experience. The ultimate in decadence: Nine (9!) hours (11am – 8pm) discovering more than 15 live stations, sipping on a signature selection of cocktails and free flow of Veuve Clicquot champagne with live band and DJ performance. Priced at VND2.8 million++ per person.

*Market 39:* If you love Korean foods, don't miss out on a gastronomic adventure of authentic Korean cuisine presented by Korean guest chefs flown in from InterContinental Seoul Coex in Korea. Discover Korean dishes at live stations with free flow of Soju, beer, soft drinks, tea and coffee. From October 22 to November 15, priced at VND1,099,000++ per adult including one glass of Soju or VND1,199,000++ per adult including one bottle of Soju.

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Open hour: from 11:00AM to 11:00PM  
[www.tandoorvietnam.com](http://www.tandoorvietnam.com)

## NEW MUSIC ROOM

Soul Academy of Music and Performing Arts, along with Loreto Kids Charity, opened a music room at Ngu Lac D Primary School in Tra Vinh. Thanh Bui, Principal of Soul Academy, performed with the kids at the opening ceremony. "They rushed into the room excitedly and grabbed every musical instrument. Each of them started to play in different notes and created a mixed medley of sound. The students did not want to go home; they were so busy creating their own work of art. Watching this scene brought so much emotion to everyone that once again, we are reminded about the power of music," says Ha My, CEO of Loreto.

## TANDOOR ADDRESS CORRECTION

In last month's article titled *Gravy Train* the incorrect address was printed. Tandoor is located on 39A – 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1. We apologize for any inconvenience caused.

## TNT BBQ OPENS RESTAURANT

Previously a delivery-only American barbecue outlet, TnT BBQ has opened up a restaurant on 3 Dang Tran Con, D1. Expect the same menu such as a quartet of sandwiches: the hickory smoked pulled pork, true to its North Carolina roots, including molasses made on site; the smoked beef brisket smothered in TnT original sauce and served on a bun, after 15-17 hours in the smoker; the apple wood smoked chicken breast, topped with a tangy southwest ranch sauce and crunchy bacon bits; and plenty of new items.

## FUSION CUISINE AT BAMBOO CHIC

This October, Le Méridien Saigon hotel opens Bamboo Chic (Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel, 3C Ton Duc Thang, D1), a new restaurant in town with a unique DJ concept. Diners can experience eclectic Japanese and Chinese dishes such as wok-fried udon noodles with Canadian lobster, wagyu beef striploin, *fine de claire* oysters, and *enoki* tempura in a stylish, animated atmosphere. A menu of inventive sake cocktails, New World wines, Japanese single malt whiskey, and international beers provide the perfect complement to an extraordinary meal.



### ELEVEN CAFÉ PROMOTION

This month, Eleven Café (29 Le Anh Xuan, D1) will award a VND100,000 voucher for every VND500,000 bill to be used on the next visit. The café focuses on Asia fusion cuisine, combining different kinds of spices from Asia and Europe. The promotion is valid until October 15. For more info, call 3822 2605.

### A MUSICAL ADVENTURE

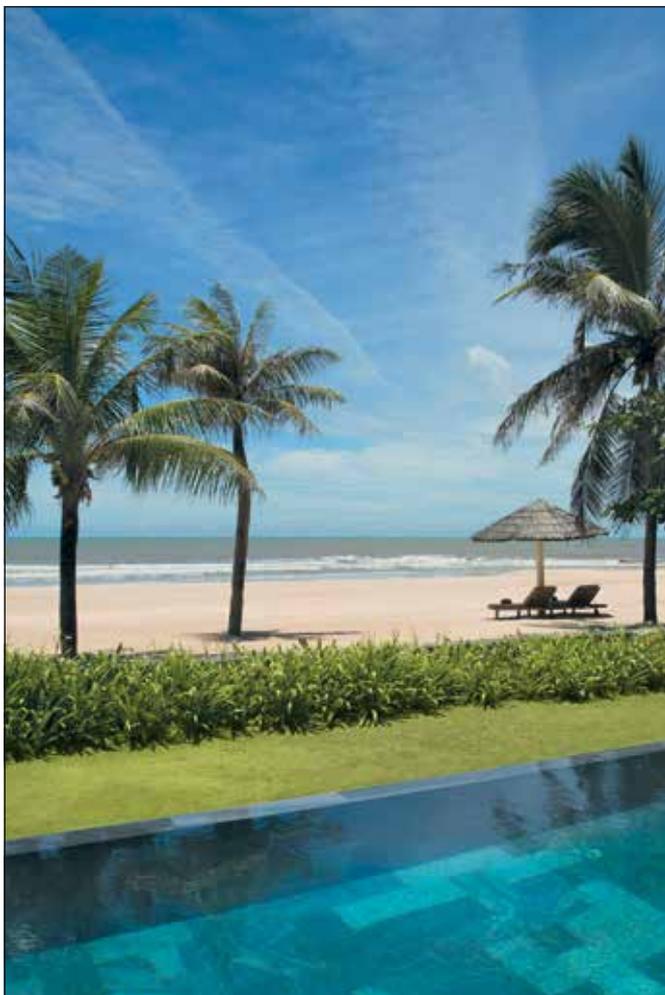
Moo Music is a new class for pre-school children that involves singing, dancing, musical games as well as new and characters by the designer of such children's shows as *Bod and The Flumps*. Moo Music features four original characters – Maggie Moo, Ollie Oink, Henry Horse and Doris Duck – each with their own repertoire of 25 original songs by well-known children's songwriter Craig McLeish, who has worked on hit West End shows like *Les Miserables* and *Miss Saigon* as well as many television favorites. Each 40-minute class features a selection of Moo Music songs with different themes: animals, journeys, counting, the senses or simply being silly. Moo Music classes will be held at venues throughout Saigon every day of the week and the first session is free. Classes cost VND150,000 for an individual lesson, with discounts for bookings of five sessions or more. There will also be special launch promotions. For more info, visit Facebook: *MooMusicSaigon*.

### INTERCONTINENTAL NHA TRANG PROMOTION

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### AU LAC DO BRAZIL PROMOTION

October 20 is Vietnamese Women's Day so remember to celebrate this special occasion with the special lady in your life. Come and treat her at Au Lac Do Brazil (238 Pasteur, D3, 3820 7157) for dinner and she will get a cocktail of her choice for free (first drink only) and a rose, courtesy of the restaurant.



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# Troi Oi

The country in numbers

# USD700

fine proposed for drunk drivers. Under a draft decree, automobile drivers with alcohol levels of up to 0.25 mg per liter of breath or 50 mg per 100 ml of blood (Level 1) will face heftier fines, ranging from VND3 million to VND5 million, compared with the current VND2 - VND3 million rates. For those with higher alcohol levels, from above 50 mg to 80 mg per 100 ml of blood or from above 0.25 mg to 0.4 mg per liter of breath (Level 2), the fines would increase from the current VND7 - VND8 million to VND8 - VND12 million. As for those with alcohol levels of over 0.4 mg per liter of breath or over 80 mg per 100 ml of blood (Level 3), they would be subject to fines of VND14 - VND16 million, compared to the current VND10 - VND15 million. Those who are fined for Level 2 and 3 violations would also have their car driver's licenses revoked for three months instead of the current two months. Motorbike drivers who are caught for Level 2 and 3 violations will face fines of VND1 - VND2 million and VND5 - VND7 million, respectively.



# VND1.6 BILLION

found inside an abandoned motorbike in northern Vietnam. Police officers in Luong Son District of Hoa Binh Province were on patrol when they came across the vehicle on the street. When no one came to get the bike, the police officers decided to take it to their station and found the cash in the storage space under the seat. A Hanoi traffic police officer told *Tuoi Tre* the bike, which is a silver and black Yamaha, is registered under the initials C.T.D., who was said to reside in Bac Tu Liem District in the capital city. A *Tuoi Tre* correspondent went to the address, but there is no one with those initials there. The bike is said to belong to someone working for a drug trafficking ring. The money is still unclaimed.

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# ~600

transgender people in Vietnam who underwent sex reassignment surgery want their names and identification papers changed to match their new gender. However, according to the ministry's staff, current regulations do not allow the modification of people's identification. The only exception is

for those whose gender is different from their physical appearance due to defects in chromosomes or genetics. Studies presented at a seminar on transgender people at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities in June last year showed that it is difficult for young transgender people to access social and health services as well as land jobs because they do not have appropriate identification. Transgender people face significant challenges because their appearance differs from the image on their ID card.

# VND950 BILLION

will be spent on building three large-scale reservoirs in the most flood-prone areas in three districts. With a total area of 100ha, the three proposed reservoirs are expected to accumulate tens of millions of cubic meters of water and resolve the flooding problem in District 4, Tan Binh District and Thu Duc District. The largest will be the VND600 billion Go Dua reservoir measuring 95 hectares in area in Thu Duc, followed by the VND300 billion Khanh Hoi facility covering 4.8 hectares in District 4, and the VND50 billion 0.4ha Bau Cat lake in Tan Binh. What is more, the city will also expand some existing artificial lakes in many parks into reservoirs for water regulation. Local authorities have also identified 103 other heavily-flooded spots, mainly in Binh Chanh District, Nha Be District and District 9, to set up smaller-scale regulating reservoirs to prevent flooding. In August, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung asked officials in the southern city to solve the flooding problem in the next five years with a focus on rectifying the situation in the downtown area.

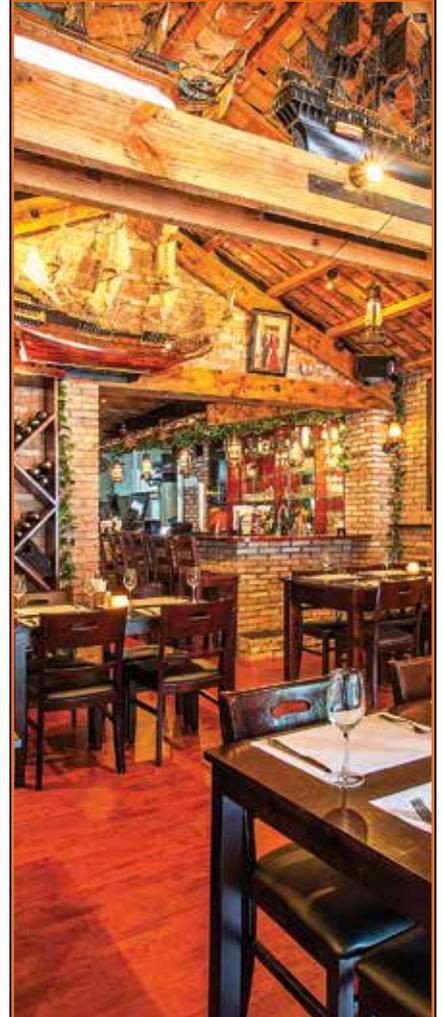
# ~300

new businesses are launched every day in Vietnam. Vietnam has seen a huge increase in the number of new companies in the past several months after an amendment on business and investment laws. The General Statistics Office reported that 9,301 new businesses were established across the country

in August, with a total capital of VND55.2 trillion, up around 41 percent from the previous month. The amended laws allow businesses to expand their activities as long as what they do is not illegal. Previously, companies in Vietnam had to exactly specify their business activities in their business license. The list of illegal business activities has also been shortened from 51 to 6, but still includes wildlife trading, human trafficking and sex services. Statistics also showed that 7,595 businesses suspended their operation in August, up 28 percent from the previous month, and 834 businesses shut down, up 11.5 percent.

# VND600,000 - VND800,000

fine for those caught using cellphones while driving, according to a draft decree by the Ministry of Transport. The draft decree is meant to improve road safety and reduce traffic accidents as well as amend and supplement existing Decrees 171 and 201 on punishment for traffic rule breakers. The penalties are aimed at deterring drivers from using cellphones when driving, a practice that can make them lose concentration, leading to fatal accidents. The inclusion of that type of fine, the first of its kind in Vietnam so far, is in line with the 1968 International Convention on Road Traffic to which Vietnam has been party, according to the board. Meanwhile, those who drive motorbikes or non-motorized vehicles on expressways would be given fines ranging from VND2 million - VND4 million, or 10 times the current rates of VND200,000 - VND400,000. The ministry will submit this draft decree to the central government for consideration next month and if it is approved, it will be enforced in December this year, the transport ministry said.



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# The Bomb Sawyers

Vietnam's deadliest job

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

IN 2015, FORBES released a list of top ten deadliest jobs in America. The professions that top first and second on this list are loggers at a 109.5 out of 100,000 workers fatality rate, and fishers at 80.8 out of 100,000. In Vietnam, there are no equivalent statistics, yet the dubious honor of being Vietnam's deadliest job, without a doubt, belongs to the bomb sawyers.

As their name suggests, bomb sawyers saw apart bombs, rockets, land mines, missiles, cartridges and various other military ordnances, many of which still have a live trigger intact, for a living. The fruits of their labor are scrap metals and raw dynamite that they then sell by the kilo for cash. During the American War, the US dropped a total of 7.8 million tons of bombs on Vietnamese territory, mostly in northern and central Vietnam. A third of these ordnance are unexploded and thus pose a risk of detonation decades after the end of the war. It is these unexploded bombs that feed Vietnam's small but enduring community of professional bomb sawyers.

"We know it's dangerous," says Nguyen Thi Tam, a professional bomb sawyer and mother of two. "But we also know that it pays the bills. My village has a saying: A bowl of blood for a bowl of rice. Whether we live or die on the job is really up to fate. So we try not to think too much of it."

Tam's entire family of six including her parents, son and daughter and a younger brother all follow the same profession. Tam's husband, Nguyen Bay, made Vietnamese headlines in 2013 as one among a long string of professional bomb sawyers who died on the job. The detonation of a rusted AIM-9 Sidewinder missile left little of his body for a funeral. Despite the tragedy, Tam and family do not plan on giving up their profession.

"We're not the only family to go through something like that in this village. We are not the first, nor will we be the last. It's a sad thing, but we need to eat and our children need to go to school," she explains.

Tam's family makes up one of the 40 families of An Hoi Bac village. This tiny village of a few hundred inhabitants in Quang Ngai is one of the biggest settlements of professional bomb sawyers due to its strategic position in the war. Before 1975, Western Quang Ngai in

general and An Hoi Bac village specifically sat smack dab in the middle of the North-South supply corridor and took a large percentage of the 7.8 million tons of American bombs dropped on the country. Today, despite a state-owned oil refinery and various campaigns to promote a fishing industry, Quang Ngai remains one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam. Its lackluster economic status and limited career options, coupled with the several hundred thousand metric tons of unexploded ordnance still buried in the shallow soil of its vast unpopulated land, make Quang Ngai a prime area to set up entire bomb sawyer communities like Tam's village.

Inside this community, the bomb sawyers have developed their own work order and production line. Where a few still prefer to do things by themselves, most bomb sawyer families tend to pool their resources and divide the work and the earnings accordingly. Young men are typically in charge of foraging nearby wooded areas to scavenge for bombs buried in the soil with community-owned metal detectors. Middle-age women catalogue and categorize their finds into classes and danger level. Old people work on de-shelling and disassembling dud artilleries. The most dangerous job - the actual sawing and splitting warheads and unexploded bombs - are left to middle-aged men, usually heads of families. The safest job, cleaning and organizing disassembled artilleries and fetching things, is always left to the youngest of the community who still have a future and other career options to look forward to. For a hard day's work, each person in the community earns roughly VND100,000, a similar wage for a new college graduate in big cities like Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi.

Tam, well into her 40s, works on de-shelling old ballistic missiles. Her children, who are close to entering college, help with the family finance by working in the community scavenging team. "I probably will do this for the rest of my life... or at least until there are no more dud bombs in our soil. But I want my kids to go to college and get some other job that doesn't require them to flirt with death for rice every day." ■



**"We're not the only family to go through [the death of a loved one] in this village. We are not the first, nor will we be the last. It's a sad thing, but we need to eat and our children need to go to school."**





Tran Thuy Thanh Truc and Nguyen Thu Phuong

# The Asian Face of Tennis

The roadmap to creating a Vietnamese superstar

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

WHEN THEN 17-YEAR old Michael Chang won the French Open in 1989, one of tennis' four largest tournaments, the world was intrigued. Standing at only 1.75m, Chang used his incredible foot speed, stamina and defense to counter the pace and power of his much larger, stronger contemporaries. Still the youngest ever men's Grand Slam winner, Chang overcame a host of former champions in his Cinderella run to the title: Pete Sampras in the second round, famously employing an underhand serve at one point to defeat world number 1 Ivan Lendl in the fourth round, and Stefan Edberg in the finals. It was the first time an Asian face had hoisted one of tennis' largest prizes.

Despite being hailed as a breakthrough figure for Asian-Americans, Chang, born in New Jersey, US to Chinese parents, was decidedly more American than Chinese. The rest of Asia would have to wait more than a decade for a truly homegrown champion to arise. Surprisingly, the next

Asian tennis star wouldn't come from China or Japan, but from tiny Thailand, in the muscular 1.85m form of Paradorn Srichaphan. The first men's singles player from Asia to be ranked in the top 10 of the professional men's ATP tour, Srichaphan proved that an Asian-born player who lived and trained in Asia could break into the game's elite. On the women's tour, recently retired, multiple Grand Slam winner, Li Na, similarly bolstered the case for female Asian tennis champions.

While Vietnam has yet to have a player ranked even in the top 1,000 on either tour, the country's hopes currently rest with 18-year-old Tay Ninh native, Ly Hoang Nam. This summer, Vietnam entered the tennis conversation when Nam, partnering India's Sumit Nagal, won the Boys' Doubles title at the Junior Championships, Wimbledon. Nam also made the Round of 16 at the French Open, helping him attain a career-high junior ranking of world number 11.

In a country with almost 90 million people, the odds are favorable for a future Vietnamese tennis prodigy. However, developing tennis, widely seen as a sport of the upper class, faces unique challenges in a developing country such as Vietnam, where top-tier resources are scarce. "Vietnam needs to focus on providing coaches, facilities and funding for young talent," says Alison Lee, Executive Vice President, International Group at ATP World Tour. "Climbing the professional tennis ladder is costly but if you have those three elements plus some local or regional playing opportunities, you are setting the system up well."

One of the main obstacles to developing young talent lies in the organizational structure of tennis in Vietnam where typically player development is left to individual provinces or even private sponsors rather than a national entity. For example, Ly Hoang Nam is supported by investment and industrial development



Melissa Pine

giant Becamex, headquartered in Binh Duong, and plays for its team and under its direction, which can sometimes mean playing professional tournaments abroad rather than representing Vietnam at events like SEA Games or Davis Cup.

“Tennis in Vietnam right now has a pyramid structure,” said Doan Quoc Cuong, Head of the Tennis Section at the national Sports Administration. “There are a lot of people who play tennis, but they’re 30-40 years old. It’s convincing juniors to pick up the sport and stay with it that’s more difficult. So what you end up with is a pyramid where only a few top juniors emerge. It’s not unlike raising a fighting cock,” he laughs, using a colorful analogy of prized birds that are showered with care and attention. “You put all your effort and pin all your hopes on one bird, but if he isn’t a champion, all that effort is wasted.”

According to Doan, an increase in prize money is part of the solution. “If winning a national tournament only pays out USD500, then what’s the point? It needs to be higher, like USD2,500 or USD5,000. That, people can live on. If parents see that their children can make a decent living at being a professional tennis player, then they’ll invest. Otherwise, good players can make more money becoming coaches to businessmen or teaching tennis at an international school than playing tennis themselves.”

“But Vietnam’s tennis future is bright,” he’s quick to add. “Vietnam has a tennis-playing culture. It’s normal to see people driving around with racquet bags slung over their shoulder. Compared to other Southeast Asian countries, we have a lot of young athletes.”

### Grassroot Plays

The August 20 Tennis Club in sunny Nha Trang is the setting for the third national



junior championship of the summer, hosting the top teens and tweens from all over the country. Tran Thuy Thanh Truc, Vietnam’s #1 Under-14 girl, has drawn the first match of the day. The 7:30 am start is both a blessing and a curse, the cool temperatures exacerbating cold muscles unused to the early hour. The match starts off slowly with six consecutive return errors. Truc, though, is the first to steady the ship and takes a 2-0 lead with strong serving and well-placed shots to the corners which have the gaggle of security guards watching from the sidelines erupting in applause.

The stakes are high for Truc because results here go towards qualifying her for one of just two spots reserved for Vietnamese junior girls at the WTA Future Stars tournament in October in Singapore.

Sponsored by the Women’s Tennis Association, the principal organizing body of women’s professional tennis, the Future Stars tournament showcases top-ranked U14 and U16 girls from 17 countries held in conjunction with the year-ending WTA Finals featuring the top 8 ranked players in the world (last year won by world number 1 Serena Williams). It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for girls from countries like Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar to gain experience against other players from the region as well as to witness firsthand how tennis is played at the very highest level, learning about athlete development, life in the public eye, media responsibilities and empowerment through tennis.

“The WTA Future Stars initiative had a phenomenal kickoff in 2014, with a fantastic turnout of young and talented



IMAGES PROVIDED BY WTA

girls throughout the region,” said Melissa Pine, Vice-President of WTA Asia Pacific and Tournament Director of the WTA Finals. “This expansion across 17 countries in Asia-Pacific [including Vietnam for the first time] shows our commitment to give back to the community through tennis, and present the stars of tomorrow on a global stage. We are excited to be able to showcase the passion and talents of these young athletes through WTA Future Stars. Through this initiative, we have developed and implemented a grassroots program for the region. It is an opportunity for the WTA to work with the local tennis associations to develop their emerging talent and give them the opportunity to compete with their peers across the region at the WTA Finals. We want to grow the sport throughout Asia Pacific and by engaging with local markets at a grassroots level we believe that this will encourage more young girls to take up the sport.”

For both players and spectators, the Asian tennis boom is most welcome. Fans get to see their favorite players up close and personal. For players, more tournaments means the opportunity to gain experience and more importantly, ranking points, closer to home, minimizing the high monetary and time costs of travel.

“The appetite for tennis in the region continues to grow and for the past couple of years, we have had new tournaments coming up throughout the region,” continued Pine. “The new WTA Elite

Trophy will be held in Zhuhai, China, after the WTA Finals for the first time. Host city of a WTA 125k series event in 2014 and 2015, Nanchang will also have its status elevated to an International event next year. In 2016, the WTA calendar will have a record nine WTA tournaments across Mainland China, Hong Kong and Chinese Taipei, compared to just two in 2012.”

Back on court, it’s easy to see why Truc names world number 2 Simona Halep as her tennis idol. At 1.68m, the diminutive Romanian is almost 12 cm shorter than the average Top 10 player, but her retrieval skills and ability to turn defense to offense are second-to-none. “Nothing gets past her,” says Truc, the daughter of a non-tennis playing housewife mother and government worker father. Introduced to tennis by a cousin at the age of eight, Truc typically trains three hours a day, four days a week (double in summer) with the goal of one day becoming a professional tennis player. Today, though, isn’t her day. She misses a few too many short balls and ends up losing a 6-9 pro set. However, it’s only the round robin stage, and by the weekend, young Truc has lifted the trophy without dropping another set. In October, she’ll join Nguyen Thu Phuong, Vietnam’s #1 ranked U-16 girl at the Future Stars Tournament in Singapore.

Through events like the WTA Future Stars initiative, Vietnamese players are getting the boost they need to get to the next level where professional tennis can

be seen as a viable option. “We understand that for developing countries, state support for sports can be difficult to secure but we believe that offering opportunities for youngsters to compete in an event like the WTA Future Stars will help to bolster the case for additional funding,” said Pine.

For lovers of the game, the future of Vietnamese tennis is brighter than it has ever been, and the benefits are there to be had. “Tennis is often called a gladiatorial battle,” said Pine, using her own analogy. “It is just you and your opponent. That teaches you mental strength, to dig deep, to battle through the tough points and hopefully win the match. Tennis and sports are a great way to foster friendships as you get to meet with people from all different walks of life who share a common passion. It doesn’t get much better than that.”

*The 2015 edition of the BNP Paribas WTA Finals Singapore presented by SC Global takes place October 23 to November 1, and will see an expanded eight days of competition and the continued inclusion of the WTA Legends Classic, WTA Rising Stars Invitational and WTA Future Stars Finals competitions. Entry to the Future Stars tournament is free. Tickets for the other events start at S\$16.90 and can be purchased through Sports Hub Tix at [www.sportshub.com.sg/WTAFinals](http://www.sportshub.com.sg/WTAFinals). Log on to the WTA Finals website [www.WTAFinals.com](http://www.WTAFinals.com) for more information. ■*

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# The Disciples

A secret society centered around the appreciation of food, wine and knowledge

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

FOR AN ORGANIZATION that has been in Vietnam for 13 years and international for close to 60, Disciple d’Escoffier Vietnam (Facebook: *Escoffier Vietnam*) is perhaps most distinguished here for being low profile and under the radar. A premier guild of *cuisiniers*, Escoffier has all the intrigue of a secret brotherhood dedicated to one pivotal cause – an unabashed devotion to the pleasures of fine food and sharing of culinary knowledge. While you may not need to learn a secret handshake or cryptic phrase to pass through the gates to attend one of their prestigious events, the two things that all members must possess are an exemplary sense of taste and a deep appreciation for fine food and wine. The people that constitute the disciples of Escoffier aren’t only chefs, but also wine connoisseurs, food service industry workers, culinary critics and food bloggers.

