



VIETNAM

09-2019

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START HERE, GO ANYWHERE!



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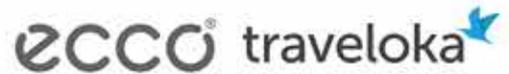
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Lawrence Young (FCSI) is the Senior Associate for Holborn Asset Management Group (HCMC office). Originally from the UK, Lawrence has been a finance professional for 30 years having worked across Europe and Asia as a stockbroker, Eurobond trader and interbank money broker. His areas of expertise lie in offshore tax efficient saving structures, higher education fee planning, inheritance tax planning, pension planning, life and health insurance, global investment property, offshore company formation and offshore banking. Email lawrence.young@holbornassets.com if you would like him to answer your questions on these topics.

To Buy Or Not To Buy

Be knowledgeable of the pros and cons of investing in Vietnam

ONE OF THE BURNING TOPICS

I am asked about frequently and I hear discussed with heated debate is the subject of property investment in Vietnam. So, what's it all about? Is it fraught with danger? The answer isn't simple. In July 2015, the government introduced the Vietnamese Law on Residential Housing. The main question to ask is, "Do I wish to follow the rules that govern buying property here?"

Some of the basics to take into consideration are the idea of buying the structure but not the land it's on. Currently, leasehold can only be obtained for 50 years in Vietnam. When you compare this to leasehold in the UK for about 120 years then it's quite short. Most mortgage companies won't lend on a property in the UK if the leasehold is less than 80 years and this is true in many countries.

There are other caveats, such as only 30 percent of flats in any one particular building are available to foreign investors and 250 landed houses in a particular ward. So restrictions apply and you will very likely be buying the property outright because sourcing a mortgage in Vietnam is almost impossible. It can be done but you will be chasing your own tail. However, if you happen to have a Vietnamese spouse the rules do change rather dramatically.

Having a mortgage and leveraging on property will keep cashflow free because it is not all tied up in a tangible item that is not a liquid asset. This gives you more access to liquid cash to place in more investment opportunities. You can

purchase property without the need for putting large amounts of cash up-front and mortgage-backed property should become self-funding if the rental income is higher than the repayments—a major target for the savvy investor to make the numbers crunch.

One of the biggest frustrations appears to be the ongoing saga of obtaining the ownership certificate from any developer. This problem started in 2017 and some would say it is a thing of the past but that's debatable.

The law states that foreigners cannot own properties in areas that are reserved to protect the national defense and security and this is where the problem seems to have surfaced. It is for the Ministry of National Defense of Public Security (MNDPS) to decide on what construes as property that would be affected under this law.

The MNDPS decides whether a property is in an area that is reserved to protect the national security, which technically could be every square inch of Vietnam. It's advisable to ascertain whether an ownership certificate is available and open to interpretation in the future.

If investment in Vietnam is still for you then some of the usual rules will apply. Start with a reservation agreement. If a deposit is involved check the agreement. If you pull out as a buyer that deposit will be non-refundable. If the seller pulls out, the agreement should have a clause that they pay double the deposit back. Not what you are looking for but it does stop the seller from looking

for a higher bid and screwing you. Get your documents notarized to remove all doubt. Move onto due diligence and then exchange of contracts.

Vietnam Versus Elsewhere

Vietnam is a frontier market now going through a period of economic growth in the high 6 percent range. Given the trade war between the US and China, Vietnam is well positioned to attract multinational firms which are increasingly worried about China's stability amid tariffs.

The best places to invest are those with favorable demographics, and fair asset prices. Other well established jurisdictions already have good existing infrastructures, great demographics and underpriced asset values. Or at least currencies that are devalued.

The UK for example has lost 30 percent of its currency value in recent years so using a cross currency deal exchanging USD (or a suitable currency) for a UK property might seem like a good idea right now. You should receive good property appreciation values and a future FX win if we believe that GBP will strengthen again in the future.

We all wish to be the "king of our own castle," and for some that may be unobtainable with global prices. Getting on the property ladder for many of the world's population will never happen. But for those with liquidity, Vietnam may well be an attractive place to invest. It's what is around the corner that deserves most scrutiny.

Me? I'll stick with renting for now. ■

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TROI OI!

The country in numbers



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TO IMPROVE DA NANG'S WATER ENVIRONMENT.

Da Nang authorities have decided to

approve a project on building works to improve water environment in the east of Son Tra district between now and 2020. It will build a system of sewers to collect wastewater and part of rainwater, upgrade Son Tra wastewater treatment station (the second stage) with a total daily capacity of 40,000 cu.m during the dry season, and 100,000 cu.m during the rainy season. The city will also build a sewer to transfer wastewater and rainwater from Hoang Sa street to Son Tra wastewater treatment station, among others.

The committee assigned the management board for transportation works to carry out the project effectively with ensured quality.

50%

OF LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES SHOULD HAVE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD PROFICIENCY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES BY 2020, ACCORDING TO THE CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

At a conference held last May to review the teaching of maths and science in English, Nguyen Van Hieu, the department's deputy chief, said learning English from native teachers was vital for global integration. The department has instructed district education divisions and schools to take the initiative to improve the quality of English teaching. Under the 2008-20 national project called "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System", children are taught English from first grade whereas in the rest of the country it starts in third grade.

There is one called "Intensive English courses" and the one to teach maths and sciences in English. For teaching English in the 2019-20 school year, the department requires primary schools to develop an environment for students to use English easily. In the city, 94.5 percent of primary school students learn English. Schools are also required to use IT to teach foreign languages, including English.



2,400

CASES OF DENGUE FEVER REPORTED IN HANOI.

The capital city of Hanoi has experienced a boom in the number of dengue fever cases from several places across seven districts, according to the municipal Department of Health.

From August 12-18 dengue fever has been widely reported with 301 cases in 145 communes and wards throughout 26 Hanoi's districts.

Associate Prof. Dr. Hoang Duc Hanh, deputy director of the Hanoi Department of Health, said the number of dengue fever cases in the northern metropolis has surged, pointing to a number of causes leading to the spread of the epidemic, including hot weather and rain, and an influx of migrants from rural areas. Since the beginning of the year, as many as 130,000 cases of dengue fever have been uncovered across the country, resulting in 16 deaths. In comparison to the same period last year, the number of dengue fever cases has seen a three-fold increase.

30-YEAR-OLD

TREES IN A NEIGHBORHOOD IN HANOI HAS APPARENTLY BEEN POISONED AS THEY

SUDDENLY LOST MOST OF THEIR LEAVES AND STARTED TO WITHER WITHIN WEEKS.

The *sua* trees, which are nearly three decades old, at a collective housing unit in Co Nhue 1 Ward, Bac Tu Liem District began losing some of their leaves. As locals dug up the soil around the trees, they noticed a vile smell of chemicals, said H., who lives in the neighborhood. “The trees lost their green leaves first, followed by the yellow ones,” said Phan Tu Bang, another resident. “This is not normal at all, as usually trees would shed their yellow leaves first.”

According to *Dan Tri* online newspaper, several groups of people wanted to buy the trees at the collective housing unit in 2018, but both local residents and authorities did not agree to sell them. Officers in Co Nhue 1 Ward have examined the trees and will report the case to the police unit in Bac Tu Liem District for further verification.



100s

OF TIRE-PUNCTURING NAILS HAVE BEEN FOUND ALONG A NATIONAL HIGHWAY IN HO CHI MINH

on a daily basis, forcing some local residents to take matters into their own hands to prevent others from having a flat tire and falling victim to dishonest repair shops.

Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper reporters met Nguyen Van Thanh, a scrap collector hailing from the southern province of Tay Ninh, last month when he was using a magnet to retrieve the sharp nails.

Along a 100-meter section of National Highway 1 in Thanh Xuan Ward, District 12, Thanh was able to collect hundreds of tire-puncturing nails weighing nearly 200 grams in total. Most of the nails had a rhombus shape, blue color, and looked brand new.

“I had already removed the nails from the street yesterday, but they were littered along the roadway again today,” Thanh said. “We don’t want other people to have a flat tire because of these nails. There were so many nails that I had to use a magnet to pick them up. It can be very troublesome for motorcyclists with a flat tire as they have to push their vehicles until they find a repair shop.”

1,000s

OF HANOI RESIDENTS WILL BE ALLOWED TO USE BUSES FREE OF CHARGE FROM SEPTEMBER 1, INCLUDING NATIONAL CONTRIBUTORS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THE ELDERLY PEOPLE AGED OVER 60 AND MEMBERS OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS.

Those applying for the free-of-charge cards can directly submit their dossiers at nearly 50 bus ticket sales booths across the city. Regarding the ticket booth at No. 1 Kim Ma Street (Kim Ba Station), applicants can receive the cards immediately without waiting. They only need to bring along one 3x4 photo and a copy of the relevant papers.

The card will be valid for five years from the day of issuance. Regarding members of poor households, the card is valid within the year (until the end of December 31).

According to Nguyen Hoang Hai, Director of the Hanoi Public Transport Management and Operation Center, the expansion of subjects eligible for free-of-charge use of public transport means aims to realize the municipal People’s Council’s resolution on giving priority to developing the large-volume public passenger transportation system.

Pursuant to the resolution, large-volume public means of transport include the urban railway system and the bus system (both normal bus and BRT). The new policy aims to encourage locals to use public transport services, thus contributing to limiting use of personal transport means and easing congestion and traffic accidents.





Song - Wave - 2005 - Industrial paint on canvas - 240 x 200 cm

Dancing with

Cherry Blossoms

A solo exhibition of paintings by Saigon-based artist Lieu Nguyen Huong Duong

Text and Images Provided by
Craig Thomas Gallery

WHEN LOOKING AT

Lieu Nguyen Huong Duong's paintings over the past decade and a half, certain references and means of categorization come quickly to mind. Duong, when pressed, will invariably say that he is an "action painter." It is certainly obvious even to the uninitiated that his style

of working mimics to a certain degree the way in which Jackson Pollock and other artists of that school painted—in Duong's and Pollock's specific cases with a canvas on the floor and the artist stalking around and effectively creating from "within" the canvas. Rather than bringing a Pollockian sense of chaos to his work, however, Duong manages to maintain a level of control in his paintings that separates him from most of his action predecessors.

According to the renowned art critic Harold Rosenberg, the core essence of "action painting" is that "it is not a picture but an event." Paraphrasing Rosenberg, the artist is not just a painter but a performer; the canvas is a recorder of artistic movement and energy and not just the setting on which the artist reproduces an image actual or imagined. There is an overwhelming wave of emotions strongly surging up inside that compels the action artist to create. The



Duong says, "I never tire of painting cherry blossoms because I love flowers and the cherry blossom is an especially beautiful type of flower that blossoms in the spring. It is a flower that is full of life and one that is uniquely suited to my style of painting. I have not yet managed to be truly satisfied with one of my cherry blossom paintings so I must keep painting them."

Looking over his entire oeuvre, it is clear and Duong confirms that which animates him most and inspires his creativity is the glory of nature in all its riotous color. The natural beauty of flowers is magnified when it passes through Duong's resplendent lens. Being a native of Tra Vinh in the Mekong Delta, Duong was born into a rich and luscious color palette. He found the imagery for his Wave paintings during a visit to the beaches at Phan Ri Cua. Duong also travels internationally in search of inspiration including a recent trip to Pakistan where views of mountain flowers resulted in a number of paintings in this collection that use colors and techniques not previously seen in his earlier work.

Beyond the technique and the categorizations, Duong's paintings stand out in a unique way from the rest of Vietnamese contemporary art. They radiate a sense of feeling which draws the viewer into them. They emanate a sense of being that is of a piece with the peaceful and even languid nature of the artist himself. Duong's color vortexes draw you into a world which walks a tightrope between true abstraction and an abstract way of viewing the world. ■

The exhibition is on display until September 17, 2019 at Craig Thomas Gallery (27i Tran Nhat Duat, D1).

process is often fleeting and the artist has no choice but to hurry and seize that sudden creative impetus when it arrives. Duong affirms this emotional synthesis described by Rosenberg as closely mirroring his own process, which he describes as the equivalent to being "in a state of ecstasy."

Duong's paintings, however, are not merely "active;" they also evince calculation, and, on occasion, even careful planning. Duong says, "I 'act' using a combination of colors that is predetermined according to a specific theme in my head, and then I continuously work with the colors until I'm satisfied with the painting." Although Duong's paintings are unquestionably abstract, there is still a strong residue

of figural representation in them. What makes Duong distinct is his combination of the pure spontaneity of action painting and his simultaneous adherence to formal art techniques. Ultimately, the impetus to classify is of more importance to art critics and collectors than it is to artists like Duong who are simply seeking to create something of beauty and personal meaning.

In choosing to title this exhibition of his works and the accompanying retrospective catalog *Dancing with Cherry Blossoms*, Duong leans into the motif for which he has become most well-known. Duong's cherry blossom paintings are much loved by both the artist and his collectors around the world. Of his particular fascination

Khieu Vu Voi Dao 6 - Dancing With Dao 6 - 2019
Acrylic on canvas - 150 x 200 cm



Khieu Vu Voi Dao - Dancing With Dao - 2019
Acrylic on canvas - 250 x 350 cm



Lovers in Paradise

The ultimate destination wedding at
InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort

Text by **James Pham**

Images Provided by **InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort**



WEDDINGS ARE OFTEN CALLED “special days” because they’re meant to be a once-in-a-lifetime event, a culmination of months of execution, years of planning, and a lifetime of dreaming. All too often, however, while the wedding will always be special to the bride and groom, it may get lost in a blur of similarly “special” weddings for the guests.

At InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort, our mission is to create a wedding day so incredibly unique that it will long remain “special”, not just to the new couple, but also to the most important people in your life with whom you have chosen to spend this most blessed of days.

Destination weddings are the ultimate way of ensuring your special day is unforgettable for your guests as well. With miles of coastline, postcard-pretty beaches, a lush forested interior, and a myriad of island hopping opportunities, it’s hard to imagine a more beautiful destination to

host your wedding than the emerald island of Phu Quoc. A breezy hour’s flight from Ho Chi Minh City, and with direct access to a handful more cities, both domestic and international, Phu Quoc is fast becoming one of Vietnam’s top wedding destinations while maintaining an air of exclusivity and luxury.

Enter InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort, set on the island’s southeastern coast. Blessed with six incredibly unique spaces that seamlessly transition from pre-ceremony cocktails to post-nuptial celebrations and everything in between, why settle for simply a memorable “destination wedding” when you and your guests can experience your special day in a fabulous “destination within a destination”?

Start off with wedding photos in the dramatic HARNN Heritage Spa. A gorgeous mix of Nature and Design, this impressive indoor/outdoor space offers a serene reflecting pool with delicate





the turquoise waters around Phu Quoc.

If you simply cannot pare your guest list down to a chosen few, InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort is pleased to host your special day in grand fashion. Say your vows in front of 130 guests in the only theater on the island while a multimedia show of your new life together is projected onto the screen behind you. The festivities then move to our Grand Ballroom, which can be divided into three sections, or opened up fully to seat up to 600 guests for a formal, fairy tale reception.

Whether intimate or grandiose, choose InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort as the destination for your most special of days on the beautiful paradise island of Phu Quoc. Select from one of three packages: Forever Bliss, Alluring Azure, or The Fairy Tale, or let our wedding consultants put together a completely tailored event. ■

For more, see phuquoc.intercontinental.com, email us at sales-bounces@icphuquoc.com or call +84 283 978 8888 for a consultation.

lotus blossoms that add softness to the background, while the building itself features elegant bamboo arches by noted architect Vo Trong Nghia.

From intimate ceremonies with just a handful of friends and family to grand, fairy tale-like soirees, the many venue options at InterContinental Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort are sure to please even the most particular of couples. If it's intimate and cozy you're after, you simply cannot go wrong with a barefoot chic wedding on the beach. Imagine the scene: Your closest friends and family decked out in crisp linen, seated on chairs set right on the sand, as you and your betrothed utter "I do" under a graceful arch adorned with sprays of fresh flowers. As the sun goes down, the wedding party heads up, all the way to INK 360 on the 19th floor. Watch Phu Quoc's legendary sunset from the outdoor wraparound terrace of our rooftop bar, followed by a relaxed dinner inside the magical space inspired by the ocean itself. Taking its cue from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, complete with dramatic octopus chandeliers and mother-of-pearl tiled floors, it's the perfect fantasy world from which to build your own story for the ages.

