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VIETNAM

03-2019

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A Revival of Saigon's Golden Age of Music

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IMAGE PROVIDED BY YU CHU RESTAURANT

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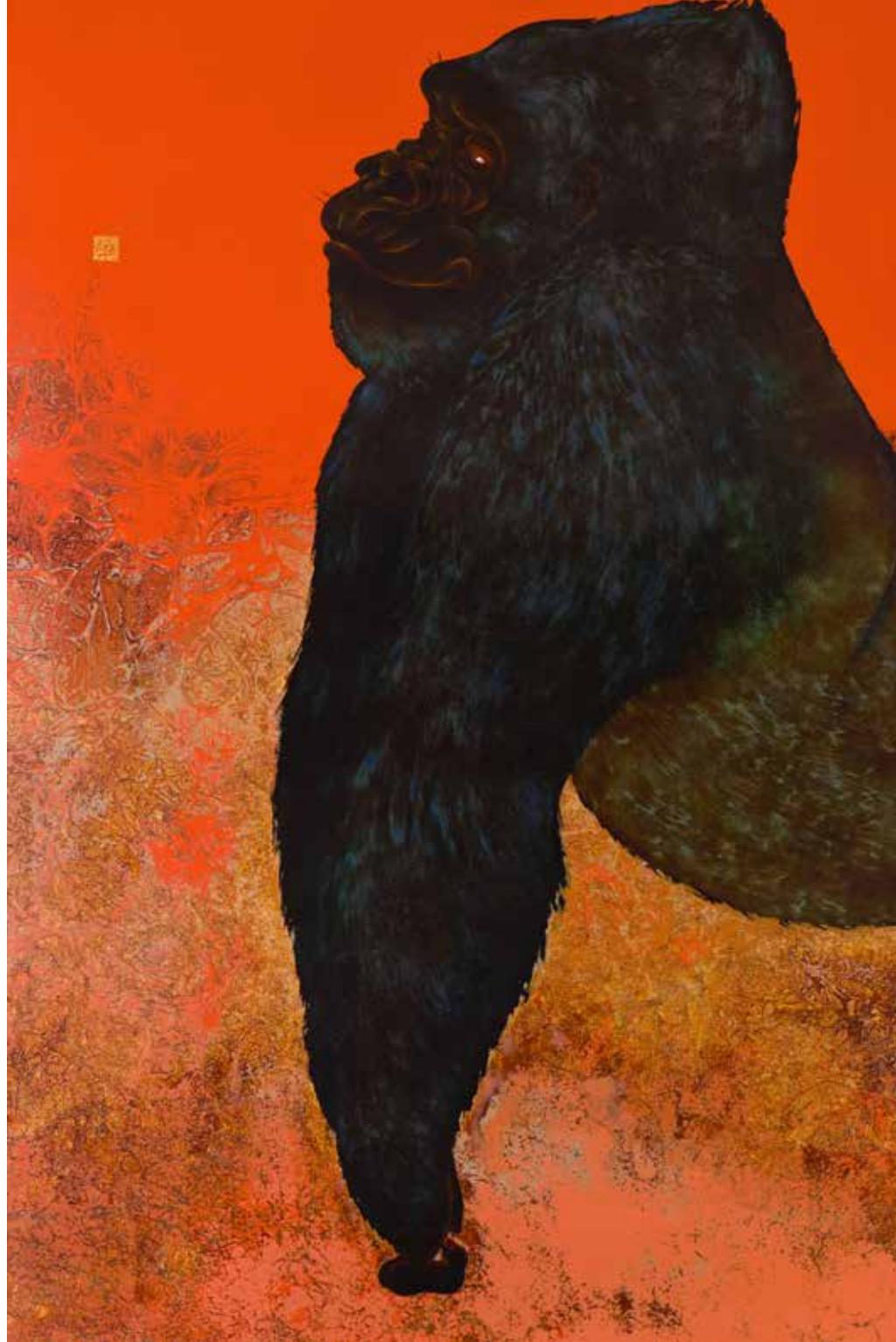
Second Thoughts

Saeko Ando artist revisits her early works

Text and Images Provided by **March Gallery**

A JAPANESE ARTIST BASED IN Vietnam since 1995, Saeko studied Son Mai lacquer painting under artist Trinh Tuan, lacquer master Doan Chi Trung and lacquer craftsman Lam Huu Chinh. She has continued to use natural lacquer in the face of competition from artificial lacquer, ensuring the continuous of this ancient craft in the modern era by integrating tradition with innovation.

Vietnamese lacquer is harvested in the lacquer plantations of Phu Tho province, northwest of Hanoi. Each tree gives only a small amount of lacquer each day, which is collected in mussel shells strapped to the narrow tree trunks. It is a mysterious substance that breathes and matures like good wine. The glow, hardness and clarity of Vietnamese



lacquer improve with the passing years and this is part of its fascination.

These days, most of the lacquer paintings we see in shops and galleries are made with synthetic lacquers. Some even use household paints. Saeko, however, has persevered with this ancient medium and made it into something very modern and exquisite through innovative techniques and her signature style.

When asked where she finds her inspiration, she quoted an old Japanese saying: “Even a dog will come up with a stick when they walk around.” Saeko explains that she always has her eyes wide open and inspiration comes in layers, in sudden explosions and in dawning realizations depending on the day.

For this exhibition, Saeko has chosen

some works that she has revisited. The original works were completed some years ago, but following a gift of some rare Cambodian lacquer, she has re-worked some paintings. She sees this as a collaboration with her former self. This is an interesting development considering that these older paintings still live and breath as she, herself, does and the pieces that she once thought were finished are, now, not finished. It is a reminder that a lacquer painting is never finished because it changes in color, clarity and hardness even if you never touch it again. ■

Exhibition on from April 24 - May 25 at March Gallery (25 Phan Boi Chau, Hoi An; marchgallery-hoian.com), and April 14 - May 19th at Anantara art space (1 Pham Hong Thai, Hoi An; artspacehoian.com)

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TROI OI!

The country in numbers



USD237

FINE WAS ISSUED TO A MAN FOR PICNICKING WITH HIS FAMILY ON AN EXPRESSWAY IN NORTHERN VIETNAM.

He also had his driver's license temporarily revoked for "parking his automobile along an expressway." They live-streamed their celebration on Facebook, which sparked widespread outrage because they did not only risk their own lives but also those of other road users on the 265km expressway. *An Toan Giao Thong* (Traffic Safety), a news website run by the Ministry of Transport, reported that Viet took to Facebook to express his apology over the incident. The man said he and his family did not mean to party on the expressway, adding that what they did was "a thoughtless act."



USD21,500

FOR A DISH OF STIR-FRIED EGGS IN NHA TRANG.

Authorities in Nha Trang have inspected a local restaurant after a group of Malaysian tourists were charged VND500,000 for a dish of stir-fried eggs, as well as exorbitant prices for other courses at the venue: a dish of boiled okras was charged VND300,000; VND200,000 for each portion of white rice, etc. The information on the bill showed that the tourists had had their dinner at Hung Phat Restaurant at 86/5 Tran Phu Street. According to Pham Van Huu, head of the provincial market management department, a delegation of inspectors has been sent to the restaurant to verify the case. The venue, however, had been closed by the time they arrived, with its signboard being taken down, Huu stated. "We have not been able to contact the owner, but will continue our probe to further deal with the incident."



USD4,300

RETURNED BY REMORSEFUL ROBBER.

A robber from southern Vietnam has recently made headlines on social media after he returned the cash and two cellphones he had stolen while also sending a letter of apology to his victim. In his three-page letter, the robber explained that he robbed the victim to pay debts he owed to loan sharks. However, after snatching Thuy's bag, he was shocked by the large sum of money and felt remorse thinking of the victim's loss. Additionally, he felt guilt whenever he saw his three-month-old baby's innocent face. After taking a few million dong to cover his debts, he decided to take the assets to An Phu police officers with a promise to pay back the money he had taken. Thuy said she appreciated the robber's regret and expressed her hope that the police would drop the case. Thuan An Town police will consider the victim's wish and discuss a proper approach.



14,000

METH PILLS WERE DISCOVERED STASHED WITHIN HUMAN ASHES ON A MINIBUS IN CENTRAL VIETNAM.

The pink pills, stashed in 70 packages, were found inside a bus used for carrying human ashes while it was parked. Tien confessed that he had purchased the pills from his mother for VND175 million and persuaded Thanh to transport the drugs in the vehicle to dodge authorities. It is unclear how much meth was seized but in Vietnam unlawfully transporting over 100 grams of the illegal substance is punishable with up to 20 years in prison, life imprisonment or the death penalty.



11 SELF-SERVICE PETROLIMEX GAS STATIONS HAVE OFFICIALLY ROLLED OUT IN SAIGON.

The self-service is applicable to both cars and motorcyclists at the gas stations under the management of the Ho Chi Minh City branch of Petrolimex, Vietnam's largest fuel wholesaler. As the model of self-service gas stations has long been the norm in many countries around the world that brings customers convenience, promptitude and transparency, the Ho Chi Minh City branch of Petrolimex said that the company will continue to expand the scope of this retail automation at its petroleum stores. In addition, it will also add more payment methods such as Visa and Master cards, QR (quick response) codes, and mobile wallets, instead of only ATM cards and Petrolimex's gas cards like the present.



13,500 TREES WERE PLANTED ALONG HIGHWAYS IN VIETNAM LAST MONTH.

The trees were planted to ensure a green, clean and beautiful environment, reduce traffic accidents and restore safe road corridors, said Huyen, the director of the traffic department. "Recently several serious traffic accidents happened due to automobiles falling into abysses. The trees being planted along mountain passes will help limit losses caused by the accidents. The sector strives that by the end of March this year, dozens of thousands of new trees will be planted along highways. To help the trees grow well, the DRVN asked local road management offices, authorities and residents to take care of them.



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Datebook

What's on this month...

MARCH 9

What: From The New World

Where: Saigon Opera House, 8pm

About: Antonin Dvorak's Symphony *From The New World*, with its special spirit and creative writing at the time it was written, has become one of the most beloved works of all time. Neil Armstrong played this symphony during his journey to the moon on Apollo 11. The sound of brightness and ambition will be heard in this new season under the baton of conductor Meritorious Artist Tran Vuong Thach.

The program also introduces the work of American musician Leroy Anderson, who was named one of the greatest composers of light orchestral music. This time, the Piano Concerto by Leroy Anderson will be performed by pianist Nguyen Thuy Yen and the HBSO Symphony Orchestra. Nguyen Thuy Yen is a member of the jury of the International Talent Contest for Steinway Young Piano 2012. Currently, she is the Deputy Head of Piano Department at Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music.

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



MARCH 24

What: Holistic Fair

Where: EtonHouse, E-Maison International Pre-School (42, Street 10, Thao Dien, D2), 9am-3pm, free entry

About: The Holistic Fair is a one-day, non-profit event focused on holistic health and wellness, including classes and free talks from holistic practitioners. At the fair, you will find an assortment of over 30 local businesses including farmers, alternative health medicine and wellness practitioners, sport promoters, kids, and community outreach and environmental services.

They aim to: provide a space for health-conscious individuals and families, small business supporters, and EtonHouse E-Maison International Pre-School Thao Dien children, parents and teachers. Support local farmers, health-related

services, and environmental protection businesses by giving them an outlet to promote and sell directly to consumers. Enrich the community by promoting farm-fresh, in-season produce; health coaches; yoga and fitness instructors; acupuncturists; reflexologists; reiki masters and other healers; cleanup initiatives; and other like-minded businesses. Inform the community about healthy and sustainable food and lifestyle choices. Give the community access to healthy eating alternatives and handmade goods made by local artisans. Manifest a community gathering that creates a festive and inclusive atmosphere, free from plastic.

Contact: Visit www.facebook.com/laholista for more info



MARCH 28-30

What: Every Brilliant Thing

Where: Soma Art Cafe (6B Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2), 7pm

About: You're seven years old. Mum's in hospital. Dad says she's "done something stupid." She finds it hard to be happy. So you start to make a list of everything that's brilliant about the world, everything that's worth living for. *Every Brilliant Thing* is a wise and witty play about depression and the lengths we will go to for those we love. Performed at Soma Art Lounge

to an intimate audience of only 50 per night, the one-man show is a new theatrical experience for Saigon theatregoers where you can't afford to miss a moment. Get tickets at ticketbox.vn/event/every-brilliant-thing-74738



Contact: Visit www.facebook.com/dragonflyvietnam for more info

APRIL 18

What: Lifestyle Vietnam 2019

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: The 10th anniversary of a very special Lifestyle Vietnam 2019 fair. There will be a much wider range of products from Vietnamese exporters, as well as other Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, China, and India & Pakistan. There will also be exporters from Africa & Europe showcasing their exclusive products. If you are looking for special products to give you an advantage over your competition, you cannot afford to miss this fair.

A list of the categories that will be included, giving more choice than ever before: handicrafts & home decoration, indoor & outdoor furniture, garden accessories, home textiles, table & kitchenware, personal accessories, leather footwear & bags, fragrances, toys, gifts & handmade items from ethnic minorities. The organizers will also be showcasing the latest designs of artisans & designers from around the world, as well as introducing many well-known One Village One Product (OVOP) items at the show. There are many privileges for International visitors that include free entry to the fair, free pick-up service from the airport, visa assistance as well as many other benefits, which can be viewed on our website.

Contact: Visit www.lifestyle-vietnam.com for more info



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Lend Me Your Ears

Ear infections in dogs are common and most dogs suffer from this painful condition sometime in their life



Nevena Stefanovic studied at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Belgrade, Serbia and Wroclaw, Poland. Her primary interest are companion animals internal medicine and surgery. Nevena is now working as a veterinary surgeon at Animal Doctors International Clinic, HCMC.



OTITIS EXTERNA IS AN infection of the outer ear in dogs. It is one of the more common types of infections that we see in dogs. Certain breeds are particularly prone to it, including those with long, floppy ears such as the spaniel or beagle. Dogs with hairy ears are another group susceptible to otitis, such as poodle and maltese.

Otitis is a very painful condition and patients usually present with symptoms such as scratching at their ears, shaking their head and even dragging their ears along the ground. They often cry when their owner touches the ear and owners often note a foul odor and a very hot and red ear canal.

The cause of this disease is multifactorial. As stated above, certain breeds are predisposed to this condition due to their anatomy. There is also often a bacterial and yeast component to the disease. A parasite, known as ear mites, is occasionally involved though this is

more common in cats.

The good news is that if this condition is caught early, it can be treated successfully with medication. This usually involves eardrops and regular cleaning of the ear canal. Always make sure to contact your veterinarian before treating because some medication can exacerbate the problem if used incorrectly.

In certain cases, medication is not enough and some dogs must have a procedure to thoroughly flush the ear canal. If this also fails then a complicated surgery must be carried out to completely open up the ear canal.

My best advice is to contact your vet immediately if your dog shows any of the symptoms described above. Most cases resolve successfully with early intervention. ■

Pet of the Month



Look how far Harris has come!

HARRIS WAS IN DIRE STRAITS

when he was rescued and taken to Saigon Pet Clinic for care in June 2018. He was emaciated, dehydrated, anemic, and had a depressed immune system. He also suffered from a severe skin disease that caused extensive hair loss. And those were just his physical problems. Emotionally, Harris had severe anxiety and was very fearful of people and other dogs.

The situation for poor Harris was very sad, and everyone involved in his care was quite concerned that he might not make it. Dr. Nguyen Van Nghia and his staff worked diligently to cure Harris' health issues while also giving him much needed socialization and kind handling. Likewise, experienced ARC volunteers put a lot of time and attention into socializing Harris and helping him build his confidence in the world.

When Harris's health finally improved enough for him to join the ARC dog walks, it took several weeks of coaxing before he overcame his nervousness enough to go outside and be put on a lead. Now, though, Harris is leash trained, muzzle trained (an important trait for medium to larger sized dogs in Saigon), and loves to join his dog and volunteer friends on the morning and afternoon ARC walks. In addition to being well-behaved on walks, Harris is good with children and other dogs.

Harris's skin condition is steadily improving, and soon his coat of white and brown will have grown in completely. We don't know how old Harris is, but suspect that he is around 7-10 years old. Whatever his age, he is a sweet companion who enjoys being active, yet also appreciates his relaxation time.

Excellent teamwork between Saigon Pet Clinic and ARC volunteers and his kind foster family have given astounding results in Harris's case, and he is ready to put the past behind him and go to his forever home. ■

If you would like to find out more about adopting Harris, please contact ARC at arcpets@gmail.com.





Forgotten Voices

A revival of Saigon's golden age of music

Text by Jesus Lopez-Gomez

IT MIGHT BE DANCE CLUB

Arcan's unique interior decoration and its oddly powerful soundproofing that always makes it feel like another world when you walk up to the venue from the quiet, otherwise unassuming homey Binh Thanh neighborhood it's nested within. The night Saigon Sound Revival played and the club's massive sliding front glass door opened, releasing the sounds of the city's wartime era rock and funk into the street gave it an especially otherworldly picture.

Ahead of cover band Saigon Soul Revival's (SSR) show at Arcan's club space upstairs, collaborator and Vietnamese musicophile Jan Hagenkoetter DJ'd in the chill section downstairs playing selections of pre-Independence Saigonese music, the Western influenced rock and funk era known as "*nhac vang*" or "golden music." The band played music from the same era on stage.

The Vietnamese music both played

was popular throughout the '50s and '60s. *Nhac vang* is both a contemporary and artistic cousin of European and US music hip at the time. The records Hagenkoetter played before the show sounded at first blush, like they could have been works by the Beach Boys or a Spanish bolero band, but the Vietnamese singing would have corrected this assumption.