Disciple d’Escoffier is named after historical chef Auguste Escoffier, who founded the *brigade de cuisine*, the modern day kitchen system with famous military precision and efficiency. Escoffier is an interesting choice as a patron saint of the kitchen – while he was certainly an exceptional cook in his own right, his contributions to French cuisine have more to do with its broad-scale codification and modernization than with the preparation of individual dishes. He’s unusual among chefs in that he’s revered not for producing an assortment of fine recipes, but for imposing a structure on an entire national cuisine – in many ways, he elevated a



Chef Sakal (right)



grubby trade into an art form, and is probably the individual most responsible for the reputation that French cooking now enjoys as one of the world's most cultured culinary traditions.

"We learn of Escoffier's name and his chef's philosophy in cooking school," says Sakal Phoeng, Executive Chef at Sofitel Saigon for the last 16 years and the current president of Disciple d'Escoffier Vietnam. "Escoffier believes in the sharing of knowledge, especially culinary knowledge." This was groundbreaking in Escoffier's time (19th and early 20th century) where there was no internet and most experts preferred to hoard their treasure trove of knowledge rather than teach it to the next generation, master chefs included.

"Chinese chefs do the same things these days," Sakal explains. "Family recipes kept secret for generations. An apprentice can spend years doing work under these chefs and then leave with almost nothing in terms of culinary knowledge. He or she is basically back to ground zero. This may not seem like much, but this practice will eventually lead to a diminished cuisine, a diminished culture as pockets of knowledge are lost between generations. French culture and cuisine was very much like that before Escoffier, who preached the virtue of sharing our knowledge with the people who appreciate it. Escoffier was the first chef to state that our culture, our culinary knowledge, we as a society are made greater by this act of sharing, not lesser. We're stronger together than apart."

### The Tenets

It took 20 years after Escoffier's death in 1935 for another young French chef, Jean Ducroux of Nice and president of the *Fraternelle des Cuisiniers*, to take up the mantle and spirit of Escoffier by founding the first Disciples d'Escoffier. It was also under Ducroux that the tenets of Escoffier were laid. One - all disciples of Escoffier must work towards the evolution of cuisine as an art form. And two - all disciples of Escoffier must swear an oath that should they find a promising young cook or *cuisinier*, they must unconditionally share their culinary knowledge with said person.

"The spirit of Escoffier," stresses Sakal "is the unconditional sharing of knowledge and a love for fine food and wine. Fine cuisine is an art unto itself. Like music or painting, recipes and tastes can change and evolve through time. There are new recipes every year, new techniques and tools every year. And, of course, if one of our members should learn something new, he or she would share with the other members."

Today, Disciple d'Escoffier is a global famous non-profit organization with branches in over 200 countries and various delegations in specific geographical regions. Aside from promoting haute cuisine and the French *L'Art de Vivre*, the disciples act as a vast support network for chefs that have just started out.

"Because we have so many established

members, we hold a huge amount of information in our network," shares the General Secretary of Disciple d'Escoffier Vietnam, Thai Tu Tho. "New chefs can come to us for support in terms of where to look for supplies and employees and how to set up a business in particular locations. Our members also tend to be the first diners and constructive critics at a member chef's new establishment."

Disciple d'Escoffier's Vietnam branch was founded 13 years ago in 2002 by Chef Didier Corlou of the Sofitel Metropole Hanoi with roughly 25 members, mainly acquaintances of Corlou in the French culinary circle. Today, the organization has grown to over 70 active members many of whom are Michelin-star chefs at premier establishments such as the Park Hyatt and

the Le Meridien Saigon, or celebrity chefs such as Jack Lee or the 2013 *Iron Chef* winner David Thai.

Every year the disciples in Vietnam hold three gala events in northern, central and southern Vietnam to celebrate with other members. Every other month or two, a member of the Saigon branch hosts a party open to both members and non-members. The party theme is up to the host and can be anything from a cocktail and hors d'oeuvres affairs to full out banquets. The food and wine, however, are unfailingly sumptuous as few disciples would suffer being the lesser chefs or caterers in a society of master chefs and gourmards.

"The disciples may have started out French," says Tho. "But we are very much an international people now." ■



# Zero to Hero

Vietnam's next musical idol

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD  
IMAGES PROVIDED BY THAO NGUYEN



AMERICAN IDOL MAY already be walking the green mile, but the popular TV format appears to be stronger than ever here in Vietnam, where the show continues to reward artists who break the local pop industry's cookie mold. While its US counterpart has long since been trapped in a decade-old zeitgeist, part of *Vietnam Idol's* continuing appeal here is its sense of the Western aesthetic – in showcasing Vietnamese talent on an essentially foreign platform, the program implies an international standard of validation for popular Vietnamese entertainment.

It's perhaps about time, then, that a Western contestant was at last crowned *Vietnam Idol* at the conclusion of the last season – German *Viet Kieu* Trong Hieu, whose English-language songs and unambiguous Michael Jackson/Justin Timberlake-styled performances overwhelmingly captured the popular vote. Hieu's victory is probably the greatest indicator yet of the thirst of Vietnamese audiences to see their own music industry as having truly come of age: their chosen idol is fresh-faced, charismatic, fluent in English and almost unbearably good-looking. He is a transformation of the local hero, a familiar face as seen through a prism held up to an American spotlight.

Suddenly the most successful celebrity export ever to come out of the small Bavarian spa town of Bad Kissingen, Trong Hieu's newfound fame has come as an outright surprise for the young singer, whose laid-back career in Germany has now spilled over into superstar status in his parents' native land. Hieu was in the country to visit family members when he received a tip-off from a friend that *Idol* auditions were entering their final day, and figured that making a play for a spot on local TV would be an amusing way to spend his holiday here. At the audition, Hieu immediately drew attention for his highly accomplished performances, and the admiration of judges and audiences alike never seemed to drop off. Now at the center of more media attention than he's ever had in his life, Hieu is already set to embark on his second national tour – and is now talking about releasing his first single here as a vehicle for his signature dance moves and vocal style.

Speaking with Trong Hieu, it's clear that the fresh star is still overwhelmed by what's happened to him, although this is far from his first experience on stage. Born to immigrant parents whose life in their newly-adopted country was far from idyllic, Hieu showed a proclivity toward

the entertainment industry from his earliest days.

"I used to dance with a friend at home," he recalls. "We would make concerts for our parents. We invited them with our uncles and aunts in our bedroom, and we had a sheet there and made a show with dancing and singing. Then my parents saw the potential, and so when we moved to a bigger city they took me to a dance school. Two or three years later, I started singing in a children's choir. That was the beginning."

Hieu's European childhood was largely sheltered from the struggles his parents faced in an unfamiliar land. "They didn't speak the language, they didn't know anything," he sighs. "They came with nothing to Germany, and they started from zero, like from hero to zero. I think for them it was very, very hard. But they always tried to give us love, they always showed us that they were here for us. As a child, I wasn't that aware of all those negative things, because I could do whatever I wanted – sure, there were things that I couldn't buy, like toys that I saw other children have, and I couldn't get. Still, my parents gave me everything they could afford; I could go to school, I could go dancing, I could go singing. That's why I think it wasn't a difficult time for



**“If I adapt too much, I would become different, but I still have to make music that people want to hear. So I want to try a mix of the tastes of the Vietnamese people and my taste. My feeling, what I think is good, and what I think people will be happy to receive.”**

me. I could still connect with my Mom, though she was crying at night; she was sad because of the hard times she had in Germany. So I could see that.”

The family maintained strong cultural ties with Vietnam. “I’ve got a big connection to Vietnam and I’ve always had Vietnam in my heart,” Hieu hastens to point out. “My parents are from Vietnam, and I look Vietnamese, and we always spoke Vietnamese, we ate Vietnamese food in Germany. So absolutely there was a big connection.”

Even as a performer from an immigrant family, Hieu’s career in Europe was already gathering speed before being unexpectedly superseded by the *Idol* win. “In Germany, I was doing my own songs – I wrote my

own, and I’ve recorded music videos,” he says. “I was doing flash mobs with children in my city, and we were recording those in the videos. There were a lot of people who liked it. I was really satisfied and happy about that. I could dance with children, I could sing my own songs. I could really do what I love.”

Trong Hieu is now set to become a semi-permanent feature of the Vietnamese music scene – and with what is perhaps a German sense of discipline, he’s dedicated to pushing beyond his *Vietnam Idol* envelope. Hieu is becoming a newly-won fan of Vietnamese music (he lists Toc Tien, Ho Ngoc Ha, Isaac, and Thanh Bui as being among his favorites) and eventually wants to write his own songs in Vietnamese as

soon as his experience with the language and local tastes matures. While the inclinations of Vietnamese audiences vary distinctly from what’s popular in Europe, Hieu is prepared to take a creative leap to achieve a lasting resonance on the local scene.

“I think I want to do a compromise, like in terms of what the people like, and what my personality is and what I want to do,” he says purposefully. “If I adapt too much, I would become different, but I still have to make music that people want to hear. So I want to try a mix of the tastes of the Vietnamese people and my taste. My feeling, what I think is good, and what I think people will be happy to receive.” ■

# Mr. Genuine Bean

A German entrepreneur's mission to change the way locals drink their coffee

TEXT BY **MICHAEL ARNOLD**  
IMAGES PROVIDED BY **DIETMAR VOGELMAN**

"I'M KIND OF a drug dealer," says Dietmar Vogelman with a wry grin. He's not entirely joking.

As Vietnam's latest coffee baron in the making, the German entrepreneur is on a mission to address the glut of unhealthy chemical fakes on the local market, putting the genuine bean back into local *phins*. While a foreigner selling coffee to Vietnamese people may seem like an exercise in selling ice to eskimos, Dietmar just may have the right formula to make it work.

"Once you get Vietnamese people to try real coffee," he says, "then it's difficult for them to go back. You start to get an addiction, you start to understand how coffee reacts and acts, and what it does to you, to your body. Once you understand

this step, then you cannot drink fake coffee anymore."

Living in Vietnam since 2009, Dietmar's interest in coffee finally saw him taking the plunge and joining the country's hundreds of small roasting businesses at the end of last year, his point of difference being a determination to provide the same quality of coffee you'd expect in Europe at prices amenable to the local market.

To his surprise, his efforts have won him overwhelming support from within the local startup community, and he has already been highly ranked at their events, at which he is routinely the only European face.

His coffee business has taken a long time in the planning, however. "I started out by stopping at farms in the middle of nowhere

and talking with the farmers directly in my broken Vietnamese," he says. "Then I worked on creating my own brand. I already had a name, Farmers Blend Coffee ([www.farmers-coffee.com](http://www.farmers-coffee.com)). I started making small packages. I didn't roast it myself. I bought it roasted already."

Without any prior experience in the industry, Dietmar started with only basic coffee knowledge. After experimenting with the roasting process using a popcorn machine at home, he eventually purchased a professional roaster and underwent three weeks' training with a fellow German expat who had previously worked for Starbucks. Having gained some level of confidence, he then focused on developing two blends – one flavored with butter, rum, and salt to suit Vietnamese tastes, and another entirely unflavored to create a local alternative to expensive imported Western coffees.

Dietmar puts the differences between local and international tastes down to simple economics. "In Germany after the war, we had something very similar to Vietnamese coffee now," he says. "Just because of the price. We had coffee, and they put chicory in it. It had the flavor of coffee, it tasted like coffee, but it wasn't. It's just a matter of choice. So we had the same thing at home like they had here. We changed, so will Vietnam."

## Mmmm... Buttered Coffee

It's taken a good deal of trial and error, however, to match the demands of local



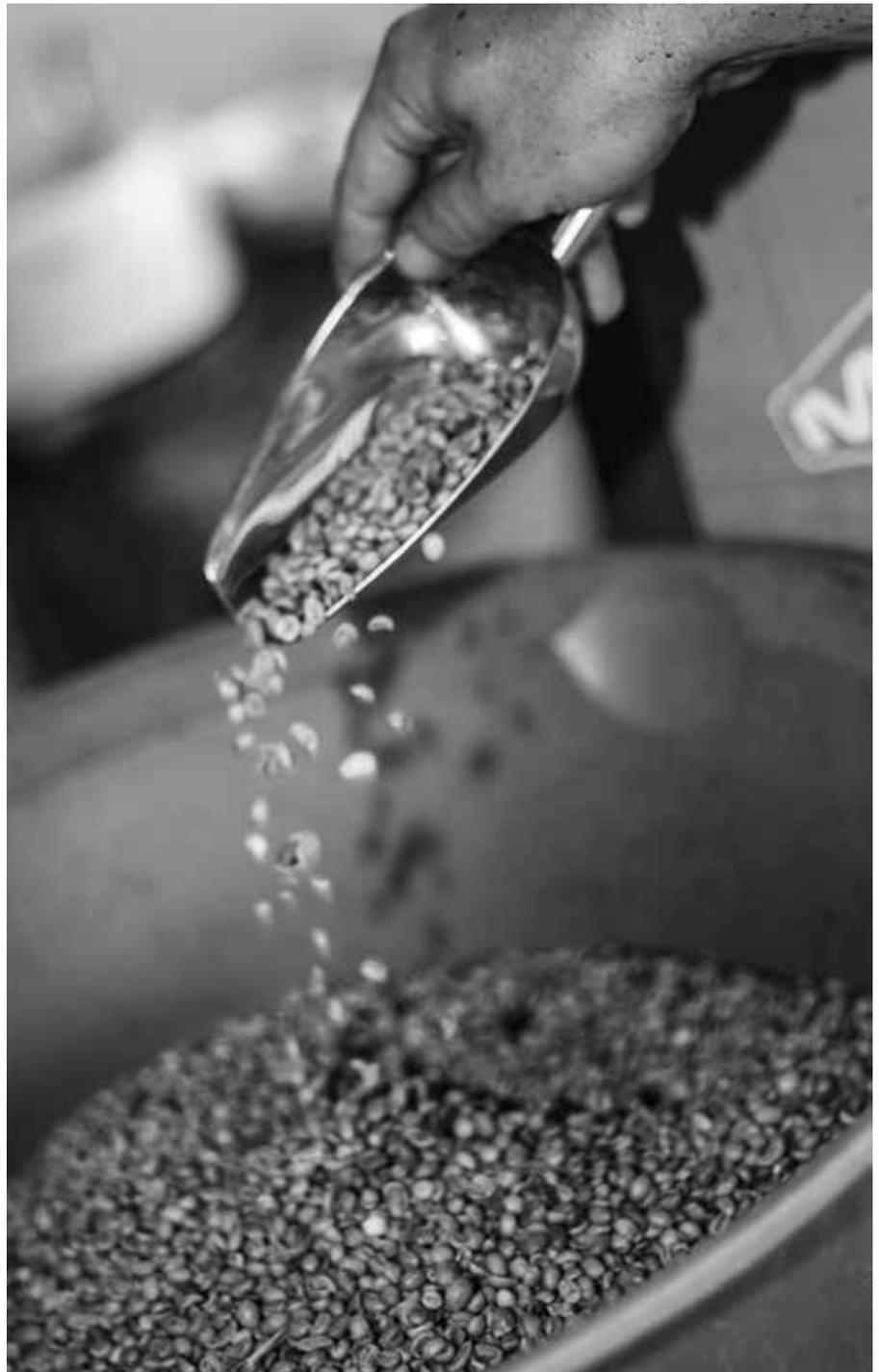
taste buds. “I mainly gave it away at first, just to see what Vietnamese people would like,” he says, “mostly to get their feedback. Most of them would say, ‘oh, no good, no good, no good!’ I asked why? It’s coffee, you know? ‘Yeah, it’s not black enough. It’s sour. It’s not *coffee*.’ I was even accused by a lady at the market of trying to sell her fake coffee. It didn’t taste like hazelnut, it wasn’t syrup, like they’re used to. But I said, ‘you know what? It doesn’t matter. I will stick with what I want to do.’ I don’t even know how to make fake coffee.”

“The Vietnamese, they like it black,” he says. “They like it when it *smells*. That’s why I put the butter in. Butter has very little effect on the taste, it just makes it shiny, it makes it seem stronger, so it looks traditional. The rum is the same thing. It’s like a marinade. That blend is better if you put it in the *phin* with sweet milk. They use about 20-25 grams for one serving, whereas with an espresso, you use only seven. But when you drink it with ice, that’s when it really waters down, that’s *why* they drink it with ice. Otherwise it’s way too strong. But if you have a street coffee that’s so black you can’t even see through it, that’s food coloring. The consistency is syrupy, which comes from some sort of starch – be it soya bean, corn starch, or something creamy. That can never be real coffee.”

“I have a very big advantage being a foreigner,” Dietmar says of his presumption to try to take on the Vietnamese at their own game. “It always sounds bad, and I don’t like to use this card – it’s just what it is. But I believe I have a better chance to teach the Vietnamese than a local would. You have *Vietnam Idol*, you have *Vietnam’s Next Top Model*, you have all these Western shows. People are in the market for all things Western. There are so many articles in the newspapers about fake coffee, and Chinese chicken, whatever – and they read these things. They would like to change, but it’s inaccessible to them. You have to give them access to the real world. If you make it accessible, they use it. They say there’s no market for unflavored coffee here, and it’s true – until somebody starts it.”

While the locals may be in for a long-overdue caffeine hit with Dietmar’s local blend, it’s his Italian-style blend that has been gaining him traction in the expat market – among foreigners who are relieved to no longer have to shell out VND300,000 for a 200 gram bag of over-the-counter grinds at Starbucks. They’ll be in for a surprise if they’re expecting a 100% arabica blend, however – there are several important reasons why Dietmar’s an unexpected champion of the much-maligned robusta bean, which by far constitutes the vast majority of local harvests.

“We Westerners are pretty focused on arabica beans,” says Dietmar. “Everybody says robusta is not good, but this is not true. My Vietnamese blend is only robusta. Robusta isn’t bad coffee, it’s just that our tastes are different. Robusta is stronger – for example, if you drink filter coffee at



home, out of a percolator, there’s robusta in it also. If you drink an espresso, even if it’s from Illy, there’s robusta in it too. It’s because robusta makes the body and the crema. It just comes naturally, because one thing doesn’t work with the other. I get a lot of people telling me, ‘you need to do 100% arabica’. I say it doesn’t work. First, the quality of arabica in Vietnam is not good. Second, it’s a very mild coffee. It’s very balanced, but robusta is the thing that gives you the kick, the body. So that’s why you blend it together.”

“It’s a matter of price and a matter of taste,” he explains. “Arabica is double the price of robusta, for example. But one thing doesn’t work with the other one. It’s like a bordeaux. Three different grapes.

That’s what it is, it’s a blend. Unless it’s a specialty single-origin coffee, 90% of all the coffee you buy are blends either one way or another. Arabica dark roast with 10% robusta medium roast, something like that.”

“I’m not into specialty coffees,” he admits. “I understand why people do it, but for me, like 99% of the rest of the world, a coffee either tastes good or it tastes not good. I’m not a hipster. A bit of lemon so it’s zesty... they like it, and why not too? But I’m not that kind of person. I understand coffee, but I don’t understand it *that* much. I’m an everyday cup of coffee – that’s what I want to be. I always buy the same things from the same people, so it’s very consistent. It always tastes the same. That’s the most important thing.” ■



# Mo' Better Blues

Bold, chic and subtly provocative, Tiana Van is a Sydney-based fashion designer inspired by romanticism, eroticism and expressionism. ■





Elegant Model Agency  
Contact: **Quang Troc** (Canton Dang)  
(US: 714 602 4111; Vietnam: 090 872 1880)  
Model: **Anh Thy**  
Dresses: **Tiana Van**

# Signore Boss

Employers' responsibilities toward their employees relating to salary, health and fair employment practices



After having obtained legal experience in his home country the Netherlands and in Cambodia, **Marijn Sproktereef** is currently an associate of **Audier & Partners**. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi), Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Marijn,

**I'm Italian and two months ago I opened a wood oven pizza place in HCMC where I currently employ five locals. They are all doing an amazing job, and they even started singing Italian opera when baking pizzas. My 'pizzaioli' work long hours six days a week, but I pay them well and I think they are happy employees. However, I am a bit concerned about my lack of knowledge on labor regulations. Could you inform me of the basics? Also, I am thinking about hiring an exchange student (my friend's son) from Italy to work part-time. Am I legally allowed to do so?**

LET ME FIRST of all congratulate you on the success of your restaurant. I trust that your pizzas are among the best in town. Now let's have a look at how well you treat your employees according to the law. The starting point to finding out more about your rights and obligations as an employer in Vietnam is the Labour Code. As is the case with many other countries around the world, Vietnam's Labor Code contains *minimum* standards of protection for employees. But, of course, as an employer you are free to offer your staff better conditions.

Pertaining to working time, the Labor Code of Vietnam stipulates that the normal working hours for employees shall not exceed eight hours per day, 48 hours per week. However, you can also provide in your labor contract that your employees will work a certain number of hours calculated on a *weekly* basis. If you do so, then their normal working hours cannot exceed 10 hours per day, and again 48 hours per week. You are certainly entitled to ask your employees to work overtime, but that is strictly subject to their consent. Furthermore, the amount of overtime hours is limited and you will need to pay a higher wage, which depends on whether the overtime work is being performed on a weekday (150%), on a weekend (200%), or on a public holiday or paid leave day (300%).

In terms of leisure time, for every full day of work your employees will be entitled to a rest break of at least 30 minutes, which should be included in the number of working hours. Special

cases aside, Vietnam's Labour Code further entitles your employees to have a break of at least 24 consecutive hours every week. Furthermore, for every full 12 months that your employees have worked they are entitled to full paid annual leave of at least 12 working days.

I don't know what time you usually close your restaurant, but keep in mind that in Vietnam the hours between 10pm and 6am are considered 'night working hours.' During those hours, wages must be at least 30% higher than during regular daytime hours. Now that we are on the subject of wages, as of January 1, 2015 the minimum wage for employees working in the inner city of Ho Chi Minh City has been raised from VND2.7 million to VND3.1 million per month, which is the same as in Hanoi. As an employer, you are free to determine your applicable wage scale, as long as you respect the minimum wage.

However, please don't forget that paying wages is not the only financial obligation that you have towards your employees. You must also arrange annual health checks, and you are obligated to contribute to their social insurance, health insurance, unemployment insurance and trade union funding and fees, which currently adds up to an additional 25% of your employees' salaries and remunerations.

To answer your last question about hiring an exchange student - the general rule under the Labor Code is that foreigners are only allowed to

work in Vietnam if they have a work permit. Some categories of employees are, however, exempted from this rule, including foreign students. And indeed, the Law on Entry, Exit, Transit and Residence of Foreigners in Vietnam states that foreigners studying at a Vietnamese school or educational institution under an international agreement may work in Vietnam, provided that the institution or school allows them to do so (in writing). Furthermore, you will need to inform the Vietnamese labor authorities of your intentions at least seven days in advance.

Notwithstanding the fact that the exchange student may not have to apply for a work permit, the Labor Code of Vietnam does impose further conditions on foreigners working here. Besides the pretty straightforward conditions of being in good health and having a clean (criminal) slate, foreigners must have so-called "specialized and technical skills." In addition to that, employers must convince the relevant State authorities of the need to employ a foreigner instead of a Vietnamese, which means that you may have some explaining to do in regards to the student's specialized and technical pizza baking skills. In practice, this may turn out to be quite a challenge since your current employees are living proof that Vietnamese *pizzaioli*-turned-opera singers can do the same job just fine.

*If you have any legal question you want answered, send them to [legal@oivietnam.com](mailto:legal@oivietnam.com).* ■

# App Decisions

A startup at the heart of Vietnam's mobile explosion



Anh-Minh Do is the editor at [TechInAsia.com](#) for Vietnam, focusing on technology startups, trends and companies. Minh is on the board of [Starhub.vn](#) - a database and forum for startups dedicated to the growth of Vietnam's business ecosystem.



WHEN FLAPPY BIRD exploded onto smartphones worldwide, mobile app fever hit Vietnam and within a few months mobile app development became 'sexy.' A year later, the phenomenon of the game is still echoed at tech-related events throughout Vietnam. At the Forbes 30 Under 30 Summit, former ambassador to the EU Madam Ton Nu Thi Ninh said that the younger generation of Vietnamese should be proud of Nguyen Ha Dong, the mysterious creator of Flappy Bird. She admonished those who downplayed his accidental fame and encouraged the audience to aspire to his success.

Then it's no surprise when I hear stories of students and mobile app developers

quitting their jobs or leaving school early to find their own 'Flappy Bird,' hoping to strike big on the App Store lottery. But all of this eagerness and pride in Vietnam's mobile industry might just be a lot of hot air that will soon fizzle out. While the country's tech industry is more mature and developed compared to its neighbors, there are still serious hurdles to overcome. The smartphone penetration only recently broke 50 percent of the population, consumers are still not familiar with using apps besides playing games, and payment remains a barrier for making money on mobile. In other words, the local market is still struggling, dominated mainly by mobile ads and

games. Therefore, it naturally makes sense that Vietnam's mobile developers rely on clients and outsourcing work as their main source of income. What about freelancers who aren't part of big companies? This is where Applancer, a new freelancing and recruitment platform dedicated to mobile app developers, comes in. On the surface it appears that Applancer may be at the heart of Vietnam's mobile ecosystem but, it might even be creating it.