For an even more intimate experience, book one of our tropical villas and let our chefs and service staff put together a cocktail soiree or gourmet meal so that you and your guests can simply relax and enjoy each other's company. For something a little more adventurous, grab your swimsuits, gather a handful of your closest friends and unfurl the sails on a luxury yacht cruising





The Speed to Success

What is a POS system and how can it contribute to the success of your retail business?

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

VIETNAM IS A BURGEONING market with all sorts of new opportunities. One aspect often overlooked is not what consumers buy, but how they buy it. That's where Speed POS is helping businesses gain a competitive advantage.

When searching for the term "POS", point of sale technology is not among the top search results. Lower down the page; however, one can see how important POS technology is to retailers worldwide. In Vietnam, retail sales climbed 11.7% from 2017 to 2018, reaching USD191 billion, and 2019 is already on pace to end the year at well over a 12% increase on that. Couple this with a growing diversity in the methods used to facilitate sales, from cash to cards to apps, and one can see how crucial the point of sale is to the transaction. That's where Luan Khanh, Director of Speed POS, is using his knowledge as a computer scientist to

ease both customers and employees in this exchange.

Luan Khanh spent seven years working for a financial services company, watching as technologies developed and markets grew, yet in many regards these two entities weren't always functioning together. As Khanh explained, "At that time you could see the industry grow, but most retail businesses were still using old cash registers."

So Khanh did something about it. He branched off, starting Speed POS in 2007, mainly working at that time with financial services and insurance companies to create the most modern, convenient methods for expediting sales. "We started with the software, however, over time we found that when people bought different types of hardware there could be compatibility issues. The hardware might not be strong or stable enough to provide adequate security.



After that we got the idea to create the hardware to suit the software and bundle them together.”

Therefore, Speed POS searched for the best hardware manufacturers, finding suitable partners in Korea, Taiwan and China. From there, they marketed the products together as a solution for retailers, with software that can enable a multitude of ways to pay, from electronic payment apps like MoMo to the more traditional methods like credit cards or cash. Whereas on the hardware side they developed various interfaces, such as kiosks, terminals, tablets and more, with an emphasis not only on ease of sale, but on having all financial transactions being secure.

With their bundles doing things like improving order accuracy and customer convenience, over the last decade Speed POS has carved out their niche. According to Khanh, “We now have three major markets. The first is food and beverage. The second is retail, from fashion and supermarkets to convenience stores. The third market we have is for hotels. We’ve had the most success in the food and beverage market.”

Why the food service industry? Well, for one there are simply a lot more sales transactions in this industry, and each one of those requires a modern interface to accommodate an increasingly tech savvy public. Additionally, with close to 20% year-on-year growth and annual sales for 2019 projected to top the USD200 million-dollar mark in the Vietnamese food service industry, this POS technology and this market were a natural pairing.

As a diner or a server, what does engagement with this POS technology look like? Well, if you go to a fast food restaurant, the first thing you may see is an employee behind a counter with a line of people in front of them. Rather than wait, a patron can skip that line and instead order from one of Speed POS’s interactive kiosks, saving time. Yet a sit-down restaurant has different requirements, and that’s why Speed POS has developed a line of terminals and tablets where servers can place orders that are immediately received by cashiers and the kitchen staff to process. They’ve even created apps for not only servers, but for customers as well, making the point of sale as expedient as possible. As Khanh adds, “Sometimes customers want to place a mobile order, so we also have a different interface to match with the mobile phone or iPad order.”

What if you own a small restaurant and your profit margins are low? While this POS technology might help to increase those margins, but at what cost? A reasonable one according to Khanh, “We have a simple line called standard POS with enough features and stability for the average restaurant,



and that starts at VND26 million. After that we have more advanced POS lines like our new model, the S240, which is very reliable, and it starts at VND35 million.”

Price depends on the needs of the business. A larger seating area might require more tablets. If there’s a bar in the restaurant it would require a terminal for the bartender. Therefore, each business requires different solutions, which is why Speed POS not only provides the software and hardware bundle, but also takes the time to implement the technology, train the staff and maintain the equipment. They have regular training sessions for new technology or new employees, making sure everyone understands the interfaces clearly so that it does what it’s intended to do—ease the point of sale. Additionally, to make it easier Speed POS uploads all of their client’s information for them, like the menu and payment options. There are even accounting, inventory applications and more.

Nevertheless, there’s one more service provider to consider in regard to the point of sale: the banks. Typically, banks apply a charge for each transaction, which can be costly for small businesses. Speed POS recognized this potential impediment

and met it head on. As Khanh recalls, “We’ve negotiated with banks to charge only a onetime fee of USD35 on those who use our technology, enabling a more profitable relationship between them and the service providers we work with, eliminating fees for each transaction.”

Speed POS technology is building a global imprint in a multitude of industries and markets in different languages, though currently their stronghold remains the domestic market. As just a few examples, Speed POS technology is used in 55 Phuc Long coffee shop locations, international fast food franchise such as Subway, and numerous local restaurants and bars, such as TNT BBQ and Quan Ut American BBQ Brewing Company. They’re also in hotels, theme parks and more. So if you’re part of business operations, small or large, and are looking for benefits such as increased ordering speed and accuracy, decreased waste, improved sales and decision making, better customer interaction, inventory and labor management, third party integration and more, you’ll definitely want to reach out to Speed POS to see what solutions they could provide for your business. ■

For more, visit speedup.vn

Some Like It

Hotter

The fiery world of chili sauces is getting spicier with J Hot Sauce

Text by Carly Naaktgeboren
Images by Vy Lam



TRAM DANG IS INCREDIBLY happy. Radiating joy with an infectious laugh and a huge grin to match, Tram is producing the uniquely styled J Hot Sauce with help from his friends and an extremely positive attitude.

The story of his hot sauce is homegrown. What began as an experiment in science and flavor with his friend became his career, “I like hot sauce, but it’s kind of difficult to find the good ones here. The hot sauce we use with *pho*, I don’t like it. So, me and my friend Jay decided to do it ourselves. We started with complicated recipes, lots of stuff and finally we ended up with a simple recipe. We refined it and refined it until we ended up with the recipe we have now. We actually started three years ago, but just for eating at home,” says Tram.

Tram says fermenting his chilies is the important process to his sauce. Fermentation means keeping the food in a way that it is broken down by lactobacillus

acidophilus bacteria, this bacteria actually makes it beneficial to gut health. Tram began fermenting his sauce by locking the mixture in airtight jars and patiently waiting.

“I think fermented hot sauce is good for your digestion. I think it smells better and tastes better. In my opinion, when I open the bottle it smells very pleasant. I chop the chili and onion and garlic, and mix with water and put salt in it and I let it sit there for about four weeks. Lacto fermented means no air, so when no oxygen gets in, then this kind of bacteria grows and eats the sugar so it’s an easy process,” explains Tram.

He continues: “After awhile, Jay left Vietnam. I made it my own, and started making it for eating and had jars everywhere and different kinds. Last year, I quit my job and I didn’t do anything for over a year. I chatted with Jay and said, ‘I didn’t know what to do.’ I was feeling lost and Jay said ‘why don’t you make hot



sauce?’ The recipe we created is simple and easy and there are chilis everywhere. In Vietnam, hot sauce has lots of additives and is not very healthy. So Jay encouraged me to start a business. And basically I really like hot sauce, I really like fermented hot sauce.”

Support from friends is interwoven in the journey of J Hot Sauce. From Jay’s encouragement and scientific background, to the artwork on the bottles by Tram’s close friend, to his friends taking home litres of sauce and consistently putting in orders. Tram is beyond grateful for the relationships he has, even naming his sauce after his best friend, and everyone seems very grateful for Tram in return.

As for the process of making the sauce, Tram looks to another important personal relationship he has with his beloved local supplier, “I get the chilis from an old lady at the market. I have her phone number so whenever I need the chilis, I call her or her daughter or granddaughter. She’s very nice and every time I ask her, she collects the good ones since a lot of times chili is broken or has black seeds which makes it bitter,” says Tram.

With the fresh handpicked chilis, Tram then mixes them with chopped onions, salt, garlic, and water. Everything is measured with great precision as a lack of balance can result in an altered taste, “depending on the room temperature and the darkness, this kind of bacteria likes the dark, in three weeks you can start to extract the juice, but four weeks it’s a little bit sour and I like that. So I normally let it sit there for four weeks. I think room temperature is perfect for it to grow,” says Tram. He then bottles the sauce and prepares it for sale.

When asked about any challenges he has faced, he discusses how this style of product is new, and people are often afraid to try it. He wants to reassure customers that it’s safe and a huge trend in health foods, “It’s, of course, difficult, like for the Vietnamese market I think it’s difficult

because people have the hot sauce they’ve been using and it’s very affordable. And at the moment I have been looking at the market. It’s not a familiar taste for the Vietnamese. And it’s a one-man business: I make it, I market it, I deliver it. I have been talking with my friends to make a team so we can make it a little bit faster,” Tram says.

“The way I make hot sauce and the reason I make hot sauce for business is because I like it and I believe it’s good. I hope people accept it and people like it. It’s been a year but it’s still very new. It’s difficult to tell people to trust it but I want them to know they can trust this product. I just need to find a way to tell them it’s safe and it’s good,” says Tram. And if his many friends and repeat customers are any sign of how trustworthy, delicious, and singular his hot sauce is, then the future of his brand is as bright as his smile.

You can find J Hot Sauce on Facebook (www.facebook.com/Jhotsauce) where you can place orders for delivery: 60ml bottles sell for VND60,000, 200ml jars are VND180,000, 500ml jars are VND425,000, and large jars of 1500-2000ml are also available. ■





Dogs Without Borders

Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada

In conversation with Mieke Hoekman about pet-ventures.com, a website about traveling internationally with your pet, because man's best friend is also man's best travel and adventure companion

Interview by **Christine Van**

Images by **Mieke Hoekman** and **Andy Scott**

When and why did you move to Vietnam?

About eight years ago I was traveling with a friend through Asia. We bought some Honda Wins and drove from southern to northern Vietnam and during that road trip I fell absolutely in love with the country, its people, scenery and food. At the end of the road trip, I decided I wanted to stay in Vietnam for a longer period to really get to know the beautiful Vietnamese culture.

Did you have dogs before Tron?

Our family always had dogs while I was growing up, from a beagle to a Bouvier to a black lab. They were my companions, bringing comfort when needed and putting a smile on my face by acting silly. There was no question to me that one day I would get my own dog.

Tell us how and where you met Tron and why you decided to adopt him?

There is never an exact right moment to get a dog, so while living in Vietnam I decided to just take the plunge (against the advice of many people). I researched what type of breeds would be a great fit for me and my lifestyle and a husky seemed to be the right choice. To my surprise, I found a litter of pups in Hanoi. I went to have a look at the litter and this little black and white fluff ball caught my eye. He was looking at me with his bright blue eyes, just sitting in the corner of the puppy pen. I was sold.

Why the name Tron?

My partner and I had just watched the movie *TRON: Legacy* and we were looking for an original name. All the neon blue colors in the movie reminded us of Tron's eyes, so we decided to name him Tron. So far we have never met another with the same name.

What were the challenges of raising a husky breed in Vietnam?

The first challenge is the climate. Although a husky's double coat is capable of withstanding extremes (hot and cold), they still need plenty of shade and water to deal with the heat and humidity. We decided to move to Sapa to have cooler weather for Tron. This brought a whole new set of challenges with it because a husky is a rare sight in an area like Sapa. We were not able to let him out of our sight for a minute because the threat of him being stolen was very real. To our disgust, we were informed that a price was put on his head to take him from us to be used for dogfighting. They never succeeded!

When traveling around with Tron, what was the easiest form of transportation: planes, trains, automobiles, etc.?

Cars are definitely the easiest way to get around with a dog, especially because you have the freedom to stop. Traveling with a dog can be unpredictable and you do not want to push the dog too far. Having the option to stop and go for a walk to



break up the journey definitely helps with keeping things fun and interesting.

The most interesting mode of transportation we have had was the night train from Hanoi to Lao Cai. Officially, dogs are not allowed in the passenger cabins, but when Tron was still very little, I was able to sneak him in under a coat. It was a real challenge keeping a puppy occupied and quiet for eight hours. We did it a couple of times until I was not able to hide Tron under a coat anymore because he got too big.

What country (or city) was the most dog friendly during your travels?

There is not one particular city or country that stands out to be the most dog friendly to us. All cities and countries have different pros and cons. What we love about Vancouver in Canada, for example, is that there are a lot of spaces/parks where dogs can run around free and be

themselves. Lots of patios are dog-friendly and stores are welcoming. Unfortunately, you are not allowed to take dogs on public transport unless you are able to carry them in a bag, something that will never happen with Tron.

The Netherlands is a bit the opposite. You can easily travel with your dog on public transport, making it easier to get around without a car. However, space where dogs can run around off-leash is limited.

And where was it hardest to enter with Tron and how did you make it work?

We did not travel to countries with extreme quarantine regulations like Iceland or Australia. We do not want to put Tron through unnecessary stress, just for the sake of traveling. The hardest part so far has been taking Tron from Asia to Europe. As the prevalence of rabies is a lot higher in Asia, Europe has strict import regulations. There is a protocol for rabies vaccinations according to a time schedule, a microchip to be able to identify the pet and followed by a rabies antibody titer blood test. After the blood test was taken (and send to a lab in Europe to be analyzed), we had to wait 90 days before we would be able to enter Europe with Tron. We also needed an import document signed by an official veterinarian in Vietnam to prove that Tron was healthy and did not carry any other diseases. All and all a lot of work, but not impossible!

Pet ownership, especially the idea of dogs as family members, is a relatively new concept in Vietnam, what prejudices did you encounter being a dog-owner while you lived in Vietnam, and especially with a big dog like Tron?

Walking with Tron on the streets in Vietnam evoked a whole range of reactions in people passing by or



Sapa, Vietnam



Spanish Banks Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

watching us. Some people would just look at us in sheer terror, somewhat understandable because they might have never seen a husky before. Other reactions ranged from being curious, to offering money to buy Tron for dog fighting. In Sapa, sometimes little kids would run up to us and try to kick Tron under the watchful eye of their parents laughing at them across the street. Many times, we have heard the words “*thit cho*” (dog meat) used in jokes directed at us. Although these events could be slightly upsetting, they were far and few from the instances where we were met with a smile and clumsy interest. Unless the dog meat markets and dog fighting rings stop to exist and dogs are seen as proper family members, there will always be a fear of dogs getting stolen, unfortunately.

What's the goal of your website, www.pet-ventures.com?

We want to make traveling with pets more accessible for everyone. It can be confusing and daunting to get the right information on import regulations or transport policies. We are aiming to collect all useful information and make it available in one place. Hopefully, we will be able to inspire people to get out more with their pets by sharing our story and that of others, but also show them that they do not have to give up their family member if they move countries.

What cities have you travelled to with Tron?

We've been to:



Calais, France



Seymour Mountain, British Columbia, Canada



Portrush, Northern Ireland



- Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Ede, Lichtenvoorde, Deventer – the Netherlands
- Dover, Manchester, Cairnryan, Hull, Liverpool - United Kingdom
- Calais - France
- Antrim, Belfast - Northern Ireland
- Sapa, Hanoi - Vietnam
- Vancouver, Kelowna, Calgary, Tofino, Ucluelet, Whistler, Squamish, Revelstoke, Golden, Lake Louise, Banff,

and camped at many places in the middle of nowhere – Canada

We have taken the night train from Hanoi to Lao Cai a couple of times. We have flown through Moscow, Russia, driven through Germany, Belgium (but never stayed over night). Twice we did a road trip from the Netherlands to Northern Ireland and back taking ferries and camping along the way. As we have spent the past 2.5 years in Canada, most

of our trips have been here. To Vancouver Island, the Rockies about four times and many small camping trips.