It's in this music tradition that SSR has worked for the three-years that the band has been active. It's music that's lively and uptempo—like the lilting "Sai Gon Dep Lam" with its "cha cha" cadence—and plays well in front of crowds. As the band's instruments' rested at the close of each song, the musicians were greeted with thundering applause and cheers from inside the packed club.

That kind of praise and glowing reception isn't always there at shows. Speaking to *Oi* by phone, guitarist Indy Laville and bassist Gabriel Kaouros said Saigon Soul Revival's classic sound has fallen flat in other places. "We played

at Acoustic Bar (in Saigon)... they just sit there and they won't react," Kaouros said. "The kind of vibe isn't there like when we went to Arcan." Keyboardist Nam Ky Tran; drummer Nguyen Huong Bao Hieu; and singer Nguyen Thu Hang, who performs as "Minh," perform with Kaouros and Laville as the band's current lineup.

Generally, the band's audiences tend to be foreigners for whom the music is new and exciting. The musicians said their toughest shows have been with majority Vietnamese crowds, especially those with young people. "...the main reason they're not interested is because it's old, it's not cool," Kaouros said.

The music was popular around the end of a divided Vietnam with the country's southern, more Western friendly audiences. But the musicians disputed the idea that SSR's body of work is exciting some kind of politically oriented reaction.

"In general, (young Vietnamese)



Saigon Soul Revival

Image by Hernes Pichon



Jan Hagenkoetter

Image by Vy Lam

are not political,” Kaouros said. Citing the popularity of EDM, Alan Walker “and shi* like that,” Kaouros said these listeners “are not generally interested in “alternative, noncommercial stuff.”

“I don’t know if it’s as simple as that,” Laville interjected. “I still feel like it’s about marketing,” he said citing the band’s tendency to court attention from foreign audiences over Vietnamese. Laville, a musician with Vietnamese and French heritage raised in Saigon, said SSR’s music and the artistic tradition they worked from was a point of pride for Vietnamese audience members he saw at their shows.

“I feel like the Vietnamese that do come to our shows, they definitely feel some sort of pride at knowing that this is Vietnamese music,” he said.

After the country was reunited, the place that give rise to *nhac vang* fell out of fashion due to its politically sensitive context, and much of the music was outright banned. Collectors who wanted to listen to the music were united through personal networks through which they could meet other music enthusiasts who wanted to enjoy the music but were all too aware of its associated risks.

This volatility effectively orphaned it. The listenership went dark and many of the labels that released the music were dismantled. When Hagenkoetter decided to turn his own work as a *nhac vang* collector in a formal music collection called *Saigon Supersound*, his search for rights holders and copyright bearers largely turned up dead ends. Similarly, Laville said he’d never heard the music before meeting Kaouros in spite of being raised in Vietnam. Kaouros, a US-born Cypriot with Puerto Rican and Cuban heritage, came in contact with the music through friends when moved to Saigon in January 2014. A friend of his, Daniel Thomas who was then a resident DJ at The Observatory, told him “check this sh*t out,” Kaouros remembered. He gave him a copy of *Saigon Rock & Soul: Vietnamese Classic Tracks 1968-1974*, another important collection of *nhac vang* music and a forerunner of Hagenkoetter’s *Saigon Supersound* series.

Kaouros and Laville met through a jam session with other musicians that would go on to form the Saigon Sound Revival band’s first lineup. “We thought, ‘sh*t, nobody else is playing this kind of music. Why don’t we do a cover band, a revival band?’” Kaouros said. The band had formalized and identified their particular artistic mission before meeting Hagenkoetter, the collector who has joined the band as an

artistic consultant and producer working with them as they prepare to release their first record this fall.

When the band formed in 2016, Hagenkoetter was at that point four years in to what started as a leisure interest in Vietnam’s pre-war music that started when he heard *Song Cho Nhau*, a crashing and audacious tune laden with funk and swagger, in 2012. “That was like, really, wow, f*ck,” Hagenkoetter said. The idea that followed: “I thought ‘Is there more of this?’”

The song was offered to listeners in the first installment of Hagenkoetter’s *nhac vang* collection, *Saigon Supersound Vol. 1*. The band played in January to commemorate the release of Hagenkoetter’s “*Saigon Supersound Vol. 2*” collection. Hagenkoetter first came in to the music as just a fan, but he said the music has evolved and grown to be a way to talk about the heritage of his and his Vietnamese wife’s children. Hagenkoetter’s work as a collector has led him to hunt the music down in a range of venues including antique markets in Saigon where necessary, which he avoids due to the generally poor state of the physical recordings. Much of his work has been conducted on the internet where blogs and YouTube channels keep the *nhac vang* music alive.

The search has led him to meet actual music collectors who vet Hagenkoetter in informal conversations over tea on living room floors before showing him their record collections. If the collector has a song that Hagenkoetter hasn’t heard before, something Hagenkoetter said that rarely happens at this state of his work, or has a recording in better quality that what he personally has, the collector has to initiate the sometimes difficult process of getting the collector to release the physical copy to him temporarily so he can can digitally archive it. Asked how many old Saigon songs he’s heard as a *nhac vang* archivist, Hagenkoetter reflexively answered “1,000 at least.” “I’ve been asked that question three times before,” he added. For *Saigon Supersound Vol. 2*, Hagenkoetter said he narrowed the final selection down from a pool of 300 possible songs for this installment.

The band’s work has won the attention of the British Council, which is considering the group for funding. Kaouros said Saigon Sound Revival has taken on a renewed importance in the current music landscape, which is searching for more vintage sounds and is wandering away from well-trodden songs and bands. Eastern music is meeting a demand for something new, and SSR is the only active, high profile band performing the *nhac vang* music.

“We appear to be the only people representing southeast Asian sounds,” Kaouros said. “If we f*ck this up, we’re idiots,” he added with a laugh. The band intends to go on to record an album for release this year, and tour the music within and outside of Vietnam. ■

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Got The Thirst?

Top your water bottle up for free at refill stations across Southeast Asia

Text by **Carly Naaktgeboren**
Images Provided by **BGreener**

WITH TOURISM BOOMING in Southeast Asia, concern about sustainable and responsible tourism is a growing conversation. How do we visit the most naturally breathtaking places in the world and preserve rather than destroy them? This is a question being asked by the organization BGreener, and being answered with a conscientious new app: *RefillMyBottle*.

“Seven years ago, I decided to make a community of like-minded business change-makers. It’s a community of caring business owners promoting nature-based tourism. If there is over-tourism and pollution, it is unlikely to attract visitors anymore. So the bigger impact was proving there is a better way of collaborating. Is it possible to have a different way of doing business? Can we do good and can we do well at the same time? BGreener honors the fact that they are business owners and want to grow their businesses. We solve each other’s problems with different communication streams and tools, promotion, and trusted sources of information... Whatever you’re

gonna give, you’re gonna receive, but not always the way you expect,” says Alex Tsuk, Friend Maker and head of BGreener.

Alex became interested in ecotourism and sustainable travel years ago and has worked in hospitality in France, Laos and Bali. He has two children who are an inspiration to his work, “I want to preserve them, I want to be positive and optimistic about the world because I have a responsibility towards them. If I don’t do anything for them, I will let them down.”

The website and app, *RefillMyBottle*, is an initiative that was started by the folks at BGreener in an effort to reduce plastic water bottle waste beginning in Bali, then spreading throughout Southeast Asia, and now all over the world, “Bali is an iconic destination. At the same time, it’s tremendously under pressure. There is hardly any water in the ground in Bali and the amount of waste is off-putting for many tourists. That combination makes it the right place to demonstrate ‘if I can make it here, I can make it anywhere,’” says Alex.



RefillMyBottle is active with over 900 free water bottle refill stations in nine countries, including right here in Vietnam. Utilizing Google Maps, all partnering businesses near your location appear with a red pin and are also readable in a list view, making it extremely user friendly. "In everything we do, we are solution oriented. We tackle a very simple problem, which is plastic waste and single use plastic waste. Having a map of all the places in the world they can refill their water bottle is common sense," Alex says. There are already over 130 refill stations in Vietnam, with one station saving 10,000 bottles in a single year alone. That's direct impact.

By including your business, hotel or space as a free water bottle refill station on the app, the potential for exposure and growth is incredible. The makers of *RefillMyBottle* know and respect that a business's greatest need is to make money, "you get people through the door, the more you appear on search engines etc, the better. If you offer free water, they are likely to purchase a juice or pizza—

people refill as they do something else. *RefillMyBottle* is... you want to show you care a little bit, that's a good place to start: 'I care even though I might not do much yet, but I will start,'" Alex says.

The best part about the app? It's amazingly simple, "Go to *RefillMyBottle.com* and click 'list my business' or download the app and add your business, it's done in two minutes," says Alex. Customers can also recommend businesses they would like to see refill stations in. Once the business confirms, it's on the app. Then, all the business has to do is provide a water bottle refill station.

As travelers and tourists continue to appreciate what the earth gives us, it's our responsibility to maintain the well-being of the places we enjoy so immensely. No effort is too small, and the individual practice of many can mean enormous change overall. By introducing an easy-to-use app with huge difference making power, *RefillMyBottle* is going global and making taking steps towards sustainable tourism as easy as a download and a few clicks. ■



Girls' Night Out

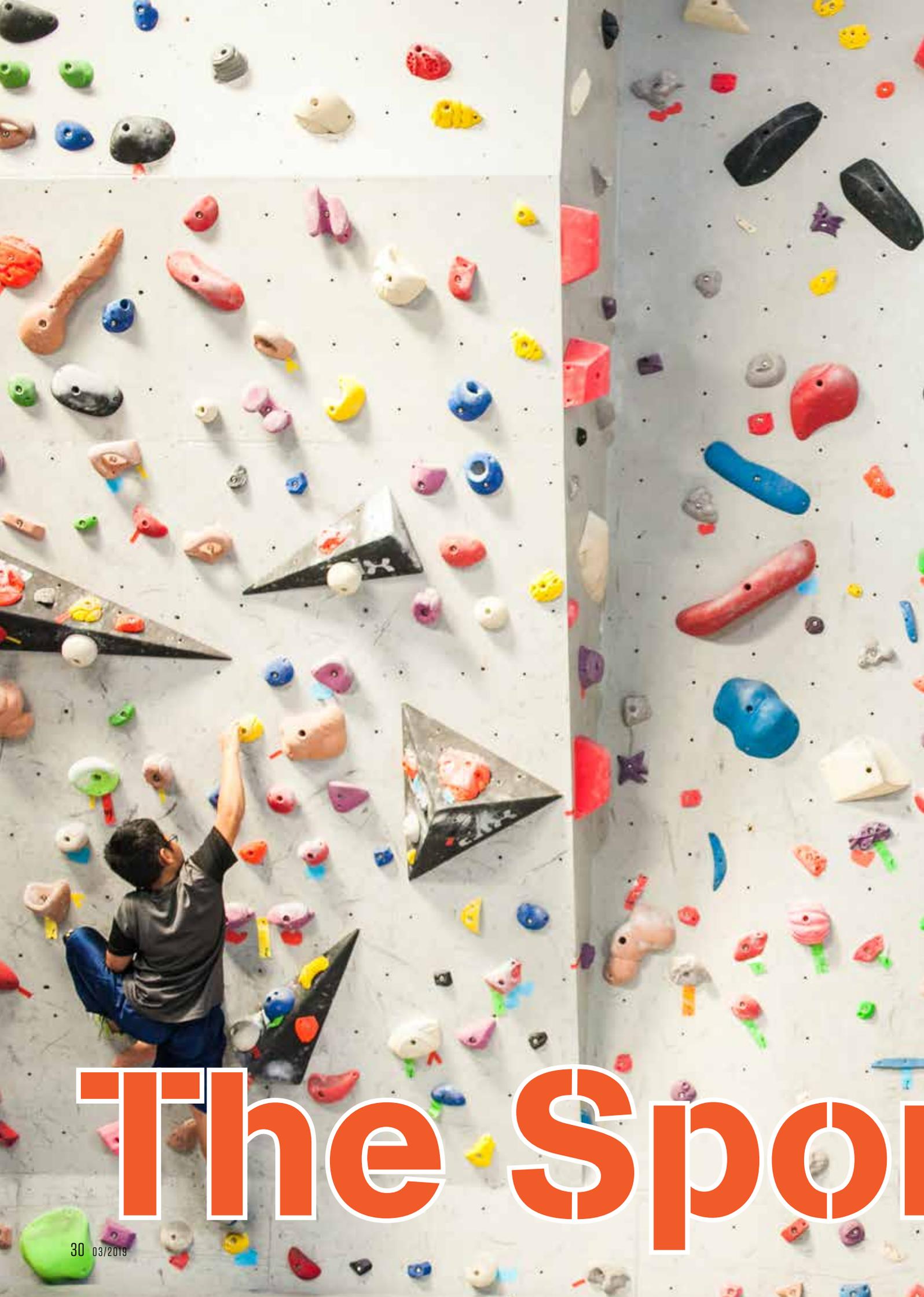
There is nothing better than launching into the weekend rolling deep with your best girl pack, sans the shackles of the patriarchy and the bros. It's time to get in sync, it's time to vibe, and it's time to hang with your gal pals with a swipe of red lipstick and a high dose of estrogen. You are woman, let them hear you roar. So why not hang out with a femme fatale crew of your own? And, while you're at it, dress for the occasion with some Instagram-worthy looks? There are plenty of sartorial options that come with ladies' night. You'll never feel better heading out with your best female friends on your arm—and a stellar outfit to match.



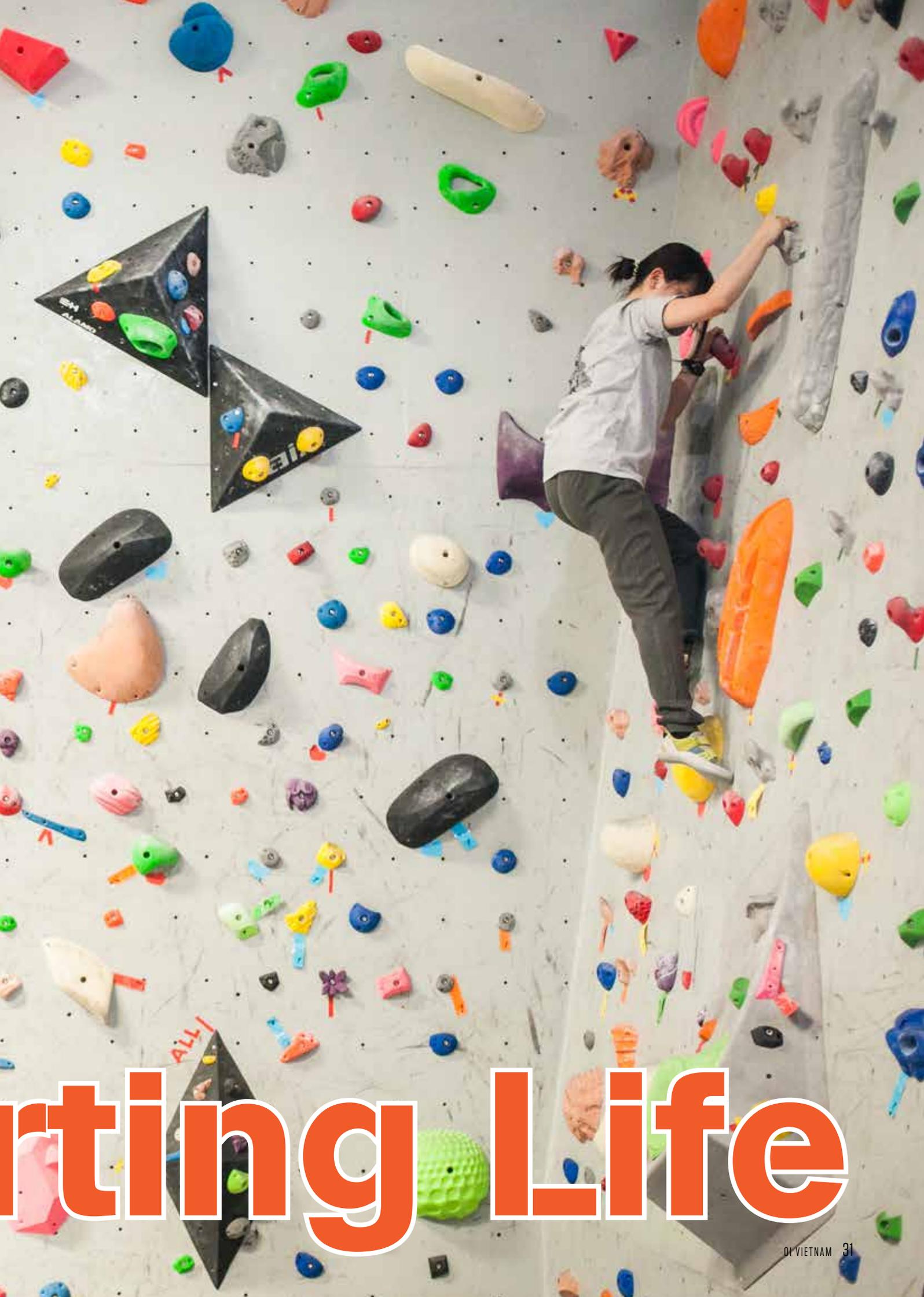




Clothes: **Umbrella**
(umbrella-fashion.com)
Model: **Sophia and Maria**
Photographer: **Rong Nobita**
Styling: **Phuc Tran**
Makeup: **Nguyen Duong**
Assistant: **Tri Thuc**



The Spor



Starting Life



KEYBOARD WARRIORS

The rise of the digital athlete

Text by **Jesus Lopez-Gomez**
Images Provided by **Riot Games**

A **IMPORTANT CONFRONTATION** will have a critical flashpoint inside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. No, we're not talking about the summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump. The leaders will be long gone by the time Vietnam hosts a *League of Legends* championship in May.