"The key for us has been the growth of Vietnam's mobile app development ecosystem. When all the pieces of the puzzle come together, we're hoping more developers can get jobs and their skills are ready for the world stage," says Nguyen Huu Binh, CEO of Applancer, who used to work at FPT, Vietnam's largest tech company, as head of mobility. After leaving FPT, Binh started his own mobile outsourcing studio, where he witnessed struggles amongst mobile app developers. Applancer's office sits in a corner of the southern branch office of Appota, one of Vietnam's dominant mobile platforms. It's a logical fit for Appota, who was an early seed investor into Applancer. Appota is keen on encouraging Vietnamese mobile developers to produce more original content and apps for the local market.

According to Do Tuan Anh, founder of Appota, he's keen on the partnership. His vision for the partnership is to lead a strong mobile development community that can produce content for Vietnamese users. Applancer, if successful, could play a meaningful part in growing Vietnam's mobile developer community. And it just might be in the right place at the right time.

## Chicken and Egg Dilemma

To get on the platform, developers must submit a form, a portfolio of prior work and a video of themselves, then the Applancer team uses this to determine if they're ready to be listed online. In addition to the freelancers, there are also 20 studios listed that can take on larger projects that freelancers cannot.



At the moment, Applancer has over 15,000 mobile app developers on its platform - 3,000 of that added in the last several months. In a country where there are tens of thousands of engineers being trained annually, this might be a drop in the bucket, but the engineers on Applancer's platform are vetted by a 15-person team daily. Binh tells me that Vietnam has over 200,000 engineers, mobile developers only account for about 10 percent of that. If these numbers are to be believed, Applancer is on pace to have a database of nearly all of Vietnam's mobile developers by the end of the year, albeit only a fraction of them will display publicly on the site. These are impressive numbers for a startup that's less than a year old.

Although the developer stats are impressive, Applancer is finding its footing on the other side of the chicken-egg dilemma - something which most platforms face. The startup has 40 new projects currently listed and looking for developers. Six projects are currently being worked on by developers and studios on the platform. Although Applancer has worked out the kinks of getting developers onto the platform with the help of partnerships with four education institutions to serve up new talent, the number of projects is still disproportionate. Getting projects on the platform is likely Applancer's next frontier. But Binh says he's intent on building an ecosystem, not just a platform. "Since my background is in mobile outsourcing, I've seen the kinds of things

that mobile developers struggle with. And at the same time, in the last seven months working on Applancer, I've started to see opportunities in Vietnam. That's why we have four main product categories now: the freelancing platform, Topdev, Head hunting, and Events. They all weave together to make Applancer. So you see, we're basically trying to build all the tools that make life for mobile developers much easier."

Let's take a step back and take a closer look at Applancer's so-called ecosystem.



When you head onto Applancer.net, it may appear at first to be a freelancing platform. And indeed, it is. But if you click around, you'll start to see tools that Applancer has built for mobile developers. This includes a marketplace where other mobile developers can download or purchase code and designs to aid in their own projects. It also has a tool called UX

Tools to help mobile developers prototype designs so clients can comment, edit and give feedback on designs.

In addition to the freelancing platform, Applancer provides a headhunting service for companies looking for developers who've had more than three years of experience. For those in recruitment, they'll know right away that this is indeed a more lucrative function than general listings. But Binh is more proud of his referral system, "The key here is that we're also allowing engineers to recommend their peers into the headhunting and freelancing platform. If their recommendation gets the job, they get a percentage of the referral cost." The referrals paired with the offline events Applancer runs, both monthly and annually (including Mobile Day, Android Day, MAIT Awards, and GameOn), keep Applancer in the minds of mobile developers throughout Vietnam.

Binh thinks that Vietnam has a lot of hidden potential in terms of outsourcing. "I really hope that any business person that wants to build apps thinks of Vietnam first. And in order to do that, there needs to be major shifts in how mobile developers are trained while in school and in training after school." Because mobile is still so new in Vietnam, it's clear that Applancer is going to have to do most of the legwork in building up its user base simultaneously with its own tools plus supporting the larger community around it.

"There's a hidden potential here, we just have to tap into it," Binh adds. ■

# Light the Fuse

Western and eastern civilizations have begun to merge several cultural design techniques, and the result is called fusion

THE WORD “FUSION” is the word *du jour* in design at the moment. It’s become quite the hot topic and is more often than not overused, but it is a true reflection of the international flavor and style in which most now live, regardless of where we call home.

The greatest example of fusion we all hear about almost daily is fusion cuisine – the art of taking a variety of international ingredients, herbs, spices, tastes and flavors from around the world to create epicurean delights and to re-jig old favorites. Presumably the same can be said about interiors. Fusion in interiors is about mixing two or more design aesthetics to create a unique and individual personal look. It’s easy, just marry two or more styles, for example the “East meets West” concept of combining modern Western designs with a distinctive bright and bold palette with Oriental design features.

On trend at the moment is syncing contemporary European designs and color palettes with a Middle-Eastern and

Asian feel, more often than not with designs and treasures from places like Iran, Morocco, India and Indochina.

So how can we pull off this partnership in design aesthetics successfully? This is dependent on how far you’re willing to push either side of the design scale 50/50 or focusing more on East or West, but whether you are focusing your fusion look completely or adding bits and pieces here and there, color is the key.

For Iran and Morocco for example, color is the forefront when describing textiles, handicrafts and ceramics from these regions. Adding color is easy and possibly the most important part of creating your fusion theme. Emulate distinctive colors like copper, warm mustard, cobalt blue or ox blood which are reminiscent of markets, stores and traditional homes in these regions and share the walls with neutrals like white, egg shell and lighter grays for balance and contrast and to keep the rooms looking contemporary.

Also be daring and introduce



David J. Campbell is the Design Director at Villa Royale Treasures and Tearoom ([www.villaroyaletreasures.com](http://www.villaroyaletreasures.com)) in Thao Dien, District 2, Saigon.

distinctive furniture, paintings, prints, textiles, cushions, rugs, and *objets d’art* from your chosen regions. If you’re focusing more on the Far East try and incorporate beautiful lacquerwares with red and gold highlights.

The rich architectural and design heritage of the Middle East and Asia includes patterns in almost every discipline. Gorgeous wooden lattice screens and windows, layered paisley and geometric patterns on textiles, intricate designs in mother of pearl inlaid in wood and beautifully carved stonework are just a few examples. Incorporating breathtaking patterns like lattice screens, geometric textiles and mother of pearl inlaid designs will give your space the personality and character of bygone days in your chosen parts of the world.

A Moroccan table lamp with cut-out Filigrain design will change the mood of a room with curious patterns on your ceiling and walls – this helps a relatively plain room embrace the fusion character with a true wow factor.

If you’re looking to focus primarily on Asian interior design, China and the Far East is always the winner with exotic and intriguing style and, of course, bamboo and silk textiles and design never falling short.

Oriental interior design is nothing new to the history of interior style. Europeans have embraced the East with incredible grandeur with Art Nouveau and the Arts and Craft movement being prime examples. Asian design has slick, clean, straight lines and are found more commonly in Japanese interiors, both traditionally and contemporary. Low to the ground furniture and bedding reflect a truly imitate and exotic flair. Japanese Shoji screens perfectly divide a room and can often be designed or re-patterned with incredible designs like wood block print, bamboo or cherry blossom.

Finally your space should be unique, interesting and beautifully curated; the overrated catalogue look is so passé. It’s not about shopping for new pieces, it’s about creating a room with fresh eyes that you fall in love with over and over. ■



# Fringe Benefits

Setting up workplace pensions and insurance for employees



**Sven Roering** is a partner and financial planner at Total Wealth Management PTE. Ltd ([www.t-wm.com](http://www.t-wm.com)). He holds an Economics Degree from Rhodes University in South Africa, and is a candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, having successfully completed level 1 and is currently working towards the level 2 exam.

**Dear Sven,**

**I have been running a successful diving school in Vietnam for many years now and have a loyal team of employees, most of whom are Vietnamese. I am worried that when they want to retire or are unable to work due to illness or injury, they will not have sufficient savings/insurance in place to provide for themselves and their families. Is there any way I can set up a universal pension plan for them in Vietnam which I could contribute to on their behalf, or an option that would allow me to deduct a certain amount off their salaries every month to finance such a scheme?**



YOUR CONCERNS ARE most certainly valid. It would be risky to rely solely on the government to finance citizens who are not able to work in any country, especially in Vietnam, because of low coverage rates in both the formal and informal sectors and the weak capacity for management and implementation of social security programs. Adding fuel to the fire is Vietnam's rapid population growth and the fact that 25 percent of the population is aged between 10 and 24. Eventually these people will become old and it will become extraordinarily difficult for the government to fund all social security needs. The onus will begin to fall upon companies and employees themselves to make sure they secure their financial futures (much like the West).

Providing added benefits to employees leverages a company's recruitment program. Job seekers will always be attracted to companies who provide them with adequate benefits and security. Loyal employees will stay longer and remain loyal if they know that the company is at least making an effort to take care of them and their families' future.

Fortunately there are several options provided by most of the major insurance companies in Vietnam, where your company is able to contribute 100 percent

to a pension plan on behalf of all your employees, or where you and your employees could contribute on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Contribution to pension/savings usually has added tax benefits for companies and employees.

Manulife offers a collective pension/coverage plan called My Freedom. With this plan your company will be the plan holder and the employees the beneficiaries. The plan covers employees for both life insurance and takes the form of a savings account as well, where female employees are allowed to begin claiming benefits from between the ages of 55 and 70 and males between the 60 and 70 years of age. The life insurance benefit in case of death will be a guaranteed amount, while the amount of money from savings that employees will be able to claim when they come of age will depend on the total amount contributed throughout the period. Companies are able to target how much they would like to contribute to the plan per year, according to their budget. Unfortunately the plan is heavily front-loaded with charges, which decrease significantly throughout the years. Therefore the longer the term of your contribution, the less charges will be levied as a percentage of contributions

in later years. A great benefit of the plan is that the returns will not fall below a minimum guaranteed level.

Additionally, Prudential provides a great option for employees that are perhaps for more sophisticated investors who would like to start a savings plan in their own name, and gain the opportunity to obtain higher returns from risky access to Vietnamese stock and bond markets. The Pru-wealth Assured plan covers against critical illness and provides a diversified investment portfolio via mutual funds run by Prudential's investment management arm, Eastspring Investments. The fund returns have been historically very good; however charges are highly front-loaded as well so it would make sense to contribute to this option for the long term.

Beginning the process of starting your employee benefit scheme is as easy as giving the relevant company a call and asking whether a consultant would be able to come to your office and discuss the details. The consultants speak English well and would be more than willing to do presentations for your employees. You can also discuss your contribution model, whether it will come 100 percent from the company, or shared between the company and employees. ■

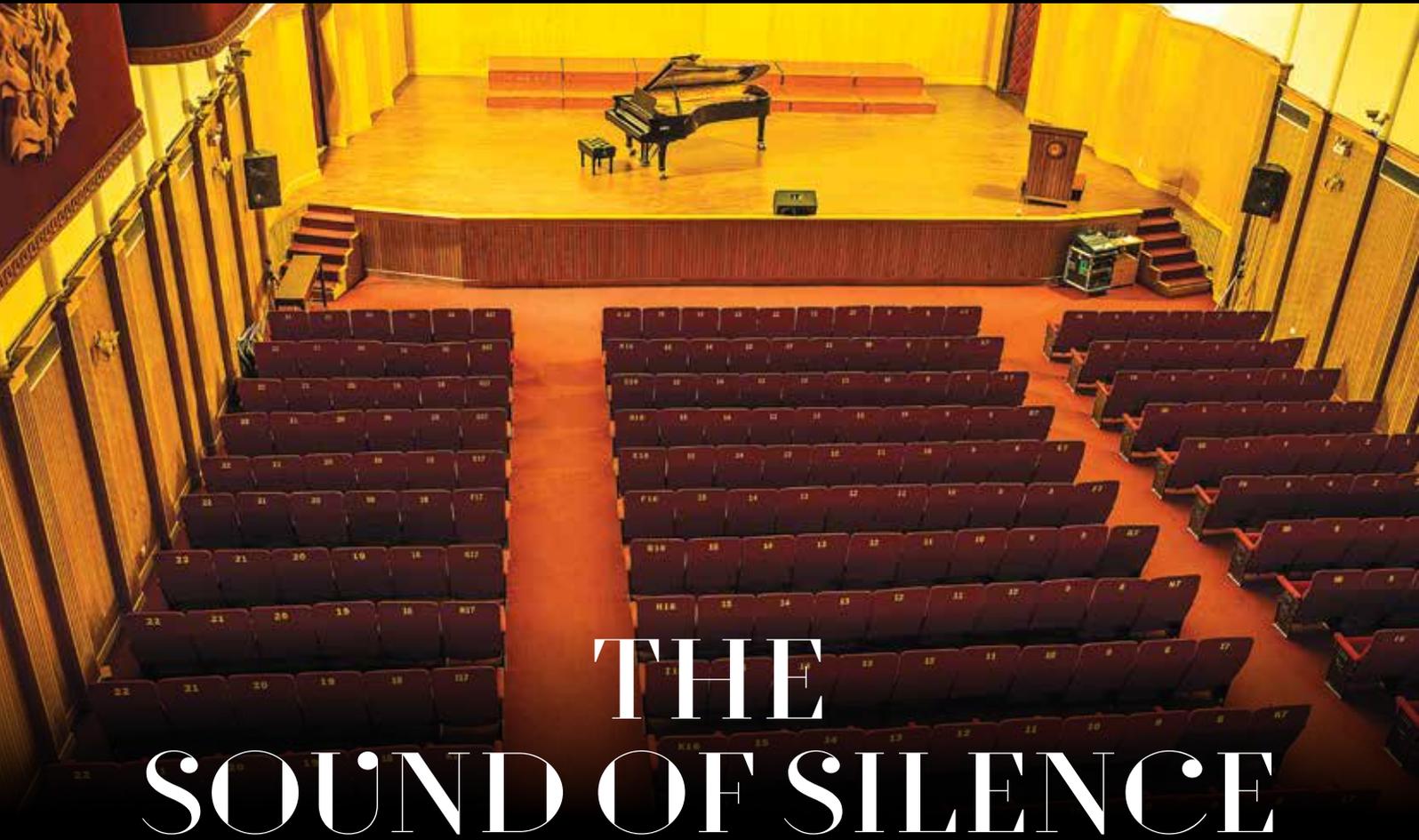


HEAR  
THE MUSIC



**I**n Vietnam today, patriotic odes to the glory of the revolution may still be heard at government meetings, but millions of ordinary Vietnamese opt for the modern pop songs being belted out on CDs and in nightclubs now flourishing in the country's major cities. Most tourists visiting Vietnam are introduced to only the traditional music of a bygone time featuring stringed instruments in odd shapes and sizes accompanied by high-pitched vocals. But to get a feel for what the Vietnamese themselves really listen to, one needs only to pop into a CD shop or tune in the radio where performers sing ballads of love and loss reminiscent of the style of Tony Bennett and Rihanna.

Vietnam's new sound has embraced Western influences while staying true to its poetic heart.



# THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Is it curtains for classical music in Vietnam?

TEXT BY NPD KHANH

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

The 2015 Vietnamese Art Festival *Autumn Melodies* finished its triumphant run on August 30th. The one-week program consisted of 11 shows from a variety of music styles and performance disciplines such as symphony orchestra, chamber music, musicals, ballet, baroque, piano solos and contemporary dance. It opened with a symphony orchestra performance by the Ho Chi Minh City Ballet Symphony Orchestra and Opera (HBSO) on August 25th 2015, peaked with a contemporary symphony performance by the Royal Norwegian Navy Band, and ended on Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

The Vietnamese press lauded *Autumn Melodies* as a veritable feast for lovers of classical music and dance art. Music academia and professionals, both local and international, praised the show for its rich content and diverse cast. Yet, unknown to the satisfied audience, behind the success of *Autumn Melodies* lies an industry desperately struggling to remain relevant to the younger generation.

"It's a truth that few in the industry like to talk about, but if we don't do anything, the Vietnamese classical music industry will die out in a decade or two," says Mai

Thanh Son, the chief of foreign affairs and spokesman for the Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music. Along with its commercially-slanted sister organization – the HBSO – the Conservatory of Music constitutes the Oxford of the Vietnamese music industry. It has two main branches of teaching: national music and classical Western music. Falling under these two branches are more than 20 music majors both practical and academic, and from the alumni of the Conservatory have emerged generations of Vietnam's best performers in music since 1956. Aside from its role as the single most prestigious school of music here, the Conservatory usually partners with the HBSO in organizing classical music and performances in Vietnam. It is also the force behind many art and cultural exchanges that send Vietnamese musicians on performing and training tours through Europe and Russia.

Considering its credentials, its reputation, and its long list of influential and wildly-successful alumni (Vietnamese diva My Linh is one), Son's statement is a shocking revelation to many fans of the Conservatory. "There are no published statistics, but ten years ago, at around the

time I was a student here, the average class at the Conservatory had from 10 to 15 students. Nowadays, we are lucky to get four or five," shares Son.

According to Son, who also teaches at the Conservatory, some classes have dropped to a single student. Entire faculties have closed down due to lack of interest. Students who graduated *cum laude* struggle to find work and a stable income. Many have been forced to take up jobs in more viable industries. On the commercial side, despite the success of *Autumn Melodies* and other classical music programs before it, things do not look much better. "*Autumn Melodies* cost VND2 billion to organize. That's not counting compensations for the musicians, most of whom performed for free or for a tiny stipend. And in return, we made a revenue of roughly VND600 million. We sold 90 percent of the seats. And that's all we made."

## Time Has Since Changed

The perplexing financial outcome of *Autumn Melodies* is the norm for the industry. By and large, few, if any, classical music performances in Vietnam, regardless of scale, success or backing, make a full

return on their investment. Most struggle to fill their seats with a dedicated audience, and even on the rare occasions of a full auditorium, the usual Vietnamese classical music performance does not make back more than 30 percent of its investment.

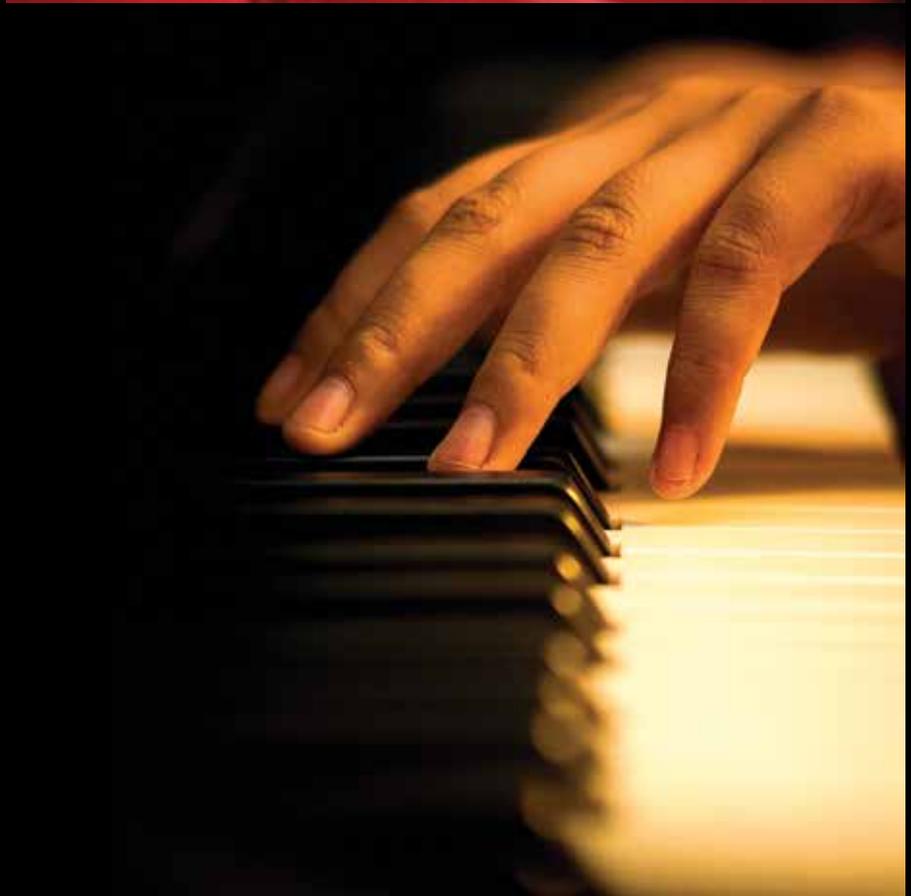
"It's difficult to break even when your ticket price is a tenth of your Western counterpart while footing more or less the same bill as they do," explains Son. "I personally do not know of any performances that have broken even. Most shows survive on government grants and the charity of art-loving sponsors. The musicians that you see on stage, they keep doing what they do because of passion, not because of paychecks, because there are none."

With these conditions, it's no surprise that fewer and fewer hopeful students come to the Conservatory to learn how to compose melodies, conduct orchestras, or how to tickle piano keys or bow the violin in concerto. The number of alumni's children following their parents' footsteps and attending the Conservatory is another quickly dwindling number.

The root cause for the industry's downfall is more than just a lack of interest from younger audiences according to Son, but a combination of a lack of forethought and marketing savvy on part of the Conservatory, and a maze of bureaucratic red tape that prevents the music academy from keeping up with time and industry.

"There was a time when we believed there was no need for marketing," says Son. Indeed, before the rise of commercial, private music schools, the Conservatory held monopoly over music education in southern Vietnam. Its sibling school, the Conservatory of Ha Noi, similarly held dominion over northern Vietnam. In the 60s, 70s, 80s and even 90s, few respectable and successful musicians came from sources outside of the Conservatory. Needless to say, times have since changed. "What our predecessors failed to understand is the fact that a musician, regardless of talent, is nothing without an audience. For decades, they neglected the vital task of creating an audience, and so now we are faced with the challenge of a rapidly declining audience pool from which we draw both new talent and support."

"Lack of marketing and public relation savvy is another issue that needs to be resolved for classical music to blossom with the Vietnamese public," says Son. "Too often there is a chasm between classical musicians and your average Vietnamese audience." Part of that chasm, Son explains, is also in how classical musicians have historically performed in Vietnam. "To an audience of heads of states or visiting diplomats, in the chambers where high ranking government officials receive foreign dignitaries. Since we are sustained by government grants, we often provide entertainment at government functions, especially those with foreign elements. That has, unfortunately, created an image of classical music as something up there and unreachable to a lot of people. We



need to reach out to the masses, but few of us know how to."

The Conservatory has made many efforts in modernizing itself in recent years. Its Office of Foreign Affairs - a misleading name as the four-person team, including Son, does the combined job of a marketing office, a public relation office and an event organization office - is one such attempt to reach out to a new audience and to private entertainment companies with the goal of reformation and survival in mind. This is no small task, however, as the Conservatory's greatest beneficiary and financier, the Vietnamese government itself, also presents its blockade in the form of a tangle of bureaucratic red tape.

"We know modernization and semi-commercialization is the direction of the industry, but we are limited in what we can do by countless policies and regulations," shares Son as he counts the few members of his team, all of which are graduates and teachers at the Conservatory. "This office is limited to only four staff members so we don't have much in terms of human resources. Our finances are similarly restricted."

Despite these obstacles, Son and his team are not daunted. "Resurrecting classical music in Vietnam is a mathematical equation with no clear answers in sight. But we can't give up. We have to keep looking and keep hoping." ■

# JAZZ HANDS

With sax player Tran Manh Tuan, you hear him  
before you see him

TEXT BY PATRICK CARPENTER

IMAGES BY GLENN RILEY



their way through the standards – songs like Gershwin’s *Summertime*, but they are searching for the *feel*. “If you can’t *play*, if you can’t *feel*, you can’t have jazz,” he says.

Jazz was born in the churches and brothels of New Orleans after the American Civil War. Slave songs, Sunday choirs and surplus horns and drums from the battlefields came together in one of the most blended cities in America, in the most mixed breed of music. It evolved from the blues to swing and traveled through wars and peace to Europe before wandering into Asia on wax records on colonial steamers. Jazz moved easily, fast and loose and willing, and evolved constantly. Joyous, desolate, it encompasses all of life.

“If you asked me to play exactly what I played last night at the club, I couldn’t do it. Each night is different. I’m playing and I’m improvising – off the body language of the band and the audience. I’m reading the mood and responding, interpreting. We’re communicating back and forth with the audience in a universal language,” Tuan adds.

So how did jazz find a home in a place like Vietnam where traditional music isn’t about improvisation and personalization? Where traditional culture, with its Confucian ethos and Buddhist influences, has long valued obedience and subjugation of the self? In such a setting, jazz seems decadent, almost irreverent.

“I first heard a saxophone when I was eight years old. I remember it clearly. It was from a song by Trinh Cong Son, Vietnam’s number one composer. I had been playing in my parents’ *cai luong* (Vietnamese opera) group since I was five. I played the moonstring, Vietnam’s two-string guitar. I didn’t have a childhood, I had the moonstring. But I heard that sax and that was it. It was the range of sound that hooked me. I started playing the saxophone in restaurants, around the swimming pools of five-star hotels, with a band, whenever and wherever I could,” says Tuan.