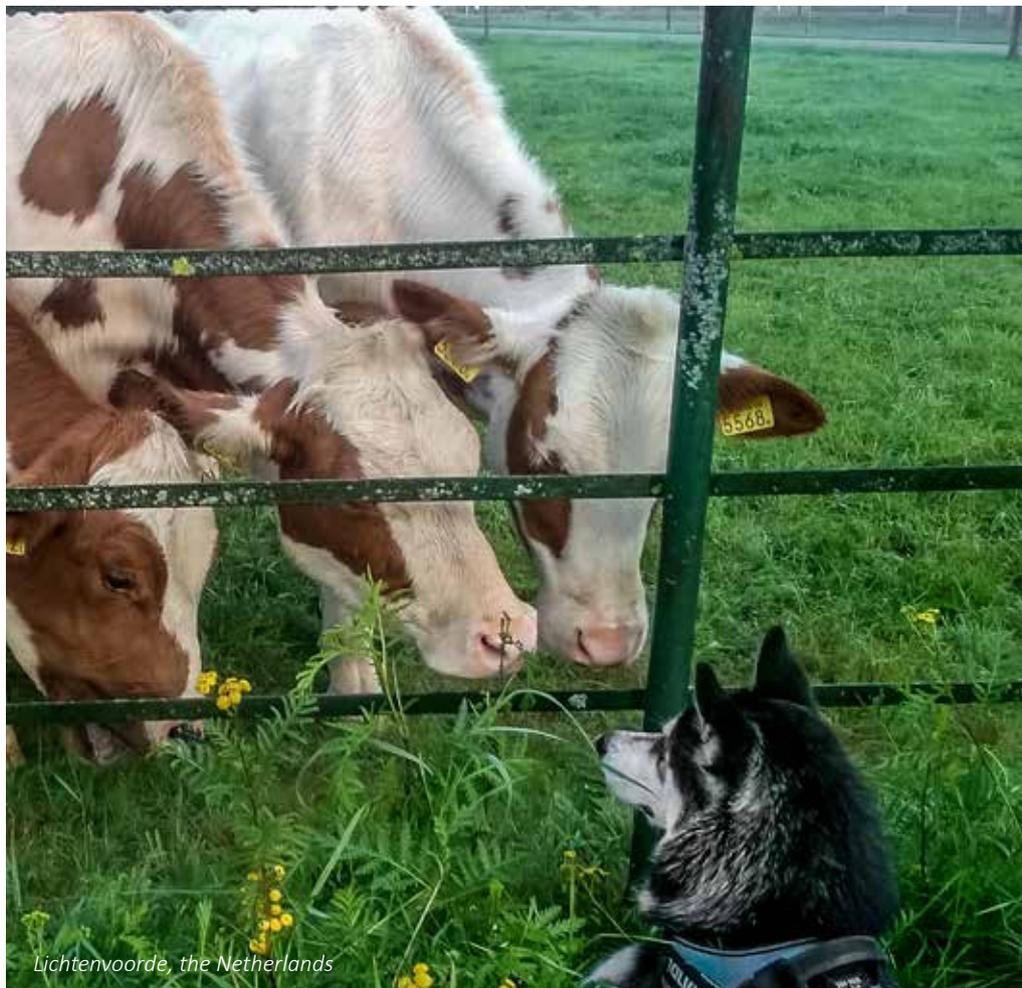
Is Canada the final adventure destination for you and Tron?

Canada is definitely a place where both Tron and I feel at home. It fits our active lifestyle and Tron can run around freely without worry. He has experienced deep snow and cold winters here, which he

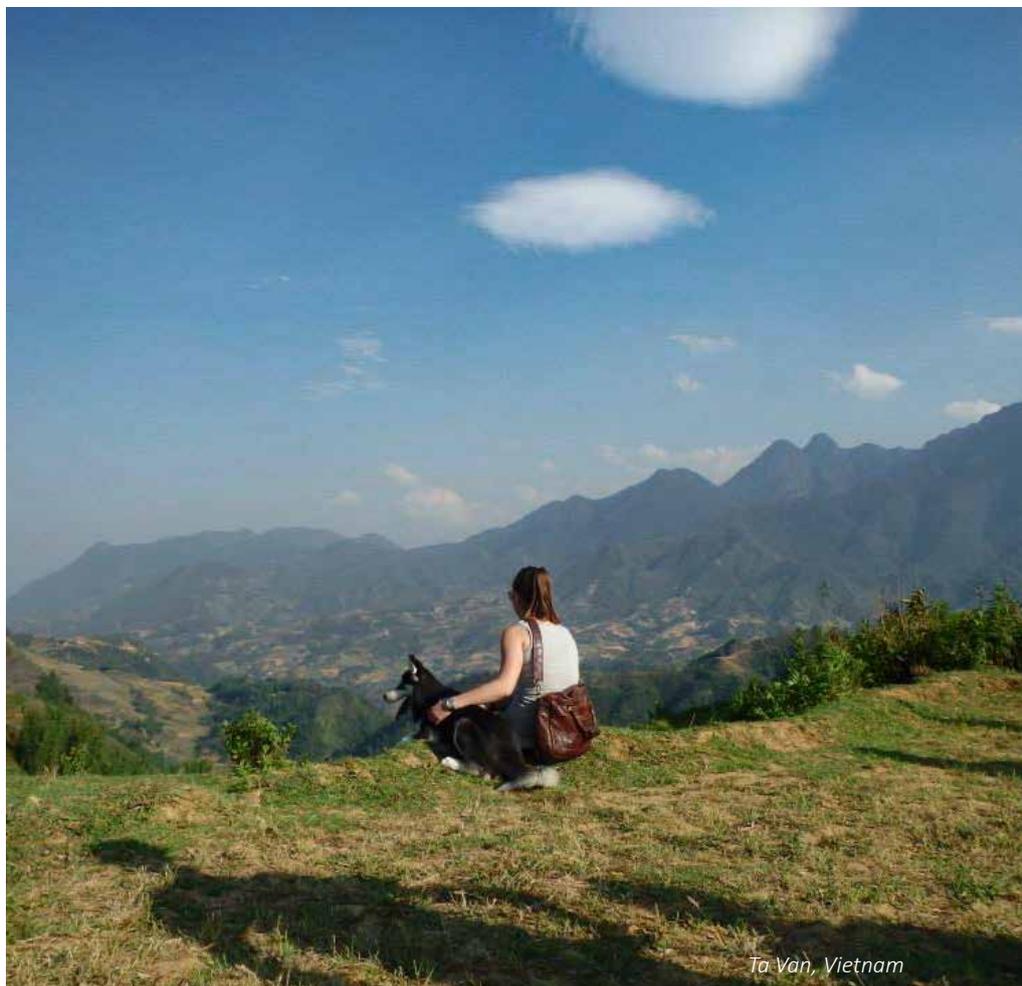


Sayres Lake, British Columbia, Canada

absolutely loves. However, there is still so much more to explore together. The one thing that is on the top of my list is to take Tron and drive in a car from Amsterdam to Beijing with him. I am particularly interested in the cultures of the countries where East meets West and take Tron on hiking/camping trips in rugged landscapes where we have to be dependent on each other, strengthening our bond. ■



Lichtenvoorde, the Netherlands



Ta Van, Vietnam

The Golden Women

Phi Pham was inspired by fashion prints of the 70s and 80s, retro and carefully tailored to fit today's modern women. Phi's women represent confidence, trying to assert her position in society while still looking beautiful. "Empowering Women", "Evolution", "The Solution is Less Pollution" are messages behind the collection, therefore "The Golden Women" collection was produced in a sustainable way, using environmentally-friendly and non-harmful materials such as cotton, linen and blended yarns.









Designer: **PHI by Phi Pham**
(www.facebook.com/phybyphiphamstore)
Photographer: **Hau Le**
Model: **Duong Tu Binh**
Hair & MUA: **Quan Hoang Nguyen (Ruan Dang)**
Accessories: **Floral Punk**

Kids

A KIDS' YOGA CLASS AT YOGA JOY SAIGON / IMAGE BY VY LAM





Delivering A Helping Hand

Having a doula in the delivery room
is increasingly common - and for
good reason





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

AT THE TIME OF PUBLICATION, doula Ann Fenton could be activated at any moment. At any minute she could get the call from the pregnant woman she's been working with in Ho Chi Minh City, a client who she's met with before to discuss the intricacies of her pregnancy but who may still be feeling a height of emotion with onset of contractions that precede the arrival of a child.

It's a special moment that, in her professional judgement, is routinely mishandled. The lights: often too bright. The moment: too rushed, too brusque, in her view. In the rush to just get it over with, Fenton said doctors can even forget the basics, like asking. "It's saying, 'Hey, I would like to do this thing. Is that okay with you?'" Fenton explained. "That's what's called 'informed consent.'"

Fenton explains her craft (www.facebook.com/birthingabroad) with the ease of articulation of a former barrister. She previously worked as a corporate attorney before volunteering as a doula in the Washington, D.C., area before becoming certified with Childbirth International Training & Certification. The cool hand under pressure is partly what doulas offer their clients in the heat of the moment. Preceding conversations have been had about what kind of pregnancy the woman wishes to have, if she wants to have a bath or shower available to her—everything down to the lights has been discussed and planned ahead of time. "Some things that clients like to do is to create a space, like a physical space, where they feel comfortable and safe and cared for. Those things that we surround ourselves with physically can impact our mental state," said Fenton.

So, a calm and tranquil mother is better able to undertake the birthing process than a uncalm one, a conclusion which seems to make sense intuitively too. What's perhaps less understood is that the sense of readiness and urgency mothers have in a space like this is hugely determinative of the smoothness of the process, Fenton said. "Labor is 99 percent a mental state. Some clients like to bring in music. Other clients like to bring in scarves. I had a client—my first client here in Ho Chi Minh City—brought in lamps and fairy lights. It was just lovely. We turned out all the lights and put on some music and kind of made a little nest for her."

Hospital staff, she recalls, were alarmed to discover the alterations. "The nursing staff was freaking out. They were like, oh my god. What's going on? The lights are out. Mom's in a corner with a scarf," she said. Finally,

the staff relented. "They let her create her space."

"That was what she wanted, so that was how I supported her," Fenton said. Other elements of the doula's care center around patient advocacy, explaining doctor decisions and giving the patient the opportunity to make an informed decision. As an example, Fenton cited the use of Potocin, a powerful oxytocin-like compound that's meant to induce labor. It's used to increase contraction frequency and bring the birthing process closer to a close, but with it are a wealth of health risks including a ruptured uterus and even fetal death. "These consequences are not something that's explained or even discussed very well," Fenton said.

The medical literature studying the health impacts of doulas like Fenton seem to show they're a health positive asset. A 2013 study involving about 200 pregnant mothers in *The Journal of Prenatal Education* showed that doula involvement on average reduced low birth weights and other infant complications as well as increased initiation of breastfeeding. Doula involvement can also be literally lifesaving. In Sweden, a country with a generous migration policy that has welcomed an influx of foreign-born residents, doulas are being used to abate maternal mortality. Mothers born in developing countries are up to seven times as likely to die during childbirth. Currently, this population is giving birth at an increased rate, according to demographics research body *Statistics Sweden*. The country is providing doulas to ensure the births happen without incident and deliver healthy children.

A big share of the doula's value is in connecting and synching all parties involved, Fenton said. "I'm a facilitator. I'm really there to bridge the gap between doctors and midwives, and the woman that's in labor. It can be difficult when you're in labor. You might make decisions differently were you in a calm [place]... not a physically compromised, emotional state."

For new mothers, Fenton said the experience of visiting the hospital to deliver the child can range from uncomfortable to traumatic. The doula tries to create a natural, comfortable environment for the mother: a bath or shower for those who'd prefer one to be there, regular walking breaks for those who'd like them, music, and so on. Where possible, Fenton said she advises women to delay their hospital visit and just labor briefly at home, and just hang out. Drink some water. Take a nap. Snack a bit. Maybe watch Netflix, and chill. ■

Get With The Program



The importance of digital literacy for children

Interview by **Christine Van**
Images Provided by **TechTrain**



Christo Hughes

CODING SKILLS ARE increasingly sought after in this digitalized world. Parents are increasingly aware about the benefits of coding for their children and are sending their kids to learn how to code.

In this Q&A, Christo Hughes, founder of TechTrain (www.techtrain.edu.vn), explains how digital literacy can stimulate inquiry based learning, logical thinking and creative problem solving.

For those who are coming into TechTrain totally blind, what is it? Who does it aim to serve?

Let's flip that question because I need to explain the problem scenario first; this

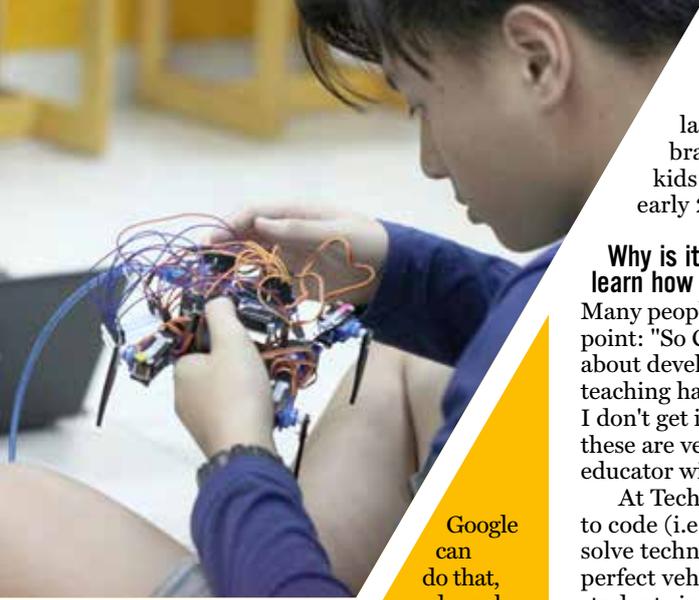
will help clarify the 'why' then I'll

explain the 'whom,' and finally the 'what.'

We have this increasingly apparent problem of students coming through the system without the skill-set needed to thrive, even survive, in the workplace. Students here are fed relentless amounts of factual information, which they need to memorize to pass exams, all leading to the ultimate goal of getting into a respected university, which supposedly will guarantee a good job on the other end. But this far too often leads to graduates who simply don't think outside the box, are therefore of limited value to their employer, and

that means to the nation of Vietnam on the macro scale.

Coupled with the fact we are living through massive technological disruption in industries, globally; we simply don't need people who can memorize loads of facts, or just follow rote processes these days. Mr.



Google can do that, and much, much more.

So, whom do we aim to serve? We aim to serve the youth of Vietnam so that they enter the working world with the necessary thinking skills to thrive. We start as young as 5 years old to lay the groundwork to foster these higher order thinking skills, skills where humans can outperform computers. We teach mainly in English and we use coding and various technological problem based exercises as a vehicle with which to introduce and train students in these thinking skills. It's a powerful combination.

Tell us about your professional background? What led you to the kids coding school industry?

I've worked in several countries over the years, but my main career path centered around product design and development for export from Asia manufacturing hubs to US and EU markets. That often involved taking on a trainer role and also leveraged (very badly in many cases) technological solutions to do the job.

I made a career switch in 2016 and went back to school, going through a 'coding bootcamp' in the US, an experience which opened my eyes to the transformative power of learning tech skills, the job opportunities available, but also the thought and problem solving nature of the skill intrigued me. I invested into the business, then in its early stages, convinced by the need for coding skills in the US workforce.

After graduating the bootcamp, I negotiated to bring their curriculum to Vietnam and offer it as a training course for young employees in tech companies here. While the curriculum was well received the one common request was to also train staff how to problem solve, how to communicate, how to cooperate, how to challenge authority in a constructive manner, how to learn autonomously. I must have met with 25 tech businesses, and every time the same refrain. It was at this point, and with a commission to develop a curriculum for one of Vietnam's

largest after-hour learning brands, I made the switch to kids coding and tech, that was in early 2018.

Why is it so important for kids to learn how to code?

Many people get confused at this point: "So Christo, you're talking about developing soft skills but you are teaching hard tech skills at your school, I don't get it?" The answer is simple, these are very difficult skills to teach, any educator will tell you that.

At TechTrain we see learning to code (i.e. to build tech tools and solve technological problems) as the perfect vehicle with which we can train students in these higher order thinking skills. Coding teaches you a very logical rational way of thinking, and as the learning and levels become more sophisticated, the exercise of getting a computer to do what you want becomes ever more complex and challenging; this require computational thinking, problem decomposition, perseverance, teamwork, communication and all that great stuff that kids must grapple with as they learn.

What are the advantages of learning how to code at a young age versus as an adult?