The game's 2019 Mid-Season Invitational will occur on May 1st in Ho Chi Minh City, which will host two rounds of the tournament with players from 13 regions, which collectively represent around two dozen countries, including far off nations like Turkey, the US and also Vietnam. From May 10 to 14, the tournament will continue in Hanoi before finishing at the semifinals

and finals in Taipei.

Players will compete for cash prizes worth up to USD2 million total per event. Vietnam is the second-largest market for the online battle strategy game, according to Chris Tran, a spokesperson with creator Riot Games. "*League of Legends* is a cultural phenomena," Chris said. "Most people in a certain demographic play or know someone who plays." The "certain demographic" Chris is talking about are young, high school- and college-aged males. He said the popularity with young adults makes sense both because of their high amounts of uncommitted time— *League of Legends* is a game that, like others, rewards continued play with more powerful weapons and in-game



currency—and the fact that the game’s central themes revolve around the importance of the individual player as a leader of an army doing battle, a place where a young person might begin to build a sense of competency and talent for themselves.

“It’s like a coming of age thing,” Chris said. The spring tournament marks the game’s 10th anniversary. “We want to celebrate the popularity [of the game]. No better way to do that than to host the championships.” Vietnamese players will play against players from around the world in the tournament. Chris said the Vietnamese *League of Legends* player community can hold their own but are generally outperformed by other countries with higher overall talent. Because of this, Vietnamese players tend to go for a very aggressive play style and are able to take control of the game sometimes by taking unexpected, unusual moves against opponents.

“We’re like the underdogs of the global community,” Chris said. “It’s a very aggressive style. Very unorthodox but a lot of raw talent. The whole world perks up when a Vietnamese person is playing...” “Vietnam’s selection as the host country of two events in this e-sports championship are also consistent with the country’s unmatched professional gaming audience size. Newzoo, a consumer research firm that specializes in e-sports participation and viewership, in 2016 found that Vietnam was home to 2.8 million e-sports enthusiasts, nearly a quarter of the 9.5 million estimated to live in the ASEAN region. The firm estimates the number of e-sports followers and players has grown since that time to 19.8 million. The report includes viewership numbers from e-sports streaming service Twitch. While online shooter *Overwatch* and tactical, team-based first-person shooter *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* have consistently pulled in sizable shares of the e-sports audience, *League of Legends* pulled in a healthy majority of e-sports viewership. The game consistently pulled in around 100 million viewing hours, according to the report’s 2016 Twitch data; that’s over 25 percent of all time spent watching e-sports on Twitch across

all the games it streams. The 2018 Mid-Season Invitational last year accrued 363 million watched hours across 60 million viewers. At peak viewership, the contest last year had 18.8 simultaneous viewers. That’s almost as many people that watched the 2019 Grammy’s.

In spite of these bonafides—the viewership, the seriousness of the competitors and the monies awarded to players are either prizes or salaries (some of which are many times higher than those of traditional athletes)—e-sports, for some, still carries a stigma belonging to broad social judgements of video games in general, that they are not serious or that becoming talented as a gamer is not a worthy pursuit.

Chris, a *League of Legends* player himself is all too aware of the cloud of stigma around what some consider a vice that should be attended to in limited quantities if at all, offered a portrayal of gaming as a kind of complementary skill much like a traditional sport. “I think when you think about something that’s competitive, it’s all about performance,” he said. “That’s one of those universal things about sports in school.”

The basic talent ecosystem works the same, he explained. All the parts are there for one to play for leisure or to play in as a paid professional.

On the question of whether e-sports is a legitimate form of competition, “when you say that, it kind of puts us on the back foot and says we’re not legitimate,” he countered.

The question of how legitimacy occurs is undoubtedly a complicated one, but a fruitful place to start is by participation, professionalization and popularity. Chris argued that all are a feature of *League of Legends* playing community and e-sports as a whole.

“There’s something out there [when] a whole generation of people derive satisfaction from it.” ■



A Fighting Family

We break the first—and second—rule of this fight club to let you in on where to throw jabs, hooks and uppercuts, and get strong physically and mentally in no time

Text by **Jesus Lopez-Gomez**
Images by **Vy Lam**

“GOOD MARTIAL ARTS IS NOT about going out and kicking ass,” professional fighter and Victory MMA International owner Victor Georgsen said. “It’s about, ‘Can you be an inspiration, can you be an idol.’ That’s what I want.”

Victor is talking about the small group of professional fighters his District 2 gym sponsors and the nearly 60 fighters who call his gym home. Building the community around the gym is work that’s as important to him as his own personal conditioning as a fighter. When he arrived in Vietnam nearly five years ago, he said the country’s MMA scene was virtually nonexistent. In the nearly two years that the gym has been open, Victor has committed his work to not only running the business and

developing his own career as a professional fighter, but also to building what he calls a “family of MMA.”

Nevertheless, it is ultimately a business, and Victor said managing the gym has presented its own challenges, some that almost ended

the gym. Many of the fighters who train at Victory MMA are foreign athletes who winter outside of Vietnam

retiring their training and also their membership payments. Victor had to take a grace from the landlord that owns the space he rents for Victory MMA—an expansive, open area on the 15th floor of an apartment building—who generously let him skip a rent payment that month to avoid shuttering the business. It was the second time in the gym’s history that it faced the definite prospect of elimination. “I clearly have no skill in managing,” Victor said bluntly with a laugh reflecting on his rocky track record as a businessman.

Instead, what he offers is a clear vision that, if nothing else, he’s strongly committed to.

The gym and the community created through it, “it’s my dream,” Victor said. “I... may not be the best fighter in the world,” he conceded, but “I want to create something for the Vietnamese people.”

Victor’s gym has committed to not only developing homegrown talent in Vietnam’s fighting community, but ensuring that these fighters have a chance to perform abroad. Victory MMA sponsor fighters who traveled to international matches. Victor has even housed and fed those training with Victory MMA. “I cannot just close it. If I close it, [the fighters] will have nothing,” he said.

As a professional fighter, the Danish athlete’s four years



Victor Georgsen



in the sport are not continuous. They are broken up into two chapters in his life. The first started as an act of quiet defiance. At the age of 17, he started going to a boxing gym he described as “dodgy” in his native country Denmark. Victor played rugby with a league in Denmark and felt unfulfilled by school. But fighting was not an option for him because of his parents’ strong disapproval. “Every time I wanted to bring up something about boxing, they’d say it’s for stupid people who are brain dead,” he said. So, he did what any sensible teenager with a forbidden interest does: just not tell his parents about it.

Developing himself became easier for him as a fighter when he moved to the UK. There, he learned his first mixed martial arts lessons. He did a few competitions before returning to Denmark where he paused as a fighter and joined the family company manufacturing furniture at age 20, work he’d continue for four years. Victor describes the period as a time of sadness, weight gain and unfulfillment. He’d go into the gym and hit bags, but having what the general public often describes as a “real job” with large, regular time commitments meant he was limited in how much he could train.

Aside from missing the conditioning, Victor said the gym brought him in contact with a community and a spirit that has kept him in fighting. Fighting may profile as a sport that’s built around posturing and tough fighters developing their fighting ability because of some kind of misanthropy, but Victor disputes this portrayal as a fighter himself. The fighters he has encountered in his training have been not only friendly and encouraging but equally committed to making the gym a space where athletes can work free of judgement like these.

“What I missed was the friendship... no ego,” he said. Sparring partners are friends, and “you don’t want to hurt you friends,” Victor said. “There’s no ego [in the gym]. Everyone’s doing it together. It’s a moment of purity.”

That experience of a welcoming, affirming fighting community was formative to him in figuring out what kind of gym he would create and, before that, confronting his parents to come out as a committed fighter, vacating his post at the family furniture business to pursue his own.

Victory MMA International’s

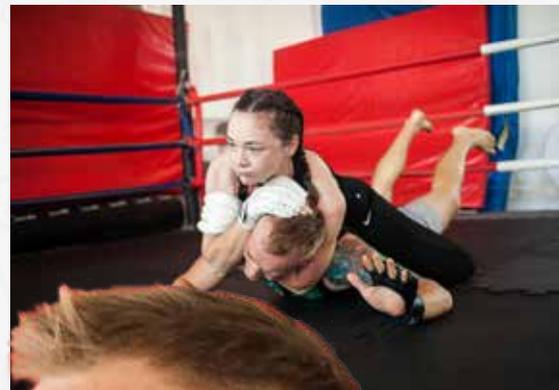
particular sport and business model—one where Victor acts as its executive as well as one of the athletes that trains there—isn’t a common one in the fighting world. Athletes with professional fighting aspirations will usually train with a team until they develop a successful career, then move on and perhaps start a team of their own, he said. “This is first of its kind,” Victor said.

There are around 500 individuals who’ve trained at Victory MMA since it opened its doors in April 2017. This year, the gym will start offering kickboxing courses, training

that it will make available alongside its existing catalogue of martial arts training: jiu jitsu, boxing, muay thai and wrestling. Victor said his gym draws trainees with a variety of training objectives. Victory MMA trains individuals just getting a regular fitness routine as well as those with aspirations to fight in competitions. There are currently five fighters that Victory MMA trains and pays. Victor said the gym often runs two classes at the same time so people in different programs can get to know one another.

Victory MMA International’s next project is to cooperate with fighting competition *Just MMA*, which will hold a contest in Ho Chi Minh City in June. Victor and his gym’s fighter will make an appearance. While Victor is still training and participating in professional bouts for his own, the language he uses about his career tends to focus on his contributions to the local MMA scene rather than his objectives as an individual fighter, “That’s basically my goal. It’s a way of life. When you’re used to this life, it’s hard to go back to the other.” ■

For more info on Victory MMA International, visit www.facebook.com/victorymmaclub



Be Like Myke

In conversation with Coach Myke Nguyen, founder of the Vietnam Basketball Academy, to learn more about the organization

Text by **Daniel Spero**
Images by **Vy Lam**



BEGUN IN 2010, VIETNAM

Basketball Academy teaches fundamentals like a crisp bounce pass or a step-back jumper, but more than that, they teach life essentials like positivity and respect.

As a youth Coach Myke Nguyen's parents instilled in him the value of communication, understanding and remaining affable despite the stress of the situation. He then applied these lessons when he traveled the world doing missionary work; work he credits with helping him to springboard into his calling of coaching. "This background helped me when I began my coaching career," he explains. "I'm now able to relate to my players who come from various cultures and from different social and economic backgrounds. I can adapt to critical situations during the games and make the necessary adjustments under pressure. I can see how much my players trust my leadership and are eager for me to teach and mentor them."

Before he established Vietnam Basketball Academy (VBA) in 2010 Myke described the beginning of his coaching journey as follows, "I was training a few of my friend's children as well as coaching some local city players on the weekends. During this time, the parents saw a big improvement in their children's health, attitude and basketball skills. They told me that I was having a big impact on their children's lives. So with the help of my family I decided to create an academy that could help the younger generations in Vietnam learn more about the sport of basketball and pass on to them some life lessons."

From there VBA expanded to private and group training for both Vietnamese and foreign students, while also providing basketball programs to a number of international schools in Saigon as well as running youth basketball leagues at the weekends. "We teach boys and girls from five years old all the way up to overseas professional players," says Myke. "Training is conducted in wonderful indoor and



outdoor facilities at some of the top international schools in District 2 and Binh Thanh. We hold our games on weekends. We want to build a sense of family and community in a safe, friendly and positive environment for students to thrive. We want to help them make new friends by playing the sport that they all have a passion for."

VBA runs after school programs and youth basketball leagues at various international schools in Saigon such as the ISHCMC American Academy, ISHCMC, European International School and The International School Saigon Pearl. In addition, VBA has recently launched U11, U16 and U19 teams who will compete against other schools and teams within Vietnam and even internationally. On top of this, VBA also has a training program for coaches, a program that continues to grow.

Coach Myke invests a lot of time, effort and positivity in his players and coaches and is thrilled when he sees his effort paying off. He

glowingly shared one of his many success stories. "One of my former players had a difficult upbringing and gave us a hard time on and off the court. Basically, he had a bad attitude, didn't get along with most of the players on the team, and played hero ball most of time he was on court. We worried that once he graduate he could get into trouble and ruin his life with bad decisions. Anyway, I kept in touch with him. He went onto university in England and received his degree, over the years changing and growing as a person, his attitude improving a lot. Fast forward to today and I'm happy to say he is one of my lead assistance coaches for our basketball academy."

This is just one of many examples Myke willfully shares about the impact of VBA. He adds, "I try to listen and provide as much loving advice as I can to my players. My coaches and I show that we care about each player and if they ever needed help we are always here for them, on and off the court. We try to suggest goals that are measured and they have a chance to reach and achieve them. A lot of the times I try to make things fun through friendly competition with me and my coaches. Over the years I have created and developed fun games that keep our players engaged in our skills training."

It's this approach that keeps VBA expanding as well as winning. They regularly enroll new students interested in taking part, and a vast majority of the new entrants to VBA's programs come from word-of-mouth recommendations, helping them grow. And about the winning, VBA teams have won five championships in the past six years and have played in the finals every year that they have been involved in tournaments or leagues with the international school teams. ■

If you are interested in coaching, have a child that might like to participate, or work for a school that might like to involve the basketball program, visit www.vietnambasketballacademy.com.



Trail Blazer



If you're looking for a more adventurous type of mountain bike riding, enduro is the way to go

Text by **Carly Naaktgeboren**
Images by **Baschi Bender**

WITH A RUSH OF ADRENALINE, a supportive community, and an escape from the hectic energy of the city, enduro mountain biking is gaining popularity and exposure in Vietnam and all throughout Asia thanks to the hard work of the folks behind the Asian Enduro Series and South Vietnam Mountain Bike Club.

Mountain biking used to only have two styles: cross-country for endurance and downhill for speed. The solution to wanting the best of both worlds? Enduro Racing. "We climb mountains but aren't timed. We just have a time limit to reach the top and then we race down the mountain. And then we keep going to the next mountain," explains Florent Poilane, cofounder of the Asian Enduro Series and 2016 and 2017 Asian Series champion. "It's four hours of racing. It's pretty nice because for cross-country or downhill you just go to the

start and race as fast as possible. [With enduro] you have a leisure stage and can ride with friends and discuss and see the landscape. You can share your experience. All times are added together at the end. This racing style started in France ten years ago, now it's the most popular sport in mountain biking, everyone does it now."

Originally from France, Florent spent 18 years riding on the national circuit and participating in Euro Racing. After moving to Vietnam and not riding bikes for two years, Florent felt he needed to make a change. Inspired by a love of travel and a desire to see a more cohesive racing organization in Asia, he got to work.

"I bought a bike and wanted to mix racing and traveling. While I travel, I can race and it allows me to meet more people and get more integrated. I know people because we share the same

passion," says Florent. "Three years ago I really started to race again and I liked it, so I was really disappointed with the number of races in Asia at that time. I reached out to some organizers and asked why are there only one or three events a year? That's how we started the Asian Enduro Series."

"In Asia, enduro started three years ago, but there was no cohesion with other countries so it was difficult for riders of any country. If you commit to training and buying a bike with only one event a year, it's not very fulfilling. That's why I wanted to get involved and bring my experience overseas," he adds. "Three people founded the Asian





community in the city has always been an important piece of the puzzle for Florent, as the sport is just as much about shared experiences as it is about racing, “I created a club called SVMB, or South Vietnam Mountain Bike. The goal was to bring people together and share my experience with them and start riding bikes off road. Two times a week we had some bike clinics. I give them techniques and they train.” And now, every weekend, a group of bikers drives the hour to the trails and goes riding together.

The sport may sound intimidating and it can be dangerous, but the community of SVMB wants newcomers to feel more than welcome and help them learn skills at a safe, healthy pace, “Anyone can ride bikes, the thing is you need to start step-by-step, this is why I created this club. You need to have someone to guide you. If you take your own bike and go to the top alone, you won’t go again. You need a technical background to go down. So we start here in the city with exercise, and then we go to the mountain. They gain confidence and then can go. Most newcomers want to go too fast, too quick. Then they quit or get hurt or feel not good enough, there is no such thing when you start a sport you will be as good as people with ten years experience.”

On why he is so passionate about this, Florent answers, “I really do this because I want to develop the sport. I have no incentive to make money. It’s rewarding to see young riders that joined us a few years ago who are now racing internationally.” ■

If you’re interested in joining SVMB, heading to the park and learning how to race enduro, visit their Facebook page: “SVMB - South Vietnam Mountain Bike” for more info.

Enduro Series, (in Brunei, Nepal and Vietnam), now we receive applications from all different countries. So far we have raced in Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, The Philippines and Indonesia. This year we are going to Japan, Bangladesh, and discussing with Korea and China.”

Although races aren’t held here, Vietnam is not without its own events. “We organized an international event with Asian Enduro Series. It was more of a gathering to invite other riders to discover Vietnam and for Vietnamese riders to meet them and see where they’re at. It was very successful with about 90 participants. Last year three Vietnamese riders went overseas to race and see how good they are, they did pretty well. I think this year, more people will go,” says Florent.