The young kids were listening to Bon Jovi and boy bands. The older crowd were conservative and sticking with the classics. Jazz was nowhere. In 1989, a group from France called *Oui, Oui, Oui* came and played at the French language center. “We talked about jazz and when they went back they sent cassettes. I listened to those tapes over and over and to CDs that my friends

Walking up to Tran Manh Tuan’s villa in the morning after the rain, there are the unmistakable sounds of a saxophone going up and down the tonal scale. It’s a distinctly metropolitan wake up call. Now the tones escape his studio and spread out over koi ponds and broad palms, past drowsy Chihuahuas and through his front gate. If you live on this street, you get free concerts. The rest of us have his Sax’n Art

club on 28 Le Loi or can catch him in the Opera House or anywhere around Saigon he headlines with his big band.

“That’s a good sax!” Tuan tells his student, a classically-trained musician who also happens to teach saxophone. Tuan is not just a performer, recording artist, producer and composer, he also teaches music teachers. They come to learn how to *play* – as in, play around. They may know how to read music, to play scales and make



brought from Eastern Europe. I loved it, learned as much as I could. The music had soul. It was personal, but at the same time, very open. And I was looking for a way to express myself. Jazz fit my persona and the saxophone fit my character.”

### Build It And They Will Come

“It was obvious I had to build my audience,” Tuan adds. “I needed a place where I could go and play, so I decided to build a club and hire myself to play every night.” The interior of Tuan’s club is bathed in red and blue light. There are saxophones wired into the walls and large photos of musicians that include Sonny Rollins and Charlie Parker. This is no downtown dive. The musicians take the stage at 9pm - piano, sax, bass and drums. The set starts with a jazz standard and the sax holds the spotlight before handing it off to the piano player.

“I started the club 11 years ago,” says Tuan. “My friends all said I was crazy. They said, ‘Where’s your audience?’ Well, in the beginning, 99 percent of my audience was imported. It was expats and tourists. I needed to find a way to grow a local audience.”

By 10pm, when Tuan takes the stage, the club is full with a blend of Asian and Western tourists, expats and locals, age ranging from mid-20s to mid-60s. All eyes are on the musicians, the chit-chat is minimal. It’s definitely a club where you come to listen, and the product is class. “I figured out how to bring Vietnam to jazz. I had to build a bridge. I picked out the old

folk music and rearranged the sound with soft jazz. I used traditional Vietnamese instruments and the instruments of the ethnic minorities. People could recognize the melody and sing along, but also be interested in where I would take it. They called it fusion and to many it is still what I am best known for, something familiar but new. If you only do things for the audience, then you are not a true artist, and you’ll have nothing at the end of the day. But you also have to be careful not to push too hard or they will go away. I made this bridge and they said it was trailblazing. I put these songs on my second CD and it was a huge hit. It’s still my best selling CD.”

Tuan breaks out the bamboo instruments on his second song, which seems to start in the northern forests before turning abruptly into the city when he picks up his sax. By the end of the song, we’re closer to Harlem than Ha Giang. Throughout the remainder of his set, Tuan is constantly playing different instruments: the tenor, alto and soprano sax, electric guitar, drum, cymbal, and unique ethnic minority instruments. One looks like three pipes coming out of a gourd, another a bit like the pan flute. When he plays them, you can see why his brand of Vietnamese fusion has caught on: they give you a true sense of place without any trappings of nostalgia. You won’t get this anywhere else from anyone else and the audience, regardless of their knowledge of jazz, seems to recognize they are getting something rare, something real.

“Day by day, the audience’s knowledge is getting better. Technology is a big part of it, with easier access to all types of music. People are exploring more musically. And I see the result in my club. More Vietnamese are coming, they’re younger and they’re coming with more understanding. Travel is another factor, both in terms of exploring outside Vietnam, and musicians coming here,” says Tuan.

Adding: “I’ve traveled to over 50 countries with my music, and I’ve played with some of the greats here in Vietnam. What I am seeing is that jazz is now truly universal. You have African and Arab beats and melodies in French jazz, you have festivals in places like Chiang Mai with musicians from Myanmar, Laos all giving local color. I’ve played with monks chanting in the pagoda in Hue. It’s all very free now. Even when you play with the greats like Herbie Hancock or Derek Nash, they give you space to create your own way.”

Appropriate, therefore, that Tuan’s set ends with *Fly Me To The Moon*. It starts misty, matching Saigon’s weather, but the audience knows by now there’s going to be fireworks before the song is through. Tuan and his band take everyone for a tour of sound, complete with him playing the soprano and alto sax together at the same time, music coming from both sides of his mouth in a frenzied Latin samba *chica chica*. From Jupiter and Mars to Rio in one song. From Louisiana to Lao Cai in one evening. ■

# THE HAT DANCE

Contemporary dance merges with Vietnamese folk music  
to create a dazzling visual performance

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES BY SON TRAN

At the premiere performance of *Nón* in June – held at IDECAF on Thai Van Lung – audiences were treated to a rare fusion of traditional Vietnamese instrumentation and the evocative, sinuous movements of contemporary dance. On their own, these forms tend to be equally impenetrable to general audiences – but in this case, their combination resulted in an unexpectedly compelling and accessible work that’s now set to make waves in Europe.

*Nón* emerged from a chance meeting between contemporary dancer Vu Ngoc Khai and traditional instrumentalist Ngo Hong Quang, who decided to collaborate after discovering that they’d both studied in Holland (Quang at the Amsterdam Conservatory of Music, and Khai at the Rotterdam Dance Academy). Their eventual performance ran overtime due to the palpable improvisatory energy generated

by the artists – demonstrating that whenever two supposedly non-compatible art forms meet, their hidden synergies can be brought into surprising and inspiring relief.

Given the success of the work’s first performance in Saigon three months ago, the pair are now committing to a three-year plan to take the show to audiences overseas in Europe and East Asia, beginning with a date in Luxembourg this December. In a region saturated in modern art, the pair hope to transmit something of the essence of Vietnamese culture in a context that is both familiar and challenging to European audiences.

*Nón* perhaps represents something new in terms of Vietnamese cultural exposure abroad. While both artists are Vietnamese, and while the musical elements are recognizably traditional at core, the impact of their performance reaches beyond local

culture into an entirely novel context. In terms of the dance, Khai – whose extensive training is entirely based on Western rather than Asian forms – works to reinterpret Vietnamese concepts according to his own understanding, while Quang seeks to transgress the traditional boundaries of his instruments.

“It’s a bit complicated, how I became interested in him,” says Khai (currently based in Germany) of the genesis of the show. “At that time, he was in Ho Chi Minh City for a performance, and then we caught up and I took him into my studio. We were playing his music, and I was improvising, and at that moment we just felt so connected. It was really so much about feeling.”

After meeting again back in Holland, the pair rehearsed together for over a week to explore the potential of approaching their own culture from a





Vu Ngoc Khai and Ngo Hong Quang

modern art perspective.

“When I work in Europe, I always wonder what makes me different from others,” says Khai, “and that is where I come from. But although I researched a lot to understand traditional Vietnamese dance, I realized that I have to respect it as it is. That’s why I don’t use Vietnamese dance materials for this work. I perform in another way, using a thematic concept to bring the cultural ideas into the piece.”

### The Mother’s Arms

In this case, *Nón* employs a range of Vietnamese icons to create an atmosphere that evokes and represents, rather than directly transmits, the culture of Vietnam.

“We worked together to find the most Vietnamese cultural characteristics to fit with the idea,” says Quang. “We first identified the rice cakes, *bánh chưng* and *bánh dày*, and we decided to focus on

them as the first inspiration to create art. But later on we got a bit stuck, and we really wanted to find something else. Then we thought of the *nón*, the conical hat, as this is a very, very beautiful Vietnamese hat, and it represents a lot of things – like the efforts of the people to try to reach the peak. Sometimes I think that’s the most beautiful concept of the piece. We also decided that we had to have a number of Vietnamese musical instruments as a collection of our different musical cultures. But the main thing I want to do in terms of the music is to focus on using the traditional musical materials to build a creation according to the modern mind, in order to achieve a modern work of art in combination with the movement of contemporary dance from Khai.”

“I focus on the circle and square, which is an idea from the *chung* cake,” explains

Khai. “In addition, I bring two elements into the piece, earth and water. Those elements stand against each other, but together, they are the start of making life. The rain falls from the sky to the earth to create a new life. I picture them as the father and the mother. When I look up, there is the mother above me, and the father under my feet. I love that image, when Quang sits under the huge conical hat, we sit and stand on the Earth, and above us is the mother covering us, the mother’s hat, the mother’s arms.”

For Quang, it’s not the first time that he’s explored the traditional music of Vietnam from a modern perspective. In his 2011 album *Song Hành*, Quang teamed up with Dutch musician Onno Krijn to recast Vietnamese folk ballads with contemporary sounds, including electrified traditional instruments and funky, abstract soundscapes. While some listeners felt that Quang was devaluing the ethnic music of Vietnam, Quang still maintains that his work is constructive in nature.

“I want to show the beauty of traditional Vietnamese musical instruments,” says Quang, “which can not only speak the Vietnamese language. The instruments can speak other languages too. It depends on the skill of the person who plays it, or who uses the instrument. Like a person who can speak many different kinds of language. There are no boundaries, the instruments can do a lot of things next to traditional music.”

“For *Nón*, I didn’t use any electronic stuff,” he explains. “Only acoustic, which is related to Vietnamese traditional music too. I wanted to do something really acoustic, while the contemporary aspect is that I go out of the modes, I go out of the scales. I move out, move around to bend the notations or go to different harmonies, to make the atmosphere of the music clearer and clearer and to suit the movement of the dancing. So it’s really something challenging, to go out of the tradition.”

The European performances of *Nón* will present the work to an audience of up to 300 people and will ideally appeal to a broader audience than ethnic Asian music tends to attract in the region.

“I think that young audiences here in Europe will be interested in this show,” says Khai. “If you just take a look, yes, it’s contemporary dance, but it’s very much connected in that once the music starts, I am a note of the instrument. So what the audiences hear and can see is not really an abstract thing. The audience just gets into it by watching and listening to the music at the same time, in the way of taking it inside the body.”

“At the same time, people are very curious,” he adds. “Young people love seeing a different culture. I’m not sure that many young people here even know where Vietnam is. We’re far away, and they just know that Vietnam is in Asia. So in a way we want to bring Vietnamese culture into Europe and everywhere around the world.” ■

# VIETNAM'S RIHANNA

Singer Thao Trang's ambition to become as famous as the Barbadian superstar

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IMAGES BY LE THIEN VIEN

I'm probably not the only one who's reluctant to bring up the topic of Rihanna when chatting with Thao Trang these days. It may be a sore point; it's only been a matter of weeks since the Vietnamese singer posted an out-of-nowhere tirade against the injustices of the music industry on her Facebook page entitled *Rihanna is world famous, why not me?* Thao Trang's been compared to Rihanna for most of her career – they share a similar dusky, dangerously seductive look – but whereas the Barbadian superstar achieved world celebrity by merely landing in Jay-Z's lap, Thao Trang's three-year campaign to connect with a decent producer in the US has thus far met with frustration.

In her post, Trang claims that the producers she's met have told her that there's nothing in terms of talent or performance that would put Rihanna above her on the stage. The problem is that they're reluctant to take a risk – even given that she's a successful artist – with someone from a low-level market like Vietnam. Getting told “sorry, you're good, but you're Vietnamese” too many times has gotta hurt.

Fortunately, Trang has no problem with talking about Rihanna whatsoever, and admits that the comparison between the singers has actually been an important part of her career in Vietnam. Of course, it's not jealousy, she laughs – “I'm only jealous in the way that I want to have that success too. It's envy. What I wrote was just an ‘I wonder...’ thing. Why I'm not like that. What do I need to work on, what's the help I need to get there?”

I'll be honest that in Thao Trang's case, I've never quite understood the comparison with Rihanna in the first place. Rihanna may have a distinctive voice, but take a good look and shake your head: that's one messed-up celebrity there, and her performances can be rough and heavier on style than they are on the actual music. If you want to get technical, Thao Trang's the more accomplished singer of the two, hands down – she delivers lucid, sunny vocals with a well-controlled gusto, just as you'd expect from a musician who perfected her tone through the study of classical opera at the HCMC Conservatory of Music. What's more, Thao Trang is exceptional in



this country in that she speaks and sings in English with remarkable fluency, and she's probably alone in the homegrown music industry to have released such an abundance of singles in the English language rather than Vietnamese.

"People thought I was out of my mind," she says of the time she started frenetically recording in English after scoring her first big break on the local music scene – she placed highly in the first season of *Vietnam Idol* back in 2007, in theory prepping her for a gentle career singing in funky Saigon cafés. But even then, she was an unusual fit for the Vietnamese music industry, and with her bushy afro and distinctly café-mocha complexion, many fans thought that she was at least partly of African descent. The nickname she picked up at the time is one that she still bears proudly today – *xau la*, 'a strange kind of ugly.'

The notoriety that grew out of her unique look, however, proved to be a source of further opportunities after leaving the show. While basing a music career on an *Idol* appearance has proven difficult even for winners of the competition overseas, Thao Trang found her kind of 'ugly' was in considerable demand here.

"I got a lot of shows, people wanted me to sing," she remembers. "At that time, my knowledge of fashion and my own image was low. Then I got the chance to travel to Bangkok, so of course the vibe, the young people, the fashion, and everything just hit me. I learned a little, I became more aware of what I was wearing, and worked out how to look better."

"At that time, I worked with a group of *Viet Kieu* friends," she says. "They were all together with a company called Early Risers. I joined them to do an OST of a movie, *Fool for Love*. I started with that, and afterwards I signed with the company for two years – I did one album, *The New Me*, and a few singles. Then my level went up step by step, and I learned a lot from those guys. They taught me so much about music – urban, R&B – and English. Before that, I just sang concerts. They taught me how to sing in English from within me. That was a new thing."

## The Right Time

The origins of Thao Trang's musical and language abilities go back way beyond *Vietnam Idol*. It's not a happy story, although she still speaks with considerable emotion about the wonderful father who taught her English and music at a very

young age. While her early childhood here in the south was idyllic, family difficulties prompted a move back to her dad's hometown in Quang Tri, where things took a turn for the worse.

"I think that was a bad move," she says. "We started all over again from zero, when we already had something in the south. One thing was that the village was too poor, and it was hard to make money. It was just a bad environment. There were guys drinking, and they treated the family badly. So we got drawn into that."

"He was a good dad," she sighs. "Until he got drunk, and totally lost it. So then he became a not-so-good dad. That's the



reason why our family broke up."

With the disintegration of her happy home, Trang had to leave school and accompany her mother back to the south, where she settled into a life of factory work and staffing a canteen. She'd still be there if the idea to pick up her schooling again hadn't come into her head from out of nowhere, prompting her to get on her bike, drive 10km into Saigon, and look for a suitable course.

"I found a school where I could study at night, because I had to work during the day," she says. "So I went there every day, and finished my 12th grade. While I was there, I met a friend who was a singer for weddings and small events. I hung out with her and she helped me to sing a little bit, mainly because we went to school together.

At that time I was driving her to her shows. And then I told her one day, 'Yeah, I would love to sing like you.' So she introduced me to the organizer of her show, and he let me go up to sing just one time. Just to know what I could do, go up to sing one song. That was it, everything started from there. Then he invited me to come and sing shows for him, for real."

Thao Trang spent the rest of her schooling balancing work, study, and singing for fun in between, without any real plan for what would happen next.

"Even though I'd been singing, I didn't think it would be my career. I just thought I'd get my degree, then work at an office like everyone else. Then after I was done with school, I was sitting with my whole class for the last time – like when you say goodbye to everybody when they go their separate ways. They kept talking about how they were going to apply for university. I sat there and wondered, what can I do? I was really bad at school, so if I went to do the exam, it was going to kill me, I'd fail for sure! I thought I was good at nothing. So based on what I thought I could pass, I applied to the Conservatory of Music, because it was focused on singing."

"It was just to have a school, really," she admits. "I wasn't trying to be a proper singer. I thought I'd study to become a teacher... we were very young back then, our thinking was very simple. But then when I started, I joined a lot of activities with friends in the class. We joined a lot of competitions, and I kept singing shows to make money. I competed a lot before *Vietnam Idol*, but because I kept failing, I thought OK, this thing may not really be for me, I'll just finish school and be something else. So I didn't expect much from *Idol* – I thought 'well, I'm not going to win anyway.' But luckily it was at the right time."

Although her father lost his battle with cancer a few years ago, he lived long enough to see the little girl he taught to sing become a star. "I think he was so lonely," says Trang. "He would drink and smoke too much. But he saw me on TV for *Vietnam Idol*, and yeah, he was alive for a few years after that. He saw it happen."

Thao Trang hasn't given up on her aspirations overseas. She's just begun working with a new music streaming app, Guvera, which has committed to promoting her in several target markets – and while she'll be sticking to performing in Vietnam for now, the long-term goal is still to make it abroad.

"I will try to focus on Vietnam anyway," she promises. "I still have to survive. But I do have some good connections right now, so we'll see how it goes. I believe in luck. That's my life. It came with a lot of luck, a lot. I will still go with that." ■

# THE WIZARD OF MUSIC

Mai Dinh Toi and his innovative musical instruments fashioned out of everyday objects

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM  
ASTOLD BY MAI DINH TOI

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



One of Vietnam's most prolific musicians, Mai Dinh Toi can often be seen on Vietnamese television and at events playing a wide assortment of homemade instruments made from the most mundane materials: garden hoses, glass bottles, rice bowls, neon bulbs, an aluminum door... He's traveled to over 30 countries over the past quarter of a century entertaining crowds with his unique blend of creativity and technical execution. He recently made national news for modifying Vietnam's traditional *dan bau* (monochord) to use its full length instead of just the front half as it has been played for centuries. From playing a pair of flutes using just the air from both nostrils, playing a flute while using his feet to play the drums or taking advantage of water glasses on the table in a café for an impromptu rendition of *Fur Elise*, the so-called "Wizard of Musical Instruments" is a blur of fast-talking, hand-waving animation who can barely keep seated as he talks about his extraordinary life in music.

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I was born in Thanh Hoa, in Vietnam's north. My first recollection of music was accompanying my grandfather as he played the flute at funerals. Pretty soon, he taught me to accompany him playing the drums when I was six or seven. Then he taught me to play the flute as well. In fact, our family has been playing funeral music for generations. My father and brothers are also musicians.

As a teen, I made it through the selection rounds to attend the National Classical Opera Theatre. I later actually had to attend two universities: the Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Cinema to study clarinet, and the Vietnam National Music Academy for the flute, because I had two different instructors.

I spent some time performing with the national orchestra, and even though audiences were appreciative, I felt something was missing. I'm the type of person who's always thinking of new ways of doing things. It took me seven years,

but I mastered playing the flute at the same time as using my feet to play traditional Vietnamese drums. It's difficult because the rhythm is completely different for those two instruments. I can't tell you how many times my wrists and ankles would swell up, harden and then go back to normal while I was practicing. I don't know if I'm a musical "genius" or "wizard" or whatever; I feel I'm just a regular person. But maybe I'm a bit more observant than average, seeing everything as a potential musical instrument. Everyone has ideas. The key is to not let those ideas fade away.

I remember one especially cold night in Hanoi about 20 years ago when I couldn't sleep. An idea came to me about using glass bottles as instruments, so I immediately got up. It was four in the morning and nothing was open except for an old lady who sold sticky rice. She gave me a funny look when I asked to buy all the bottles she had. She had to climb up to her crawl space to pull them out. All the while, all I could think about was how to put the bottles together, what they would sound like and what song would capture their unique sound. Now, that bottle instrument is part of my act and audiences really like it when I use bottles from their country to make the instrument.

You know, I have dozens of ideas, but out of those, maybe only one will succeed. I've had lots of failures. No one will ever know how many monochords I've broken while trying to modify it to use its entire length. I've also tried to make instruments out of clay pots. I went up to Binh Duong to test them out but found that they were too big and the sound they produced wasn't clear. But music and invention is all about trying new things.

That's what helped me make the decision to leave the national orchestra and move to Saigon. If you only rely on the orchestra or the government to pay your salary at the end of the month, it can lead to complacency, not really working but still getting a salary. Very few people would dare leave the safety of a government job, but I felt I had to push myself, find my own path. So I moved to Saigon because I felt Saigonese are more open to innovation, and that's when I felt my musical road open up for me. But striking out on my own was scary, too, because you have only yourself to rely on. I had to become a businessman as well. But I prepared for that, too. As a university student back in the day, there weren't bookstores where you could just sit and read like now. I remember taking a job at a used book shop. I didn't receive a salary, but instead got to read all the books I wanted. When I came across an interesting paragraph in books about

business or success, I remember tearing out tiny pieces of them to stuff in my shirt pocket. I hope the people who bought the book didn't get mad because there was still a lot of the book left! [laughs]

I guess I'm lucky, too, that I can play a lot of instruments. My training was in the flute, oboe and monochord, but I can also play the saxophone and other woodwind instruments. But it takes a lot of hard work to be able to control your breathing to produce a long, steady stream of air, not unlike a skilled singer. It's like a bee — when its wings hum steadily as it hovers in the air, not darting from one place to another. My breathing exercises aren't quite meditation, but they do involve sitting still and practicing holding my breath, just trying for a little longer each day. One day, I found that I could hold my breath for two to three minutes or put my face in a wash basin for a long time and not see any bubbles come up. I remember pulling some pranks at the swimming pool, doing a dead man's float for minutes until the lifeguard rushed over to save me. [laughs]

So it's really both a combination of creativity and execution. An idea at first

were many people who changed it and perfected it over the centuries. But I wondered why only the top half was used. My modifications have allowed the entire length to be used, doubling the number of notes it can play. I call it the "after twin," like a missing twin that's now been reunited. But the *dan bau* doesn't belong to me. It belongs to Vietnam. It's like discovering a fishing pond and telling your friends to come and fish. Or finding a fruit tree where everyone can come and eat. But if you want to take part of the root home and grow it yourself, you'll have to think of the person who planted it. People come to me and ask me to make them a modified *dan bau*, but I just tell them to bring me theirs and I'll modify it for them. I don't mind people copying me. But if they take one of my instruments and call it their own, that's another thing. The Vietnamese have a saying: Beat the one running away, not the one running towards you. So when musicians phone me up and say, "I like what you're doing. Can you show me...?" I'm happy to help, because the execution part is easier. Anyone can execute. It's coming up with the original idea that's difficult.

Personally, I'm not afraid for the future of traditional Vietnamese instruments. The key, though, is in not just preserving them, but further developing them. If people don't like a performance, it just means it needs a few more elements to make it better — like rice that is half cooked. If we continue to develop the precious heritage of our traditional instruments, audiences will come. Look at places like Japan or Korea where there are hundreds of traditional musicians who can all make a living. Why can't Vietnam be like that? I'm telling you

straight — Vietnamese musicians are very skilled, on par with foreign musicians. It's just that we don't have enough opportunities to perform, just an event once a month at the opera house or for birthday parties or whatever. But Vietnamese musicians have to apply themselves to their craft and not just think about money. If that's your attitude, then you won't succeed. First and foremost, it has to be for the love of music. The younger generation of musicians have got it right. Instead of asking "how much will you pay me?", they're getting together and performing for free at coffee houses. They're saying: "Here's my product. If you don't like it, you don't have to pay." But in the meantime, they're honing their skills. Music is all about passion and dedication. You have to give it your all and it will reward you with everything.

To collaborate with Mai Dinh Toi on projects or to meet this inspiring, talented musician, contact him at [maidinhtoi@yahoo.com](mailto:maidinhtoi@yahoo.com) or at 090 388 3870. ■



might seem easy to execute, but sometimes it takes months or even years. But in the end, the reward is worth it. When I feel the audience on the edge of their seats, when a crowded opera house suddenly goes quiet to the point you can hear a pin drop as the first note sounds... Then the rapturous applause at the end. There's nothing quite like it. I don't feel as if I've had to sacrifice anything for my music. It's all happiness. I'm the happiest person alive. To study what you love, to be able to make a living from music... the time spent practicing and the frustrations of failure is only a thousandth of what music has given me — fame, money, joy. Especially the joy that comes from performing on an instrument that is my own creation. Flutes are common. But to make an instrument out of bottles or a garden hose, that's unique. I thought of it. I made it. I play it.

### After Twin

My latest project is the modification of the *dan bau*. Obviously, before me, there

# Wine & Dine

IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN





# Meat on Swords

A night at a *churrascaria* is a quintessential Brazilian experience

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

RECENT YEARS HAVE seen Brazilian steakhouses, called *churrascarias*, grow in popularity. There a variety of them from corporate chains to establishments that rise to the level of fine dining. The origin of the *churrascarias* dates back to the early 19th century when European immigrants settled the Rio Grande do Sul area of Brazil and became adept at raising and herding cattle. These settlers came to be known as *gauchos*. Their method of cooking, called *churrasco*, was inspired by the *gauchos*. *Churrasco* involved putting large cuts of the best meat on skewers and slowly cooking them over charcoal. The chefs, called *passadores*, used their knives to slice off thin pieces of meat

onto the plates of their dinner guests.

The tradition continues today with *churrascarias* enjoying growing popularity throughout the world, and our beloved Saigon is home to one of our very own, *Au Lac do Brazil* (238 Pasteur, D3; 3820 7157). Au Lac is the passion of Nga Stromler who is a self-confessed foodie. Nga explained that she wanted to open a restaurant for some time before happening upon a *churrascaria* while on holiday in Portugal. “I knew immediately that I wanted to bring this back to Vietnam,” she explained. Nga and her husband Jan set about opening up their first location at 238 Pasteur; she picks out the food for the

menu and he curates the wine list. Thirteen years later their passion for attending to the carnivores of Saigon burns as hot as the coals over which they roast their meat.