It's never too late to start. We've had career changers in their 50s learn coding from Scratch at www.techelevator.com and successfully land software developer positions. That said, like almost anything, the young brain learns fast and we encourage learners to start early at TechTrain. Like any skill, the more you practice the better you will become. But I reiterate, our mission is not to create expert software developers per se, our mission is to shape the thinking mind of our students to handle complex, abstract, and unfamiliar scenarios, employing soft skills and tech tools to help solve them, all in the English language.

What courses do you offer?

We currently offer courses for girls and boys aged 5-15. For our youngest students we teach logical concepts, problem solving and computational thinking, all without the use of a computer. Thereafter, we have 3 foundational courses in coding, depending on age and prior ability, which lead into a variety of further courses in robotics, augmented and virtual reality, 3D technologies, web dev and more.

What do kids actually learn when they learn programming? Do they just learn how to use a tool? Or create a game or two?

Crafting your own creations is a huge part of TechTrain. All of our courses are intended to have a project element to them, which allows each student to feel accomplishment at having created something of their own design. With our first courses this will often

be a game (of varying complexity), but as our students become more knowledgeable in their coding this will take the form of apps, websites, and even their own virtual reality environments.

How do you find quality instructors?

We look for individuals who share our vision of transitioning Vietnamese students from tech users into tech creators. We have found that the most important qualities for a TechTrain teacher are a passion for technology, a critical mindset and a strong foundation in pedagogy. We have also been lucky to work on our team with very senior technology professionals for whom education is now a more rewarding career choice than high pay high pressure business.

Does learning to program help with a child's other learning? We all know 'integrated' education instead of learning subjects in silos makes for deeper and more fundamental understanding among kids.

Absolutely. Learning to program helps students with a variety of skills and subjects. When students learn to program, they develop a problem-solving mindset and way of looking at the world that may surprise you. Have you ever noticed that your (successful) software developer friends are often incredibly skilled at analyzing and resolving problems.

What is unique about TechTrain's courses, compared to coding courses that are already offered in international schools in Saigon?

I can't say for certain as I've not sat through many coding classes at international schools! I think a couple things here. There's always going to be a more passionate committed vibe in a smaller organization; we built it around a mission and a problem statement that we feel strongly about, it's therefore part of our identity and we care very much about what we deliver since it represents us as a team. Furthermore, for us it's all about the tech, it's not just one of a dozen subjects, it's what we eat, sleep and breathe at TechTrain.

How does TechTrain measure success?

We purposefully don't put heavy emphasis on the grading process, we see the most progress happens as students progress through experiential learning and teamworking, not when feeling the pressure of studying for tests. We rely on class by class 'formative' approach which takes the pressure off, uses the concept checking of students as an opportunity to reinforce learning. We look not only at the student's grasp of the tech concepts, but also English language (where non-native), soft skills and, of course, problem solving approaches. ■

Mind Your Kids

Text by Daniel Spero
Images by Vy Lam

Creating mindful children
one breath at a time

YOGA JOY SAIGON (*yogajoyusaigon.com*) opened three years ago in 2016 by American Alison Lockwood. Alison, from Marblehead, Massachusetts, came to reside in Vietnam in 2007, working as a teacher when she met her Vietnamese husband while volunteering for Saigon Children's Charity. At the time she wasn't thinking about a future in yoga. "I'd dabbled in yoga and I never really loved it. It just didn't totally click," she explains. "I knew it was good for me, but I could never get into consistent practice. Then, after my twin boys were born I needed to find a way to get active again, but because I had 3 children under 2 years old I had a very limited schedule in terms of what I could do."

She started simple, watching videos and doing chair yoga, a less strenuous form of the discipline, while her children had their daily naps. "I found that it was a mood

shifter for me. I started feeling better. I started feeling active. I felt proud of myself and I really started to get more interested in yoga in terms of the anatomy of it and the different asanas (body positions)," she continues.

Then on a trip back home to the US, while visiting a local gym, something changed for Alison. "That was a big move for me. I had always worried that yoga was a type of exercise where there was some self-consciousness about it because if you weren't flexible or you weren't able to do fancy moves then you felt like everyone else was kind of looking at you; maybe you felt out of place or awkward or embarrassed. And I do think that a lot of people find that as a stumbling block to

starting yoga." She decided to change that.

Her kids got a little older and she had a bit more time so she took a training program specifically for teaching the discipline to children, eventually teaching yoga at the preschool where her daughter attended. "It was amazing. I loved it. I loved how receptive the kids were. I loved how happy it made them. I felt like I could teach them valuable things. I infuse a lot of mindfulness into my yoga, and I thought if I can get these kids started at age three, imagine what type of figures they're going to be like by the time they're in high school."

Alison mentioned mindfulness as a lot of yogis do, which refers to focusing one's awareness on the present moment. It means calmly





the activity. They then place their hands on their hearts and focus on calming breaths. “I’m trying to teach them that they have a tool inside of them and that tool is their breath; that they can control their emotions and actions by slowing things down and breathing. And if I can give a five-year-old that tool imagine how much easier his emotional development can be.”

Demographically, the kids’ classes are a healthy mix of genders and races, more so than the adult classes, which have a higher percentage of women, but Alison was quick to remind that men are welcome, too.

Alison has spent years perfecting her teaching and yoga techniques designed for children, and it shows. Her commitment to a welcoming, ego-free, professional environment has translated into highly dedicated members of the Yoga Joy Saigon community. ■

different themes.

We learn about posture. I use puppets, I use bubbles, parachutes, a ton of props, because I want to engage them, and it works. One of the favorite things we do is called yoga adventure. Each week we create a yoga journey where kids learn five or six different poses as we pretend to blast off to outer space or go on a trip to the beach. We walk around the room and play pretend to each theme.”

Over the years she’s created a number of fun, educational themes to meet the kids’ interests, from princess themes to character play. She combines those appealing premises with spirited yoga activities. “Kids don’t want to sit still so we are moving, but at the same time they are learning a lot about mindfulness.” When this winds down she rings a traditional Tibetan bell, which signals for the kids to stop



acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. That sounds like a tall order for preschool children, but Alison was encouraged by the glowing feedback she received from parents about the benefits of yoga and mindfulness to both their children’s physical and mental health.

Following the success of these classes, a friend suggested she open her own studio. “I really wanted a studio where people don’t feel self-conscious; a non-pretentious place. I wanted any mom or dad out there who may not be flexible, who may not be in shape, who may be overweight, who may be injured; I wanted them to feel that there’s a place for them to come. So I opened Yoga Joy Saigon with the intention of creating a place for not only providing yoga for children, but creating a community for District 7 families,” says Alison.

The idea of calculated postures, meditation and mindfulness may seem unattainable to small children. It even sounds difficult for teens with their increased reliance on smartphones, but the methods employed by Yoga Joy Saigon address that in a way that’s fun and engaging for kids and teens alike. As Alison explains, “It’s tricky to get some people hooked on kids’ yoga because they don’t understand it. They think that I’m lining the kids up on mats and standing in the front of the room and guiding them through asanas just like you would an adult, but it’s not like that at all. We know that a four-year-old couldn’t tolerate that. They’d be bored in a second. So we sit in a circle and we learn things like breathing, pranayama, by using



你好

Nǐ Hǎo

Meet Hilolbegim Rahmanova,
Saigon's Mandarin language teacher
to all ages

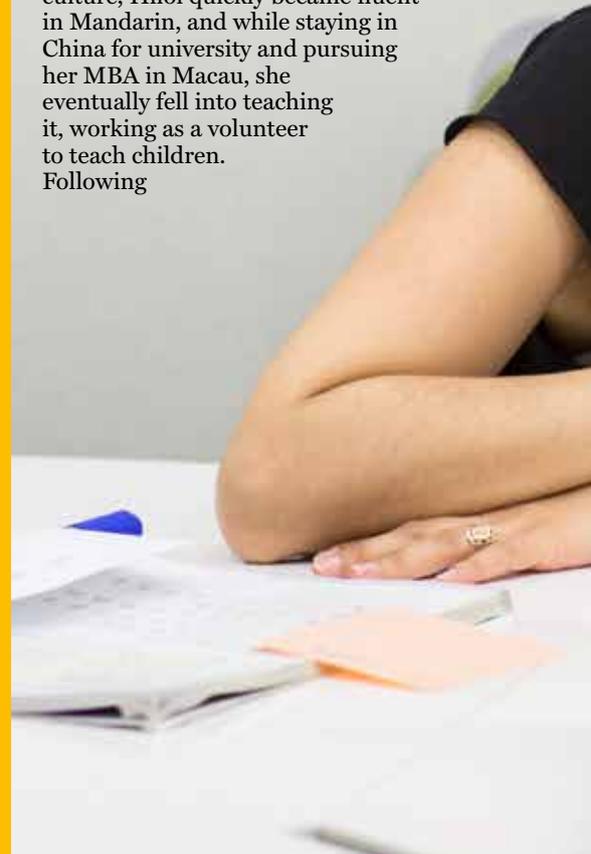
Text by Daniel Spero
Image by Vy Lam

WHILE VIETNAM'S SECOND

language acquisition is largely fixated on English fluency, evidenced by the boom of English language centers in cities throughout the nation, Mandarin is a language with some high-profile students, from the children of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner and even royals like Prince William and Kate Middleton. The official language of China, Mandarin is spoken by approximately one in five people in the world, meaning the language is and will continue to be essential for global business and communication.

In Ho Chi Minh City, a passionate and dedicated Mandarin teacher named Hilolbegim Rahmanova (www.facebook.com/hcmcchineseschool) lives amongst the thousands of English language centers and classes. Hilolbegim, who goes by Hilol, is a native of Tajikistan. However, at the age of nine her parents moved to China to ensure that she and her sister would receive a better education, and they did, but not without some challenges. Because she didn't speak Mandarin officials from the school made her start from the beginning, placing nine-year-old Hilol in the first grade. As she recalls, "It was quite hard. The first semester was really hard because I couldn't understand anything and it was a very typical Chinese school, like with 60 students in one class and the teachers were very strict, but then I got used to the atmosphere and the conditions and I grew up with the Chinese."

Immersed in the language and culture, Hilol quickly became fluent in Mandarin, and while staying in China for university and pursuing her MBA in Macau, she eventually fell into teaching it, working as a volunteer to teach children. Following



university and matrimony, she and her husband were considering their next move when one was revealed to her. "After I got married, me and my husband decided maybe we needed to go somewhere, but somewhere close to China, and I had a friend who recommended Vietnam," she explains. "I was like, 'I don't know this country at all.' But we came and from there we stayed and it just happened organically." That was four years ago

After they settled in Saigon, Hilol began looking for employment opportunities, but the opportunity didn't come in the business industry as she had expected. "My friend, when I came here asked me, do you want to teach my friend's kids English, and because I was new and didn't have a job here I said ok." She took the job and as she

went on to describe, it went very well, leading them to ultimately switch from learning English to Mandarin.

Even through the successes, however, Hilol wasn't convinced that teaching was for her. She even contemplated giving up, but "I could see how much they grew with me. I could see their change and that made me really happy. They inspired and encouraged me to keep going."

What started as a side gig blossomed into a full-time profession with over a hundred students mainly in districts 2 and 7, with students as young as two and as old as 50 from upwards of 20 different nationalities. Therefore, she works diligently to cater to each of their needs. "Whatever they want. Some students ask me to teach business Chinese. Some ask me to teach the type of language needed for traveling and tourism. Some ask for something even more specific, like helping them with the words needed to deliver a eulogy in Chinese, so I teach kind of everything. Language is a very important tool. Almost everything we want to express, only language can help us, so if we know that language very well,

we can make a lot of contributions and change, so it's very, very important."

Hilol says that speaking and grammar usage are relatively easy, but that writing Chinese, with the volume of characters and the multitude of meanings they may possess depending on the context, is the more challenging part. It also depends on the age and ability of the students. "Some of the students just need to learn speaking, so we focus on speaking, but if they're more interested in reading and writing, then we're going to do that. One method is not suitable for everyone. I adapt to the needs of each student." ■





THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

HOLISTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR COMPREHENSIVE GROWTH

Placing great emphasis on all aspects of students' growth through various activities, The American School (TAS) is the place to nurture healthy, socially responsible and talented citizens of the world.

WITH ITS COMPREHENSIVE international curriculum, TAS is proud to be the school where students can prosper in all aspects of learning. Scientific and artistic activities take place throughout the school year along with diverse student clubs. They offer students invaluable opportunities to apply what they learn in class into making real-life scientific projects, develop physical strength and express themselves through various art forms.

TAS Arts Week

Taking place annually and usually in May, TAS Arts Week is the traditional week-long event that all TAS students across Early Childhood Center (ECC), Elementary School and Middle School/High School enjoy. Last school year, TAS parents, students and faculty were totally impressed with all of the wonderful artworks that were exhibited at TAS Art Gallery. These included colorful paintings, abstract patterns, logos, foil sculptures, fairytale-inspired illustrations and photographs.

Apart from the Art Gallery opening, TAS Arts Week also witnessed the scope of students' talent through various stage performances, such as "Carrie" The

Musical – based on the book of the same name by Stephen King, TAS Urban Lights' "Brainstorm" about teenagers' problems, giving adults insight into how their brains work. Mural painting and jewelry making enchanted TAS ECC kids, while TAS Elementary School students also had their best time during Arts Week with amazing Spray Can Art Workshop.

TAS High School Musical performance

Musical performance is an integral part of TAS high school arts curriculum. Throughout the years, performing arts students and teachers have presented to the audience different musical performances based on world famous musicals. Last school year, they brought the essence of **Disney's High School Musical** to the stage, and wowed everyone with their energy, liveliness and vibrancy. With this musical, TAS High School students were encouraged to express themselves freely as actors and singers, and to live their teenage years to the fullest.

TAS Urban Lights' performance in Australia

Urban Lights is TAS young company of performers whose big dream of performing on one of the world's biggest

stages came true last March, when they stepped onto the stage of **Perth Fringe World Festival in Perth, Australia** - the third largest fringe festival in the world.

Urban Lights' performance at this worldwide stage was called *Me. Asian?*, a play that explored how a generation of Asian teenagers navigate the clash between technology, the West and tradition and what it means to truly belong in the 21st century. The story was told from the perspective of our students, educated in a Western system and permanently attached to the internet. Verbatim interviews taken from different generations of family members and the stories of the performers themselves were interwoven with physical theatre, cultural music and dance forms to create a storytelling experience unlike any other.

The performance received rave review from Stage Whispers in Australia, which praised the group's efforts to make use of various performing arts techniques. *"Wonderful use of physical theatre, strong use of dance and drawing on the cultural traditions of Vietnam and Korea, created group routines that were visually stunning, a wonderful contrast with some candid and very funny storytelling and lovely use of verbatim theatre."*



Urban Lights



STEM Day



High School Musical

TAS STEM Day

TAS STEM Day committee put together many different activities for TAS Middle School and High School students to showcase their passion and talent in STEM field last school year. The morning was for students to present their science projects, while at the same time, catapults engineering competition took place as an opportunity for future engineers to showcase their ability. Those who created bridges to take part in the bridge competition also proved their talents and delivered their best effort.

Besides focusing on scientific projects and applications, **TAS STEM Day** also gave students insight into jobs in STEM field through interesting STEM industry talks. Throughout late morning till early afternoon, STEM adventures took place across the school campus, allowing students to choose the problem-solving tasks they wanted to try and worked to complete them as fast as possible. The day was marked with a bit of humor, as many teachers and students wore famous adventurers' costumes, vying for the Best Costume prize.

Other activities from students' clubs

TAS has a diverse list of clubs that students can join after school, focusing on a wide variety of subjects that are tailored to the students' interests and needs. For ECC kids, **Muay Thai Club** run by Mr. Lafe Conger is a must-join, packed with exciting moments and aimed to improve the kids'

core strength and mobility. TAS Elementary School students surely had lots of fun with **Acting Club** last school year, while their slightly older fellows in Middle School and High School had the opportunities to be a part of **Glee Club**, **Sustainability Club** and **Queer Straight Alliance**.