Because Asian Enduro Series offers organization and communication between countries, it makes racing much more accessible internationally, even being endorsed by The World Cup

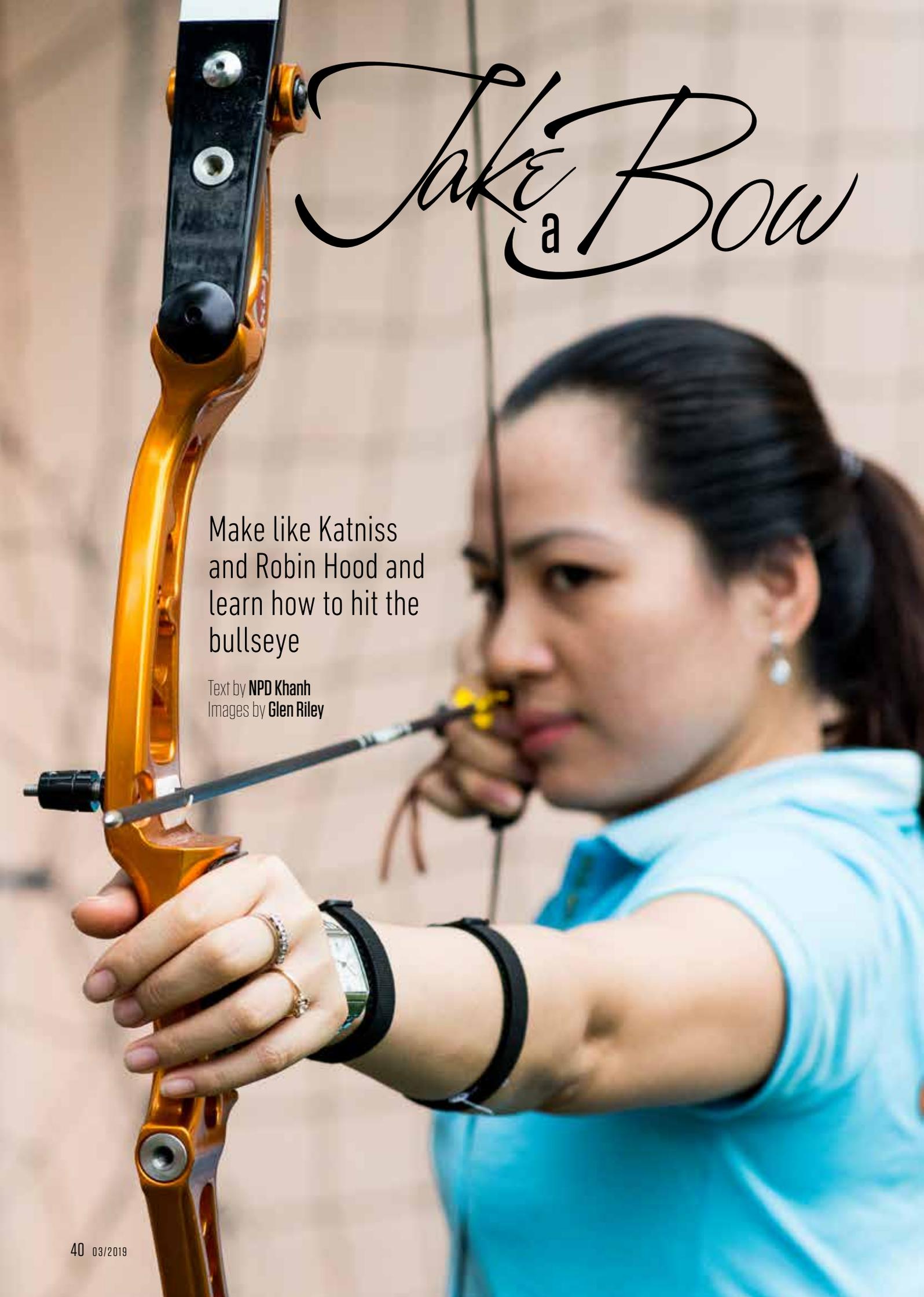
and EVOC Sports. “It’s an international series, we don’t want to have too many events, so we keep it five or six events a year, so every two months. We want to have more participants. We limit it at 150 or 200. In the past we were less than that, but now we have to stop at registration,” he explains.

Several years ago there were no enduro trails in Vietnam, so Florent and friends got to work building them in Ba Ria, painstakingly digging and cutting bamboo every weekend. The bike park took a total of 40 weeks, over three years time, and now has different trails for differing skill levels.

“In most countries there are already trails, in Vietnam that was not the case. To ride bikes, we need trails. So three years ago I found a mountain, Nui Dinh, in Ba Ria. We found that this place had a lot of potential, near the city, very natural. So I asked around town, how we can do a trail there? At the end they gave us the right to make the trail,” says Florent.

Growing a supportive biking



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue polo shirt, is shown in profile aiming a gold compound bow. She is holding the bow with both hands, and the arrow is nocked and ready to be released. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Take a Bow

Make like Katniss
and Robin Hood and
learn how to hit the
bullseye

Text by **NPD Khanh**
Images by **Glen Riley**

“PEOPLE ASK ME THESE

questions a lot: Why archery? Why not some other modern sport?” says Hoang Anh, founder and president of the Saigon Archery Club (SAC), the first and largest archery club in Ho Chi Minh City. “To a lot of people, archery is kinda boring. Watching an archery tournament is a bit like watching paint dry. But to fans, the beauty of this ancient sport lies in its subtlety. It’s like yoga, only more intense.”

In a four-by-ten-square-meter-room on the third floor of the Youth Cultural Center are dozens of bows, from simple recurve ones costing as little as USD200 to complex, Olympic level compound bows costing around USD2,500. This is the headquarters and storage room for the SAC. One of the club’s oldest members is an 84-year-old retiree while its youngest is a teenager still in secondary school. Every day the club is visited by 10 to 20 drop-ins and as high as 50 to 60 during the weekends.

SAC (Facebook: *Saigonarcheryteam*) was founded on June 2013 and the story that led to its formation is one of chance. Hoang Anh, a Viet Kieu, was a former coach for the American national archery team and on a trip back to Vietnam he brought with him a bow and went to the Youth Cultural Center to practice. “They have a big yard here that’s perfect for practicing. My room at the time was too small even for a beginner’s five-meter range practice. I couldn’t exactly shoot in it,” he explains. Because of Hoang Anh’s many joint projects with the state-owned Youth Cultural House, which includes the first community skating rink in the city, he was able to easily obtain permission from the committee to borrow their yard for practices, during which he gathered a sizable group of spectators.

“A lot of kids and teenagers and a fair amount of adults watched,” he says. A few weeks later the boldest among them approached him for lessons, and that was how the Saigon Archery Club started. Hoang Anh funded the club himself with his initial investment of ten practice bows ranging from VND3 to VND6 million each. The club inaugurated with

ten core members including Hoang Anh as the president and his close friend and assistant Doan Thi Le, who also manages the skating rink, as vice president.

In the past several years, SAC has grown significantly in both membership and capacity. They now have over 30 bows in their stockroom. The club provides several services including skill-developing classes from beginner to advanced levels, and bow and yard renting by the hour. Due to its community driven nature and support from the Youth Cultural Center, SAC services are charged on student rates and are easily affordable to most people.

They often host their own archery competition, using the same standards with which Hoang Anh trained the American national archery team.

“It could almost be said that archery is a lot like an amalgamation of yoga and golf. It is like yoga in that to perform a pose correctly the breathing must be perfectly relaxed and normal even though many of the muscles in the body will be under extension or contraction and you will be fighting against this tension to maintain a relaxed pose and let your body flow into it.” As he speaks, he demonstrates with a practice bow, shifting into stance with the ease of one who has played the sport for decades. “The same occurs with archery. And as with golf, muscle memory is incredibly important in that the swing or the shot must be done exactly correct each time. In Olympic recurve target archery, medalists will be pulling and holding 40-50 pounds and must have extremely fluid and relaxed composure and technique to get the shot off accurately and consistently over a great number of arrows shot in each competition.”

“There’s something so nostalgic in archery, something elegant, and a little bit romantic too. Like Robin Hood, only in modern gears,” he adds. Though none of its members aside from Hoang Anh has participated in an international tournament, he hopes to eventually train the first generation of professional Vietnamese archers within his club. ■





Hang On

A relatively new sport, bouldering gathers momentum amongst the local community in Saigon

Text by **Katie Kinnon**
Images by **Vy Lam**

ON A TUESDAY AFTERNOON, I find myself clinging to a wall four meters off the ground, unsure how to get back down. “Push off the wall and fall on to your back!” the instructor yells at me. Four meters suddenly seems a lot higher than it did when I was on the ground and I am reluctant to release my hands from the climbing holds. Getting up was the easy part, getting down is the challenge. Spread out on a wall in a position common only in a game of Twister I push back and land on the crash mat on my back, my heart pounding in my chest and adrenaline coursing through my body. I think to myself, “What have I gotten myself into?” The answer to that is research. To find out why people, both locals and expats, are falling in love with bouldering and see if it lives up to the hype.

Bouldering is rock climbing stripped down, leaving the harnesses and ropes behind to climb walls no more than five meters high with just your hands and

feet. Although it may seem like the easier option, it's not. Bouldering involves using your finger tips and toes to scale a wall using hand- and footholds of varying sizes, some of which are no more than tiny bumps. Occasionally, the wall tilts forward to create an overhang and sometimes the wall is essentially a roof, which only people who channel their inner Spider-Man can complete.

Climbing next to me are three Vietnamese guys taking it in turns to climb the overhang wall. They're laughing and helping each other out, using a laser pointer to show each other where to position their hand or foot next. When things get tricky the instructor steps in and shows them how to complete the route. It's hard to tell that they are beginners; they all look so relaxed and seem to have learned a lot quickly.

I arrive at Vertical Academy – Climbing Gym (789D So 1 Binh An, D2) to meet Thuc the owner, a friendly

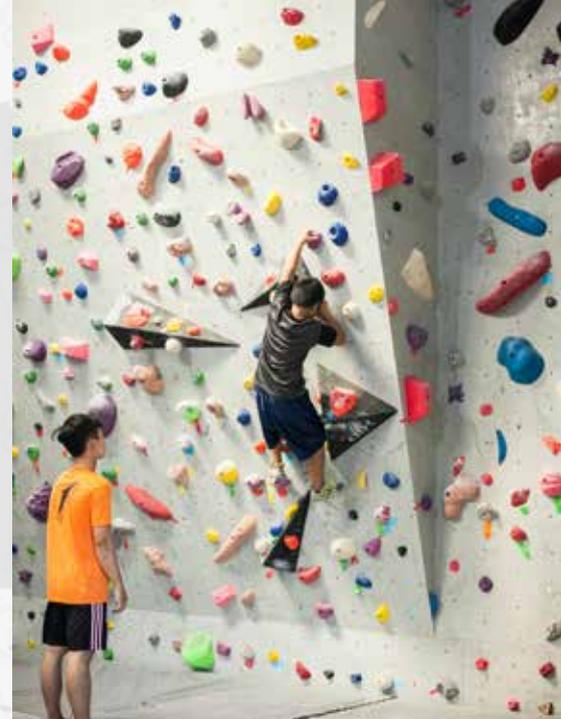


woman who has been climbing for five years. Thuc had dreams of being an architect since she was little but while at university she found a climbing center and quickly became hooked on the sport.

Bouldering is a relatively new sport in Vietnam. The first bouldering gym opened in Hanoi in 2011. Saigon didn't have a bouldering gym until sometime after but now has two climbing locations across the city. So, who are the regulars that come to Vertical Academy? "Fifty percent are locals and 50 percent are expats. We also have more Vietnamese and young Vietnamese too, which is good because it's not a common sport here," says Thuc. "We have a big Japanese community here and French people come here a lot, too."

Besides nationality, the gym sees climbers of different ages coming through their doors, from young children who do it for fun to adults who want to de-stress after work. The team works with students from international schools as well as kids with disabilities, and they are all quick learners. "If you have a chance to see the 6-10-year-old kids climbing the wall, you will say 'wow' they are so incredible. After work people come to hang out with each other, they stay here for hours. Some people can't stop coming here for even a day. They tend to climb for half an hour and then chat for an hour," says Thuc. Vertical Academy has a strong, friendly community that Thuc is clearly proud of, "We treat each other like family, we share our passion."

Thuc began her career in bouldering in 2015 when Vertical Academy first opened. She loved the community the gym created and wanted to get involved in the business. She trained to be part of the team and soon became a



manager. Thuc took over the business in 2017 when Vertical Academy moved locations.

For a Vietnamese person, it's not easy to pursue a career in sport. Her family and friends didn't understand why she wanted to work in a sport and not follow her dream of being a successful architect. "In Vietnamese society they don't consider sport as important as school," she explains. Thuc's parents now approve of her choice and are supportive, although they still struggle to understand it.

To really get into bouldering "it takes time for you to love it. You need to try it two or three times to know the beauty of the movement," says Thuc. It takes practice and patience to be as graceful as the experts and you need to work on balance, flexibility and strength. She assures me that people soon become hooked and quickly improve. Although slightly terrifying at first, I can completely understand the hype around bouldering. ■



Rifle Range

“WAR TAUGHT ME HOW TO

handle a gun and shoot. It has saved my life many times. But this is peacetime now and I don't want people to think only of war and bloodshed when they see a gun. I want people to look at it and see more than what TV shows and movies show them. I want them to see the discipline, the skill, the patience and the knowledge required to handle one,” says Le Hai Vu, a veteran of the American War and co-founder of Saigon Sniper Club (www.facebook.com/saigonsniper).

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

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

“The first step, of course, is to dispel the misconception that you have to be either a professional athlete or in the military to learn how to shoot,” Linh continues. “We do this by offering both skill classes and rental services. If you just want to check us out, maybe try a couple of shots, it doesn't cost a lot to

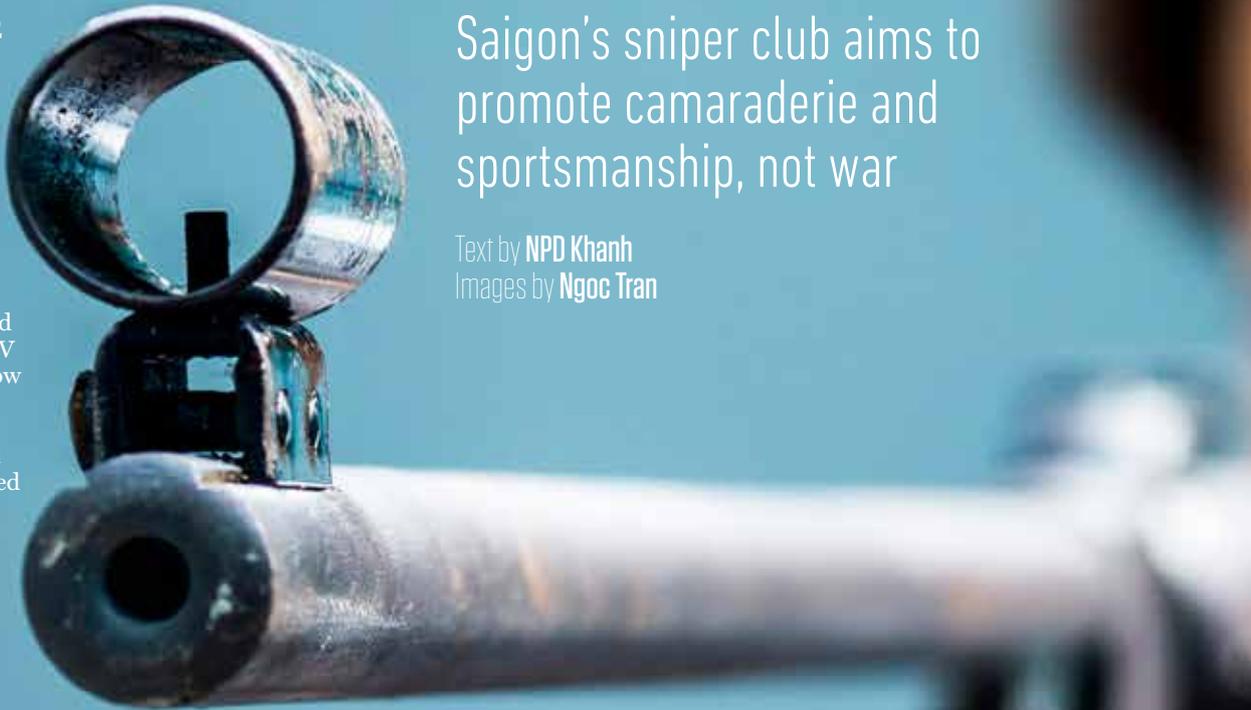
Saigon's sniper club aims to promote camaraderie and sportsmanship, not war

Text by **NPD Khanh**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**

rent an air gun and a couple of pellets. If you are a little more serious, we have classes and fixed schedules that are inexpensive. Going professional is a choice and you don't have to if you don't want to. The point is to be available and accessible to people.” The range is 100 percent privately owned and is open to both locals and foreigners.

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

“We have many limitations still,” says Kim Oanh, chief trainer at Saigon Sniper, pointing out the shooting range's fairly limited facility. The range is housed within the state-owned and run Nguyen





Binh Khiem Sport Club in District 1. Practice space is a row of seven firing stalls 10 meters apart. The air guns available are all used, older models.

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

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



Man of the Cloth

TREKKING AMONGST HILLTRIBE villages in the mountains of Northern Vietnam over a decade ago, bag designer Jake Orak had an epiphany. “Seeing tribes in their natural environment, just existing, was incredible,” remembers Jake. “Some didn’t even use money, just trade. I witnessed thriving communities, people with their hands dyed blue from indigo, wearing their traditional dress... I felt incredibly privileged to experience this and I wanted everyone I knew to know that something like this still exists on Earth. I felt a sense of responsibility wash over me.”

Putting his design experience to work, Jake started Ethnotek, a social enterprise that creates laptop, camera and travel bags using ethically-sourced textiles from artisan villages in Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia and Vietnam. Creating a market for the art of hand printing, weaving and embroidery helps the artisans stay in their villages and pass their skills down to the next generation.