Au Lac’s staff greets their guests warmly, foreshadowing the experience that waits. Once seated, uninitiated patrons will notice a small plastic button that accompanies the otherwise typical place settings. Upon closer examination, the button has a green side and a red side. As long as you keep the green side up, the *passadores* will continue bringing meat. When one has finally had enough, simply turn the button over to red to signal your surrender. But until that moment arrives, and it will, you are free to gorge yourself.

While there is an a la carte menu available, most opt for the all-you-can-eat *churrasco* (VND650,000 per person) menu that includes a variety of side dishes. The *churrasco* features calabrian sausage, bacon-wrapped shrimp, chicken wings, pork ribs, smoked ham, grilled pineapple, beef shoulder, leg of lamb, and *picanha*, which is a sirloin cut and a specialty of Brazilian steakhouses. The beef and lamb are imported fresh via daily airfreight from New Zealand while pork and chicken are sourced locally; an exclusive provider



supplies the ham and sausage.

The parade begins with sausage and bacon-wrapped shrimp. Both are wonderful starters as they are on the light side and couple well with the variety of condiments on the table such as tangy mustard or chimichurri sauce. Chicken wings and pork ribs come next. The wings offer some zing as they're barbecued with Vietnamese palates in mind, and the beef rib packs quite a mouthful, while the smoked ham and grilled pineapple offer a sweet combination for a change of pace. The beef shoulder was a wonderful surprise. It's a savory selection with a pleasant, grainy texture that falls apart as it's eaten. We favored it over the ribs and recommend making it a point to get a second serving. The leg of lamb was terrific. Again, one can have it more well done, but lower temps are the way to go. The signature cut of *churrasco* menus is the picanha. It's a tender, thinly sliced cut of meat that is best enjoyed at medium rare to rare, although they will have some cooked up a bit more for those who are squeamish about their meat being too red. Without question it's something you'll want to come around again, and possibly again, so keep that button green side up!

Not everyone has the fortitude to go in for the never-ending procession of meat, and for those people there is the plank steak (250g, VND650,000). New on Au Lac's menu, it's a great ribeye steak served with a choice of rich, mashed potatoes or a baked potato, bacon-wrapped asparagus,

and grilled tomatoes. Tender and juicy, it's a perfect fit for less ambitious carnivores who don't want to be left out of the fun. Whether for more intimate affairs, or large family or business gatherings, Au Lac do Brazil is sure to please everyone but the vegetarians amongst us. ■



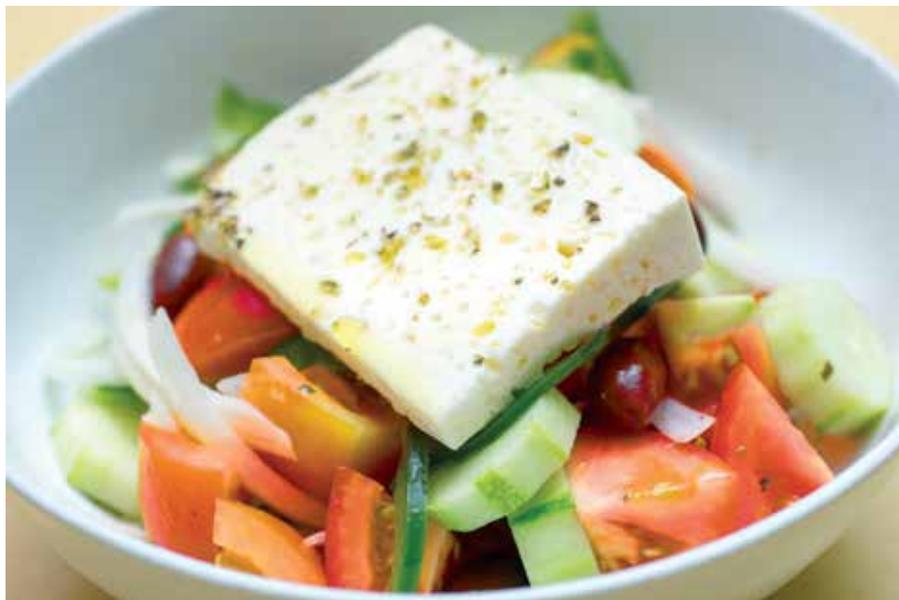
IMAGE PROVIDED BY AU LAC DO BRAZIL



# All Hail Zeus!

Authentic Greek fare at budget-friendly prices

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



FOR ALL THE great food that Saigon has to offer, it can sometimes be hard to find a good meal when you don't feel like Vietnamese fare or necessarily want to blow the food budget on a single outing. What's left is often greasy fast food or Western-ish dishes that disappointingly taste like Vietnamese versions of the real deal.

Enter **Zeus** (164 Cong Quynh, D1), a small family-run Greek eatery that focuses on a simple two-page menu of traditional Greek food made well. The décor is equally unpretentious with a comfortable, no-nonsense dining area with the requisite framed photos of the Acropolis and the blue rooftops of Santorini, while the front of the restaurant houses the outdoor grill and rotating spit for the gyro, sending heavenly wafts of roasting meat out onto busy Cong Quynh.

Our meal started off with Greek salad (VND130,000) and Tzatziki (VND80,000). The salad had well-balanced proportions of tomatoes, cucumbers, onions and green peppers with an entire brick of feta on top, a decadent reminder that the excellent cheese is made fresh in-house — tangy, rich, salty and not crumbly, everything a good feta should be. The dressing is simple and doesn't seek to overpower the freshness of the ingredients, a nice balance of sweet with a punch of sour. (The salad might be slightly heavy on the onions for some, so if onions aren't your thing, you may want to ask for less of it.) The yogurt and cucumber Tzatziki was equally solid, thick and hearty, with a generous drizzle of olive oil, and served with grilled pita, also homemade. Zeus' pita is slightly thicker than elsewhere and is grilled for a smoky crispiness on one side, so you'll want to eat it right away while it's still hot.

Zeus was originally opened as a souvlaki shop and its Mixed Souvlaki Plate (VND165,000 with accompanying green salad, or VND205,000 with Greek salad) was a tasty combination of chicken and pork souvlaki, a kebab of minced beef with bread crumbs which was well-spiced for an earthy rusticity, and a hearty beef and pork sausage. The grilled meat skewers were tender and juicy, especially the pork, with just the right amount of charring. The star of the green salad was the dressing, a light honey and olive oil concoction that left us

FROM TOP: Greek salad; Tzatziki; and Mixed Souvlaki Plate with green salad

wanting more.

At only VND60,000, the Greek Moussaka was a steal, a generous portion of fried eggplant and potatoes covered with minced beef and Béchamel cream sauce, the ultimate in comfort food, its richness cut by the dollops of sweet ketchup and tangy, salad dressing-style mayonnaise. Another budget-friendly dish was the Gyro pork pita at VND 40,000, stuffed with thick slices of slow-grilled pork, fried potatoes and tzatziki sauce, all wrapped up in a pita — a quick meal in itself.

The standout of the evening, though, was the Giouvetsi, a classic baked Greek pasta and beef casserole, and at VND200,000, one of the more expensive dishes on the menu, but completely worth it for its fussy recipe. Giouvetsi calls for simmering chunks of beef in red wine and tomato sauce until tender and then adding a short-cut pasta and finishing in the oven. At Zeus, the meat sauce is simmered over low heat for 8 hours with a few bay leaves thrown in for that pleasant aromatic quality before the addition of orzo, then cooked in a clay pot which helps maintain the heat for as long as you're eating it. It's the perfect antidote to a cold, rainy Saigon evening.

The desserts do not deviate from the restaurant's mantra: simple foods made with good ingredients. The flaky, not-too-sweet Baklava (VND40,000) is loaded with walnuts, almonds and cashews while the Greek yogurt (VND60,000) features Zeus' own branded yogurt topped with homemade marmalade — orange,

strawberry, lychee, grape or mango, all using Greek honey.

Since chef-owner Eftiochios Mountakis and his Vietnamese wife, Sammy, moved back to Vietnam from Athens in early 2013 to open Zeus, their goal has been to serve up authentic Greek fare with no MSG or other chemicals. As a youngster, Eftiochios lived on a farm where his father raised 3,000 sheep and goats, growing up drinking goat and sheep's milk and eating homemade cheeses. Unable to find authentic Greek products in Saigon, he's

applied that same farm-to-table mentality to Zeus, where the restaurant produces its own feta cheese and Greek yogurt, both to be used in its own dishes and to be sold commercially. Find Zeus products for sale at the restaurant or in stores like Maximark and Phuong Ha with more distributors in the works. Feta is priced at VND160,000 for a 200g package, or VND790,000 for a 1kg tub. Greek yogurt is VND65,000 and VND55,000 for strained and unstrained versions in 170g containers, or VND270,000 per 1kg tub. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Eftiochios Mountakis with family; Greek Moussaka; Gyro pork pita; Giouvetsi; and Baklava



# Don't Call it a Steakhouse

Caring about meats is what this grill house is all about

TEXT BY JULIAN AJELLO IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

THE FOLKS BEHIND newcomers to the Saigon dining scene, Racha Room and Relish & Sons, completed a trifecta with the addition of **Stoker Woodfired Grill & Bar** (44 Mac Thi Buoï, D1). Located mere steps from Racha Room, Stoker welcomes patrons with a dark wood interior and rich hues that project warmth as you stroll inside. The bar hosts an impressive array of fine spirits including an extensive collection of bourbon, scotch and gin, all of which are employed to create tantalizing cocktails to get your evening off to a rollicking start (Happy Hour is buy-one-get-one on everything, 5pm-7pm, seven days a week).

Leading the kitchen is chef Julien Thabault. Trained in France, Julien left Paris after five years of study to cut his path through the culinary world working in London, his last stop being the renowned Quo Vadis in London's Soho neighborhood.

"We're not a steakhouse," Julien professed with a determined and confident tone. "We're a grill house; we care about all our meats." Stoker has plenty of them on offer, including steaks, pork, lamb and even salmon, and they use a custom built room to dry age some of their choicest cuts. Stoker doesn't stop there with what feels like a bespoke restaurant experience, however. Other than ice cream, they do everything in house, from baking their own breads and pastries to smoking and curing their own meats. "We care about our products and we're not scared to put up our prices a bit to obtain the best quality," he admitted. "We want to serve only the best."

After giving us a guided tour of the menu, providing suggestions, and asking us about foods we enjoy, Julien assembled our evening's meal. We started out with some rosemary flatbread (VND55,000)

from their wood fired oven; herb-roasted bone marrow with chimichurri sauce, caramelized onions, and sourdough bread (VND210,000); and an organic tomato salad with chorizo sausage and burrata cheese in a balsamic vinaigrette dressing (VND190,000).

The bone marrow is the most compelling menu item and, as it happens, the most popular as well. Despite Stoker being only two months old, the bone marrow starter is popular amongst their clientele who can't seem to get enough of it, and with good reason. The roasted herb crust is a wonderful balance for the soft, fatty marrow's rich texture. Combined with a small dollop of caramelized onions on a sourdough toast point makes this a brilliant way to begin a meal. I might prefer the toast points a bit more thin to allow the marrow to stand out more, but it's a savory dish that insists upon being ordered. The organic tomato salad was stellar and it highlights Stoker's obsession with using only the best ingredients for their menu. A mix of fried and raw Dalat cherry tomatoes is combined with local raw tomatoes, burrata cheese, and chorizo in balsamic vinaigrette to deliver what I thought was the biggest surprise of the evening. The freshness of this dish can't be overstated, nor can its delightful mosaic of flavors.

But Stoker is a grill house, and we were eager to see Julien make good on just how much they care about their meats. We dined on an Aussie filet aged 21 days (220g, VND790,000) and Secreto Iberico (180g, VND420,000), served with mashed potatoes

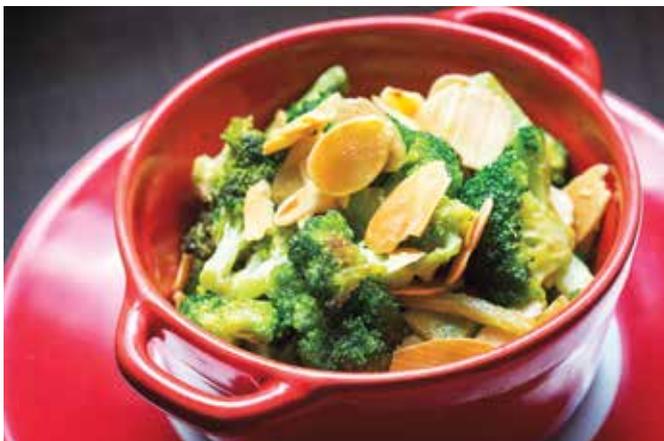
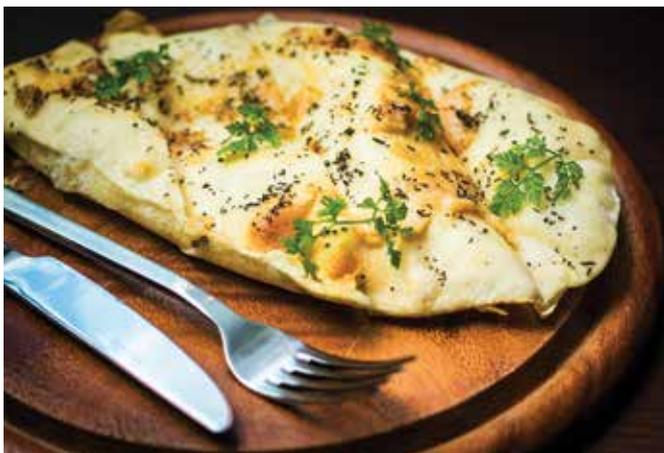


IMAGE PROVIDED BY STOKER

IMAGE PROVIDED BY STOKER

(VND90,000), asparagus with feta cheese (VND150,000), and broccoli with almonds in brown butter (VND70,000). The mashed potatoes were sinfully smooth and buttery and may as well have been served for dessert. The most apt term to describe them is decadent. The broccoli in brown butter was quite appealing, but sautéed asparagus remains my preferred vegetable with grilled meats. The addition of feta cheese provided a tangy change of pace.

Their flagship filet was a beautiful cut of meat, dry aged in their custom aging room, and served on a wooden block with a bit of salt and your choice of sauce. The dry aging makes a tremendous difference. First, it evaporates moisture from the muscle, which concentrates the beef flavor and taste. Second, the beef's natural enzymes break down the connective tissue in the

muscle, which creates a more tender beef and a silky texture. The Secret Iberico, or secret cut, is from just behind the shoulder of a Spanish pig fed a diet of semi-wild acorns. Cutting into the tender slab of pork revealed its bright pink interior. Few restaurants are daring enough to cook pork to medium temperatures, but Stoker does so with confidence. One bite is all it takes to confirm their care for their meat is sincere. Dining on pork cooked to a medium temperature reveals flavors one doesn't have the opportunity to enjoy when the meat is cooked well. It's something that may give one apprehension, but it rewards the bold handsomely.

The attentive staff was not about to let us depart without indulging in something from their dessert menu. On the advice of our server, we ordered the chocolate

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rosemary flatbread; Bone marrow; Tomato salad; Aussie filet; Broccoli with almonds; and Secret Iberico

fondant with flaming cherries and vanilla ice cream (VND160,000). Watching rich, molten chocolate flow from the inside of a cake where it can be mixed with cherries and vanilla ice cream is an exquisite way to finish off an exquisite meal. Stoker gets everything right in spades, and their quality demands return visits for those willing to pay a bit extra for the experience they provide. But don't call it a steakhouse. ■

# Razzmatazz

Shiraz is the name given to the dark-skinned Syrah grape, but now it's also the name of the newest wine shop in Saigon



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



IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

WHILE IT SEEMS appropriate to call a wine shop *Shiraz Wine & Coffee Shop* (20 Mac Thi Bui, D1), however it was not named after the grape. According to the owners, Shiraz encompasses many meanings that they want to translate to their customers - love, creativity, success - all of which can be associated with the spirit behind Shiraz. Noticing a gap in District 1 where people can find a wide

selection of wine at affordable prices, they decided to bridge the gap. The two aim to educate and promote wine among young Vietnamese who are now starting to become curious about wine and the culture.

Shiraz has over 550 different wines in stock, and their selection changes every month, giving guests an astonishing choice, with bottles starting at

VND255,000 and even going up to several million dong; whatever price suits you, you will find it here. Apart from a great selection of wines from both Old and New World, Shiraz has a coffee area, a smoking area, and the upstairs area is available for private bookings and is free if guests buy the food and wine from the shop - making it ideal for birthday parties, wine tastings and company events.

For example, one of the premium wines you can enjoy at Shiraz is Cedula Real, a jewel coming directly from Rioja in Spain. The limited edition wine is made from a blend of 90 percent tempranillo grapes with another 10 percent from local grapes that help give the complexity you will find in this fabulous wine. Being a Gran Reserva, the most premium Spanish wines, this wine spends a minimum of two years in the barrel and another three years in the bottle before it is released - this gives you an idea of the complexity and beauty of the wine.

Another of my favorites found here is Kaiken Ultra Cabernet Sauvignon from Argentina. A subtle beautiful wine made by iconic Montes winery, full of fruit while delivering good complexity - a pleasure to drink.

If you prefer white wines, give Mercedes Eguren Sauvignon Blanc a try. This inexpensive wine delivers a cocktail of tropical fruits in both the nose and palate with the right acidity, making it ideal as an aperitif or paired with oysters, prawns or white fish.

At Shiraz visitors can buy the wine to take home or drink on the premises (with a seven percent service charge), giving guests the opportunity to enjoy their tittle of choice served in professional Riedel glasses in a sophisticated atmosphere. What is more, good wine pairing is also available in the premises with wine-friendly food like imported cheese, cold meats and pâté.

Whether you come to Shiraz to buy a bottle of wine for a present, to enjoy it on the premises, or simply to learn more about wine, you will be spoiled for choice, in a warm professional atmosphere with great prices. ■

# Candy Crush Crudité

How a smartphone game inspired healthy cooking for kids



Vietnamese chef **Jack Lee** ([www.chefjacklee.com](http://www.chefjacklee.com)) has served a host of Hollywood A-listers from Angelina Jolie to Barbra Streisand, and recently returned to chef for Acacia Veranda Dining (149-151 Nguyen Du, DI). His biography *You Don't Know Jack* by *Oi* writer NPD Khanh will be released later this year.

A FEW YEARS ago, my daughter contracted the deadly H1N1 virus. She was in a hospital for over three weeks – truly a dreadful time for my wife and me. Seeing our three-year-old on a hospital bed riddled with plastic tubing and with a fever that would never come down, as well as never-ending blood draws, almost broke my heart. My Angela loves food – but during those times, food was the last thing on her mind, especially hospital food. We couldn't make her eat anything, not even her favorite french fries.

Although I knew full well that sick people just do not have an appetite, as a father I was very concerned, as she had already lost a lot of weight. Being a chef, I wondered to myself what could entice children to eat? It had to be something colorful, tasty, and fun that they wouldn't

necessarily realize was healthy food.

When she finally came home, her recovery took another few weeks before things went back to normal in our household again. While trying to make her feel better, we played a game on my phone, and she pointed and said, "This is what I want to eat!"

The game was Candy Crush. Immediately, my mind started turning, and I had an exciting idea. My inspiration to create healthy, appetizing food for kids was right in front of me. From then on, every day I would prepare a healthy dish to entice my children to eat. As time went on during these experiments, I began to get a grasp of what my children liked to eat. Immediately, I started creating healthier counterparts of the original dishes my children enjoyed.

To my surprise, it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. After each meal, I would ask them what they liked and disliked about the food. To this day my children are my best critics.

My wife and I strongly believe in eating healthy food. Fruits and vegetables are always a part of our meals. The benefits of eating a healthy and balanced diet is widely publicized, and although it's cute and adorable to see a chubby baby, overfeeding is probably the most unhealthy thing parents can do to their children.

Obesity starts with what we feed our children at home. It's best to start eating well at a young age, as healthy food is a big factor in raising a healthy child.

With that, I leave you a simple recipe that your children will enjoy. ■



## CANDY CRUSH CRUDITÉ WITH RANCH DRESSING

Now, remember that vegetable crudité can be anything you put on the plate. As long as the Ranch Dressing dip is good, your kids will eat it up. Bon appétit!

### For the Ranch Dressing:

- 1 cup buttermilk
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1 clove of garlic, grated
- 2 tablespoons fresh flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly-ground black pepper

If you're making this dish for adults rather than children, you can consider adding ½ tsp of Tabasco.

### For my crudité I like to use:

- 2 cups celery
- 1 cup carrots
- 1 cup beets
- 1 whole yellow and red plum
- 1 cup of forbidden rice (cooked and seasonal)
- 1 cup of cooked pearl onion
- ½ hot house cucumber

## >>The List

# Wine & Dine

## BARS



### Blanchy's Tash

Known 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



### Chu Bar

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

158 Dong Khoi, D1



### Harry Casual

This sports pub has five floors including inside/outside area on the ground floor, a lounge area, 4 pool tables, 6 dart boards and a rooftop bar. Along with good selection of 70s, 80s and 90s hits with attentive staff and pub grub.

R1/49 Hung Gia 3, PMH, D7



### Last Call

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

59 Dong Du, D1  
3823 3122



### O'Brien's

Two-storey Irish-themed bar and restaurant that offers a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. Known for its excellent food menu, this is a fun place to socialize while shooting pool or playing darts. They occasionally have live music.

74/A3 Hai Ba Trung, D1



### 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

## Also Try...

### Broma Saigon Bar

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

41 Nguyen Hue, D1

### 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

### Donkey Bar

An open air, but well cooled bar in the heart of Bui Vien on the site of the once popular Stellar cafe. A cut above the regular backpacker haunts in style and offer. Downstairs is a modern bar with flat screen TVs showing sports, a huge circular bar and tables, and outdoor seating for people watching. Upstairs are air conditioned rooms, pool table and outdoor deck.

119 Bui Vien, D1

### Game On

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

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1

### onTop Bar

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

167 Hai Ba Trung, D3  
3822 4866

### Purple Jade

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

1st floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon  
6pm until late  
dine@icasianasaignon.com

### Saigon Saigon Bar

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

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

### Xu Bar

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

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



For full review, please visit: [www.oivietnam.com](http://www.oivietnam.com)

# CAFÉS



## Bach Dang

An institute that's been around for over 30 years, Kem Bach Dang is a short walking distance from The Opera House and is a favorite dessert and cafe spot among locals and tourists. They have two locations directly across from each other serving juices, smoothies, shakes, beer and ice cream, with air conditioning on the upper levels.  
**26-28 Le Loi, DI**



## Cafe RuNam

No disappointments from this earnest local cafe consistently serving exceptional international standard coffee. Beautifully-styled and focussed on an attention to quality, Cafe RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.  
**96 Mac Thi Bui, DI**  
[www.caferunam.com](http://www.caferunam.com)



## Chat

A quaint cafe with a red brick wall on one side and a mural of everyday life in Saigon on the opposite. A friendly staff serves smoothies, juices, and a good array of Italian-style coffee such as cappuccinos and lattes for cheap, prices start from VND15,000.  
**85 Nguyen Truong To, Q4**



## MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Matcha Zen Garden - Peace, Serenity and Beauty. MOF, Saigon's Matcha pioneers have channeled all the ZEN of a Japanese garden into a miniature edible masterpiece. Using premium Japanese Matcha, MOF's desserts, please the senses and excites the palate.  
**Somerset Chancellor Court, GF, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai & Mac Dinh Chi Corner, District 1, HCMC**  
**(08) 3823 9812 / www.mof.com.vn**



## The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting.  
**Ground floor - InterContinental Asiana Saigon**  
**3520 9099**  
[dine@icasianasaiagon.com](mailto:dine@icasianasaiagon.com)



## The Workshop

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



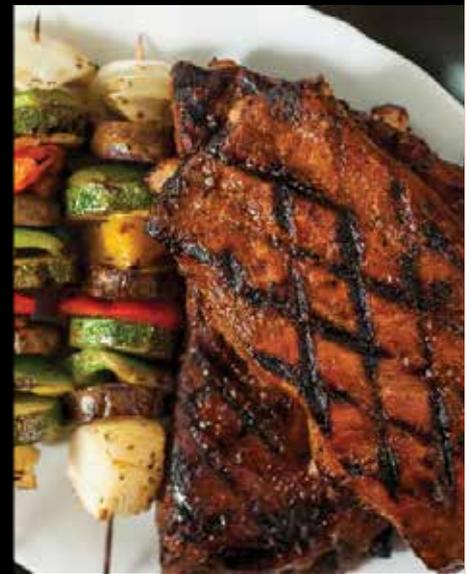
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# CHINESE



## 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](http://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](http://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, Nihko Saigon Hotel**  
**235 Nguyen Van Cu, D1**  
**3925 7777**



## Ming Dynasty

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

**23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7**

## Also Try...

### Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

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

### Ocean Palace

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

**2 Le Duan Street, D1**  
**3911 8822**

### Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

The brainchild of an overseas Chinese/Vietnamese architect who wanted to build something extraordinary in his home town, this venue combines the architectural features of seven world heritage structures blended into one. The

cuisine is just as eclectic with representative dishes from several major Chinese traditions.