Glee Club, as the name suggests, is a school club that focuses on singing and spreading the love for music to both students and teachers. The club brought plenty of joy to many TAS events, including Christmas Bazaar and TAS Arts Week. Besides accomplishing excellent academic achievements, TAS students are also encouraged to voice their opinions and fight for the just causes they believe in. Sustainability Club turns this encouragement into reality, giving TAS students the platform to promote environmental protection and sustainable development. Queer Straight Alliance, on the other hand, gives its members the platform to fight for inclusivity, combat homophobia and toxic masculinity.

With these educational, captivating and diverse activities, TAS continues to prove that it is truly the place where generations of future world citizens are born. You can always learn more about TAS diverse students' activities and other aspects of TAS on the school website at www.tas.edu.vn



Muay Thai Club



Spray Can Art workshop



Sustainability Club

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a sleeveless, floor-length brown dress, is sitting on a large, layered rock formation. She is leaning forward with her chin resting on her hand, looking towards the camera. The background features a lush garden with various plants, including ferns and a small waterfall cascading over rocks. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting during the day.

Dazed

Valenciani (www.valenciani.com) is a homegrown luxury boutique set up by one of Saigon's most acclaimed fashion designers, Adrian Anh Tuan. Known for its feminine, figure-flattering gowns and dresses, Valenciani's designs accentuate and emphasize the female form. Flaunt your feminine charms in delicate flouncy shift dresses and pantsuits with exaggerated hems from the Dazed Collection.







Wine & Dine

SEOUL NIGHT GALLERY & BAR / IMAGE BY VY LAM





In the Mood for a Drink

The throwback to the Prohibition-era establishments is once again in vogue, and on-trend Seoul Night Gallery & Bar is worth seeking out

Text by Paul Kim
Images by Vy Lam



Shinyoung Lee

BUI VIEN IS STILL FULL OF surprises. As modern Saigon is becoming ever more ephemeral, so is Bui Vien. Change always starts small. When it comes to change no one wants to be the first, but there's always a mad dash to come in second. So, who will be first in bringing the cocktail speakeasy scene to the often-dissolute backpacker area?

Saigon has plenty of speakeasies, but no matter how hard the bars try, they slightly miss the mark of what makes a faithful homage of a “speak.” They are situated in a suppressed location with a nondescript entrance, but always lack the impish mood of danger looming around the corner. That was part of the original appeal during the prohibition era. Speakeasies revival in the late 2000s/the early 2010s in all of the major cities—not just Saigon—often fails to replicate this sentiment.

This is how Bui Vien plays a crucial role in the charm of **Seoul Night Gallery & Bar** (133 Bui Vien, D1). Despite the name of the bar, the setting will remind you more of a movie scene composed by Wong Kar-wai than a K-Pop music video. Hidden in the narrow side alley, you'll find Seoul sandwiched between two massage parlors. It was, in fact, once a massage parlor as well. Across the entrance, you

will find the back of a bustling restaurant kitchen. Look for the line cooks taking frequent smoke breaks to light the way.

The front is a semi-open-air art gallery space with local and expat artists showing off their work. You'll have to walk through the gallery and into the back past the cloaking red velvet curtains to enter the bar area. Once inside you'll find a dimly lit horseshoe bar that seats no more than 12 people. It's not much bigger than a small kitchen dining area (and that was probably the original intention for the single-family housing during its initial construction). This offers ideal intimacy for a date night or making new friends. There is additional seating upstairs in a space that's more prosaic.

The patrons consist of the artsy types and the tourists looking for the unique and obscure. The bartenders in obligatory vests are overly eager to demonstrate their knowledge of mixology. They might take it a bit too seriously, but it's needed in the highly competitive world of craft cocktails in Saigon. You will also, more than likely, meet a young Korean expat couple sitting in the corner, made up of a male musician and a female graphic designer by day—owners and operators of the establishment by night.

Due to lack of space in the bar, there



Hanyang of the night



Moon Ray

is a limitation in their inventory of spirits and mixers. (During Prohibition, speakeasies weren't slinging a vast library of concoctions but rather whatever hooch the staff could obtain under the alcohol ban.) This predicament leads to the bartenders aptly making bespoke or slight variations on classic cocktails to adjust to this challenge.

As for their signature cocktails; all of them lean towards the tropical side—made with indigenous fruit, vegetables and herbs. They also provide a reasonably diverse selection of single malts and whiskey. The Moon-Ray (VND180,000) is a beautiful blend of gin, elderflower syrup, lime juice and fresh passionfruit. Hanyang of the Night (VND240,000) and Eclipse (VND180,000) are recommended. The bartenders spend as much time preparing the garnish to look like floral wedding arrangements as they do spending to create the whimsical cocktails—so patience is key as an imbiber.

Once you are nicely sauced, you can exit and return to the chaos that is Bui Vien as if you traveled from another dimension unbeknownst to any of the people. Like Wang Kar-wai's films, it will feel as if you are the central common character in crisscrossing stories of the same movie. ■



Bui Vien



Chef's Choice

For an innovative, artful Japanese fusion dining experience, you have to eat here

Text by Grant Hawkins
Images by Vy Lam

PERCHED ABOVE A QUIET courtyard in one of District 1's busiest and most exclusive neighborhoods is **FUME Japanese Fusion Cuisine** (74/7L Hai Ba Trung, D1), Saigon's newest premium dining experience. Dedicated to creative constructions, top-tier ingredients and playful presentations, Fume is a unique and unforgettable visual and culinary journey that's as impressive as it is original.

Fume is located in Saigon's historic "Manufacture d'Opium," a former opium refinery that has since become the host of some of the city's most noteworthy restaurants. Patrons are welcomed down a red-carpet walkway, up a spiral set of stairs into a minimalist, auditorium-like space. The dining room is clad in concrete accented by large plants and tasteful artwork, with an open kitchen full of bustling chefs along the back wall. Craftsmanship and attention to detail are evident everywhere from the table settings to the chef's uniforms, but most notably in the food.

The drinks menu offers something for every occasion, from a broad selection of wines, to Japanese favorites like *umeshu* and sake, to signature cocktails. Our meal began with the Mixtus Sirah

Malbec from Argentina (VND750,000), a dry red that is served chilled. The dining menu is still being finalized, so we were served "omakase", literally "I'll leave it up to you." One of the top recent trends in Japanese dining, the chef is given the freedom to create innovative and surprising dishes unique to the patrons.

Our appetizer course was *Asoshe*, an assortment of small bites. These included two small sushi rolls, small but lively portions of duck and mackerel, smoky and savory grilled chicken skin, assorted root vegetables, and a small foie gras sandwich served with cashew butter. This dish showcases the increasingly popular philosophy of focusing on ingredients; it avoids complex concoctions in favor, and instead seeks to draw out the natural flavors of premium-quality produce, fish and meat. As with everything at Fume, the attention to detail of the presentation was stunning and impressive, but soon to be outdone.

Concealed by a cloud of smoke and covered by a glass dome, the next dish looked like something straight out of a Netflix series. On removing the dome, one discovers a portion of Bonito, a cured saltwater fish, accompanied by sea salt, garlic slices and wasabi. We were



equally blown away by the presentation and the flavor: a smoky, tender bite with spice and salt to taste. Next up was a more traditional, but no less considered, selection of Grilled Vegetables with mashed potatoes, served with a balsamic reduction and soy sauce. The premium

selection of produce was again evident, and while we could taste the smokiness of the grill, the focus of the dish was the ingredients themselves.

By the fourth course, one could expect the surprises to end, but one would be wrong. Served in warm broth and accented by cabbage and gold flakes (yes, real gold) was a slice of premium Wagyu beef. It is paired with a chilled poached egg in black pepper sauce—easily the most exciting pairing of the evening, both for the contrast of salty and savory, and the tender, warm beef with the cool egg yolk. Despite the gold flakes, this is one dish that Instagram just can't do justice to; it's truly a full sensory experience.

Our final course was a more

traditional yet equally considered Salmon cooked in dashi, a Japanese fish broth, and served in an enormous Japanese clay pot on a bed of long stem rice and mushrooms. The fish was tender and packed with flavor, and the rice was cooked to perfection. This dish pairs with a cup of clam soup, a salty and fishy mixture, which was another highlight of the evening.

As the newest entry in a line of exclusive dining experiences to occupy *hem 74* Hai Ba Trung, Fume Japanese Fusion Cuisine is guaranteed to surprise, delight and impress. Come prepared for playful, surprising presentations, original and exciting pairings, and a ubiquitous attention to detail. Leave the rest to the chef. ■





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 G is Garnacha

Why you should (re) discover Grenache

GRENACHE, OR ALSO KNOWN BY its original name Garnacha, is one of those grapes most people have tried, but not many remember, mostly because it is usually found in blends rather than on its own.

The grape originates in Spain, which is still its major producer, and once was the most planted grape in Spain, but due to the difficulties of cultivating it, most wineries replaced it with Tempranillo.

Although its most popular blend is GSM (The G is Garnacha), which you will find in Australia and South of France, especially in the Rhone Valley, perhaps the two more internationally celebrated reds are Chateauneuf du Pape and Priorat, where Grenache takes the main role, and sometimes the only role.

Provided yields are restricted, and particularly if vines are relatively old, Garnacha can produce some amazingly rich, spicy reds especially in central to Northern Spain. For example, you will commonly find Garnacha as a blending partner on Rioja wines, and a few top wineries have started experimenting with 100 percent Garnacha from Rioja.

But what makes Garnacha special, and why should you try it?

Firstly, is the versatility of the grape. Garnacha can really produce great

different wines, with huge diversity depending on the vine age, production style and aging. For example, good young Garnachas tend to be full of fruit, sometimes on the sweet side, without added sugar, making them very appealing for people who are starting to drink wine; in addition, if served a couple of degrees cooler than what is usual for red wines, they can become really enjoyable.

At the other end are the complex wines. This complexity can be achieved by aging in the barrel, but especially if you find some wines made from old vines, which although yield little wine, the concentration and complexity is amazing. And this is the second reason, the complexity that you get in usually inexpensive wines.

While many Garnacha vineyards were destroyed in Spain, many others were left to grow on their own. Some wineries have been resuscitating these old vines, sometimes older than 100 years, and making absolutely amazing wines.

Another beauty of well-made Garnacha wines is that due to its relatively high alcohol content and backbone, you can age them for quite a long time and they will keep improving. So why not get a bottle of Spanish Garnacha next time you go out? ■

Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS



Escape Lounge and Rooftop

Escape Lounge and Rooftop, a new stylish, sophisticated lounge in Thao Dien is a reminder of the time when flying was elegant and romantic. You can enjoy the view from their rooftop surrounded by palm trees, bamboo, murals, relaxing music, all in a vacation atmosphere. Escape serves tropical cocktails, spirits, great food, and Saigon's best craft beers.
11 Thao Dien Street, Thao Dien District 2
083 827 9179/escapelounge.vn



Also Try...

Air 360 Sky Lounge - Events

This rooftop bar combines vibrant music, fancy designs and 360 degree view of Saigon's skyline to make it one of the best spots for drinks, lounging and events.
0974 58 77 88
136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1
www.air360skybar.com

Broma Saigon Bar

Famously known for 'not being a bar' Broma is one of Ho Chi Minh City's most popular hangouts with prices ranging from VND30,000 – VND500,000. Broma is a more upscale option for those wishing to escape the cheap drinks in The Pham.
41 Nguyen Hue, D1

Chill Skybar - Dining

A modern lounge, bar and dining space that is considered the first "skybar" concept in Vietnam. It is perched on top of AB Tower, exclusively on the 26th and 27th floor with views of the city's skyline
0938 822 838
Level 26, AB Tower, 76A Le Lai, D1
www.chillsaigon.com

Eon Helibar

This cosmopolitan nightspot is an ideal venue for a vibrant night out with live acoustic performances and DJ's spinning nightly, EON Helibar has a non-smoking section. Rental of the entire restaurant for larger functions is also available.
Level 52, 2 Hai Trieu, Ward Ben Nghe, District 1

Shri Rooftop Bar & Restaurant

Shri Rooftop Bar & Restaurant at Centec Tower overlooks some of Ho Chi Minh's top attractions, including Reunification Palace, Notre Dame Cathedral, Kumho Plaza, and Lotus Building, as well as the Phu My Suspension Bridge over Saigon River. Open all day, you can savour modern European and Vietnamese fare at the indoor dining area before enjoying the rest of the night at the rooftop bar and lounge.
Centec Tower, 72-74 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai

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

Saigon Saigon Bar

This iconic bar is a great place to watch the sun go down over the lights of the city and relax with friends. Live entertainment nightly, including their resident Cuban band, Q'vans from 9pm Wednesday to Monday.
19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
(028) 3823 4999
www.caravellehotel.com
11am till late

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

MICROBREWERIES & CRAFT BEER BARS



Lê La Saigon

Set in a vintage-retro style décor, this open-air oasis on city's liveliest corridor offers coffee in the morning, vietnamese and western cuisine from a renowned local chef in the evening, and live music welcoming guests from around the world nightly. Cafe-Restaurant starts 10AM, everyday live music starts at 9PM.
138 Le Lai street, D1, HCMC.
090 816 61 38
FB: Lelabarpag



Also Try...

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/

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

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, Cafe RuNam is now embarking on the road to becoming a successful franchise. The venue's first floor is particularly enchanting in the late evening.

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1
www.caferuam.com

La Rotonde Saigon

Situated in an authentic French colonial structure, this relaxed cafe 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

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

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

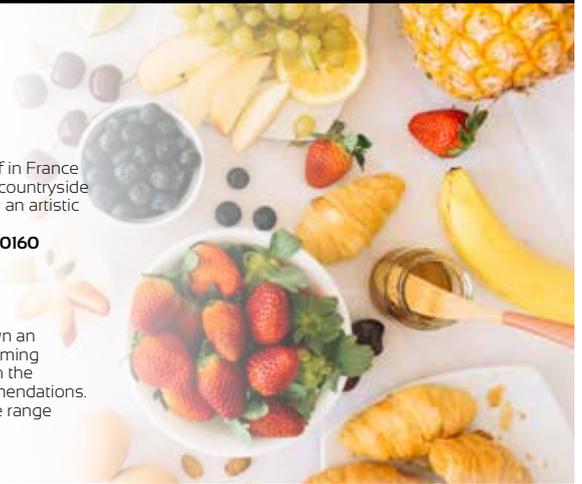
Chef Thierry Drapeau a 2 star Michelin chef in France takes his inspiration from the surrounding countryside and its top-quality ingredients, then adding an artistic flourish to his fine regional cuisine.

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

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



ITALIAN

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

Giao 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

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

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

Opera

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

2 Lam Son Square, D1

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

INTERNATIONAL

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 "Bee" 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

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 offered - 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, funky and eclectic.

1st Floor, 171 Calmette, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City
www.tomatito.vn +84 869 388 864
www.facebook.com/tomatitosaigon

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

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

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

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

Ichiban Sushi

Ichiban Sushi Vietnam serves fine sushi and signature drinks/codetails 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.sushidingaioi.com

Yoshino

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

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

KOREAN

Lee Cho

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

48 Hung Phuoc 2, D7
5410 1086

Galbi Brothers

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

R1-25 Hung Phuoc 4, Pham Van Nghi - Bac, D7
5410 6210

Seoul House

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

33 Mac Thi Bui, D1
3829 4297

THAI

Koh Thai

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

Kumho Link, Hai Ba Trung, D1
028 3823 4423

Lac Thai

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

71/2 Mac Thi Bui St. D1
028 3823 7506

Thai Street

Authentic Thai Food in a fun street-food setting. All the favorites of Thailand - Tom Yum Goong, Red and Green Curries, Som Tum - prepared by their Thai chef.

26 Thao Dien Road, Thao Dien, D2
028 6654 9525

The Racha Room

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

12-14 Mac Thi Bui, D1
090 879 1412

Tuk Tuk Thai Bistro

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

17/11 Le Thanh Ton, D1
028 3521 8513 / 090 688 6180

VIETNAMESE



Ngoc Chau Garden

Serving up fresh and traditional Vietnamese fare since 2015, Ngoc Chau Garden is a centrally located gem in District 1, just a stone's throw from Nguyen Hue. The menu has local favorites, such as Vietnamese Grilled Pork Patties with Citronella and Pork Ribs. The menu and decor reflect Viet Nam's countryside with vintage window shutters and walls made from mud and straw with oil lamps - giving the restaurant a charming, homely atmosphere.