Most of the bags come with removable front panels which can be switched out in seconds for a completely new look. While Ethnotek products are manufactured in Vietnam, the company itself has yet to open a brick-and-mortar store. Instead, Ethnotek products can be found online (www.ethnotek.com) and at retailers worldwide. ■









Wine & Dine

YU CHU / IMAGE PROVIDED BY INTERCONTINENTAL SAIGON







Fit for a King

Yu Chu gives comfort Cantonese cuisine a royal makeover

Text by James Pham
Images by Vy Lam and InterContinental Saigon

CHANCES ARE THAT IF YOU’VE had Chinese food outside of China, it’s been a version of Cantonese cuisine. In the 1800s, a large number of mainly Cantonese immigrants journeyed overseas to work on the railroads in America or to follow the gold rush in Australia. They brought with them their cuisine which combined with local ingredients and outside flavors to produce the “pseudo-Chinese” comfort food most of us know and

love. However, in search of authentic Cantonese and Peking cuisine with a sophisticated twist, we headed to **Yu Chu** (First floor, InterContinental Saigon Hotel & Residences, Corner of Hai Ba Trung and Le Duan, D1).

Yu Chu means “Imperial Kitchen” and the name is fitting as Cantonese food is viewed as China’s “haute cuisine” for its wide range of fresh, flavorful ingredients. Cantonese cuisine originates from Guangdong Province



(whose capital city is Guangzhou, or Canton), known for its winning combination of superb agriculture from the Pearl River Delta and its rich aquaculture, thanks to its proximity to China's southern coast. We have a taste of both in the Deep-fried garoupa fillet (VND350,000), the lightly breaded fish being a vehicle for the tartly sweet passion fruit sauce. The Deep-fried whole garoupa (market price) was also a winner for both taste and presentation. Served on an oversized plate for maximum wow factor, the body of the fish surrounded by a garden of colorful garnishes overlooked tender chunks of meat carefully removed and lightly sautéed with crunchy broccoli florets and juicy mushrooms, all topped with delicate threads of dried ginger for a touch of mild tanginess.

Unlike cuisines from other parts of China where food is buried in spices, oil, and heavy seasoning, Cantonese cuisine is all about treating the ingredients with the lightest of touches to showcase their natural flavors. Steaming is the least intrusive of all cooking techniques and Yu Chu employed it well on the Steamed chicken with Chinese sausages (VND190,000). Simple yet packed with flavor, we could taste each and every ingredient—the earthiness of the sliced mushrooms, the umami from the sausages, the hint of sweetness from the red dates. Also addictive were the Steamed shrimp dumplings, delicately encased in spinach-tinged wrappers. Together with the Fried dried shrimp and pork dumplings (each VND70,000 for 3 pieces), whimsically presented as trompe l'oeil carrots complete with parsley tops, we vowed to return for Yu Chu's popular all-you-can-eat dim sum lunches and dinners, taking a page from the beloved Cantonese tradition of *yum cha*, a leisurely meal of dim sum and tea.

Benefiting from Canton's long history as a major port city, Cantonese cuisine also embraces ingredients and flavors from near and far. The Fried crab in shell

(VND190,000) was pleasantly surprising in its non-traditional flavors with firm chunks of crab meat, enoki mushrooms and sweet onions simmering in a rich, velvety white sauce, topped with a layer of very light breading. There was a smear of tart French dressing to cut through the richness, but we preferred the unapologetic indulgence of the dish just as it was. The Sizzling wok-fried beef (VND258,000) was a delight as the waiter opened the cloche to unleash a heavenly cloud of aromas featuring familiar flavors but with the addition of mandarin skin and shiitake mushrooms.

Besides being light and mellow, Cantonese cuisine is very much about the “mouth feel” or texture of foods. This was evident in the Deep-fried prawn with salted egg (VND278,000), an intriguing pairing of ingredients that takes simple prawns to the next level by adding the grittiness of salted egg yolk, as well as the Bird's nest soup with winter melon and seafood (VND750,000). The viscosity of the melon soup was superb—thick to extract all the flavor of the melon yet still translucent and light. The shrimp and scallops were served separately, prettily wrapped up in an omelet pouch, further



showcasing the texture of the soup.

We finished with a luscious Mango pudding (VND95,000) with a dollop of strawberry puree for a perfectly light ending to an authentic Cantonese feast where the freshest of ingredients and naturally good flavors were the star of the meal. ■

Prices are subjected to 5% service charge and 10% VAT





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

The Magic of Old Vines

Age before beauty in the world of viticulture

EVERY NOW AND THEN A BOTTLE of wine reaches the market with a label that says “old vines”, “*vinas Viejas*”, “*Vignes vieilles*” or “*alte reben*”, depending on where the wine comes from. But, how does the age of the vines influence the taste and/or quality of the wine?

In the wine world, there is the misconception that the older the wine the better. This is totally wrong: some good, and even great wines, when they age they become better and better to a point where they don't. For most wines, their taste may change a little in 3 to 8 years if they have been barrel aged, or may slightly have improved, but it is unlikely that keeping them longer than that will make any positive difference. And for young wines, and most whites and rosés, if you keep them for years you may get something much worse because their freshness will diminish.

In the case of vines, the opposite is true: when vines get older, the quality of wines produced from their grapes tend to improve considerably because old vines tend to provide more complexity and more depth.

But how old is old? There is no regulation requiring on how many years the vines must be to qualify as “old vines”, that depends entirely on the producer, which is misleading because many use the term as a marketing tool to charge more for their wine. So, disregard any wine bottle marked “old vines” that does not indicate the age of the vines.

You start to see some old-vine characters when vines are around 40 years old, but to experience real depth vines should be at least 70 years old. As vines age they produce less grapes, and of smaller size, that lets more air circulate between the grapes, so less chance for illnesses; that also allows for better ripening.

Old vines also produce more concentration in the grapes as the vine drives all the nutrients to much fewer bunches and grapes. That concentration is passed to the grapes and then to the wine.

If you like complex concentrated wines, look for wines made from “real” old vines, you will pay a little more for this, but just a little, and it is worth it! ■

Depends on how it's cooked. Done rightly, on a charcoal or pan-seared, it should be smokey, and a bit earthy like a mushroom with a different texture. It's like this: It's juicy, with striated texture, hopefully some fat, crispy on the outside with a tenderness that melts in your mouth.

You have the right steaks from THE LITTLE DOOR!

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Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS



Liquid Sky Bar

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

21F - Renaissance Riverside Hotel Saigon
8-15 Ton Duc Thang, D1 / 028 3822 0033



Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar

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

141 Nguyen Hue, D1



Social Club Rooftop Bar

Part of the Hôtel des Arts Saigon, Social Club Rooftop Bar is a great place to overlook Saigon's glittering skyline sipping on a cocktail and unwinding. Things become more vibrant with the ambient music and DJs at sunset. Social Club Rooftop Bar has the highest rooftop infinity pool in the city.

76 - 78 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Dist.3
Tel: (+84) 28 3989 8888

MICROBREWERIES & CRAFT BEER BARS



BiaCraft

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

90 Xuan Thuy, D2



East West Brewery

Saigon's Local microbrewery located in the heart of District 1, HCMC. Offering a taproom, restaurant, and rooftop beer garden where customers can enjoy local brews and food crafted with ingredients from the East to the West.

181-185 Ly Tu Trong St. District 1, HCMC **091 306 07 28**
booking@eastwestbrewing.vn www.eastwestbrewing.vn
facebook.com/eastwestbrewery



Rehab Station

Gastropub in a lovely quiet alley, serves Asian fusion food, 15 kind of different craft beer from most of the popular breweries in Vietnam, along with 60+ imported bottle beers, mostly from Belgium.

02839118229 hello@rehabstation.com.vn
facebook.com/rehabstationsg/

Also Try...

Winking Seal

Winking Seal offers a revolving selection of craft beers brewed by the bar. Enjoy their Happy Hour from 7pm to 9pm or come by on a Saturday night to join the beer pong tournament on their rooftop terrace.

50 Dang Thi Nhu, Nguyen Thai Binh Ward, D.1

Tap & Tap Craft Beer

Tap & Tap is the first bar of its kind in Thao Dien. This is a self-serve craft beer bar using the 'Pour My Beer' digital tap system. You can pour as much or as little as you like and sample 20 different kinds of beers in their open air bar and courtyard.

94 Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien, D.2

Heart of Darkness Craft Brewery

Heart of Darkness are prolific brewers - having brewed over 170 different styles of craft beer since they opened in October 2016.

31D Ly Tu Trong, Ben Nghe Ward, D.1

Belgo Belgian Craft Beer Brewery

Inspired by the beer culture of Belgium and Vietnam, Belgo built a unique place inspired by Belgium architecture with it's own brewery, offering typical Belgian dishes combined with a local twist.

159A, Nguyen Van Thu, Da Kao Ward, D.1

Pasteur Street Brewing Company

They opened their first Tap Room 'The Original' in January 2015 and now have 5 tap rooms spread out in D.1, 2 and 7. Pasteur Street Brewing Company distributes its beers to approximately 150 locations in Vietnam.

Address 1: 144 Pasteur Street, Ben Nghe Ward, D.1
Address 2: 144/3 Pasteur Street, Ben Nghe Ward, D.1
Address 3: 29 Thao Dien, Thao Dien Ward, D.2
Address 4: 120 Xuan Thuy, Thao Dien Ward, D.2
Address 5: 67 Le Van Thiem, Tan Phong Ward, D.7



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, D1

K.Coffee

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

Opening time: 7AM- 10PM (Sunday closed)
86 Hoang Dieu, D.4 - 38253316/090 142 3103

Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Buoai, D1
www.caferunam.com

La Rotonde Saigon

Situated in an authentic French colonial structure, this relaxed café is the perfect haven to escape the hustle and bustle of District 1. The east meets west interior décor is reminiscent of Old Saigon, and is greatly complemented by the Vietnamese fusion cuisine on offer.

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1

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, D4

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. 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 cafe sua da served here.

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1



French Restaurant

Daily Set Lunch
at **VND180.000**

2 courses + 1 soft drink
Le Bacoulos french bistro,
13 Tong Huu Dinh
Thao Dien. Q2. HCMC

02835194058



The open-air premises include a bar and terrace and there is an air-conditioned dining room.



FRENCH



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.

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2
028 3519 4058
www.bacoulos.com



L'Escale by Thierry Drapeau

Chef Thierry Drapeau a 2 star Michelin chef in France takes his inspiration from the surrounding countryside and its top-quality ingredients, then adding an artistic flourish to his fine regional cuisine.

90 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, D.2 - 028 3636 0160
manager@restaurant-thierrydrapeau.asia
www.restaurant-thierrydrapeau.asia

L'ESCALE
Thierry Drapeau

Also Try...

Le Jardin

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

31 Thai Van Lung, D1

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



We are Smoky BBQ ribs online restaurant.
Beef brisket (at least 1 kg): 650.000 VND/kg
Beef ribs (2.3 - 3.2 kg): 600.000 VND/kg
Pork ribs (1.8 - 2.4 kg): 450.000 VND/kg

Facebook page: Long's Smoke House
Delivery: (+84)968.790.890
Email: longsmokehouse@gmail.com



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
028 3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.ciaobellavietnam.com

Ciao Bella



Italian Trattoria Oggi

Italian Trattoria Oggi is a perfect place for either a dinner, night out or special party in the breathtaking resort setting and distinctive interior, where you can enjoy the best that American and Australian beef has to offer together with premium wines.

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang Street District 1
(0)28 3823 3333
www.lottehotel.com/saigon

Italian Trattoria Oggi

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
028 3824 4286

Carpaccio

Rebranded "Carpaccio" after many years under the name Pomodoro, this Italian restaurant still has a simple, unpretentious European decor, sociable ambiance and friendly welcome. A small corner of Italy in Saigon.
79 Hai Ba Trung street, D1
+84 90 338 78 38

La Forchetta

La cucina La Forchetta is located in a hotel building in Phu My Hung. Chef Gianni, who hails from Sicily, puts his passion into his food, focusing on pastas and pizzas with Italian meat and fish dishes as well delicious homemade desserts. Most of the tables are outside, so you can enjoy a relaxing outdoor dinner.
24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
028 3541 1006

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

Pasta Fresca

Hidden on a rooftop in District 1, in a secret garden in District 2 and now also found in District 3, Pasta Fresca offer vegetarian friendly pastas.

Address 1: 28 Thao Dien Street, Thao Dien, District 2
Address 2: 13/1 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, District 1

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
028 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



JAPANESE



Chaya Restaurant

Chaya, a new small Japanese Cafe is coming to town. We are here to bring the best Japanese atmosphere to Saigon customer. At Chaya, customer can relax on the Tatami, taste some delicious Sushi Roll, Japanese sweets or local cuisine while enjoying Japan historically decorated space. Most of our ingredients are imported directly from Japan, especially Kyoto Matcha. Welcome!

35 Ngo Quang Huy Street, Thao Dien, District 2
0938 996 408 (Vietnamese)
0939 877 403 (Japanese)
chayavietnam.com
 Facebook: chayavietnam

Chaya



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
028 3827 1618
gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com

Gyumaru

Also Try...

Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn

Kesera Bar & Restaurant

An Ideal place for your city escape and enjoying Japanese fusion foods. We have the best bagels in town, fine wine and cigars in a custom cabinet and is a must-do for anyone visiting the city.

26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Ben Nghe Ward, Dist 1
028 38 270 443

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
028 3930 0039
www.sushidiningaoi.com

Yoshino

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

2A-4A Ton Duc Thang, D1
028 3823 3333

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

VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

Five Oysters serves authentic and excellent Seafood & Vietnamese food with 5G Green beer at VND12,000 as well as a promo of VND10,000 per fresh oyster daily. There's also a rooftop, a great place to start or end the night! Recipient of Certificate of Excellence 2014-16 from Tripadvisor and Top Choice 2015 by Lianorg.com. Recommended by VNexpress.net, Lonely Planet, Utopia and Saigoneers.
234 Bui Vien, D1



SaiGon Grill

Located on the rooftop of Saigon Royal Building, Saigon Grill has an absolutely fantastic view over the city. Classical BBQ with beef, pork and seafood by a small charcoal grill at the table and friendly staff. Enjoy our great BBQ with a glass of wine.
Rooftop 7th floor, Saigon Royal Building
91 Pasteur, Ben Nghe Ward, D1
Opening time: 4pm-11pm
0916622662
www.saigon grill.vn



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
028 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
028 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
028 3848 0144

Hum

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

2 Thi Sach, D1
028 3823 8920
www.hum-vegetarian.vn

May

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

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
028 3910 1277

Mountain Retreat

Home style cooking from the Vietnamese north in a quiet alley off Le Loi, Mountain Retreat brings a rural vibe to busy central D1. The breezy and unassuming décor nicely contrasts the intense northern flavors ideally suited for the international palate.

Top floor of 36 Le Loi, D1
+84 90 719 45 57

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
028 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
028 3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

The Hue House

Located on the 10th floor roof of the Master Building, The Hue House opens up to a breezy space with views over the city. The décor is simple yet elegant – bird cages repurposed into lamps, bonsai centerpieces in pretty ceramic bowls and lots of greenery. The menu highlight unique ingredients only found in Hue, like the Va tron fig salad with shrimp and pork, assorted platter of rice cakes meant to be shared, the sate-marinated ribs come with a plate of crunchy greens and mixed rice, originally grown by minority groups in the Central Highlands, and many more.

Rooftop Master Building
41-43 Tran Cao Van, D3
Opening time 10am-10pm.
0909 246 156 / 0906 870 102

INTERNATIONAL



Madcow Wine & Grill

Mad Cow combines the feel of an edgy grill with the casual tone of an urban wine bar to create a stylish, laid-back atmosphere. Guests can enjoy a delicious meal on the 30th floor of the award winning 5 star Hotel, Pullman Saigon Centre, and look out over vibrant Ho Chi Minh City. Mad Cow's expert culinary team brings each cut of meat to flavorful perfection on handmade charcoal grill. Aside from grilled delights, delicious tapas are on offer – sourced locally and created fresh every day.

**30th Floor, Pullman Saigon Centre
(0)28 3838 8686**



Tomatito Saigon

Tomatito won the award for Best Restaurant of Saigon 2018. This sexy tapas bar is Chef Willy's casual interpretation of the prêt-à-porter concept. Willy has a very personal perception of style, that is reflected in all his creations. His universe is colorful, fun and eclectic.

1st Floor, 171 Calmette, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

www.tomatito.vn

www.facebook.com/tomatitosaiagon

+84 869 388 864



twenty21one

A new casual dining venue with an innovative tapas menu divided into two categories: Looking East, and Looking West, with dishes such as

Crispy shredded duck spring rolls and Bacon-wrapped

dates stuffed with Roquefort

blue cheese There are two

dining levels: an upstairs mezzanine and downstairs are tables with both private and exposed positioning (open-air streetside; and a terrace by the pool out back).

21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3

TWENTY21ONE



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
(0)28 3824 8358**

Also Try...

Blanc Restaurant

How to listen with your eyes? Blanc Restaurant employs a team of deaf/hearing impaired waiters. Try a new dining experience and order your dishes from the a la carte menu in sign language; communication will take on a new form.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, D1

02862663535

www.blancrestaurant.vn

Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar

Manzo means "Beef" in Italian and as the name implies, it's a "Meat Bar". Manzo also offers several different dishes matched with local craft beer and selected wines, set in a classic European bar atmosphere.

Butcher MANZO & Craft Beer Bar was established in the heart of HCMC on Le Thanh Ton Street in District 1.

17/13 and 17/14 Le Thanh Ton street, District 1, HCMC

028-2253-8825

www.butcher-manzo.com

FORK Restaurant

Open from 11 am till 11 pm everyday, Fork Saigon gathers Spanish tapas and asian one going from 50.000 VND to 160.000 VND. It offers an expensive list of international wine and 16 available by the glass. A mixologist corner is also present with Gin and Vodka base in addition to local craft beers and seasonal white or red sangria. A set lunch at 190.000 VND served Monday to Friday from 11 am to 3 pm is also available. It allows you to pick any 3 three items between a large selection (Montaditos, meat, fish and vegetable), iced tea and dessert of the day included.