**12 Duong 26, D6**  
**3755 1577**  
[www.7kyquan.com](http://www.7kyquan.com)

### Shang Palace

Renowned as one of the finest restaurants in the city, Shang Palace boasts mouth-watering Cantonese and Hong Kong cuisine served in a warm and elegant atmosphere.

Whether it be an intimate dinner for two or a larger group event, Shang Palace can cater for three-hundred guests including private VIP rooms. With more than fifty Dim-Sum items and over two-hundred delectable dishes to choose from, Shang Palace is an ideal rendezvous for any dining occasion.

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

### Yu Chu

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

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



# SPANISH



## 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](http://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**



## Pacharan

Ho Chi Minh City's original Spanish restaurant, Pacharan occupies a high profile corner spot on Hai Ba Trung. 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**



## 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 VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.  
**90 Cao Trieu Phat, Phu My Hung, D7**





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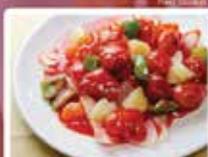


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 "Baba brings India to Vietnam"

# 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 Bacoulos

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

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



## Le Terroir

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

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



## Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1  
www.tycozsaigon.com

## Also Try...

### L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1  
0948 415 646

### La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton  
2229 8882

### La Nicoise

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

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1  
3821 3056

### La Villa

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

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

### Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1  
www.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



## 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  
33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2



## Bollywood

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

SA 26-2 Sky Garden 2, Phu My Hung, D7  
Hotline: 0906357442 (English)  
130 Ton That Dam, Ben Nghe, D1  
0866795267-66863168

## Bollywood

Taste Of India



## Ganesh

Ganesh serves authentic northern Indian tandooris and rotis along with the hottest curries, dovas and vada from the southern region.

### 38 Hai Ba Trung, D1

[www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com](http://www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com)



## Saigon Indian

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

1st Floor,  
73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1



## Tandoor

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

39A - 39B Ngo Duc Ke, D1  
39304839 / [tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com](mailto:tandoor@tandoorvietnam.com)



## The Punjabi

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

40/3 Bui Vien, D1



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# ITALIAN



## Ciao Bella

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

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

*Ciao Bella*



## Inter Nos

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

**26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2**  
**090 630 12 99**  
[info@internos.vn](mailto:info@internos.vn)  
[www.internos.vn](http://www.internos.vn)  
[facebook.com/internossaigon](https://facebook.com/internossaigon)



## La Bettola

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

**84 Ho Tung Mau, D1**  
**3914 4402**  
[www.labettolasaigon.com](http://www.labettolasaigon.com)



## La Cucina

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

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



## La Hostaria

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

**17B Le Thanh Ton, D1**  
**3823 1080**  
[www.lahostaria.com](http://www.lahostaria.com)



## LovEat

Mediterranean food meets the Italian flair at LovEat. Home made scrumptious dishes are served in exquisite setting, that embodies the métier and the spirit of a modern bistro with an atmosphere that is warm and welcoming in the heart of the city. Black mussels, slow cooked ribs, tiramisu are some of the signatures dishes of LovEat's extensive menu.

**29 Hai Trieu, D1**  
**086 260 2727**  
[www.loveat.vn](http://www.loveat.vn)

## Also Try...

### Casa Italia

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

**86 Le Loi, D1**  
**3824 4286**

### Opera

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

**2 Lam Son Square, D1**

### Pendolasco

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

**87 Nguyen Hue, D1**  
**3821 8181**

### Pizza 4P's

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

**8/15 Le Thanh Ton, D1**  
**012 0789 4444**  
[www.pizza4ps.com](http://www.pizza4ps.com)

### Pomodoro

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

**79 Hai Ba Trung**  
**3823 8998**



# JAPANESE



## 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



## 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



## Ichiba Sushi

Ichiba 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.ichibasushi.vn



## Mondo

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



## 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

## Also Try...

### Blanchy Street

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

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

### Chiisana Washi

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

River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2  
6683 5308



### K Cafe

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

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

### Osaka Ramen

This sleek, open-kitchen contemporary eatery serves up Japanese noodles starting from VND78,000. There are also set menus, individual dishes and a range of smaller, appetizing sides.

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

### Sushi Dining Aoi

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

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

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

### Yoshino

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

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

# KOREAN



## Galbi Brothers

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

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



## Kang Nam Ga

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

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



## Lee Cho

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

**48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7**  
5410 1086



## Seoul House

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

**33 Mac Thi Buoi, D1**  
3829 4297



## Won's Cuisine

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

**49 Mac Thi Buoi**  
3820 4085



# THAI

## Baan Thai

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

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

## Koh Thai

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

**Kumho Linh, Hai Ba Trung, D1**  
3823 4423

## Lac Thai

Hidden away down a narrow alley in the heart of downtown this unique Thai restaurant boasts authentic flavours and surprising character. Eat downstairs at tables in a cosy, themed environment - or be brave and climb the narrow spiral staircase to the attic and crouch on cushions in true Thai style while attentive staff serve plates to share.

**71/2 Mac Thi Buoi St. D1**  
3823 7506

## Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

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

## The Racha Room

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

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



# STEAKHOUSE



## Corso Steakhouse & Bar

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

Ground Floor, Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, D1  
3829 5368 / [www.norfolkhotel.com.vn](http://www.norfolkhotel.com.vn)



## 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.  
Unit CRI-12, The Crescent, Phu My Hung, D7  
[www.elgaucho.asia](http://www.elgaucho.asia)



## 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



## Nossa Steakhouse

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

36 Pham Hong Thai, D1  
[www.nossa.vn](http://www.nossa.vn)



## Pho 99

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

139 Nguyen Trai, D1  
S36-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7



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# VIETNAMESE



## Five Oysters

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

234 Bui Vien, D1



## 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



## 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 Khanh, Binh Thanh  
6258 1508  
papaya@chi-nghia.com  
www.chi-nghia.com



## 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



## 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  
3932 6363  
Opening time: 10:30am-2pm; 5pm-9pm  
9526 2958  
Facebook: quanna.vegishouse



## Red Door

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

400/8 Le Van Sy, D3  
012 0880 5905  
Facebook: "Reddoorrestaurant"

## Also Try...

### 3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1  
3821 1631

### Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

### Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

### Com Nieu

Famous for its inclusion in the Anthony Bourdain *No Reservations* program, the

venue is best known for its theatrics. Every bowl of rice is served in a terracotta bowl that is unceremoniously shattered upon serving. Unforgettable local food in a very pleasant traditionally-styled venue.

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

### Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1  
3848 0144

### Highway 4

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

101 Vo Van Tan, D3  
www.highway4.com

### Hum

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

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

### May

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

3/5 Hoang Sa  
3910 1277

### Nha Hang Ngon

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

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

### Temple Club

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

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

### 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

### 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

# INTERNATIONAL



## Bamboo Chic

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

**Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel**  
**3C Ton Duc Thang, D1**  
**6263 6688**  
[www.lemeridien.com/saigon](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)



## Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant

Brotzeit serves authentic Bavarian cuisine such as Schweinshaxe or Pork Knuckles, Nürnberger sausages, Weisswurt - Bavarian white sausages and more in a chic and contemporary setting. Brotzeit also has the widest selection of premium German beers, made according to time-honored German beer-brewing traditions. The restaurant is ideal for chilling-out, business meetings or get-togethers with friends.

**Kumho Links, 1st Floor, 39 Le Duan St.,**  
**Ben Nghe Ward, D1**  
**(08) 3822 4206**  
[www.brotzeit.co](http://www.brotzeit.co)



## Cali Burrito

Owned by an American, Cali Burrito serves delicious Californian-style (specifically San Diego) burritos, tacos and quesadillas. Popular favorites are carne asada, grilled chicken, sausage and eggs, and steak and eggs. Located in Phu My Hung, D7, stop by or order for speedy hot delivery.

**Duong So 6, Hung Vuong Building 1 (E006), Phu My Hung, D7**  
**Delivery: 090 255 0533**  
**Facebook: Cali Burrito**



## Dutch Restaurant

Dutch Restaurant "The Bourgonnier" is a unique place where traditional, authentic cuisine and service is brought back in the modern city of Saigon. Our Chef and Staff invite you for an experience with attentive service and great food like our Signature Dishes: Chateaubriand, Bisques, Canard and Seafood

**No.62, Duong So 65, Tan Phong, D7**  
**3775 1219**  
[www.dutchrestaurant.vn](http://www.dutchrestaurant.vn)  
[info@dutchrestaurant.vn](mailto:info@dutchrestaurant.vn)



## Eleven Café

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

**29 Le Anh Xuan, D1**  
**08 3822 2605**  
[info@elevencafe.com.vn](mailto:info@elevencafe.com.vn)  
**Facebook: ElevenCafeVN**



## Latest Recipe

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

**Level M, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel**  
**3C Ton Duc Thang, D1**  
**6263 6688**  
[www.lemeridien.com/saigon](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)



## 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**



## Villa Royale Treasures

Villa Royale specializes in antiques from Europe and Asia. Enjoy lunch or high tea while surrounded by treasures from around the world. Specializing in over 40 flavors of luxurious TWG tea.

**3 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien, D2**  
[www.villaroyaletreasures.com](http://www.villaroyaletreasures.com)



## Zombie BBQ

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

**628A Vo Truong Toan, District 2**  
**6685 3756 / 09 1851 0139**  
**4pm - 11pm**  
**Facebook: ZombieBarbequesaigon**



# Travel & Leisure

IMAGE BY [ROB MCNAMEE](#)

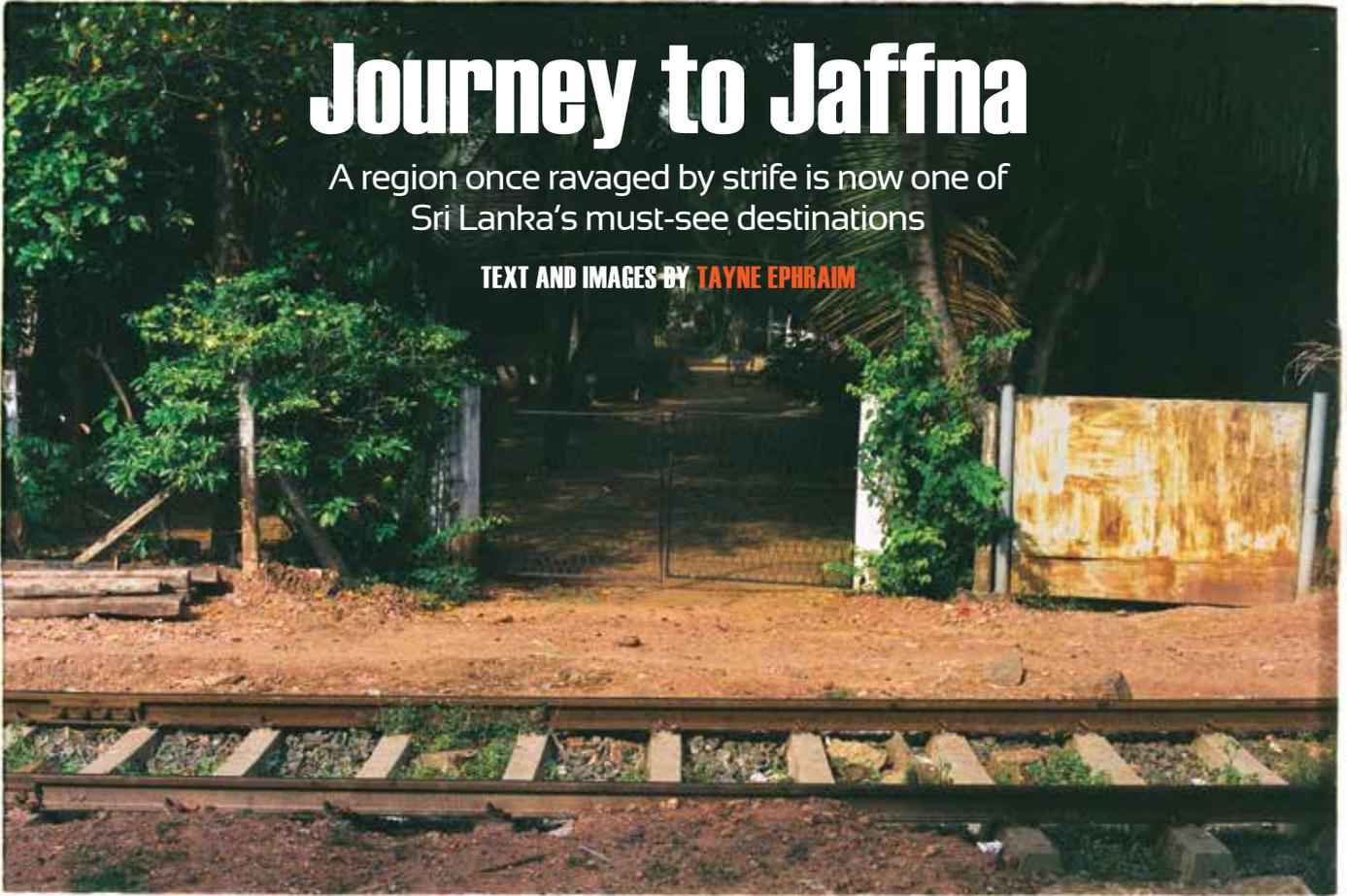




# Journey to Jaffna

A region once ravaged by strife is now one of Sri Lanka's must-see destinations

TEXT AND IMAGES BY TAYNE EPHRAIM



I'M ON THE mail train to Jaffna, my head stuck out the window with repeated clacking of the rails, sway of the carriage and unstoppable motion into places unknown - here I remember what it is to travel. Then the moments of euphoria pass, and you're cramped into an uncomfortable night on a wooden seat between bags and grandmas in the tropics.

I step out of the newly-built Jaffna Station and eat a breakfast of curry puff pastries and milk tea in a local café opposite with the newspaper-toting early birds of Jaffna. The city itself feels closer to an overgrown fishing town. I finish up and walk the streets like a schoolboy off to class past old ladies sweeping their front yards with wooden brooms and magpies

swooping from the trees. But under the small-town quaintness the scars of war still fester.

I encounter two soldiers intently scanning the side of the road with a metal detector as if probing for loose change. "Drop something?" I ask them as I pass by. They smile and shake their heads, "Mines." Then they continue on with their task, passing the detector over the same ground I just walked on my way from the station.

I can see grand colonial edifices pockmarked with shell holes and cracked masonry from stray bullets and shrapnel damage. It lends the town the atmosphere of a recently reoccupied graveyard. But things are not as bleak as they may seem. Schoolgirls still ride home in white-

uniformed clusters atop antiquated bicycles by the sea; new housing projects are springing up in the gaps left by the bombed-out husks of houses wearing coats of pastel-colored paint. The rebuilding effort is well underway and the overall atmosphere is a hopeful one, in the slow-moving, old-world sense of long tropical days and fisherman drying out their nets along the roadside for another day on the boats.

I find a small room in a white-colonnaded villa called Sarras set amongst small shady grounds of potted botanics and dozing hounds of leisure. Waiting for the manager on a chair fashioned out of a planed and lacquered tree stump, I watch the cross-eyed groundskeeper stalk the yard with his

watering hose as vintage cars of long-gone epochs rust under hessian blankets in the grass. The only other guests are a family of French dining in the hall.

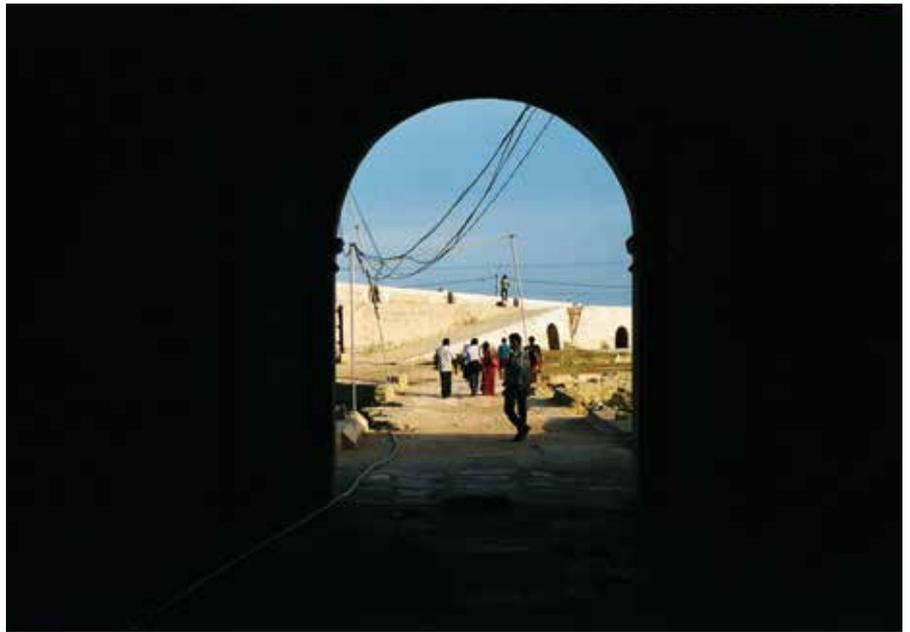
In the late afternoon I take my postcards down to the melancholic ruins of Jaffna Fort on the small promontory at ocean's edge. It's the best spot in town to soak up a maritime sunset coming down over the outlying marshy islands. Standing atop the walls, it's not difficult to recreate in my mind the former majesty of this imposing structure. Cows and soldiers mill about the former courtyards and structures once housed within, though sparse are the remains, just some jumbles of stone and occasional retaining wall still standing.

I watch a family of shrouded Saudis on holiday enter the arch of the fortified gate below the walls, nearly all of them young girls in burqas, like black sheep at the heels of their shepherds, herded in through the gates of the old city. Rested against the ramparts as a group of school children on excursion picked their way across the rubble, I pen postcards back to Saigon.

Much of Jaffna's charm comes from the friendly folk you find strolling its sleepy streets, walking their bicycles or putting by on scooters. I encounter Mr. Brody, a wise wet-eyed doctor walking his bicycle over the train tracks, and he wishes me a good day. Where am I headed? he enquires, and might he be of any assistance in helping me find my way? His granddaughters are waiting for him at home with their homework open before them on the cool tiled floor, Tamil television music playing out of somewhere, some other room. Crows call out the open window and an old woman sweeps in the yard, back bent to her broom. The doctor tells me of the years he spent teaching science and mathematics in Nigeria and later, London. In his beige pressed shirt with pens in pocket and loose-fitting coffee brown slacks, Mr. Brody is a refined old gent even in his retirement. He bids me farewell at the crossroads and continues on his way.

### **Pocked Full of Bullet Scars**

I rent a scooter from a nearby guesthouse (it takes a little convincing on my part in lieu of a license, and a promise to pay in full any fines should I have the misfortune of incurring one) and cross the man-made causeway by the fort to the nearby Kayts island, camera draped around my neck and rolls of film stuffed into my pockets in search of Kayts Fort, which I'd seen depicted on a postcard. There are five islands in all, joined to each other by land bridges and a ferry crossing. These are not, however, islands in the classic tropical sense of swaying palms of white sand idyll, but rather sand-ringed swamps and marshlands, Jaffna's outlying wetland areas. Its geography is in many ways reminiscent of the Mekong. The road to Kayts, contrary to my expectations, is a procession of shattered houses by the high road built atop the marsh, like a Roman highway of rotting crucifixes. The destruction out on the islands is of another





order. The area saw systemic bombardment during the war years, and every dwelling suspected of harboring arms, which must have been nearly every structure on the island, was shelled into oblivion. Even the black-trunked palm trees are pocked full of bullet scars.

Kayts town itself, perched at the tip of the island, as I soon discover, is little more than a small cluster of shell-shocked colonial-era shophouses and a haunted church, which I trudge through the long grass to get a closer look at, all the while very conscious of the warnings bandied about online not to wander from the main roads for fear of lingering landmines.

I find my fort floating out to sea, a tiny fortified islet espied from the rocky shore atop my rented scooter through the parted reeds - Kayts Castle still standing tall over the ruins of the marsh. I content myself with this brief impression as the sky grays over and threatens with rain. Back then along the desolate run, past road crews and tankers re-tarring the asphalt, hollowed out as one returning from the banks of the Styx.

By rented scooter, foot and bicycle, I find myself returning along the coastal road alongside clusters of smashed houses sprouting weeds from the rubble, past new housing developments, catamarans drawn up onto the shore, fisherman's nets drying out along the road, and at the end of it all, the enigmatic skeleton of Jaffna Fort like a tombstone at the land's end. This section of Jaffna more than any other, south of the old town, predominately a

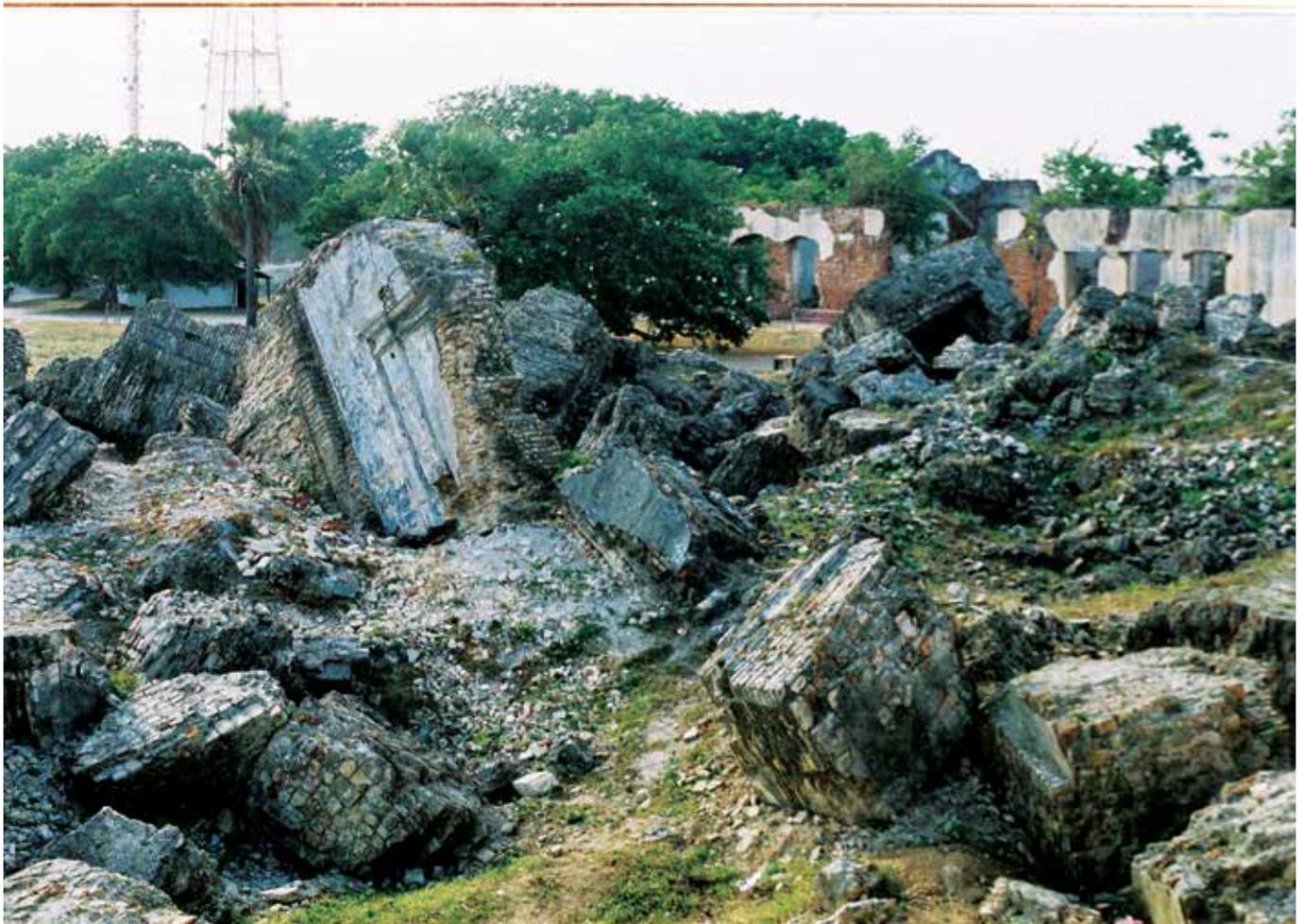
Tamil neighbourhood, bears the greatest concentration of devastation, and presents itself as somewhat of a rambling slum by the sea, thriving with punks and fishing

**To the lonesome traveler who ventures there, Jaffna paints itself as a meditative, melancholic place. On the close side of calamity, yet flourishing with splashes of new vitality, much as a blackened forest regenerates new saplings after the flames have gone.**

families, a definite contrast to the rest of the city. Rheumy-eyed fogies sit out on their porches, idly extolling in their senility as bare-footed children play shirtless in the street.

The military here make their presence felt the most keenly, patrolling with their weapons and milling about on street corners like bored police officers, with the rare occasional armoured vehicle or troop truck spotted on the streets. Overall though, it is an occupation in its dwindling stages. Relations, or so it seems on surface level meandering along Jaffna's streets, have become for the most part normalized after decades of bloody conflict and insurgency. The civil war officially ended in 2009 with the fall of the Tamil Tiger's last stronghold, Kilinochchi, with tens of thousands displaced. But where one would expect to find a residual climate of horror and fear, one finds instead the domestic hum of small-town commerce, of children riding their bicycles to school, and the bland duskiness of suburban streets in the heat of equatorial afternoons. People just getting on with their lives. The cyclone fences are being rolled back, flowers and ferns are being planted at the green fences of the remaining garrisons, thalis are being eaten at cafes around dim tables by men with orange painted into their beards. Hindus at leisure in the heat.