116 Ho Tung Mau, District 1, HCM City
(028) 6687 3838
ngochaugarden116@gmail.com

Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
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

Ben Thanh Streetfood Market

Located in the city center there is a food court filled with dishes from all over the world, cooked by indigenous people, at affordable prices. Open most of the day and night, Ben Thanh Street Food Market offers live music on Tuesdays and Saturday night.

26 - 28 - 30 Thu Khoa Huan, Ben Thanh Dist, W 1, HCMC
0901 26 28 30

Open Time: 09:00 AM - 01:00 AM

FB: BenThanhstreetfoodmarket

Instagram: benthanhstreetfoodmarket

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

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

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

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

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

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My Cambodia, Your Cambodia

Personal essays on the Golden Land

As told by **James Pham, Rachael Mussig, Shauna O Mahony, and Leanna Payne**
Images by **James Pham**

LIVING IN CAMBODIA IS AT times incredibly infuriating yet touchingly endearing. Streets are alternately dusty or muddy, depending on the season, but reliably congested with tuk-tuks, cars, and motorbikes, especially in Phnom Penh, where even short distances take unreasonably long to cover. The heat gets oppressive, even by 8 in the morning, soaking through your clothes.

Despite all this, there's something about Cambodia that works its way under your skin and becomes a part of you. It's the corner moto dup (motorcycle taxi) guy who knocks on your door to make sure you're okay after you've been MIA for a few days with dengue. It's a complete stranger who after a few minutes of chitchat decides to open up about their experience during the Khmer Rouge, silent tears punctuating their story. It's sharing a bag of boiled peanuts with some friendly students along the riverside as

pigeons circle overhead and the odd elephant lumbers down the street.

Also known as Kampuchea, derived from a Sanskrit word meaning "Golden Land", Cambodia entrances, infuriates, and inspires, etching memories both tarnished and glittering.

These are the stories of three women who have made Cambodia their own.



The Dreamer, as told by Rachael Mussig

It never ceases to amaze me just how much was going on in this country while the outside world just moved on. Cambodia in the 1970s was in the grip of terror under the rule of the Khmer Rouge, and the after-effects of this rule are still impacting Cambodia today. What never surprises me, however, is the Cambodian people, the people who showed resilience and strength to overcome atrocities like they had never known. Cambodian people like the founder of Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), Arn Chorn Pond.

Arn was born into a family of artists, but in 1975 was sent to a child labor camp under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. In order to survive, he learned from a Master Artist how to play *khim*, a hammered dulcimer, to entertain the soldiers. Eventually, he escaped to a refugee camp in Thailand and was adopted by an American family and grew up in the US. Later, he returned to his much-loved Cambodia to rebuild the legacy of his family. Over 90 percent of Master Artists lost their lives to the Khmer Rouge and in 1998, Arn, with the support of a small group of dedicated people, created a program to bring back the Cambodian arts, and CLA was born.

Why am I so passionate about this organization? I am lucky enough to be in Cambodia with the Australian Volunteers Program, and from the moment I read about the position, it grabbed me by the heartstrings. Having travelled to Cambodia before and falling in love with the country, my life and career path were destined to come back again someday... and that day has come.

There are so many reasons why I love CLA, and more specifically the cultural enterprise of CLA that I work for, Experience Cambodian Living Arts (ECLA). Experience Cambodian Living Arts lives out its mission each day, to share amazing arts and culture to audiences around the world and to create a sustainable future for the artists that we support. This is done through providing employment opportunities for 30 artists in the incubator program, who perform on stage each night in the dance show, "Earth and Sky". The dream is that with professional training and personal growth, these artists will be able to continue to work in the arts for years to come. The artists also coordinate a daily dance workshop and do private performances and workshops.

The artists bring Cambodian arts to life in their performances every day and the passion and enthusiasm they have for what they do is truly inspiring. There is no single artist on the stage; they are all in this together and that is really clear backstage before a performance. Many of the costumes require the artist to be sewn



into them, crowns need to be placed, hair and make-up needs to be perfect and everyone works together to make this all happen. There is an energy that the artists exude, and it is infectious. All this happens before they even take to the stage.

Each artist truly feels privileged to be a part of the incubator program, and under the direction of Voan Sovay, herself a ballerina in the Royal Ballet of Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge, they know that they are being trained by the best. One of my Cambodian highlights so far was taking part in the *Sampeah Kru* earlier this year, a praying ceremony where the artists give thanks to their teachers, past and present, and remember the souls of those who have taught them dance and morality. To see such a reverent ceremony and the artists so respectful to their teachers really reiterated the importance of preserving Cambodian arts.

Coming to work every day is a joy. Being a part of an organization that is truly achieving amazing things in the arts sector is a joy. Arn has said that his dream is that one day, every child in Cambodia would carry a musical instrument and not a weapon as he did. After 20 years of Cambodian Living Arts, this dream is becoming a reality.

The Artist, as told by Shauna O Mahony

Cruising around the streets of Phnom Penh in a classic remorque, one can easily see Cambodia as a land of smiles. It is just after sunrise and locals in the capital are busying themselves selling coffee, fruit and delicious breakfast dishes, often to a backdrop of stunning street art created by local and international artists.

Up until the 1960s, Phnom Penh was known as the "Pearl of Asia", in part because of the groundbreaking art, music, and film being produced by

the Kingdom. The following decade, Cambodia lost this reputation due to the tragic and brutal Khmer Rouge regime which oversaw the death of 90 percent of Cambodia's artists.

Forty years later, one thing is clear—you can't kill creativity and Phnom Penh is at the epicentre of a cultural renaissance sweeping the nation to reinstate the city to its former glory. After spending five years in Phnom Penh, I've had the privilege of facilitating the booming street art scene by connecting artists with local businesses and projects. This has multiplied the number of murals littered around the city (now close to 100) and most importantly, has fostered an appreciation for urban arts within the local community. We've hosted amazing international urban artists including Seth Globetrotter (France), Alex Face (Thailand), and Mate2 (UK). This era can be considered the Cambodian Art Renaissance, with the past five years seeing more artists, exhibitions, workshops, and festivals than the preceding 40 years.

Independent art galleries are at the forefront of Phnom Penh's art renaissance. For example, since its conception in 2017, the KBach Gallery has worked tirelessly to identify, support, and promote Khmer-inspired artists. Most notable among these are the winners of the KBach Arts Competition 2018: Hour Soben and Nguon Kolkateka. These young Cambodian artists effortlessly fuse traditional Cambodian elements with international urban art to create a unique "Kbach" style. Soben paints stone-like faces inspired by sculptures of Jayavarman VII in Angkor Wat juxtaposed with psychedelic backgrounds and riddled with Khmer motifs. Kolkateka, on the other hand, paints seemingly traditional scenes from Cambodian mythology which upon closer inspection include homages to contemporary international pop culture.

Pearls take seven years to form and mature and the same can be said for Phnom Penh. It will take a few more years for the cultural arts market to



The Factory

mature to its full potential. However, in the meantime, Phnom Penh has enough hidden gems to satiate any art lover.

The Foodie, as told by Leanna Payne

Both working in relief aid, my parents met in Cambodia during the time the Khmer Rouge were trying to retake the country from the newly formed national government. Growing up in Phnom Penh, I've seen this modest 8 square kilometer patch of land transform from where Pol Pot was the nightmarish bogeyman out in the countryside to an international city replete with modern luxuries. You don't witness something like that without an appreciation of the human ability to continuously choose optimism.

My parents often traveled to conflict regions for work, so I was also raised by three Cambodian women in a kitchen. It was from them that I learned that food was how a culture negotiated its relationship with its environment and its people.

As survivors who lost their

rural childhood to the American carpet bombings of the countryside and subsequent Khmer Rouge genocide, food connected my Aunties to their ancestry. Under the Khmer Rouge, rice was seen as the Nationhood which in turn complicated their relationship with food. It wasn't simply sustenance, history, and culture to them, but all those things taken to impossible extremes. Dance with me in that thought for a while.

Much later, as they began raising children of their own under more peaceful conditions that they were able to redefine that relationship to one of love and pass down that intangible heritage.

Growing up, we had limited electricity and lived out of those classic giant orange iceboxes that still are a quintessential part of Cambodia's scenery. Every morning at about sunrise, I'd get taken to the market on a rickety Honda Super Cub and receive a careful education on what to look for in freshness and seasonality. Once home, we learned how to balance flavors, textures, and concepts on a single plate.

I was fortunate to have been raised by people who put their soul into their food. But for many Cambodians, the definition of authentic Khmer cuisine is not so clear. In a country where the majority of people over 40 have experienced considerable trauma, many have not been able to redefine their relationship with food. Understandably so, given genocide, the disconnect during the famine that followed, and the general unavailability of a variety of produce for many years. Kids at school began bringing fast food for lunch when that entered Cambodia's marketplace, and I saw Cambodians mistake Vietnamese cuisine such as *banh xeo* as their own because they couldn't differentiate street food from Khmer.

When I ask Khmer people what their favorite food is, many will say it's *amok*, a uniquely Khmer steamed curry, but when pressed, won't be able to recall the

Boeung Kak





Local noodles

last time they ate it. It's what they feel is the expected answer, and the obvious one because it's on every tourist menu. For a very long time, there's been a lack of self-awareness or thought into what Khmer food is, and if so, only from the perspective of Westerners.

When I started connecting with chefs I realized that there were quite a few of us that grew up with Aunties who dutifully pointed out details in markets and scolded us in kitchens, people who also grew up frustrated and curious about a lack of care in local restaurants, about supermarkets and the internet, about fast food lunches.

"Outside" food during my childhood were strictly limited to the realms of fried noodles and grilled pork over rice, just the surface of what Khmer food really is. Today, though, I see exciting new yet old "discoveries" on my Facebook feed, daily market excursions, or in passing restaurants during my Honda Super Cub rides.

If food were a love language, then Cambodia is finding its voice. Having recovered from famine and war, markets are now bursting with ingredients chefs haven't touched in decades.



BBQ Master - Image by Lost Plate

When the French first arrived, they identified 2,000 varieties of rice unique to this tiny country. Our largest lake, the Tonle Sap, is the largest reservoir of freshwater fish in the world, boasting a volume five times more than all of North America combined. This wealth is finally coming into play.

Cambodia's reemerging food scene also benefits from not being industrialized. While neighboring Thailand only has three farms where palm sugar is still made traditionally, here my BBQ man will berate how rains have affected the complexity of the sugar palm in the south this week. Even salts are still traditionally made by hand, allowing for an indescribable layering of flavors and sensations.

My whole life I've been witnessing this culinary renaissance continue to ebb and swell with no end in sight, and I have never been hungrier. ■



Leanna on tour - Image by Lost Plate



The Pickle Man - Image by Lost Plate



Boeung Keng Kang Market

IF YOU GO...

Experience Cambodian Living Arts puts on the highly entertaining "Earth and Sky" dance show every evening in a theater on the quiet grounds of the National Museum of Cambodia. The one-hour show features dozens of performers in full costumes, accompanied by live traditional music, showcasing elements of Cambodian mythology, ancient traditions, and village life. For an even more intimate experience, take the 90-minute afternoon workshop where a handful of dancers teach you the fascinating meanings behind the hand gestures as well as a series of dances. For more info, including private performances, workshops or family and school trips, visit www.experience.cambodianlivingarts.org

Shauna O Mahony is the owner/director of KBach Gallery (www.kbachgallery.com) as well as managing director of Urban Forage. Founded by food fanatic, Australian Sonya Duck, Urban Forage specializes in street food and street art tours as well fine dining and fine art tours, in partnership with KBach Gallery. Known for its relaxed, casual yet professional approach to tours, Urban Forage understands that most people want to feel submerged in the adventure, rather than on a scripted tour. In addition to Phnom Penh, Urban Forage has now launched in Siem Reap, offering the region's first "Rolling Food Tour" and Bar Cycle. For more, visit www.urbanforage.co and www.barcycle-cambodia.com

Leanna Payne is the resident food nerd and Operations Manager for Lost Plate Food Tours, and is currently on her 23rd year of residency in Phnom Penh a few blocks from her favorite market. When she isn't there, she's in Siem Reap meeting chefs and fishermen for their upcoming Siem Reap Food Tour. Dinners with her and her team of culinary ambassadors start at USD59 per person. Find more details at www.lostplate.com



Urban Oasis

Phnom Penh's Villa Langka continues to enchant

Text by James Pham
Images provided by Villa Langka

DURING MY 10 YEARS OF living in Phnom Penh, Villa Langka was an expat favorite, a little oasis just blocks from the Victory Monument and the closest thing Phnom Penh had to a downtown. We'd slip away for a few quiet hours by the pool as an antidote to the searing Phnom Penh heat, and enjoy a beautifully prepared Western meal that didn't break the bank.

Everything that made Villa Langka one of my favorite hangouts more than a decade ago, makes it a wonderful place to stay now. While the boutique property has received a few upgrades since then, most notably renovated bathrooms, the soundproofing of rooms, and an enlarged restaurant, life at Villa Langka still revolves around its gorgeous cerulean pool, surrounded by lush, mature trees and shrubs for a tropical vibe that's completely unexpected in an urban hotel. The entire courtyard is closed off from the buzz of the city by tall walls, creating a secluded compound feel.

Named after the pagoda just across the street, which in years past served as the city's crematorium, Villa Langka embodies quiet restfulness. Curled up with a summer read, the sound of trickling water in my ears, it feels more like a beachside resort getaway than a capital city but here I am. "Maybe it's the happy ghosts," laughs General Manager Rémi Delchambre, while pointing out the Prime Minister's house nearby, which may explain why this neighborhood



has escaped the construction of tall buildings, which have popped up everywhere else in Phnom Penh.

Comprised of just 48 rooms divided between the original villa with its lovely tiles and vintage furniture and a newer hotel block featuring hand-stenciled accents and a contemporary-casual vibe punctuated by bright tropical colors, Villa Langka strikes an easy balance between style and substance. The two-bed spa

and wellness center even has a French-certified doctor who's able to perform treatments including acupuncture, mesotherapy, and aesthetic medicine, including botox and suture lifts. Outside Villa Langka's walls, the Royal Palace, National Museum, and riverside are just a 20-minute walk away, while the area immediately west of the hotel is an expat favorite with chic boutiques and reasonably-priced Western food joints.

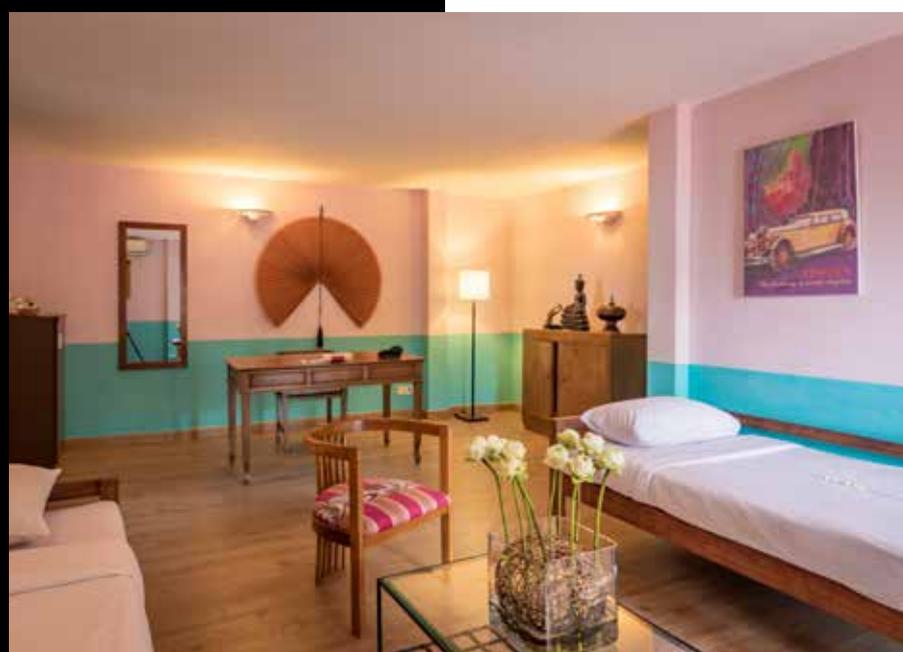


However, you'll likely find a reason to stay in and eat. Situated poolside but separated by a leafy hedge, the covered restaurant is open to breezes yet blissfully shaded from the sun. Light filters through the pretty decorative cutouts in the walls while wicker chairs, stone and wood tables, and natural centerpieces add a spa-like tranquility. The menu is a mix of Asian and Western classics, all beautifully prepared. "Our prices are the same as they were five years ago," says Rémi of the extremely reasonably-priced menu. "We don't want people to feel as if we've trapped them to eat here at the hotel. It must be a pleasure to eat here."