15 Dong Du, D1

028 3823 3597

info@forksaigon.com

www.forksaigon.com

Noir - Dining in the Dark

Can you differentiate beef from duck? Mystery meals are served in complete darkness by blind/visually impaired waiters. Select from one of the three-course set menus from the East, West or Vegetarian. Mystery wine pairing available too. Discover with taste and smell, embark on a culinary journey of the senses.

178/180D Hai Ba Trung, Da Kao, D1

02862632525

www.noirdininginthedark.com

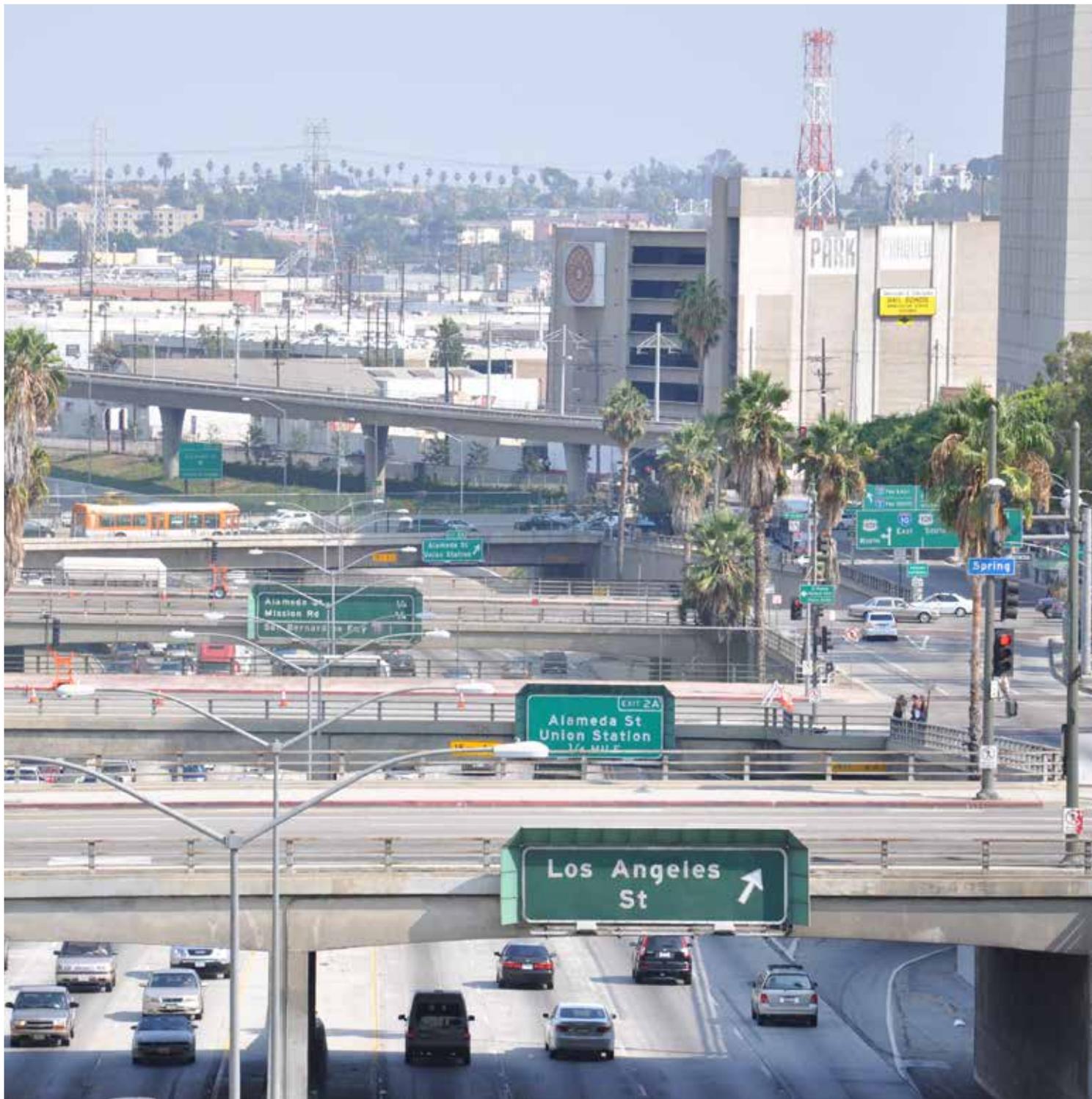


Travel & Wellness

WATERWORLD / IMAGE BY DAVID MULLER







Echoes of Asia *in* *L.A.*

Text by **David Muller**
Images by **David Muller and Jerami Johnson** (Instagram@photobyji)

For unparalleled diversity in Asian culture and Hollywood movie magic, Los Angeles is the place to be

SOME YEARS AGO I TRAVELED to Taiwan and to save costs I stayed in a super cheap, somewhat dilapidated and terribly grimy guesthouse called Amigo, located in Taipei New City. There I struck up a friendship with an American couple, Jerami Johnson (JJ) and Michelle, who had come to try their hand at teaching English. Jerami and I shared a common interest in photography and we enjoyed discussing different camera techniques. Later they moved back to the States and I moved to Vietnam to work, though we would still talk via the Internet on a regular basis. On his return JJ had an unusual request, he wanted to buy a cyclo and start a business driving tourists up and down Venice Beach. So, I went all



Victorian era. The area and the houses feature in countless Hollywood movies. In fact, owners of the houses make a substantial side income renting out their homes to Hollywood production companies. Driving around, JJ pointed out the houses that were featured in *Top Gun*, *Back to the Future* and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* music video.

Saturday morning JJ dropped me off in nearby Chinatown to start my exploration of downtown L.A., in particular my fascination of how Asian communities have influenced the making of American cities. In the Vietnamese and Chinese languages "America" means "beautiful country." The Chinese settlers came to America in search of wealth and a new beginning but many were coerced into laborious manual work such as constructing the railroads. I was impressed to see how the Asian community holds onto the old traditions and culture through the various social clubs and facilities in the area such as kung fu, ping-pong and lion dancing. There were many older people using the facilities and there were even heated games of *co tuong* being played in the park grounds. In the local library a great majority of the books were dedicated to Asian languages and a very large section of Vietnamese novels and literature.

L.A. is a massive urban sprawl, but within the downtown area there is a public light rail system which links up its inner areas. Purchasing the all-day pass, I jumped on and took the train down to Little Tokyo. The receptionist at the front desk of the Japanese American Cultural & Community Centre was a middle-aged man who proudly told me he was fourth generation American-Japanese. Inside told the story of the Japanese immigrants who made America home as well as the difficult time during WWII for these families who were rounded up and kept in internment camps. The movie *Snow Falling on Cedars* came to mind as I read about their lives in America in the 20th century. A special Japanese Manga exhibition was also being displayed in the contemporary art section showcasing the exploits of a samurai bunny named Miyamoto Usagi in the comic book series



over Ho Chi Minh city going to different cyclo workshops sourcing one for him. It was amazing to learn that there were so many different models, styles and, of course, prices for cyclos. After a few weeks searching, word was out and I would literally have a band of cyclo drivers camped out at my office calling out that they had the best price for a new cyclo.

Fast forward a few years and I was heading to the States on business with a weekend stopover in L.A. JJ and Michelle were kind enough to let me stay at their home. JJ picked me up in his old beat up beige colored ford Bronco jeep. He proceeded to take the long scenic route back to his home. We stopped off at Long Beach to see the supersized

container ships berthed at one of America's busiest ports. While stopping next to a police motorcycle rider with a mean looking machine gun holstered on the back of the bike, I commented on the excessive fire power. JJ explained that a few years ago there had been a bank robbery and pursuant siege where the police were heavily out gunned by the criminals. Ever since then the police had lobbied the city to carry far more firepower.

JJ's home was located in Echo Park, downtown L.A. He explained that it was one of the oldest suburbs in L.A. and that the homes were built during the





Usagi Yojimbo. On my way out, in the gift shop I purchased a black umbrella with a handle shaped like a samurai sword grip. Over the years I would always get quite a bit of enjoyment every time I snapped open the umbrella in defiance of the rain.

From Tokyo Town I headed over to Korea Town—150 city blocks spanning 10 streets and 15 avenues. Korea Town is primarily a mix of Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups and it is the most densely populated suburb in L.A. The single biggest ethnic population is by far the Koreans and walking down the main street I passed the Korean consulate and Woori bank (“woori” means “our bank”, one of Korea’s largest banking institutions). Sitting in the Korean restaurant getting a late lunch, I could hear not only Korean but also multiple Asian languages being spoken around me. In the 21st century a new wave of Korean economic migration is now focused on Vietnam, with a sizeable Korean population living in areas such as Phu My Hung in District 7, HCMC.

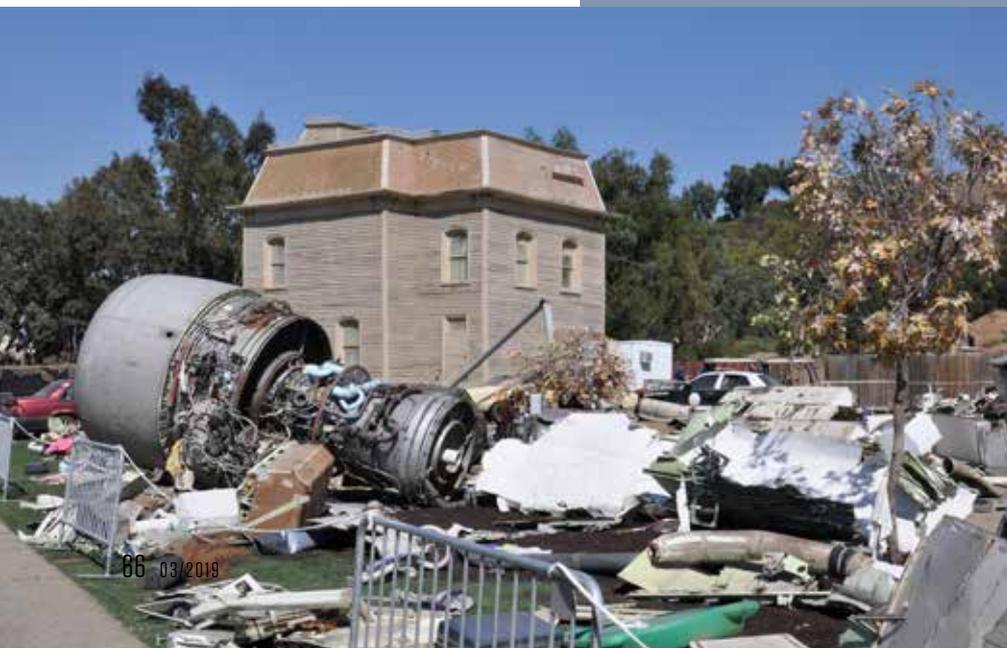


Sunday I took the subway up to the start of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The street is like a circus sideshow with many people dressed as different movie characters, from Marilyn Monroe to Bumblebee. Movie stars names, from today and



yesteryear, some with their handprints and signatures, adorn the sidewalk leading up to the Chinese and Dolby Theatres.

At the top of the hill I found Universal Studios. Walking up to the ticket booth the seller suggested I purchase the after 2pm discounted “Front of the Line Pass,” allowing me to jump ahead of the queues at all rides. The first ride began with a dinosaur 3D rollercoaster ride, and then we jumped on a tour through the various movie lots and stage sets. Passing through old fake





New York neighborhoods and even a fully downed Boeing 747 mock crash site. It gave me some insight into how Hollywood can create some of the tricks that make movies magical.

Although *Waterworld* was a box office flop the spinoff act at Universal has become a popular tourist attraction. The fire from the action packed explosions radiates off the stage straight into your face and add to the spectacle. *The Blues Brothers* is one of my all-time favorite movies and the music performance from the Jake and Elwood team will have you toe tapping in the audience. The final show I saw was the Hollywood Animal Actors: a trained Vietnamese potbelly pig, the monkey from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* and a desert fox. The show highlighted the strong bond between the animals and their trusted trainers who help get the animals to perform on camera.

My feet swollen and blistered from walking on pavement for two days straight, I returned to Echo Park, just on dusk to rendezvous with JJ. He then drove us out to see a photography exhibition his friend was putting on. The highways crisscross through L.A. looking like lit up serpents, snaking their way through the landscape taking us to far off suburbs in the valley. Passing through Orange County, I caught a glimpse of that familiar Vietnamese script I'm so used to, adorning restaurants, businesses and shop fronts.

The exhibition was being held in a professional photography retail store. It documented the life of Jeff Decker, famous artist, historian, collector and, since 2009, Haley-Davidson's official sculptor. At the exhibition JJ introduced me to his friends Jeff Decker and Chandler Scott. Jeff was wearing a cool leather biker jacket with his trademark name "Decker" on the front. He handed me his business card, which was on a thick piece of white cardboard, embossed

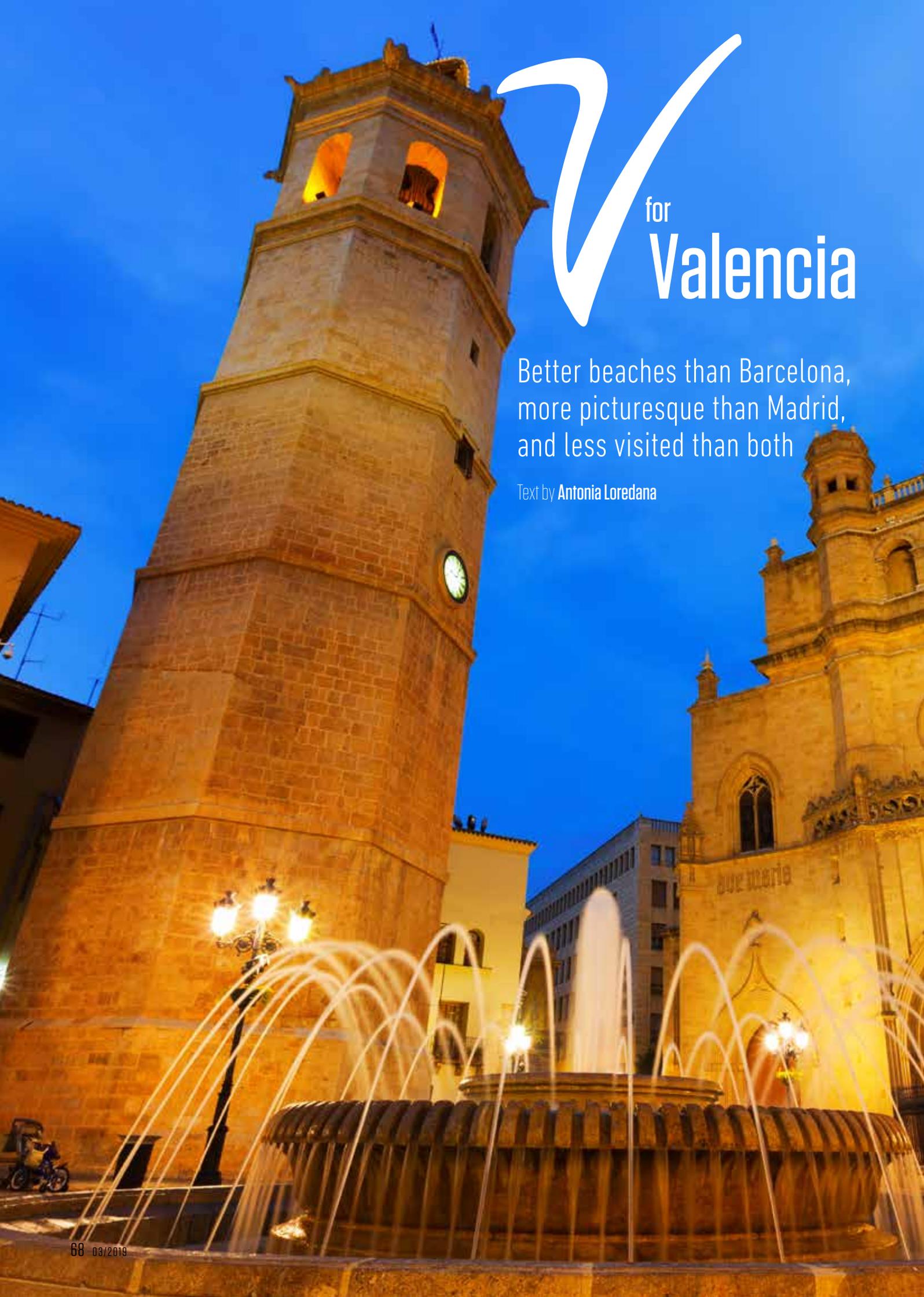
on it were just one cool logo and below his name Jeff Decker with no other contact information. Chandler was sporting a gruff beard and wearing the coolest old western hat. Later I'd learn he had actually made that hat and after growing up in L.A. had now moved to Utah to resurrect a dying art form by starting the Tatton Baird hatters, custom made felt and fur hats like those from the Old West.

After the exhibition we all went over to a local Mexican restaurant known for its super cheap, no fuss meals. The restaurant was open till late into the night and it was a favorite hangout for young people returning from a night out and needing some fast food to soak up the alcohol in their systems. JJ asked me what I wanted but not really knowing Mexican food well I said, "I guess I like the quesadilla." They all laughed and said it's "ke-sa-dilla" because having lived in Vietnam I pronounced the "que" like the Vietnamese word for "hometown."

The last day, with only a few hours before my flight, we got to talking about the roads we'd taken through our journey of life. I asked JJ, "Whatever happened to the cyclo?" He replied, "I'll show you." He took me to the garage at the front of his house and lifted the roller door shutter and inside the garage rested his two greatest possessions—the cyclo and a custom built Harley-Davidson chopper. He explained that after a short-lived career on Venice Beach he had to shelf his business because the insurance coverage was just too high. He later turned his hobby and passion of photography into a profession, working as the onset photographer for the Discovery Channel's *Monster Garage*.