Later I hop on highway buses down to the tea country to escape the heat. To the lonesome traveler who ventures there, Jaffna paints itself as a meditative, melancholic place. On the close side of calamity, yet flourishing with splashes of new vitality, much as a blackened forest regenerates new saplings after the flames have gone. ■





# Colorful Colorado

There was a time when Colorado was the Wild West  
and that spirit stays alive today

TEXT BY **CHELSEA VAN** IMAGES BY **ROB MCNAMEE**

COLORADO IS FOR the hale and hearty. A place where the elderly boisterously mock passing 4x4s and reminisce about their skills on VW Bugs; where to get to work you may have to hold onto the roof of your car to spare your caboose a bruise. Colorado is also where the Trans-America Trail runs through. The TAT, as it's endearingly called, is a coast-to-coast trail on completely dirt roads. The American state is famous for its 52 fourteeners (a mountain that meets or exceeds an elevation of 14,000 feet (4,270m) above mean sea level), its Rocky Mountains and its large national landmarks and parks, but with the TAT we followed it through the less traversed southern Colorado and America's Wild West. Southeast Colorado is ruled by derrière-branded cattle and their rugged ranchers, and if you make them laugh, they'll point their shotgun towards some animal for dinner as a treat.

For a while I pretended to be a cowgirl as my partner and our two dogs traveled

through Colorado - it was both exalting and cringing. Every traveler knows to welcome laughter; whether it's with you or at you. In this case, it is at you paired with a "you're not from around here." And since most of the land here has been claimed, the safest spot for camping would also be on a ranch hand's property - no cow patties or cougars. I watched as our rancher reached into his freezer and plucked out a bear's head and paws (however, it's capital punishment for stealing chickens). He will use the paws to make moccasins for his grandchild and has already used some rendered bear fat to oil his boots. I held the head in my hand, it's much smaller than I imagined, and wondered what bear tastes like. It is like eating double animal. Then our rancher showed us his wall of skulls, the all-American trophies. I spotted a bison skull and whispered to my partner, "Aren't those protected?" "Yup," he replies. As a blaze is set inside a barrel with

black frittering pops, I asked him another question, "Can you burn plastic?" "Nope," he answers.

## Thoughtful Lakes

Colorado is speckled with mountain towns like Salida, Telluride and Silverton - the survivors of our Manifest Destiny who thrived beyond mining and railroad. These towns are as quaint as quaint can be with celebrations and recreation centered around its most extreme conditions: skijoring (a race between horse rider and skiers among snowy obstacles), Hardrock 100 (a hundred mile race elevating and declining between 67,984 feet) and the Alpine Loop (a backcountry byway weaving around the San Juan Mountains and the ghost towns that did not make it).

The Alpine Loop has its origin as a "wagon road" that led from one town to another, yet driving even the tamest route makes you wonder about the quality





of that wagon. On Cinnamon Pass, we reached high elevations that we doubted our poorly-equipped vehicle could handle, crossed vibrant high alpine meadows, and our blood pressures soared as we edged over shelf roads. From there you are dropped into the ghost town of Animas Forks, where walking through the halls of the abandoned homes I imagined the madness that ensues from being snowed under 25 feet. We continued our way through Ophir Pass, a scree-sloped road streaked with beautifully intoxicating hues of red, gray, green and yellow. We finally took respite in Silverton, a town once strewn with saloons but now replaced with tourist outfitters. The only place that still seemed like it belonged was a shop that sold handwoven sweaters - Weathertop Wovens. Quaint.

The Great Sand Dunes National Park is notable for its 400,000-year-old and 755-foot-high mountains of sand that hug the face of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. A birthplace of elements – a marriage of sand, stone and water to create the dune field, the alpine tundra, the montane forest and the wetlands.

We followed the sandy Medano Creek primitive 4x4 road into the national preserve and I can't help but notice the wavering inclinometer as we drift and roll over the deep plush sand. In the national preserve we took a moment to forage for chokecherries and found a broken antler near our camp, a reminder of life's stresses. Later, we hiked up the sand dunes and it is as difficult as it sounds – each step burning into the soles of our feet the fact that you cannot outrun a sandworm. Upon reaching the peak I looked over to the mountains next to us and took note of how windy it was, the same wind that is constantly eroding one to create another. Then, I look over the dunes and thought maybe our dogs can sled me down from here.

Somewhere in the San Juan Mountains, the largest mountain range in southwestern Colorado, we nestled for the night. The sun leaves us early and arrives late over the mountains, and to keep us warm I steeped some pine needles in hot water. As we put out the fire we notice dark shadows shuffling up, bear cubs? No, a mother porcupine and her baby! The dogs were already in the tent so my immediate caution was taken care of as I watch the porcupines make their way past us. I wanted to go and follow them into their home but they made no such welcome gesture back towards me. They did not care about us and knew we would be gone by dawn.

Even if you did nothing of what we did and spoke to no one, Colorado will never disappoint. There is no escaping the sensations. Even a highway will not take you to your city without first having you acknowledge the surrounding thoughtful lakes. ■

**BIO:** To read more about Chelsea and Rob's (pictured top) off-road adventures on the Trans America Trail, visit [arrowswest.com](http://arrowswest.com)



# Flying Colors

Traditional flags and their meanings in Vietnam



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



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIDGET MARCH

FLAGS HAVE BEEN used to communicate meanings, directions and identities for over 6,000 years. The earliest known flag is a bronze relic from Iran dated around 4,000BC. I never thought much about the meanings of flags until I moved to Vietnam where they are far more common than in my native England. Neighborhoods in Vietnam are transformed during festivals and national holidays by the brilliant red and yellow national flags. Areas around temples are sometimes festooned with striped buntings that are strung from post to post.

The national flag, with its red background and yellow star, takes its styling from the Soviet hammer and sickle flag which also includes a yellow star. In Vietnam, the star represents the five sections of society: farmers, intellectuals, factory workers, businessmen and the military. Yellow is the color of the Vietnamese people and red is universally used to signify revolution, strength and courage. In the alleys and narrow streets of Hanoi, a few scarlet and yellow flags projecting from balconies and upper storey windows instantly inject a feeling of national pride and celebration.

The large temple flags with their jagged or toothed edges make a bold statement, don't they? These are Buddhist in origin but have been adopted more widely within the special blend of religion and ancestor worship practiced in Vietnam. The flags outside a large temple will each have a different color for the central square. Blue is the color of compassion, yellow is balance, red is for the blessings of Buddha's teaching, orange is for wisdom and white represents purity and liberation. The size of the flag will denote the importance of the site. Ancient temples display much

larger flags than more modern or lesser temples and meeting houses. Sometimes you will see a small flag outside someone's home – this usually indicates that there is a monk residing within. So, don't display Buddhist flags at your house unless you want the neighbors to bring offerings to your door!

Triangular flags mark the route to the home of the deceased during the funeral week. Black and white is often used for these flags in Hanoi. In Hoi An and Da Nang I saw maroon and dark blue and ochre to mark these sad occasions.

Small striped and squared flags will lead the way to the temple door. The closer to the temple, the larger the flags become. Once inside the temple enclosure, the positioning of flags around the main courtyard convey meanings about festivals or other temple events. Usually, a yellow flag representing the sun occupies a central position, blue and green flags representing nature and sky will be in the eastern corners. A white flag for the moon and metal will be in the west, and black or indigo in the north represent water.

For parades, the flags take on even more meanings. The red flag representing the phoenix should take the lead. Behind that the dark turtle is flanked by the blue dragon to the left and the white tiger to the right. These complex messages are easily read by locals, but I just marvel at the spectacle and now I know never to pass a massive temple flag without stopping to explore the ancient pagoda within. ■

# Flyers Behaving Badly

How not to be "that guy"



Having visited nearly 60 countries as a travel writer and award-winning photographer, **James Pham** blogs about his adventures at [FlyCarausFly.com](http://FlyCarausFly.com)



I CAN'T BEGIN to put into words how travel has enriched my life over the years. I've learned to see the world from a more educated viewpoint. I've eaten marvelous foods that I couldn't even pronounce. I've been heartbroken to see those less fortunate than me, wondering if I could last a day in their shoes (or lack thereof). I've seen indescribably beautiful places with my own eyes that I had never even thought to dream about. I've learned to appreciate what I have and be thankful for the opportunities that have come my way. For me, travel is catharsis. Travel is learning. Travel is a privilege.

But lately, I've seen too many people treat traveling as a right, especially on airplanes and in airports. July saw one of the most outrageous incidences in

recent memory when a British man was charged with disorderly conduct, assault and battery and disrupting the operation of an aircraft causing his London to Houston flight to divert to Boston. His alleged bad behavior involved yelling at other passengers, pushing flight attendants trying to calm him down, striking his wife and finally urinating in his seat. I wish I could say that incident was an isolated one. But no, just last month a drunk passenger headed to Portland, US woke up shortly before landing and began relieving himself. "Approximately 30 minutes prior to landing he stood up and began urinating through the cracks of the seat onto the passengers seated in front of him," the police report said. "At some point Jeff Rubin lost his balance

causing him to fall backwards and urinate upwards which got on the passengers and seats next to him as well as some other passenger's personal belongings." Talk about a nightmare flight. Not sure how you recover from that.

There's something about travel that seems to make people feel free from the constraints of normal life. Early party mode? Like the 14 men traveling from Glasgow to Tenerife who were so rowdy, drunk and threatening that the flight had to be diverted and the offending parties banned for life from Jet2.com? Or maybe putting yourself in unfamiliar situations triggers bad judgment. That seemed to be the case for one Chinese woman who couldn't take a 700ml bottle of Rémy Martin XO Excellence through airport



security. Instead of ditching the USD200 bottle, she stood there and drank it all. By the time she was done, she couldn't stand up and was deemed unfit to fly. I think all of us may have done something similar, like eat a piece of banned fruit before going through Customs, but to exercise such lack of judgment to the detriment of your own health is a head scratcher.

Another contributing factor is the reduced cost of flying. With so many budget carriers, flying is within the financial grasp of more people than ever before. That also means there are more first-time or infrequent flyers who haven't a clue on flying etiquette.

In August, photos of a Chinese woman letting her child defecate in the rear of a plane in China emerged online. Why she didn't choose to use a bathroom or a diaper is anyone's guess. Vietnam made international news when a pop singer allowed her 4-year-old son to urinate into a sick bag in his seat on a Vietnam Airlines flight. Add to that the all-too-frequent reports of Vietnamese flyers opening emergency exit doors, stealing life jackets, food trays and other accessories and abusing airport personnel, like the April incident where a woman slapped a

VietJet employee who wanted to weigh her carry-on. I've been on countless flights where shoes quickly come off and bare feet are pointed in all directions or people watch movies on mobile devices or laptops without headphones. Last week, I sat across from a man who thought the airport lounge was a good place to shave.

It's clear that the Golden Age of Flying is long gone — the days where people dressed up to fly, there were no security hassles and you actually looked forward to airplane meals served with real cutlery. In the days since, flying has become more accessible, but also significantly less comfortable. To make up for cheaper fares, airlines are stuffing more people in the same amount of space, reducing the seat pitch and leading to clashes between passengers who feel they have the right to recline wherever, whenever. I was on a 45-minute flight last week when the person in front of me immediately reclined his seat all the way back on a small turboprop plane. To keep up profitability, airlines are also decreasing services like meals and beverages as well as personnel, meaning more lost baggage, more oversold flights as routes are being consolidated, and more delays as airlines are using

fewer planes and turning them around faster. People are bringing on more and larger carry-on to avoid paying baggage fees. Overall, the "friendly skies" aren't so friendly anymore.

But there are things you can do to insulate yourself to the extent possible as well as avoid being "that guy" who makes flying miserable for others.

**Be polite.** This includes flight attendants and fellow passengers. Flight attendants aren't servants, so don't expect them to help you lift your carry-on (it's not part of their job description). A smile and "hello" might just be remembered when it comes time to helping you find an empty seat (or row) away from a potentially annoying seatmate.

**Respect boundaries.** You know that t-shirt with a big expletive on it that's so comfortable to wear? Do everyone a favor and leave it at home. Same goes for ultra-revealing clothing, perfume and aromatic foods. If you must take off your shoes, please wear socks. Clean socks. Bare feet in other people's space is never okay as is any type of personal hygiene maintenance. We're all in this together. Literally.

**Don't hog the overhead bin.** It's meant for one piece of luggage per passenger. So hang on to your jacket and purse and put it under the seat in front of you. Once the doors close and there's still room, by all means, use whatever storage is available. Also, when you stow your luggage, put it in front-to-back to take up the least amount of space possible. Plan ahead by packing a tote bag (or even a plastic bag) with things you'll actually need on the plane instead of waiting to get to your seat before fiddling with your luggage, thereby holding up the line.

**Minimize disturbance to others.** This includes using seats for balance, either as you're walking down the aisle (use the overhead compartments instead) or getting up. Instead of grabbing the seat in front of you, use your arm rest. As you're boarding the plane, considering holding your bags close to the ground instead of around your shoulders where they'll hit fellow passengers as you walk by. If you

have to recline, take a quick look behind you first. If the person is on a laptop or filling out a form on their tray table, perhaps just wait a bit or tell them that you're going to recline. If the flight is less than three hours, consider whether you really need to recline at all.

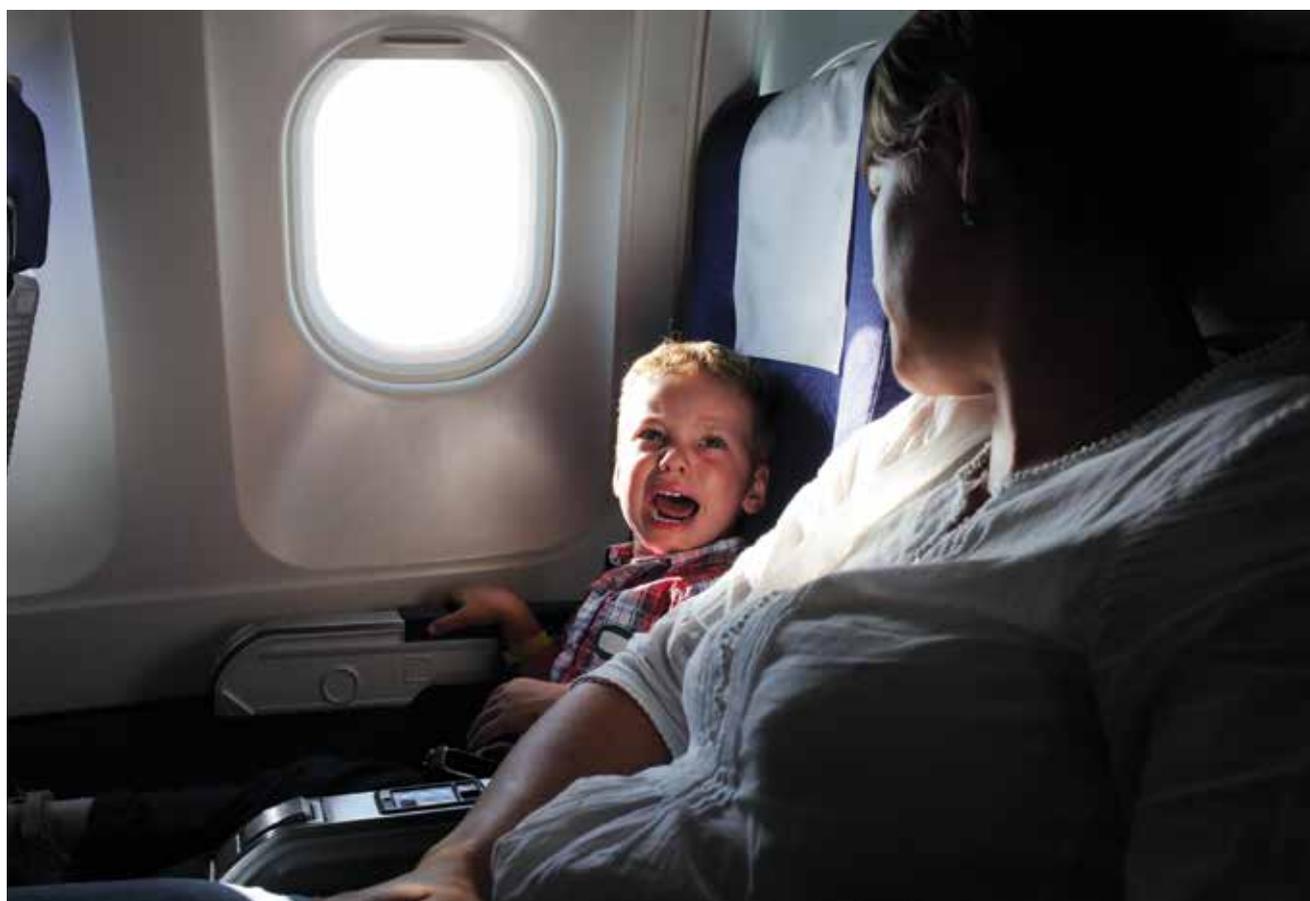
**Mind your children.** Flying is tough on kids who find it difficult to sit for long stretches and who might be more sensitive than adults to air pressure changes or motion sickness. In addition to trying to calm your child down during the flight, pre-planning is imperative: bringing along snacks and drinks, a tablet with their favorite movies, having them well-rested, and avoiding red-eye flights when everyone is trying to sleep are good starting points. I've known families who choose seats in front of each other, rather than in a row, so that if the child *must* kick a seat, it's their parent's and not someone else's. But despite the best-laid plans, sometimes kids just act

up. I'm much more sympathetic when I see a parent trying to do their best to keep their child quiet instead of simply ignoring the noise.

**Be judicious with alcohol and medication.** Yes, you're on vacation and deserve to kick back a little. But alcohol, combined with air pressure and possibly sleeping pills that might wreak havoc on your system make for a bad combination. So perhaps stop drinking long before you're intoxicated and switch to water or juice. Save the partying for when you land.

**Above all, relax.** Travel rarely goes off without a hitch. Insulate yourself with a good pair of noise-cancelling headphones and your favorite movies or magazines to make the time pass. A sleep mask, neck pillow and whatever helps you be more comfortable can also go a long way to helping you make the best of your flight. Bon voyage! ■

**In addition to trying to calm your child down during the flight, pre-planning is imperative: bringing along snacks and drinks, a tablet with their favorite movies, having them well-rested, and avoiding red-eye flights when everyone is trying to sleep are good starting points.**





# Ho Tram Open

Ben Styles, Vice President Golf and Residential Development at the Ho Tram Strip talks about the Inaugural Ho Tram Open

## Why an Asian Tour event, and why now?

We decided to embark on this journey to promote this wonderful country that we live and work in. The event will be broadcast in 190 countries worldwide and into over 650 million households. We also want to help grow the game on a domestic level. And what better way to do that than by bringing in some of the world's finest golfers to inspire juniors here in Vietnam?

As for why now, ever since our hotel opened in 2013 - and even before that, really - we have been focused on making the Ho Tram Strip a magnet for tourism in the Asia-Pacific region. Not years from now, but as soon as possible. To do that, you need to get the word out. Hosting an event like this enables us to do that to great effect. It's a powerful platform, and it's an opportunity not many resorts have, as very few - especially ones here in Asia - have golf courses of this caliber, designed by Greg Norman, on a spectacular piece of seaside property.

## How would you describe this event to a non-golfer?

As the ultimate entertainment experience. It will basically be a week-long celebration of what the Ho Tram Strip has to offer, with world-class golf on display during the day and a host of glamorous leisure opportunities at night. That's why the slogan for the event is "Asia's Grandest Stage." The Ho Tram Open will be the stage for one of the grandest weeks of entertainment in all of Asia.

## Could this be considered the start of big things for Vietnam and golf?

There's no doubt about it. The Ho Tram Open is the richest sporting event in Vietnam's history, with USD1.5 million

*"All I keep hearing is that the resort and golf course are nothing short of world-class. When I heard more about what the promoters were looking to achieve, it made the decision even easier. It's going to be a great week for everybody with plenty of good golf, excitement and entertainment."*

*- Darren Clarke, Ryder Cup Captain on the Ho Tram Open*

up for grabs. Some of the world's best players will be competing, from 2016 Ryder Cup captain Darren Clarke to perennial world top 10 player Sergio Garcia to Bluffs ambassador Robert Rock, who has won twice on the European Tour. As anyone who works in the golf industry knows, there's no better way to grow the game of golf on a local level than through hosting a big-time event. Being able to watch the pros is what inspires kids to learn the game themselves. We look at that as a responsibility of ours. Who knows - very soon we could have our own Robert or Darren or Sergio playing on the European and US tours.

## What do you think the lasting legacy will be following the Ho Tram Open?

We've got a three-year agreement with the Asian Tour, and every intention of maintaining that relationship for many more years to come. Our goal is to create

a strong degree of synonymy between the Ho Tram Strip and the Ho Tram Open. When people think of one, they also think of the other. And when they think of either, we want them to think world-class. As in, world-class event, world-class destination, world-class entertainment, and so on. That's why we've partnered with Troon Golf, the world's premier golf management firm. We are committed to making this event the best on the Asian Tour calendar and a source of tremendous pride for Vietnam.

## If you had to describe the event in three words.

Asia's Grandest Stage.

*The Ho Tram Open will take place December 3 - 6. For more info, visit [www.hotramopen.com](http://www.hotramopen.com)*



Ben Styles

# >> The List

# Travel



### Ana Mandara Villas Dalat

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



### BEST WESTERN PREMIER Havana Nha Trang Hotel

Situated in the center of Nha Trang, the biggest five star hotel in Vietnam – Best Western Premier Havana Nha Trang will leave you an unforgettable experience. Spacious suites with breathtaking ocean-view, massive outdoor pool 3-faced to the sea, underground tunnel connecting to the beach from the hotel, Sky Bar on the roof of the City and more. Come and enjoy your time!  
**38 Tran Phu Street, Loc Tho, Nha Trang**  
**T: (058) 388 9999 / Fax: (058) 388 9900**  
[www.havanahotel.vn](http://www.havanahotel.vn)  
[info@havanahotel.vn](mailto:info@havanahotel.vn)



### Bhaya Cruises

Bhaya combines oriental style with contemporary luxury to create an unforgettable experience cruising Halong Bay. The Bhaya fleet (Bhaya Classic, Legend Halong and The Au Co) offers a total of 178 luxury cabins and suites accommodating more than 400 passengers for Ha Long Bay cruises or hosted events (weddings, corporate retreats, incentives, meetings, and more).  
[www.bhayacruises.com](http://www.bhayacruises.com)  
**093 344 6542**



### Fusion Maia 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](http://maidanang.fusion-resorts.com)



### 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](http://www.nhatrang.intercontinental.com)



### Mia

With its own private white sand beach, cliff-top ocean views and jungle clad mountains as a backdrop, Mia resort has carved out its own little piece of tropical heaven in Nha Trang. Mia features a variety of accommodation options, each with fantastic ocean views, nestled among manicured gardens. There are great dining options, a relaxing spa and gym.  
**Bai Dong, Cam Hai Dong, Cam Lam, Khanh Hoa**  
**0583 989 666**  
[www.mianhatrang.com](http://www.mianhatrang.com)  
[info@mianhatrang.com](mailto:info@mianhatrang.com)



### Pullman Danang Beach Resort

Located on the stunning white sands of Danang beach, the stylish Pullman Danang Beach Resort is an oasis of activities and facilities for the modern traveler. With an idyllic setting on the silver shores of Central Vietnam, this luxury resort is perfect for a family holiday or romantic beach getaway.  
**Vo Nguyen Giap, Khue My, Ngu Hanh Son, Danang**  
**0511 395 8888**  
[www.pullman-danang.com](http://www.pullman-danang.com)



### Sheraton Nha Trang Hotel & Spa

With 280 ocean view rooms and suites and six signature restaurants and bars, including Altitude – the highest bar in Nha Trang. Amenities include outdoor swimming pool with infinity edge and reflection pool area, Shine Spa with 9 luxurioux treatment rooms, Sheraton Fitness with 24-hour access, Sheraton Club Lounge, Link@Sheraton, Sheraton Adventure Club, and a purpose-built Cooking School.  
**26 - 28 Tran Phu, Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa**  
**058 2220 000**  
[www.sheratonnhatrang.com](http://www.sheratonnhatrang.com)



### The Island Lodge

Newly-opened, The Island Lodge is a 12-room Indochine-themed lodge set on Unicorn Island (Thoi Son). Mekong River view rooms and bungalows are scattered around the grounds, but the jewel is the open air restaurant/lounge fronting 50 meters of riverfront along with a French restaurant. There's also an infinity swimming pool and Jacuzzi.  
**390 Ap Thoi Binh, Thoi Son, My Tho**  
**073 651 9000**  
[www.theislandlodge.com.vn](http://www.theislandlodge.com.vn)

## >> The List

# Health & Beauty

## DENTAL



### Dr. Hung & Associates Dental Center

A centrally located dental center that uses the latest modern equipment with a team of skilled specialists. Services include cosmetic, implant, braces, prosthodontics, pedodontics and more. Expect high quality service at a reasonable price.