Included in the room rate is an excellent breakfast spread with a few lovely surprises. The hot and cold buffet offers the makings of a full English breakfast, complete with baked beans, creamy mushrooms and eggs cooked to order. Homemade jams and muesli are a nice touch, but the range of breads and pastries including flaky croissants and an assortment of baguettes, all baked on site is truly impressive for a boutique hotel. While noodle soups are the generic staple of every Asian restaurant, Villa Langka's is truly outstanding, an elevated version of Phnom Penh street noodles that I'd happily pay for in a restaurant. The clear consomme-like broth enjoys a natural sweetness from chunks of carrots and turnips, a filling yet light way to start the day. With how early Phnom Penh gets hot, you'll definitely want to err on the side of a light breakfast to make it through the morning.

While Phnom Penh is developing at the speed of light, it's good to know that some great things never change. ■

Villa Langka has seven room categories, ranging from compact Standard Singles that start at USD44, all the way through 55 sqm Suites located in the traditional Khmer villa. For more, visit www.villalangka.com



The Main Street of America

Travel through history on The Mother Road at Route 66

Text by **Maryann Stubbens**



FINDING HISTORIC ROUTE 66

in Albuquerque New Mexico is easy if you know where to look. Route 66 officially ran through Albuquerque from 1926 to 1985, and today Albuquerque is home to the longest urban stretch of Route 66 in the country at 18 miles.

Route 66 played an integral role in Albuquerque's growth and development in the early to mid 1900s and today you can still find Route 66 era businesses, diners, motels, architecture, signs and vibes in New Mexico's largest city. You can still sleep in a classic Route 66 era motor court motel, eat a burger at a Route 66 era diner, and see some of the neon signs that have been burning bright on Central Avenue for decades.

Albuquerque is a great place to "get your kicks" and we'll provide a brief history of Route 66 in Albuquerque, share information on how to find and drive Route 66 in the city, point out all the Route 66 highlights in Albuquerque. We'll share all the best Route 66 attractions, help you find the best neon signs in the city, and give you tips on where to eat and sleep along the route.

Albuquerque was founded as a Spanish colonial outpost in 1706; however, it really started to boom as a modern city in the early to mid 1900s. This was due in a large part to Route 66. The city has long been multicultural, being strongly influenced by the Spanish, Mexicans, Native Americans and other early European and American settlers.

The route that is now Central Avenue has served as a trading route for Native Americans, a wagon trail for early settlers, and later the route for the city's electric streetcar. The advent of the automobile and the establishment of Route 66 would bring a new mix of Americans to New Mexico from all over the country.

The road would bring all kinds through Albuquerque, from migrants escaping the Dust Bowl and ravages of the Great Depression, military servicemen heading west during and after WWII, traveling movie stars, and

Albuquerque



families off to see the Grand Canyon and Disneyland.

Route 66 always ran through Albuquerque. The first alignment of US Route 66 through the city ran north to south along what is today 4th Street from 1926 to 1937. However, the later Route 66 alignment ran through the city east-west from 1937 through 1985, and a number of tourist-focused business (e.g., eateries, hotels, gas stations) sprung up and thrived along what is today Central Avenue.

Many Route 66 travelers decided to put roots in Albuquerque as they headed west looking for a better life, and it was the first major city westbound travelers would have seen in 100 miles after leaving Santa Rosa, NM. In fact, my friend Ethan's grandmother's family came here from Kentucky and decided to stay in Albuquerque seeing it as an oasis after passing through the dusty plains of Oklahoma and Texas during the Dust Bowl era.

However, as shown in Disney Pixar *Cars* film, the heyday of Route

66 didn't last for very long. Just as the automobile and highways, like Route 66 reduced train travel and led to the death of railway hotels, the coming of the interstate system would reduce the traffic along the older and slower highways like Route 66. Many interstates were simply run on top of sections of Route 66, but Albuquerque's Central Avenue was spared due to local opposition.

The I-40 runs parallel to the post-1937 Route 66 and I-25 runs parallel to the pre-1937 route. By the 1960s, many of the businesses surrounding Route 66 were not doing well and it would not be until the 1980s that economic conditions began to improve and interest rose in protecting and revitalizing old Route 66 era businesses and buildings.

Today, some of those Route 66 era businesses survive and you can still eat, drink and sleep in several of the same spots as American travelers in the 1950s. Many businesses have since closed, but you can still see a lot of surviving architecture and signs from the Route 66 era along Central Avenue and 4th Street, some are now abandoned while many others are now inhabited by thriving new businesses.

Albuquerque is an easy place to drive Route 66 as most people simply drive from one end of Central Avenue to the other. However, if you start researching information on finding Route 66 in Albuquerque or looking for maps about historic Route 66 in New Mexico, you may be a bit confused that the information don't always line up. This is because there were two official routes in New Mexico, and both included Albuquerque.

The Highlights

There are a range of places tied to Route 66 in Albuquerque including Route 66 era motels, former gas stations, neon signs, theaters, bridges and diners. There are also more recent Route 66 tributes to be found in Route 66 themed diners, murals, museum exhibits, signs and even a giant Route 66 themed casino.

This is a long urban stretch of historic Route 66 (the longest actually!)



Grand Canyon



Barelas-South Fourth Street Historic District



and there are probably hundreds of Route 66 connections that could be made in Albuquerque. However, I have tried to strike a middle ground for those who want to simply drive along Central Avenue and see a few highlights from their car windows and those who have a more serious interest in the history of Route 66 in Albuquerque.

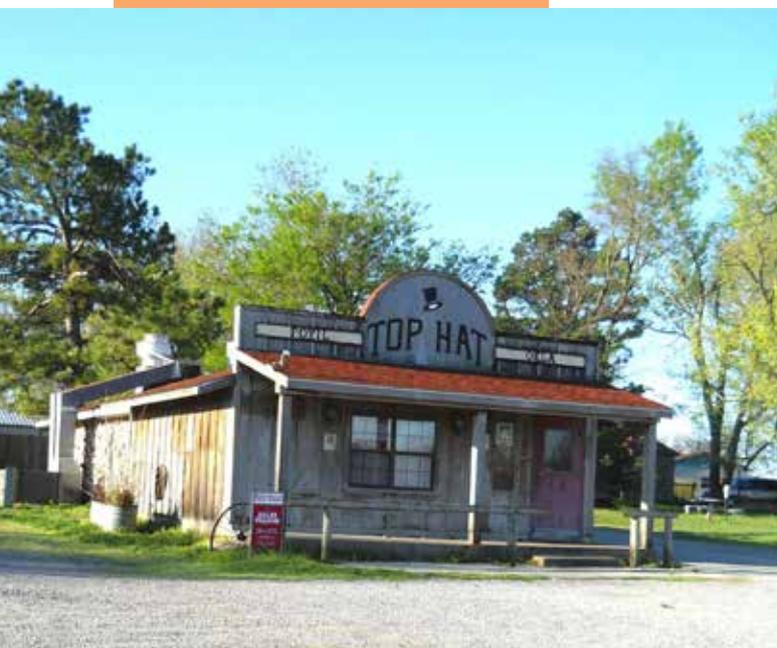
I'll start the pre-1937 highlights (along 4th Street) for those wanting to drive the older route, and then do a separate list for those driving the more popular post-1937 route (along Central Avenue).

Pre-1937

These are listed from north to south, if you are coming from the south, just reverse the list. Part of this area makes up the Barelas-South Fourth Street Historic District, which runs from about Stover Avenue to Bridge Street south of town along Fourth. This district contains a number of Route 66 era buildings list on the



Bridge Street



National Register of Historic Places; however, many are no longer open for business.

El Camino Motel

6851 4th Street NW, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque

The El Camino Motel is a Pueblo Revival motor court motel and is the sole survivor of the many motels that once lined this pre-1937 stretch of Route 66 with vintage neon signs out front.

El Camino Dining Room

6800 4th Street NW, Los Ranchos De Albuquerque

The El Camino Dining Room is a casual locally-run restaurant built by Clyde H. Tyler in 1950. It's a popular place with 1950s decor and serves a variety of New Mexican and American classic dishes. The neon sign says they serve only breakfast and lunch. It is located just across the street from the El Camino Motel although the two businesses have separate owners.

Madonna of the Trail monument

Near intersection of 4th Street and Marble Street

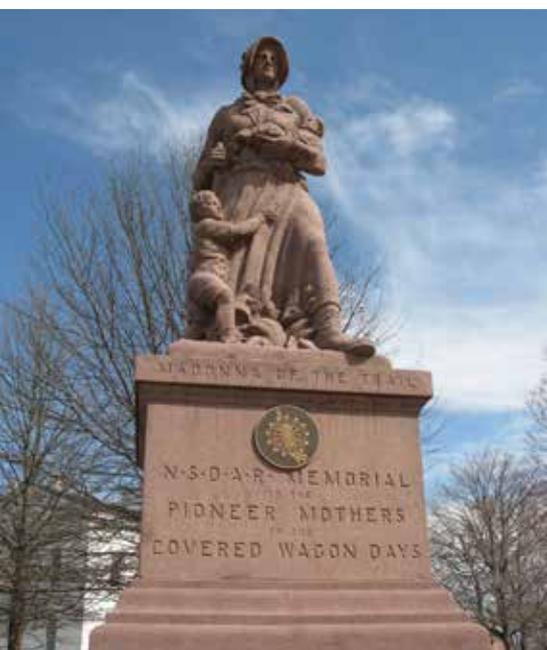
The Madonna of the Trail monument was first placed in Albuquerque in 1928 by The National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution to honor the strength and spirit of the pioneer women who traveled the National Old Trails Road (sections of which became Route 66). The statue shows a stern-faced pioneer woman holding a baby in one arm and a rifle in the other. A young boy clings to her skirt.

It is one of 12 such 18-foot stone statues with one located in each of the 12 states that the National Old Trails Road passed through. We saw a few of the Madonna of the Trail monuments on our Route 66 travels. You can find it located at Fourth Street and Marble Street in Albuquerque, which used to face Route 66 travelers until the alignment changed to Central Avenue in 1937.

El Camino Motel



The El Camino Dining Room



Madonna of the Trail monument

Tingley Beach

1800 Tingley Drive SW (requires short detour)

Located a few blocks off the pre-1937 Route 66, Tingley Beach was once a neighborhood bathing pool and beach, known as Conservancy Beach and later called Tingley Beach in honor of Clyde Tingley, a state governor. In the 1950s the beach was closed to swimming and became used primarily as a fishing spot.

Today the facility offers fishing ponds, paddleboats, nature trails, a gift shop, restaurant and a narrow gauge train ride. The train connects Tingley Beach with the nearby Rio Grande Botanic Garden, Albuquerque Aquarium and Rio Grande Zoo (all four of which are part of the larger ABQ BioPark).

It is free to visit and we primarily came to see the ducks and walk around on sunny days. It is also a convenient place to stop if you are planning to also visit the zoo or aquarium. ■



Tingley Beach

Expatriate Expectations

Often frustrated, disappointed or angry? Learn how shifting your expectations can create more peace and wellbeing

LET'S TALK ABOUT EXPECTATIONS.

You've recently moved to a new country, or perhaps you're an expat already well adjusted to living abroad. Do your expectations influence your day-to-day experience? Do your expectations impact how you respond to the daily difficulties and joys of being human in a new culture? The answer is probably, yes, of course they do.

When people in a new country stare at you because you look unique or different, does that bother you? Did you expect this not to happen?

When you get asked 10 times a day about your job,

or if you're married, how do you respond to that? Were you expecting people to act differently towards you? Where did that expectation come from? Maybe you are a student, and your peers are relating to you much differently than they did back home. Can you adjust your expectations to make room for this new reality?

I think it's important that we examine how our expectations are playing a part in our daily responses. Another way to frame this is looking at our reactions versus our responses. When we react, we are operating from our past conditioning and our expectations that people/conversations/events play out a certain way. When it doesn't happen like that, we can become frustrated, angry or disappointed. Is this response beneficial? Maybe yes, probably no.

On the other side of the coin, when we respond, we are taking a moment to choose how to proceed. The response is usually more thoughtful, skillful and wise. Taking a moment before responding allows us to consider how our expectations might be influencing how we perceive this moment. Thus, one might even decide that not responding is the best response in this situation. We might think about this through the lens of becoming a 'pauser.' Taking that extra moment to pause, soften and relax around this experience, so as to make emotional room for it to exist just as it is, not how you think it should be. In fact, if you notice yourself often using 'should' as you think about things, this is your red flag that your expectations may be ruling your experience.

William James, who some consider the founder of American psychology,

has said that "the art of being wise is the ability to know what should be ignored." This connects neatly to how we might think about expectations, and that is the key- thinking about/being mindful of our own expectations. Here are three simple (but maybe not easy) things we can do to play around with how our expectations might be influencing our experience:

1. Notice any patterns related to people, events or situations that seem to trigger feelings of disappointment, frustration, anger or any other feeling/emotion. This includes "should"-ing. Often just noticing that pattern can be enough. For example: Ohhh, I often get frustrated with the teenage girl on the motorbike who cuts me off in traffic without looking where she's going. She "shouldn't" be driving like that! This is one of mine, but you can think about what triggers you in your life.

2. Reflect on your expectation. For example: I believe that the person/event "should" be other than it actually is. Is that realistic? I grew up in America, where people are taught to drive cautiously, and more often than not, yield to others in the name of safety, and certainly look over our shoulder when driving to check the blind spot. However, in Asia, at least in Vietnam, people don't drive that way. Can I make emotional room for that reality? Can I expect to be cut off when driving, and adjust my driving style accordingly (more defensive driving)?

3. Practice shifting your expectations once you've noticed and reflected on which expectations are impacting your sense of peace and wellbeing. You might take a moment each morning to set the goal to become a 'pauser,' or to respond instead of react when your triggering event inevitably takes place. For example: Ok, when I get cut off today, I'm going to take a deep breath, try to remember that is the norm here



Robert is a licensed psychotherapist (www.herosjourneytherapy.com). Similar to counseling, therapy is for those who are struggling with problematic behaviors, beliefs, feelings or relationship issues. Robert has been to over 30 countries, a highlight being riding a motorbike from the south of Vietnam to the north. He now lives in Saigon and focuses on working with expats in Vietnam.

in Vietnam, and that this teenager wasn't taught how to drive safely and considerately.

In psychology, this is called "response flexibility." We are training ourselves, when appropriate, to think about things and respond to people and situations that are more beneficial for us and others. William James said, "the art of being wise is the ability to know what should be ignored." This can mean having the ability to mentally re-frame a situation, by noticing the "should" thought, and learning how to choose to let that thought go.

One final note, it is not suggested here that we need to learn how to let go of all expectations surrounding events and people that make us uncomfortable. Sometimes the wise and skillful choice is to take appropriate action so that our (or other's) health, wellbeing and safety is the priority. If you feel like you could use help managing the expectations and challenges of being an expat abroad, you can contact me. ■

>> The List Business

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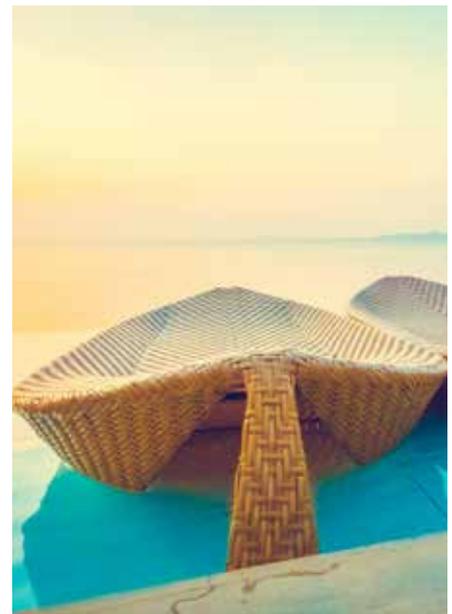
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Kids & Education



Using Dance to Promote SEL Skills

Bringing dance into the classroom with simple exercises can help elementary students develop social and emotional learning skills

By Margot Toppen

LAST SCHOOL YEAR, VETERAN teacher Jennifer Grau decided to introduce dance as part of her effort to build bonds between her special education students and the general education second graders at her school on Chicago's West Side.