Today JJ is a freelance photographer based in Japan (follow him on Instagram @photobyjj). He shipped his beloved chopper over and cruises through the scenic villages, forests and rice fields on the back roads of country Japan. A free spirit with camera always in hand, he's living the Asian dream of documenting everyday life in Japan as well as the interesting and often bizarre alternative subcultures that seem to thrive on that amazing archipelago. ■





V for Valencia

Better beaches than Barcelona,
more picturesque than Madrid,
and less visited than both

Text by **Antonia Loredana**

VALENCIA BAKES IN THE SUN

by day, smells of oranges at night and burns entirely once a year, during the world-renowned Las Fallas Festival, the city's most important holiday—when the noise of fireworks and the stink of gunpowder fill the air for several sleepless nights in March.

Valencia, the third biggest city of Spain, is sometimes perceived as the “ugly sister” of Madrid and Barcelona. A grossly inaccurate comparison, but one at least that has helped it stave off the invading crowds who prefer to visit her aforementioned siblings. In fact Valencia is undeniably picturesque, the wriggling streets of its Old Town betraying both Roman and Arabian influences

and punctuated with meticulously maintained orange gardens and open squares full of outdoor cafes that bustle until 3am. Girding the Old Town is the dried bed of the river Turia, a beautiful green belt of attractions including the amazing Bioparc immersion zoo and The City of Arts & Sciences. The latter is one of Valencia's most recognizable symbols, a futuristic white city designed by avant garde local architect, Santiago Calatrava.

If that wasn't enough, the city's never-failing weather (with an average of 15 degrees Celsius on Christmas Day!) and long stretch of Mediterranean beaches make Valencia even easier to fall in love with.

Best of the Beaten Track

Valencia's heart remains in its medieval Old Town, and the best spot to start any walk is at its central point, the huge gothic Cathedral of Our Lady (you can find it located between two cozy, medieval squares: La Plaza de la Reina and La Plaza de la Virgen). Remarkably the Cathedral holds the very chalice that many historians believe to be the true Holy Grail (someone really should have told Indiana Jones), and after you've paid your homage you can enjoy some of the best views in the city by climbing the Cathedral's highest tower, El Micalet. Casting an eye over the medieval architecture of the Old Town it doesn't take much imagination to picture the city's greatest hero, the Moor-fighting knight El Cid Campeador, being hoisted triumphantly through the city streets.

From La Plaza de la Virgen it's good to take a slow stroll down Knights' Street (Calle de los Caballeros). Here's where the famous El Carmen quarter starts. Strolling down the narrow streets, crossing La Plaza del Negrito and heading South, you will reach the stone building of La Lonja de Seda: the old silk market and one of the greatest examples of lay architecture from medieval Europe. In front of La Lonja you can see the huge art nouveau Mercado Central building, one of the largest indoor markets in Spain. Fresh seafood is delivered here every single day, although nota bene: the city's specialty, paella valenciana, doesn't in fact contain any seafood whatsoever—originating from the nearby marshes true paella consists of rice, saffron, garlic, chicken and rabbit. Entire rabbits with no skin and plucked roosters' heads make some of the market's stands look quite spooky.

For a true Spanish experience the strong-stomached might want to catch a bull fight at La Plaza de Toros, the second biggest bull ring in Spain (after Madrid), located next to La Plaza del Ayuntamiento and the Main Train Station (Estación del Norte).

Hipster's Guide

Surprisingly, El Carmen, Valencia's most famous district, has managed to retain its authentic feel, despite its location in the center of the Old Town and being a firm favorite on the tourist track. The district is renowned for its quirky look and late opening hours of its tiny bars, whilst the liberal vibe has also made it a Mecca for hippies. Two of the best spots to start a Valencian night out are on La Plaza del Negrito and Baja Street.

However, if you really want to escape fellow foreigners head to the Ruzafa district instead. Here, inconspicuous bars, scenic squares and gardens exude a chilled-out atmosphere and you can often find live music by street musicians. One recommended place is Cafe Ubik, a small bookshop-cafe where you can pop in to have breakfast or start to your day with a glass of red wine (yup, Spaniards



La Plaza de la Reina



El Carmen

do it!), meet up with friends or just swap some second-hand books.

Experience & Events

It would be a sin not to take advantage of the amazing weather conditions that the city has to offer. No wonder that most of the Valencian's favorite activities take place outdoors. A bike ride along the dried out river Turia is a perfect way to see the best of the green side of the city. Colorful cascades of flowers, exotic trees and fountains line the route eastwards to the final destination of Santiago Calatrava's La Ciudad de las Artes y Las Ciencias. At the far west end of the old Turia River's bed, el Parque de la Cabecera is located. Never mind the distance, because once you're there, you will feel as if you were five again by taking a ride across the lake in a kitsch swan-shaped gondola.

They say that every Valencia citizen is a fire freak, and this theory is certainly borne out by the city's most important fiesta, the insane Las Fallas festival. Even though the festival itself lasts only around a week the preparations take place all year, so that, by the middle of March, the city is ready to turn into one vast, extremely noisy, street party. Every important square is adorned with its own Falla, a huge statue made of wood and plastic, often related to current political or social events. Between 15th and 19th of March no one works, children throw firecrackers in parks and public places, the streets are cut off from regular traffic and kiosks selling doughnuts and sweets appear all around the city. Some of the locals escape out of town, while others prepare for the upcoming sleepless nights, as the bars are allowed to stay open until 6am each morning. During the last night of Las Fallas, "la Nit de Foc", the entire city burns as all the figures are set on fire at the same time. Only the winning statue is spared, and preserved in the Las Fallas Museum to be admired for all antiquity. Arguably the most impressive aspect of the festival is the impeccable state of the streets the very next day. Clean and empty, they

confuse the visitor by giving the impression nothing happened at all and you just woke up after some crazy dream...

More festival madness takes place on the last Wednesday of August every year, just outside Valencia, in the village of Bunol, in the form of the world's most famous food fight—La Tomatina. Armageddon with tomatoes.

Finally Valencia is home to one of Spain's finest football teams, winning La Liga six times in their history, including twice in the 2000s—not easy when you have to beat Barca and Real Madrid over the course of the season! Sports fans will enjoy the experience of seeing Los Che in action.

Pillow Talk

Home Backpackers is located in the very center of El Carmen district and, with its big kitchen and common room, is the perfect spot to make new friends and meet fellow backpackers. The only annoying thing is the lack of elevator (the building is 4-floor high), but in the end who cares when

a huge sunny terrace greets you at the top of the roof? If you're looking for a more intimate atmosphere you can go for Home Youth Hostel or Rooms Deluxe Hostel, which offer nicely-designed customized private apartments and small shared rooms, instead of bunk beds and crowded dormitories. For the most demanding and sophisticated visitors, there's nothing like the luxurious, Las Arenas Hotel, located at Malvarrosa beach. The hotel has become famous for its impressive gardens, terraces and almost one-century-old spa and swimming pool complex.

Fork Out

The Spanish love food and the day's rhythm is ruled by their eating schedule. A morning coffee with a sweet snack for breakfast, a solid bocadillo (baguette) for lunch, then around 4pm (after their



Falla del Ayuntamiento



Turia River



Las Fallas Museum



Malvarrosa beach

sacred siesta) it's time for delicious chocolate con churros (hot chocolate with a variety of a doughnut); and then finally a late, long and rather lazy dinner in the evening. Tapas is, of course, the famous food of Spain and the best place in Valencia to try these small plates is La Tapeta del Carmen. The prices are very reasonable, the food is homemade and the number of fully booked tables tells its own story. Wednesday is the discount day at 100 Montaditos, another casual bar (a bit more touristic, though), located at Plaza de la Reina. People start to queue for a table at 4-5pm, as you get montaditos (small sandwiches) with almost any filling you can think of for just one €1. On the other end of the scale Michelin stars have started lighting up the city's cuisine and the likes of Riff and Vertical will delight gourmets. For something in between a new wave of gastro bars offer innovative tapas dishes in chic venues for very affordable prices. Get in on the trend at Canalla Bistro, where dishes created by famous local chef Ricard Camerena can be enjoyed in an informal environment.

Drop In

The motto of Valencian people, "vivir sin dormir" leaves you in no doubt of their life outlook. The bars are open all day long and they are followed by the clubs, which open around 2am and don't close until the break of dawn. The party style has changed over the decades though. In the early 90s, La Ruta de Bacalao (suburban, beach disco houses, offering a great deal of drugs mixed with techno and rave tunes) echoed all around Spain. Those days are gone. Today, in summertime, all the bars along Malvarrosa beach throng with people, often still partying when the first rays of sun creep over the horizon. Las Animas Puerto is the best spot on the strip with great views from its numerous terraces, although sadly the music is a weak point. Outside summer the party is yet more raucous, partly because Valencia is the second biggest city in Europe when it comes to number of foreign exchange students (after Barcelona). The student club zone

is Polo y Peyrolon Street and around here even a mid-week night can turn into a never-ending fiesta. For some alternative music seekers, the Piccadilly Downtown club can be recommended. Previously a brothel, today it is a hidden club in the old town with some good indie rock music on the speakers.

Getting There & Around

The local airport Valencia-Manises is located just outside the city and it has been recently connected to a new, quick and comfortable suburban metro line, and now it takes only 20 minutes to get there for just a couple of euros. The airport offers cheap flights (Ryanair, EasyJet, Vueling) to most of the mayor cities of Spain and Europe (London, Milan, Paris, Oslo, Dublin, Rome, etc.) and regular airlines, such as Spanair or Iberia, that fly also outside Europe. The local train service is very reliable, yet the coaches tend to be cheaper. The coaches are the best way to visit the nearby cities, such as Alicante, for example. It takes about 5 hours to travel to Barcelona by train, and just 3.5 hours to get to Madrid by bus.

Hard Copy and Silver Screen

Valencia's most famous son Vicente Blasco Ibanez is one of the most talented authors ever to put pen to paper, and his WWI epic *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is not to be missed, while *Blood and Sand* is surely the best novel ever written about the art of bullfighting. Finally, the first novel written in Spain was penned and published in Valencia—check out *Tirant The White*, for the kind of chivalrous romp that Cervantes went on to parody.

The unforgettable architecture of Valencia's City of Art & Sciences comes to the fore in Disney's big budget sci-fi adventure *Tomorrowland* starring George Clooney, so if you fancy watching a movie on the flight over to get you in the mood start here. Other than that legendary film director Pedro Almodovar has shot various parts of his amazing cannon of work in this Spanish beauty. ■



Vicente Blasco Ibanez

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>> The List Travel



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Lotte Legend Hotel Saigon

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www.lottehotel.com/saigon



Mia [R]

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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.

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The Island Lodge [R]

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.

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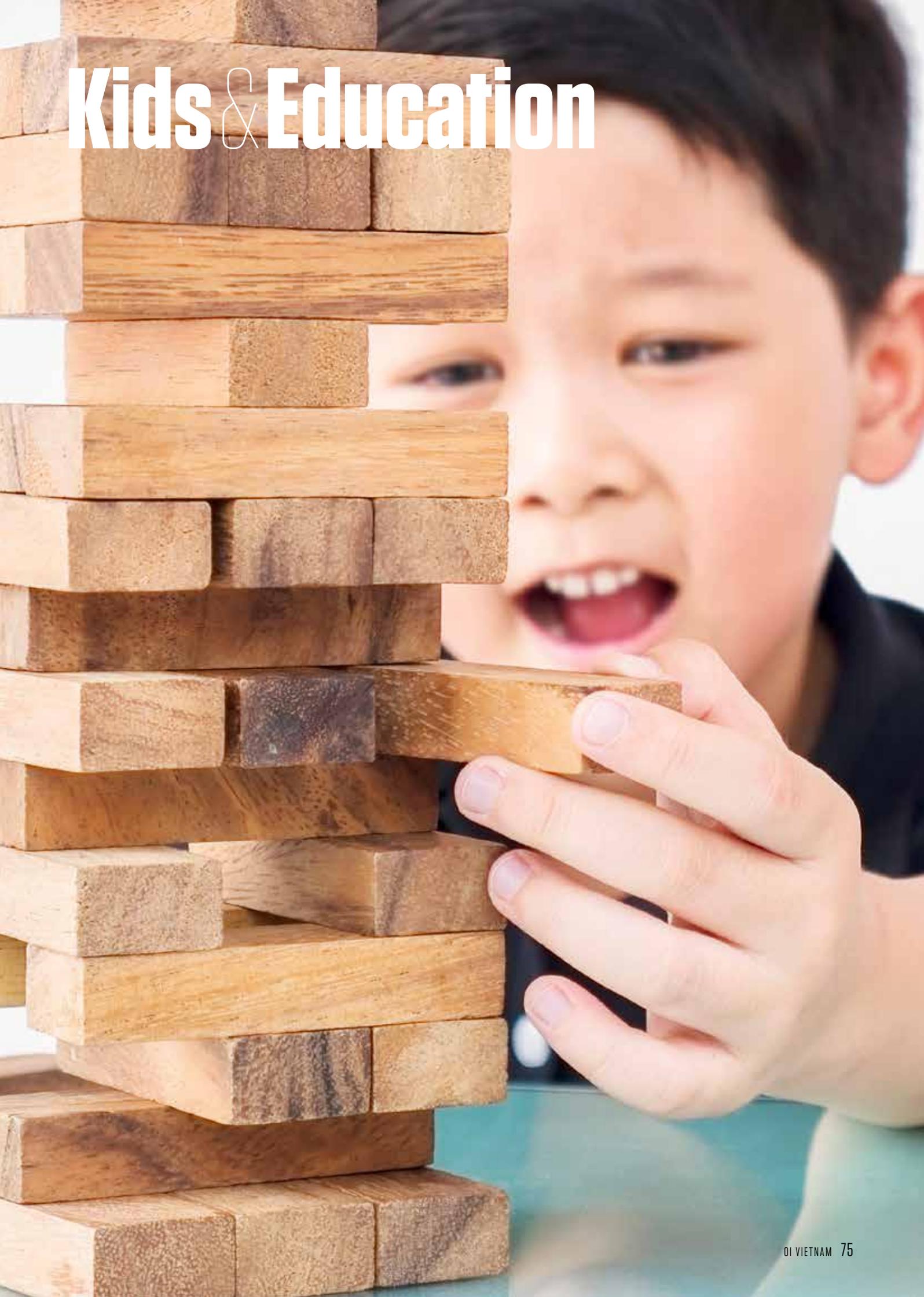
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 For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

Kids & Education

A young boy with dark hair and a joyful expression is playing with a tall stack of wooden blocks. He is holding one block with his right hand, ready to place it on top of the stack. The blocks are light-colored wood with visible grain patterns. The background is a plain, light color, and the boy is wearing a dark-colored shirt.



LIFE IS A SPORT

Why and how to raise “sporty” children

Text and Images Provided by ISSP

“KIDS TODAY.” IT’S SUCH A timeless and all-encompassing phrase, used over the span of generations to denote the way that things and people change over time, and the ways in which those changes are reflected in our youngsters. One commonly held perception of children in the new millennium is that they’re too distracted by technology to bother to play outside or engage in physical activities.

Often, busy parents compound this issue by providing their children with iPads, computers, and gaming systems to keeping them pacified over long periods of time with technology acting as their de facto babysitter. It’s an easy fix for

parents who are overwhelmed by their children’s persistent and interminable energy levels.

Health Beyond Childhood at ISSP

The jury is still out on what the long-term effects will be on the adult lives of children who live sedentary lifestyles, interacting more with technology than they do other human beings. Conversely, what has been proven is that there is a plethora of reasons to raise athletic children who engage regularly in competitive physical activities. International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) - the only international elementary, early years’ school in HCMC to have the

prestigious accreditation from the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), prioritizes sport’s education from an early age. One of the ways that the school accomplishes this is by giving parents some tips on how to raise kids to be sporty.

Inactivity Causing Obesity to Rise in Ho Chi Minh City

Problems related to physical inactivity are endemic in Vietnam. Studies show that lifestyle in Vietnam is one of the most sedentary in the world. A 2017 Stanford University study showed that Vietnamese adults averaged a total of 3,643 steps a



day, falling significantly below the global average of 5,000. Vietnam was only seven slots from the bottom of the list, topped by Hong Kong whose citizens take an average of 6,879 steps.

The 2016 Joint Annual Health Review published by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Health Partnership Group (HPG) found that 28.7% of Vietnamese aged 25 and over don't exercise at all with 25% of young people saying they don't participate in sports. The same study found that people who don't exercise are 20-30% more likely to die younger than their counterparts that exercise for at least 150 minutes per week.

Healthy Adulthood Starts in Childhood

Children in Saigon are especially prone to becoming overweight, with the obesity rate of school-age children reaching 19% as recently as 2016. Clearly, raising active kids who place value on exercise and developing athletic ability as well as an overall healthy lifestyle has benefits that will add to their longevity and happiness!

There are also less obvious benefits to engaging in athletics and competitive sports. Children who get involved in organized sports at a young age experience advantages that span their lives. Athletic children grow up with more positive body images, are more high-achieving in their middle and high school years, and less likely to engage in drug abuse. Lester Stephens, Head of International School Saigon Pearl chimed in, "Children can become better communicators, develop a strong work ethic, and learn real teamwork [through sports]."

These young athletes also learn how to cope with failure. American basketball phenom LeBron James imparted this wisdom, "You have to be able to accept failure to get better." Sporty children develop the wisdom to realize that what might initially look like failure can

become a doorway to success with the sharpening of their skills and the forging of their determination.

Early Parenting Tips for Raising Sporty Children

Start Early!