**Building 244A Cong Quynh, D1**  
**08 3925 7526**  
**08 3925 7527**  
[nhahoadrhung@gmail.com](mailto:nhahoadrhung@gmail.com)  
[www.nhahoadrhung.com](http://www.nhahoadrhung.com)



## Also try ...

### 2000 Dental Clinic Trung Tam Implant

Established in 1999, 2000 Dental Clinic now has 65 dentists serving 3 locations offering the full range of dental care, including surgery, implants and extractions.

**125 Le Thi Rieng, D1**

### Elite Dental Group

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**57A Tran Quoc Thao, D3**

### European Dental Clinic

Offering state of the art technology, competitive pricing, and supreme quality, this dentistry is truly dedicated to their patients.

**17 - 17A Le Van Mien, D2**  
[www.europeandentalclinic-asia.com](http://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**

### Saigon Smile

With a group of experienced doctors and professional staff trained to do teeth cleaning, dental work and other teeth enhancing procedures.

**96 Tran Nao, D2**  
**6674 4255**

### Smile Dental Center

Quality dental care with whitening, cleaning, and orthodontic services. Japanese equipment and techniques.

**173 Ton Dat Tien, D7**

### Starlight Dental Clinic

Award-winning quality care and personal service in clean premises, offering general dentistry, whitening and cosmetic surgery, implants, orthodontics, pediatric, and preventive dentistry.

**2Bis 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



### Cham Nail Spa

Located in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, five minutes from Ben Thanh Market, they offer top notch services that include acrylic, gel shellac, mani/pedi using only luxurious brands such as O.P.I., Morgan Taylor, Le Chat and more - all at an affordable price. With a modern facility, Cham Nail Spa is the latest in trendy nail treatments and therapy with a private and personalized touch.

**60M Le Thi Rieng, D1**  
**093 762 0965**

[www.chamnailspa.com](http://www.chamnailspa.com) / Facebook: "chamnailspa"



### Maison Mikio 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 Ton Dat Tien, D7**  
**5412 4773**



### Moc Huong Spa

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**9C Ton Duc Thang, D1**  
**3911 7118**



### Orient Skincare & Laser Center

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

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



### 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](http://www.sweetspa.vn)



### Villa Aesthetica Cosmedi Spa & Laser Center

One of HCMC's finest newly-established spa and beauty centers, Villa Aesthetica is the only venue in Vietnam to offer premium-class LPG Endermologie treatments, erasing localized fat and imperfections. Also known for their unique Turkish Hammam massage.

**54 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2**  
**6264 3388**  
[www.villaaesthetica.com](http://www.villaaesthetica.com)

# Business

## INSURANCE



### Blue Cross

Blue Cross Vietnam is a Medical Insurance Administrator specializing in Health and Travel Insurance in Asia. Our competitive advantage is in our design and administration of modern travel and medical insurance plans; plans built for people living and working in Vietnam.

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3821 9908



### Also try ...

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21st Floor, 115 Nguyen Hue, D1

#### BaoViet Insurance Corporation

BaoViet is now the leading financial insurance group in Vietnam with more than 145 branches across 63 provinces.

23-25 Thai Van Lung, D1

#### IF Consulting

IF Consulting has for 20 years provided advice to individuals and businesses in assessing health/accident risk and finding the best suitable solution. The company is independent and Vietnam-based.

3rd Floor, IBC Building  
1A Me Linh Square, D1  
www.insuranceinvietnam.com

#### Liberty Mutual Insurance

Liberty Mutual is a 100% US-owned general insurer licensed to provide insurance services directly to Vietnamese individuals and state-owned enterprises as well as motor insurance.

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

#### McLarens Young International

McLarens Young International is a global claims service provider that helps our clients achieve timely and equitable claims resolution.

9th Floor, Yoco Building  
41 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1  
3821 3316

#### Prudential Vietnam

Prudential Vietnam is one of the leading life insurers nationwide, also providing a variety of financial solutions, with over 200 customer service centers, branch offices and general agency and business partner offices.

Unit 25F, Saigon Trade Centre  
37 Ton Duc Thang, D1

## REAL ESTATE AGENCIES

### Colliers International Vietnam

Globally, Colliers International is a leading commercial real estate services company offering comprehensive expertise to investors, owners and tenants around the world.

7th Floor, Bitexco Office Bldg  
19-25 Nguyen Hue, D1  
3823 3529

### Cushman & Wakefield Vietnam

Their primary focus is on consultancy, brokerage, and investment across the retail, office, and hospitality sectors.

14th Floor, Unit 16, Vincom Center,  
72 Le Thanh Ton, D1  
3823 7968

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House Link offers a wide array of apartments and houses for lease all over Ho Chi Minh City.

23 Phung Khac Khoan, D1  
3824 5271

### JLL Vietnam

JLL is a professional services and investment management firm offering specialized real estate services to clients seeking increased value by owning, occupying and investing in real estate.

26th Floor, Saigon Trade Center  
37 Ton Duc Thang, D1  
3910 3968

### JVK International Movers

Focused primarily on the international and local movement of household goods since 1979, JVK has established itself as a leader in this unique transportation field.

1st Floor, Saigon Port Building  
3 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4  
3826 7655

### Realty World

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111 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh  
3899 4979

### Savills

Savills PLC is a global real estate services provider listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Avalon Bldg, 53 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D1  
3825 8598

### The Nest

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369/6 Do Xuan Hop, Phuoc Long B, D9

### Vietnam Sotheby's International Realty

Vietnam Sotheby's International Realty is the exclusive representative of the prestigious Sotheby's International Realty® brand in Vietnam. With luxury properties and professional sales agents in Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City.

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### Also try ...

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3521 0071

ags-vietnam@agsfourwinds.com  
www.agsfourwinds.com

#### Asian Tigers

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12th Floor, Me Linh Point Tower  
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www.santaferelo.com  
info@santaferelo.com.vn

# Kids & Education

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# Daddy's Little Girl

The shifting relationship between a father and daughter when she starts growing older

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

IT'S ONLY TO be expected that dads have a special bond with their girls, just as mothers tend to be closer to their sons. For most young daughters growing up, Daddy is the first man in their lives, and a great deal of their own sense of gender can be strongly influenced by their relationship with that key male figure.

When puberty hits, there are a host of factors that can spoil a loving father/daughter relationship. There are plenty of social taboos, for example, that can make any dad uncomfortable with keeping up the same level of affection that he used to share with his little girl – and while most of these social mores are quite appropriate, it's also unfortunate that at the very time a daughter is most in need of validation and guidance, her father senses that the time has come to maintain a proper and dignified distance.

In certain circumstances, this can hit expat families rather hard. A Caucasian father of a tall, teenage Vietnamese daughter told me recently that he receives cold stares whenever he walks outside with his arm around his little girl – and that in order to avoid such misunderstandings, he instinctively backs away from any display of affection, to the point where he's found himself becoming standoffish even at home. That's a heartbreaking development in any warm relationship, and it can lead to a lot of confusion for a maturing young woman – to suddenly be abandoned by the one person they've always been able to rely on in the past. But the fact is that once a young girl starts getting her bumps and curves, embarrassed dads tend to take a step backwards – both physically and emotionally.

It is an embarrassment issue, but it's also one of the agonies of fatherhood – and it's probably not talked about enough for parents to recognize the problem and find solutions that work. Unfortunately, part of the issue is that as young women undergo the emergence of their sexual development, their fathers – as men – retreat, seeing their formerly effortless cuddles and play-fights transform into complex no-go zones. Accepting the sexual emergence of your own child of either gender is a challenge in itself, but when it comes to acknowledging that their budding sexual identity is going to have an impact on your relationship, the thought process – particularly in men – tends to shut down right there.



**Keep up the warmth and the contact, but give it to her straight – “You’re getting too big for a piggy-back ride, honey, but come here and let me give you a big hug instead.”**



But it remains an issue that must be acknowledged if you’re going to settle on a comfortable new paradigm in your relationship with your daughter as she enters physical adulthood. As you transition your parenting from father-of-a-girl to father-of-a-woman, it’s important to understand the difference between a *relationship with no sexual dimension* and a *non-sexual relationship*, even though they sound like the same thing. There’s a complete sexual void in any relationship with a child, because a child has no sexuality (or an embryonic one, depending on the child). There is no such void in a non-sexual relationship with any other adult, including your own children.

### **Straight Talk**

Frankly, if you don’t get this, then you’re going to end up pretending it’s not there – which in turn is why so many fathers alienate their daughters the moment they start dating, refusing to accept the turn of the biological dial. We know that our children emerge into adulthood in every way, and the role of the parent at that point has to remain a nurturing one – it just needs to be modified to suit. It’s important not to switch off the emotional support merely because of the complexities that come out of nowhere when the hormones start to toll. As her father, you still need to be there for her while all this happens.

So the tickling and cuddling and stories in bed aren’t appropriate anymore; that’s obvious. It’s equally obvious, however, that there’s no need for a complete withdrawal of physical affection – she’s only going to interpret that as rejection, and with a teenager’s emotional tendencies, that kind of relationship can sour very rapidly. Keep up the warmth and the contact, but give it to her straight – “You’re getting too big for a piggy-back ride, honey, but come here and let me give you a big hug instead.” Make sure she still gets as much time as you can give her, and be conscious of the fact that you’re still the most important male figure she has going. Above all, seek to ease the changes that are inevitably going to occur in your relationship as you both adjust to them with frank, warm conversation, and try not to get flustered and shy if she wants to talk about the intimate and difficult issues she’s facing.

Finally, don’t forget that it’s very common for a teenage girl to sometimes withdraw into herself for her own reasons. While it’s unfair for a father to back away from his daughter out of emotional discomfort, it’s not wrong for a maturing child to need to take steps back as she finds her own independent balance. You can’t take this personally – it’s not about you.

Our children are people; they shall not remain young, and one day they’ll be much older than you are now too. No matter what age or gender your child is, try reflecting that each human life is an arc, a sequence of constant change. That’s what you’ve brought into the world, and as a parent, you’re in a privileged position to see this happen before your very eyes. Try not to pull away while it happens, or you may just miss out on something precious. ■

# To Believe Is to Fly

“The dream must be kept alive in our children, and in good schools this can be felt higher up the age ranges as well as among the youngsters.”



Gavin Natrass is the Assistant Head Teacher at Renaissance International School Saigon ([www.renaissance.edu.vn](http://www.renaissance.edu.vn)).



ALL CHILDREN WHO enter primary school have this imagination, this love of discovery - the thrill of being praised following a success that stems from their own natural creativity being given an opportunity to be demonstrated. Later, this creativity, often driven through the changes into adolescence, becomes challenged, diminished and even seemingly ‘lost.’ The cause of this may well be academically driven routines that are essentially uncreative and restrictive.

The dream must be kept alive in our children, and in good schools this can be felt higher up the age ranges as well as among the youngsters. Freedom to take risks, to make mistakes, to innovate and reimagine are the natural freedoms children want as they explore their learning styles and preferences, tinker with their many talents and begin to set their own life goals.

If you believe you can fly, you believe in yourself and have that essential ingredient for school and life success: self-confidence.

How can a school in Saigon provide your children with the very things they need to be able to make their mark in Vietnam and beyond? Take a look around as many schools as you can and look for evidence

that learner empowerment is actually ingrained within the school’s ethos.

For a child to become justifiably self-confident is ultimately the single most essential quality a parent can wish to see in their child. To have peace of mind that they will be able to shine when they are ‘out there’ in the big wide world and building a life that allows them to stand on their own two feet.

How can a parent or school guide a learning journey that results in self-confidence brimming from each child, yet not overflowing either? This question begs an immediate answer: that parents need to find a school they feel they can work with in partnership.

This time of year many parents are making these choices, and the long-term implications of such decisions will ultimately have an impact on those confidence levels at ages 16 to 18 and beyond. So what to consider when looking for a new school? What to prioritize when making your decision? What do you look for that will, one day, see you looking into the eyes of your youngster and seeing a confident young man or woman reflected back at you?

Given that there are now many international schools in this great city, clues can be found from vision and mission statements (websites) handbooks, discussions, feel, ambience and environment. Is there a Parent Teacher

Association? The happiness and general mood of the pupils themselves are great indicators of a school’s internal culture. Wall displays and classroom space should be noted, teacher pupil ratios will give a measure of expected academic success. The academic success track record of a school will, to a degree, also help to complete this aspect of the choice being made. If the school is selective then a closer look may be needed, after all in real life we are not so free to choose those we engage and work with. Look at the breadth and balance of the curriculum, how the academic program is complemented by the extra-curricular activities. Balance then is a key ingredient of the mix, and, academically, breadth of skills via a broad range of subjects studied has been reported from commerce and industry as being desirable for the rapidly changing 21st century workplace.

**How am I unique? What are my strengths and weaknesses? How do I like or prefer to learn? Will I be challenged beyond my preferences too?**

To dig deeper requires some longer-term focus. How closely can a school mirror and prepare children for the skills that are transferable for life - into the workplace or into the entrepreneurial pursuits of those inclined to go their own way? If a school has a skills focus, this will be apparent to parents by asking about the types of assessment the school uses. If the focus is on heavy end-of-year exams, then the focus is on knowledge retention. More



**The moment you doubt whether you can fly,  
you cease forever to be able to do it.**  
- J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

**I believe in what I do, and I'll say it.**  
- John Lennon

**The image that concerns most people is the  
reflection they see in other people's minds.**  
- Edward de Bono

frequent formative type assessments are far more skills-based. These facilitate learner empowerment and build self-confidence through self-awareness and self-direction through a learning journey that is meaningful. A good school will still feature end-of-year summative assessments, of course, but the emphasis upon these will be balanced by what has actually gone on through the year, and will be apparent from the dialogue between the teacher and learner.

Ask: "How often will I receive feedback regarding my son/daughter's achievement and attainment and understanding of Assessment for Learning?"

If the learner does not have the language of self-awareness, then the dialogue between teacher and learner cannot develop to a deeper level. Walk into any large bookstore and there will be a self-improvement section for those who possibly never had any personal reflection guidance at school. To know

who you really are is now big business for publishers, who aim their guides at practically anyone of working age. The books sell because people have never looked inwardly or else need a reminder about such things or may have simply forgotten techniques that may have worked for them previously.

Within educational circles there has been much progress in the area of mindfulness and self-awareness in recent years. Learning has been opened up to systematic approaches due to the recent discoveries in neuroscience. The idea of neuroplasticity proves what many of us knew all along - that intelligence is not fixed. With the right plan you really can learn anything new at any time in your life.

Whatever your goal, the starting point is confirmed by the other great educational discovery of recent times - that of emotional intelligence. The starting point again is self-awareness. A child

can develop mindful questions: "How am I unique? What are my strengths and weaknesses? How do I like or prefer to learn? Will I be challenged beyond my preferences too?"

And finally for parents, concerning this new school you are considering: will it provide your children with opportunities within a respectful international community? The opportunity to meet both like-minded and different but responsible learners and caring teachers; the opportunity to identify not only with the content of the lesson but with actual skills and concepts. Done right, this delivers personal motivation, elevating self-belief, recognition of capabilities and promoting lifelong learners brimful of self-confidence.

Thankfully there are good and great options in this city, and the right school, where individuals can find the perfect fit for a flight of confidence, may just be the next one you take a look at. ■

# Animals on the Go

Traveling with pets in Vietnam, part 1



TRAVELING WITH A dog or cat within Vietnam can become overwhelming. Relocating to or moving away from Vietnam with pets will present complications that need to be considered and planned for well in advance. This is the first of two articles providing advice and tips to overcome obstacles when traveling with pets. This month I tackle the problems of traveling locally. Vietnam is not a pet-friendly travel country, however many pet owners do travel with their pets as they consider them part of the family and want to include them on their travels. You will encounter unwillingness from people who simply do not share your love of your furry family member.

If you own a *dog*, getting around the city with one is relatively easy by taxi or motorbike. Taxis will take them if they're secured in a carrier. For small carriers place it on the floor of the taxi and open a few windows for ventilation so the dog's odor doesn't remain in the car. For larger carriers, place in the back of a 7-seat taxi. Bring a couple of wet/dry towels just in case your dog has left a surprise! However, if you travel with a *cat*, do not be surprised if you are refused a ride. Many taxi drivers forbid cats in their cars as they're considered bad luck. Tip: fold down the flaps of

your non-plastic cat carrier and place on the floor of the taxi quickly, without fussing. If the driver makes an inquiry tell him it's a small dog. If there is any further trouble, tip generously for his inconvenience.

If you ride a motorbike, consider training your dog to ride along with you. For smaller dogs and cats, a secure carrier that can be nestled into the floor of the motorbike is recommended. Tip: always secure a strap to the carrier and put them under your seat to prevent the carrier falling off or getting stolen. Larger dogs should be introduced to motorbike travel gradually to become acclimatized to the movement, the noise, the heat and other motorbikes in traffic. They need to learn to feel stable (center of gravity) when standing upright while the motorbike is moving.

## Car, Train, Bus, Plane and Hotels

Creating a safe, comfortable trip with a pet always begins with considering the logistics of a trip (transportation and accommodation) and their needs: behavior (temperament), nutrition, maintenance and security.

Talk to your local travel agency and hire a private car and driver that's pet friendly. This is highly recommended because you gain complete control



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

over your pet's care. Traveling by train or bus is not recommended as there are no clear rules and regulations concerning pets. By plane, Vietnam Airlines has a special cargo service for pets. Go to [www.vietnamairlines.com](http://www.vietnamairlines.com), look for the menu item: Before You Fly > Baggage Information > Special Baggage > Pets / Animals as Checked Baggage (AVIH). It's not advisable to travel long distances with your dog on a motorbike.

There are a few online travel sites that provide listings of dog-friendly accommodations in Vietnam. It is best to contact them directly to verify, as you do not want unpleasant surprises. Begin your search with these recommended sites: [bringfido.com](http://bringfido.com), [wotif.com](http://wotif.com), [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com), [letsbookhotel.com](http://letsbookhotel.com), [petvacations.com](http://petvacations.com) and [dogfriendly.com](http://dogfriendly.com). Use keyword phrases of your destination, for example, "Nha Trang, Vietnam."

## Behavior

Think about the temperament of your dog. The humidity, dust and noise of long trips in Vietnam can overwhelm the best of us. If you do not have a history of traveling with your pet and question the dog's temperament it might be best to consider leaving them at home.

## Nutrition & Maintenance

Bring along a supply of your dog's regular food and treats. Maintaining your dog's regular feeding, exercise and sleeping habits will make the trip less stressful. Bring fresh water from your home because, like us, dogs can develop intestinal problems from new sources of water. Diarrhea is not a problem you want to deal with on the way there or in your hotel room.

## Security

Include a few favorite items (toys, bed, etc.) of your dog for his sense of security. It is always recommended to have your dog tethered or leashed with a collar and harness with some kind of identification. Be aware of your dog all the time; resist the temptation to let the dog roam. There are dog thieves everywhere. ■

# A Growth Mindset

Two basic mindsets that shape our lives

LAST MONTH, I went for a tennis lesson for the first time in a long time. The first question my new tennis coach asked was, "How long have you been playing?" I looked at him – all 21 years of him – and replied, "23 years." The look on his face was difficult to describe but I had clearly shocked him.

It's true that most people in their 30s, particularly those who play sports, believe that they are past their peak. However, unlike most people, I still believe that I can become a better player than I was when I was 16. Physiologically, my body may never reach the same levels of physical fitness or flexibility, but I firmly believe that there are many things I can do to become a better player than I was all those years ago, like improve my technique, develop new tactics, and work on thinking skills to cope with the mental side of the game.

The point I'm trying to make is that, over the years, I have developed a growth mindset. As a teacher, I come across many children who think very differently. They believe that they are either good at something or they are not. Put simply, some people come to believe that success is based on their innate abilities – their natural capacity to do well. These people are said to have a "fixed" mindset. Others, who believe their success is based on hard work, learning, practice and doggedness are said to have a "growth" mindset.

What I have just described is the life's work of Carol Dweck (*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006), a pioneering researcher in the field of motivation and why people succeed (or not, as the case may be). The key message from her research is that while ability and talent are important contributors to success, they will only get you so far. Attitude, and the way we approach things, is ultimately more important.

## Praise

As simple as it may sound, Dweck's findings suggest that children develop

one or the other of these two mindsets due to the type of praise they receive from the adults in their lives. When a child does well at something, adults often give praise in an attempt to encourage that child to maintain their interest and continue to make progress. That's harmless, right?

But as adults, however, we generally assume what we say and what children hear are the same. Sadly, that is not always the case. What few people realize is that praising the talent or intelligence of a child can lead that child to develop a "fixed" mindset because the words 'talent' and 'intelligence' suggest each have pre-determined abilities. The knock-on effect is that it makes people believe past successes were simply achieved because the difficulty of tasks was within their capability.

But, with such a mindset, if we believe the task ahead exceeds our capabilities, we quickly assume we will fail and look to avoid taking part at all; hence, people with fixed mindsets are far more likely to stick to easier tasks, ones they know they will be successful at, something I'm sure we can all relate to. On the other hand, by praising the amount of effort a child



Brendan Hearne is the Deputy Headteacher at Saigon Star International School. He moved to Vietnam in August 2013, having previously taught at two award-winning schools in the UK.

has put into a task, it encourages them to believe that they could rise to even greater challenges, should they arise, as long as they work hard at those too.

## Reaction to Failure

A key difference between these two groups is how they react to failure. Fixed-mindset individuals dread failure because they believe they will be judged as lacking in talent. In contrast though, individuals with a growth mindset do not fear failure nearly as much as they realize that past performance is not necessarily an indicator of future performance. They believe that they can exercise control over what happens next time.

Ultimately, it is this positive 'can-do' attitude that leads some people to seek harder challenges continually, and to accomplish great things.

So, what can be learnt from all of this? Well, simply put, both parents and teachers should give praise carefully. By that, I mean we should be careful about what we praise because, ultimately, the type of praise we give to a child will have a significant impact on the type of mindset that that child in our care comes to develop. ■



# 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.

#### Foundation & Early Primary Campus:

4, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

#### Primary & Secondary Campus:

2, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC

5431 1833/34/35/36  
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

#### 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



Science behind play

### EtonHouse International Pre-School @ An Phu



Following an international curriculum for children aged 18 months to six years, in the early years, an Inquire-Think-Learn approach is followed, inspired by the Reggio Emilia Project of Northern Italy. It is a play-based, inquiry model in which children co-construct their learning in close, respectful collaboration with their teachers. This helps us provide an environment where children take responsibility for their own learning, offering them a head start in life.

1st and 2nd floor, Somerset Vista, Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2  
08 6287 0804

www.etonhouse.vn/schools/hcmc  
info@etonhouse.vn



We leave no question unanswered

### 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



### International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)



#### International School

International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) is an elementary school catering for ages 18 months to 11 years. With 90% of our teachers having master's degrees, we are able to promise a vigorous American curriculum whilst including specialist subjects such as music, art, sport and the languages. ISSP focuses on developing the whole child within a purpose built campus.

92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh  
2222 7788 / 99  
www.issp.edu.vn



### The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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

#### Thao Dien Campus:

42/1 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien Ward, D2

#### An Phu Campus:

Ground floor, Block B, An Khang/Intresco Apartment, No. 28, Duong 19, Khu pho 5, D2

3744 2639 / 0903 858659

montessorivn@gmail.com

www.montessori.edu.vn



### Renaissance International School Saigon

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

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



### Saigon Star International School

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

Residential Area No.5,  
Thanh My Loi Ward, D2  
3742 STAR / 3742 7827

www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



### The American School

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

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

08 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admissions@tas.edu.vn

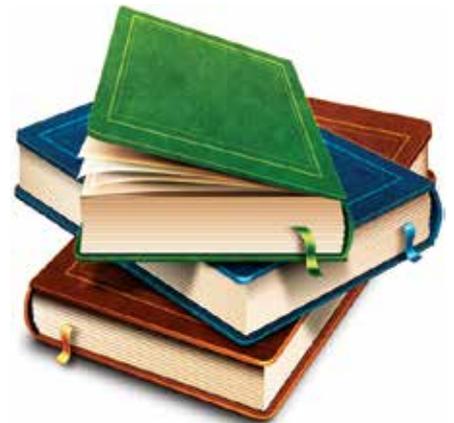
www.tas.edu.vn



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

The most established international school in HCMC and recently celebrating 20 years of success. ISHCMC is a fully accredited IB World School, authorized to teach all 3 programs of the International Baccalaureate curriculum to students aged 2 to 18 years. 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 organizations. ISHCMC has over 1000 students from over 50 different nationalities.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2  
(08) 3898 9100  
admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn  
www.ishcmc.com



## Also...

### American International School

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

Elementary School (102C Nguyen Van Cu, D1)

Middle School (35 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh)

High School (781/C1-C2 Le Hong Phong, D10)

### Australian International School (AIS)

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

Xi Campus (Kindergarten)

190 Nguyen Van Huong, D2

Thao Dien Campus (Kindergarten & Primary School)

APSC Compound  
36 Thao Dien, D2

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

### 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

### 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 five-hectare, well-equipped campus.

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

# Faces & Places



## It's Time to Make a Change

For World Rhino Day, WildAid and Change organized a public memorial to commemorate the death of more than 760 rhinoceros in the world last year.

IMAGES BY KHANG THAI

## Get the Popcorn Ready

Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon held a special edition of movie night for the premiere of *Hotel Transylvania 2* at Vivo City.

IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

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