Using videos to help her students learn a few simple steps, Grau was able to get them working with both preferred and non-preferred partners. The energy of the music and the students' focus on the steps helped them forget about any differences they felt between themselves and their classmates.

Grau's new strategy worked like a charm. "It was the first time all the kids were engaged and collaborating without any fights or complaints," she said. The lessons helped students explore ideas of diversity and social engagement, and they finished by reflecting on how the activity helped them get along better.

The most successful social and emotional learning (SEL) programs use active forms of learning to teach students, and evidence suggests that dance outpaces other forms of physical activity and other forms of arts learning when it comes to improving SEL outcomes. Despite the evidence, dance is not included or prioritized in the curriculum of the vast majority of schools in the US and around the world.

Two Left Feet? No Problem!

In many schools, the greatest barrier to bringing dance into classrooms is a lack of comfort with dance on the part of classroom teachers. For most students, permission to move—especially with music—offers considerable stress relief and an immediate boost to their sense of optimism and joy. Luckily, there are resources that can take the pressure off teachers to lead the activities.

Dance can be used to foster students' intrapersonal and interpersonal SEL skills, as well as skills like responsible decision-making. ■





Intrapersonal SEL Skills

Self-awareness and self-management are fundamentally rooted in the body, making dance an excellent tool for building such competencies as emotional awareness, accurate self-perception, and impulse control.

Using dance to identify emotions: Dance and movement can be a great way for students to explore how emotions are shown and felt in their bodies. Give your student this prompt: “*Emotion* is a word that describes the feelings you have. How does your face show emotion? How do other parts of your body show emotion?” Next, invite students to follow along to the dance or movement video you’ve selected. After the students perform the dance together, ask them to choose a favorite move from the dance and practice that move while showing an emotion they select. They can do this in pairs—each student should guess what emotion their partner is trying to convey.

Conclude the activity by prompting students to reflect on what their body feels like when they are showing the emotion they select. By thinking about what an emotion feels and looks like in their body, they become more self-aware and attuned to their emotions.

Interpersonal SEL Skills

Many dance and movement activities promote teamwork and cooperation and provide rich opportunities for developing relationship skills and social awareness.

Using dance for communication:

In this activity, students consider how they communicate both verbally and nonverbally, and they practice listening and responding to input from others.

To start, give students this prompt: “When we communicate, we use words and body language to let other people know our thoughts and feelings. How can you communicate with words? How can you communicate with body language?” Next, as in the activity above, invite the whole class to follow along to the dance or movement video you’ve selected.

Finally, have students practice giving each other feedback with active listening skills. Have them try the dance or movement while facing a partner, and think about how they can be friendly with their partner as they work together. After trying some steps together, prompt them to talk to each other about how it went—was it easy? hard? fun? silly? While they’re listening to their partner’s feedback, they should make eye contact and smile in encouragement. Prompt them to end the activity by thanking each other and exchanging a handshake or high five.

Responsible Decision-Making

Dance and movement can be a wonderful way for students to work on problem-solving and to develop the ability to evaluate and reflect, which in turn can affect their thinking on things like their responsibility to help make the world a better place.

Using dance to promote good

citizenship: In this activity, students explore ways to make healthy choices and then identify a personal “superpower” that can help make the world better. Give your students this prompt: “It’s important to act in ways that are healthy and positive for ourselves and others. How can you be safe and speak up for others?”

Invite students to follow along to the dance or movement video you’ve selected. Once they’ve got the moves down, have them identify a superpower they could use to make the world better and embody the superpower by adding it to the movement activity. They should think of a pose that will show the superpower, and then discuss their ideas.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations

When choosing resources for dance or movement-based activities, keep in mind that dance can be useful in fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect: By studying dance forms that originate in other parts of the world, students gain understanding of the history, identities, and values of others.

Dance can also help students overcome cultural and linguistic obstacles because of its focus on nonverbal communication. For English language learners, in particular, dance provides the opportunity to express themselves through the body and has been shown to bolster their self-esteem.



Live, Liver, Life

A doctor's lifetime dedication to understanding and treating liver diseases

I'VE OFTEN WONDERED WHAT led me to specialize in diseases of the liver. The fact is that in my early days of practicing medicine, the calling was even clearer than it is now, and it came from a sense of compassion for people who have no hope.

Patients who have no hope deal pointlessly with their suffering, but that doesn't mean they're alone in their pain. It extends to their family and also the medical staff who attend them, because every day is the same—heavy with sadness in the knowledge that there is no possibility of recovery. The enthusiasm among doctors for such patients is often very low, because there is nothing that can be done for them.

For some reason—who knows why—I have always felt comfortable with this situation. I have always felt ready to devote my soul, my energy, my attention, and my silence to this kind of patient.

This led me to my area of medical interest. It began with a group of patients who suffer from a genetic condition known as *familial amyloidotic polyneuropathy*—a progressive hereditary disease in which many of the nerves become useless. At the age of 20-something, sufferers may experience

some sexual impairment. By their late 20s, they start having problems with walking. At 30-something, they feel tremors in their hands. By 45, they would tell me “I'm alive, but it's like I'm dead already. I can't feel my hands, I can't move anything.” They become paralyzed; sometimes they don't even have a sense of taste. Their gastrointestinal system doesn't work, and they suffer from constant diarrhea and ulcers.

I followed these patients, and I made a family tree. I spoke with them a lot. I told them that what was making them suffer was not some kind of punishment from God; it's a genetic problem. But any time you find this kind of family, it's always the case that no one in the community wants to touch them or to have any relationship with them, because they know that if they get married to one of them, their kids are going to have a problem. They may seem strong and healthy, but soon enough they'll be bedridden.

At the time, I was a member of a group of liver specialists that included elite physicians. We did a lot of research on this disease, including those patients in the terminal phase—and I asked how it was possible that there could be no

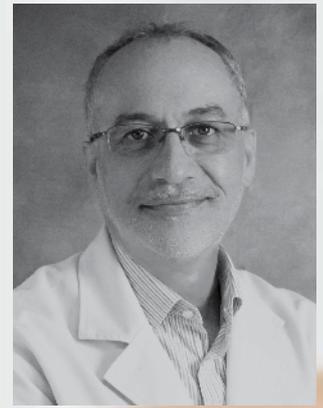
hope for them. I was told, “Pedro, there is hope—but it's not available in Argentina. There is no chance of performing a liver transplant here.”

I'd just graduated at that time and was just a beginner, but I started to study more about physiology, about how the liver works, how to help patients and to prevent liver disease. There are plenty of little details you need to take care of with the diet and the medicine that you use to balance such disorders. But in the end, the patient still dies. The treatments are just to extend life, and the quality of life.

I saw patients with liver disease constantly. This was my training—I started with the most difficult patients, and only later on did I learn how to manage the easy cases. This is not how it's usually done, but it meant that my residency was very effective in acquiring deep knowledge about the liver.

As I said, I was in a group of elite specialists. I started to become addicted to collecting information from my colleagues and cross-checking the data. I taught myself English, Excel, and PowerPoint. I worked those hours for free, doing statistics and gathering resources for scientific papers.

Then I started to do research about



Argentinian native **Dr. Pedro L. Trigo** received his MD with honors at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and completed further programs at Pittsburgh University's liver transplant unit.

liver transplantation—for autoimmune disease, for alcoholic disease, for liver transplantation, for something called *primary biliary cirrhosis*. I wanted to know what happens with these diseases when you receive more or fewer transfusions. What happens with this disease in the first five years, or in the second five years.

Over time, I became a kind of leader in liver transplantation, especially in cases of *fulminant hepatic failure*. This is one of the worst liver diseases ever. Today you're chatting with me, tomorrow you start vomiting a little. The day after, you're shaking, and the day after that, you're in a coma. The following day you're on the waiting list for a transplant, without which you're dead within three days.

At the peak of my career, I became an expert in this field. I was about 33, and I remember saying "now I can retire". It was like I had already touched the sky with my hands. But it was difficult, and of course my wife realized that the only time she could get my full attention was while I was driving—because if I wasn't driving, I was studying or working, or sleeping. That's eventually why I came to

Vietnam, because in the end, I had touched the sky on one side, but on the other side—I had no time with my wife and no time with my kids. And in this more private place, I finally learnt how to manage the easy cases too. In medicine, that is also important.

Science is improving so quickly. Now I'm older, and I have witnessed how much it has improved. Most of the treatments that I gave just ten years ago would be considered a crime if I prescribed them today. At that time, I saw more of these kinds of patients who suffered from chronic liver disease, and the treatment was like torture. I believe that the only reason the patients didn't give up on their treatment was because I gave them my full support. Without this treatment, they would end up facing a liver transplantation, or death.

Now in some cases, this problem doesn't exist anymore. Take one tablet per day for three months, and you're cured with no side effects.

My specialty, hepatology, is facing many changes recently because many of the diseases that resulted in liver transplantation are much scarcer than they once were because of the new medications. Of course, there are still

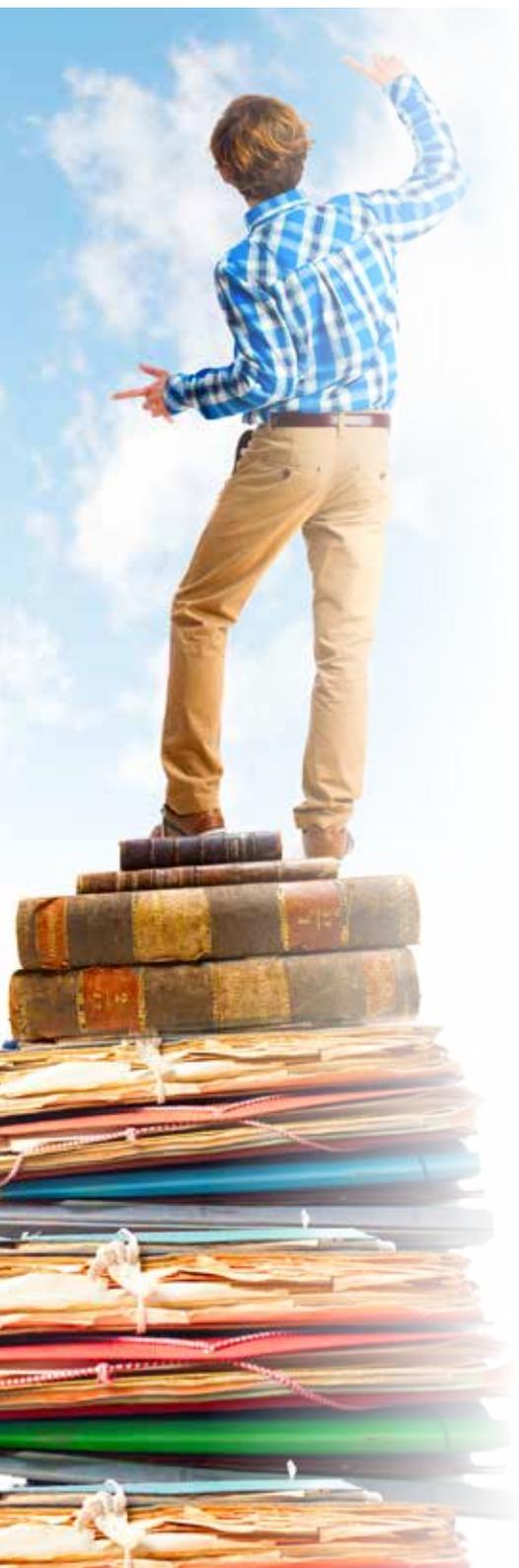
other diseases that can cause enough damage to make a liver transplantation necessary, such as fatty liver disease—which has become a silent killer and is affecting more and more people all around the world. That's why hepatology is still a very important field of medicine.

When you enjoy your job, you can do the same thing 100 times a day and you enjoy it each time. Why do my patients choose one doctor and not another when the treatment is the same? It's clearly the *approach*. When you become old and well-trained, technically, consultations only need to last five minutes. But I enjoy knowing about who is in front of me. What is their job, who are their family. What do they care about?

I like this kind of rapport, and I miss the time when I was able to share this part of the doctor-patient relationship with those whom I treated in Argentina, even those who then had no hope. The consultations would be very brief, then we would chat about life, about sports. When your patients are chronic patients, you see them every two or three months for the rest of their lives, and sometimes their lives are quite short. Even still, you can offer support, understanding, and friendship. ■

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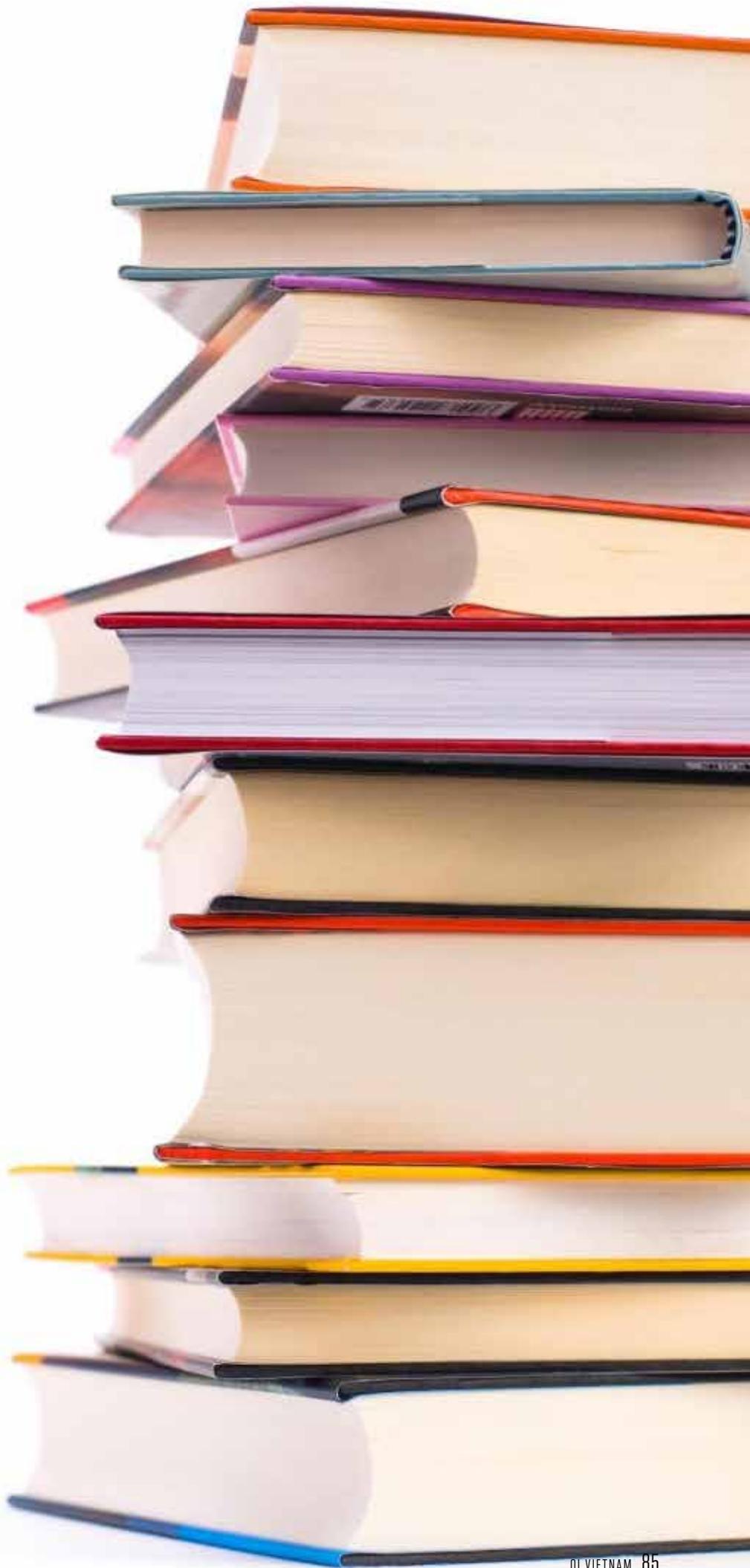
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