It's never too soon to start getting your children in touch with their inner athlete! A baby makes tremendous advances in her physical skills and movements, for example. Children want to move; they just have to be encouraged to continue to do what their bodies want to naturally.

Rae Lang, Deputy Head of School, suggested getting babies to respond physically to sensory output, "Ring a bell so she'll turn her head toward you." Also, get your baby out of the stroller! Children need space to move and to master new movements. Time spent playing and exploring on their belly will help your baby to develop balance and orient themselves. These first movements and responses will be the doorway into your baby's athletic future!

Level Your Toddler Up!

Toddlers provide an obstacle in that they easily get bored or frustrated when presented with challenging activities. The key is providing them with short-term challenges that will help them further develop their agility. Something as simple as blowing bubbles and having your child pop them (an almost instinctual response, as much as chasing and dispersing flocks of pigeons on the ground) will help a child's hand-eye coordination. At the same time, they'll learn valuable running and jumping skills. Capitalize on the fascination children have with balls by always having a kickball, a beachball, or small rubber ball handy. This will give your child experience with the ways that balls roll and bounce. Simple activities like letting your child walk on your bed will help them develop balance as they try to navigate an unstable surface.

Go for a Team!

Children should take part in age-appropriate team sports or recreational leagues. It is also important for sports instructors to remember that "it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." A coach's emphasis should be on having all of the kids participate, not just for the team to score points while more challenged players are bench-warming.

International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) understands their role in helping to foster happy, well-adjusted, and dynamic children by providing an

abundance of opportunities for students to engage in athletics and various physical activities. At ISSP, children have a chance to experience various sports including basketball, football, swimming, martial arts (kickboxing), ballet, yoga, aerobic, and especially Smart steps program (for Early Years - only ISSP has this program in Vietnam). ISSP approaches sports with the awareness that playing sports serves to keep children healthy, but also provides important lessons that they will carry on with them throughout their lives beyond their school years. Playing sports is just as much about building character as it is about building athleticism which is why ISSP's key message has been "beyond academic excellence, we nurture character."

We hope these early-age parenting tips from ISSP will help you send your child on a trajectory for happiness as well as good physical and mental health.

- So when it comes to your kids, don't be a sideline coach. Be active and engaged in your child's athletic life with the knowledge that it goes hand in hand with his or her academic path.
- Assist your child to forge a winning spirit, while helping them understand that the lessons they learn in sports are the real victories that they'll carry with them throughout their lives.
- Remind your children that in every aspect in their lives the only way they truly lose is if they give up, and that the strongest competition they'll ever have is the one with themselves. They should always be striving to be better than the person they were yesterday. This is the true victory in life. ■





FI GH TI NG BA CT TE RI A

Strengthening your child's
immune system

BACTERIA, VIRUSES AND OTHER pathogens are all around us—it's impossible to avoid them. Fortunately, we have a way to protect ourselves against the threat of infection in the **immune system**.

When the human body is exposed to a threat from a pathogen, it fights back by analyzing that threat, designing **antibodies**, and then producing enough of them to disable the infection. It will also remember the design so that it can easily produce more antibodies later if a similar threat is encountered. We call this form of memory **immunity**.

A child's immune system is much weaker than an adult's. When a child is born, his or her immunity is like a blank sheet of paper. They've had no exposure to pathogens, so there's no memory of how to fight them.

Usually, a child's first exposure to bacteria is in the birth canal. This exposure contributes to the development of the child's general health and the sensitivity of the immune system. Children delivered by C-section do not have the same exposure as those naturally-born, which could impair normal development.

All babies, however, have weak immunity during the first weeks of life. At this time, they are normally protected by the antibodies they receive from the mother's milk. That is the importance of breastfeeding: babies cannot produce their own antibodies efficiently, so they need to get them from breast milk. This is called **passive immunity**. Unfortunately, there are no antibodies in formula milk because antibodies are created by a very delicate and complicated process in the human body. Babies who drink formula milk cannot receive this protection.

Immunization before six weeks of age for most antigens results in a weaker response and poorer immune persistence, mainly because of the immaturity of the immune system. Doctors need to wait until a baby's immune system is strong enough to produce antibodies efficiently and fight disease. With the exception of hepatitis B, bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) and OPV—which are all given at birth—the recommended age to give most vaccines is at two months, or six weeks at the earliest.

When functioning properly, the immune system can identify a variety of threats including viruses, bacteria and parasites, and also distinguish them from the body's own tissue. Children with **immunodeficiency** are more likely to get both recurrent and life-threatening infections, because their immune systems do not have the strength to fight. On the other hand, a child whose immune system **hyper-reacts** to infection will suffer from allergies, where

the body's immune system will fight uselessly against a non-threat, causing its own health complications.

A child with an **autoimmune disease** has an immune system that fights against the body's own tissue by mistake. For example, diabetes type 1 is an autoimmune disease where the body produces antibodies that fight its own pancreatic tissue. Other examples are Hashimoto's, thyroiditis, and SLE.

It's clear that the immune system is very important—it plays a central role in fighting disease. To a child, developing a mature immune system is crucial to good health throughout all stages of life.

Improving Child Immunity

The immune system is sorted into two types. The first is **innate immunity**. This is what the body has available to it from birth. Physical barriers like skin and mucus form part of this system, protecting against non-specific pathogens. The cough reflex, skin oil, and earwax all help to expel pathogens from the body. Some kinds of cells in the body produce chemicals for innate immunity, which are called interferon and interleukin.

The second is **adaptive immunity**. That means that when the body is exposed to a threat, it produces antibodies specific to that pathogen and then remembers those antibodies. This natural ability is what makes **vaccination** possible.

So how can we augment this ability and improve the natural immune system?

The first way is **nutrition**. This is very important, especially for infants of less than one year of age who rely on breast milk for their antibodies. We now recommend breastfeeding for as long as possible—at least until twelve months of age—and exclusively for at least the first six months. By seven or eight months, we need to provide babies with a variety of foods from different food groups. The protein, fat, carbohydrates and even minerals and vitamins in solid food are very important in improving the health of the immune system.

Unfortunately, many parents routinely give children multivitamins and mineral supplements without seeking medical advice. This is not a good practice because with some vitamins, an overdose is toxic. Oil soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, K and E can be very dangerous in overdose, causing seizures, nausea and vomiting.

Vitamin D is an exception. Babies normally produce their own vitamin D in response to direct sunlight, but as the exposure to ultraviolet radiation in sunlight is risky, it's better to supplement the diet with one drop containing 400 international units of vitamin D per day.

Another problem is that parents

sometimes overfeed their children. While good nutrition boosts the immune system, overfeeding can lead to diabetes. Obesity and gastro-oesophageal reflux are also potential consequences of overfeeding in infancy.

The second way is **sleeping quality**. Good sleep is very important in nurturing the developing immune system, so a child should have an environment that is conducive to the quality of sleep. A newborn baby should sleep 18 hours per day, and a toddler 12–13 hours per day. A preschooler should sleep 10 hours per day. It's important not to disturb a sleeping child which is another reason to avoid bottle feeding infant children; many parents wake their baby to feed, compromising their developing immune system.

Hygiene is the third way to boost immunity—it is most important to wash hands before preparing meals, or after going to the toilet. The immune system includes the skin and its oil, so washing the hands helps to reduce the spread of pathogens. It's also vital that very young infants avoid contact with sick people, and are not exposed to smoking in the home, chemicals (choose organic food where possible) and pollutants in the air.

The last one is **vaccination**. Vaccines use our knowledge of the immune system to mimic infection, generate immunologic memory, and prepare the body for future infections. It's very important to follow the vaccination schedule. The schedule is carefully planned to take into account the developing immune system. If we vaccinate too early, the baby has insufficient ability to produce antibodies. If too late, then the risk of a child being infected without the protection of immunity becomes greater.

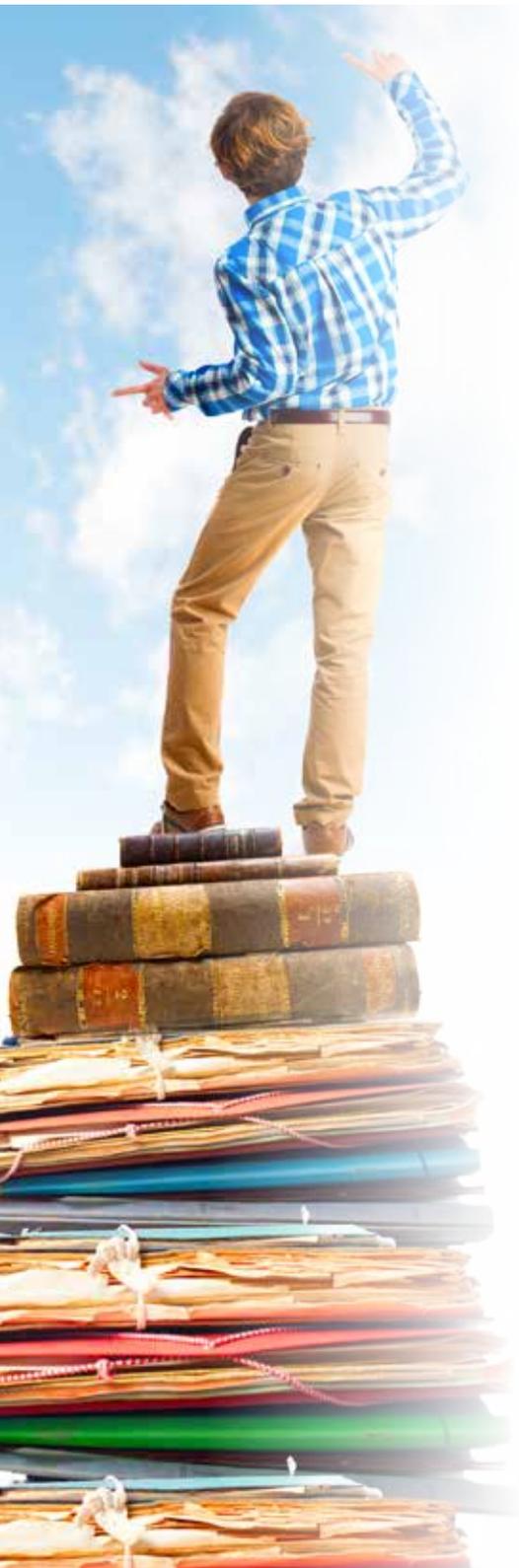
By properly adhering to the standard vaccination system, you give your child the best chance of developing a robust and healthy immunity that will serve as a lifelong protection against infection. ■



Dr. Linh's studies in France and the US gave him a broad experience base in treating a range of pediatric illnesses. He takes particular care in cooperation, communication and education of parents to ensure a better treatment environment for children in medical need.

>> The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



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www.theabcis.com



At EtonHouse International Pre-School Franchise - An Phu, children aged 18 months to 6 years experience a Reggio Emilia style, play-based early childhood education. The progressive Singapore-based EtonHouse **Inquire - Think - Learn** curriculum, delivered by dedicated international teachers, enables pre-schoolers to enjoy fun and hands-on learning in Somerset Vista, An Phu.



Level 2, Somerset Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, D.2, HCMC
028 6287 0804 / 093 868 4676
info@etonhouse.vn
www.facebook.com/Etonhouse.AnPhu
www.etonhouseanphu.com



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 21 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. In 2018, The American School will open its new, sprawling mega-campus in District 2's An Phu Neighborhood. This purpose-built facility will house up to 1200 students from pre-nursery through grade 12. This is an exciting time in the growth of the school!



177A, 172-180 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2
028 3519 2223 / 0903 952 223
admissions@tas.edu.vn
www.tas.edu.vn



The International School Ho Chi Minh City - American Academy

ISHCMC - American Academy is a U.S. curriculum secondary school, preparing students aged 11 to 18 years old for success at universities worldwide. Early university credits, through SUPA and AP courses, a 1:1 University Counseling Program, and an extensive EAL program sets our graduates on the road to success with 100% acceptance rate and U.S. \$1 million scholarship fund to overseas universities.



16 Vo Trung Toan, D2
+84 (28) 3898 9100
admissions@aaavn.edu.vn
www.aaavn.edu.vn



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

Vietnam's only international school offering a U.S. curriculum for children 18 months to 11 years old within a 100% English language environment. With a library containing over 13,500 English books and more than 60% of students achieving above grade level English, ISSP graduates are well prepared for secondary school at ISHCMC or ISHCMC – American Academy.

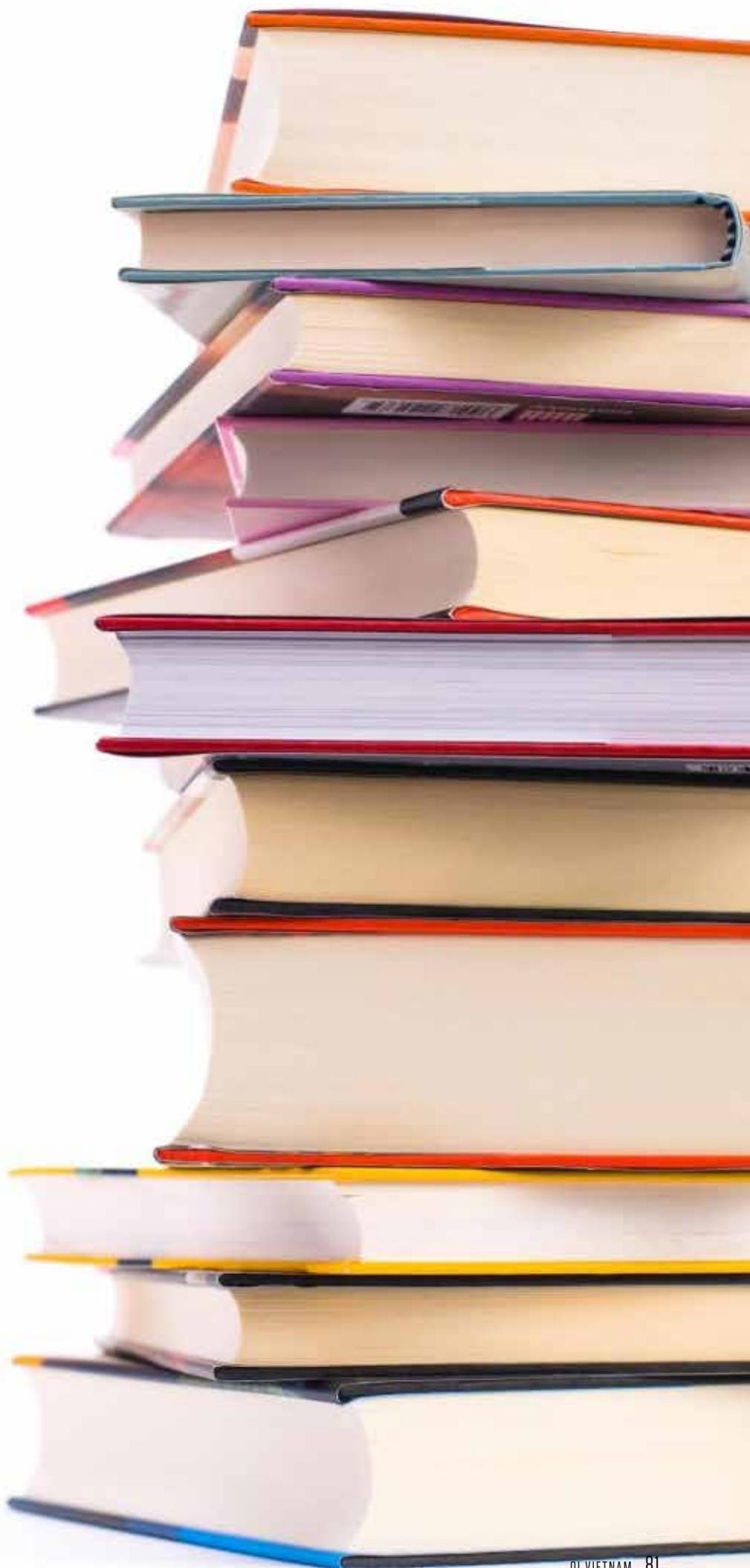
92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh
+84 (28) 2222 7788/99
admissions@issp.edu.vn
www.issp.edu.vn



SSIS

SSIS is a not-for-profit school providing an American-style education from Early Childhood through Grade 12. SSIS offers AP and IB Diploma, over 80% of our teachers hold advanced degrees, and our students represent 40 nationalities. We are the only Apple Distinguished School in Vietnam, and our state-of-the-art facility sits on a spacious, six-hectare campus.

78 Nguyen Duc Canh Tan Phong Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
(84-28) 5413-0901
info@ssis.edu.vn
www.ssis.edu.vn.





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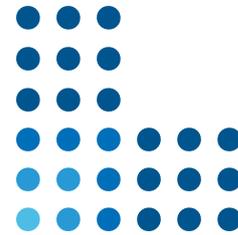
1. G FLOOR, DOMESTIC TERMINAL
 2. 1ST FLOOR, DOMESTIC TERMINAL
| Opposite Gate 9
 3. 1ST FLOOR, INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL
| Near Gate 22 - 26
 4. 2ND FLOOR, INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL
| Near Gate 27
 5. 3RD FLOOR, INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL
-  Fresh2GoSASCO





**International School
HO CHI MINH CITY
AMERICAN ACADEMY**

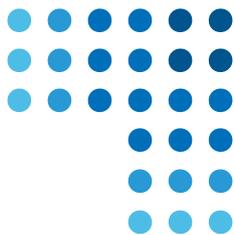
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PARENT WORKSHOPS - *Hội thảo dành cho Phụ Huynh*

• EAL: Supporting All Language Learners

Chương trình EAL: Hỗ trợ học sinh học bằng ngôn ngữ thứ hai

• Road Map to University

Chuẩn bị cho Bậc Đại Học

• Student Time Management & Organization Skills

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Access our Vietnam website: www.pos.com.vn