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VIETNAM

8—2016

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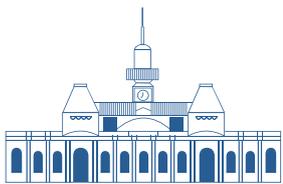
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# Datebook

What's on this month...

## AUGUST 6

**What:** The 4th Danang International Marathon

**Where:** Danang

**About:** A four distances—full marathon, half marathon, 10km and 5km—fun run for charity. The marathon is the first professional marathon in Vietnam certified by IAAF - AIMS (International Association of Athletics Federations and Association of International Marathons and Distance Races).

**Contact:** Email [info@pulse.vn](mailto:info@pulse.vn) for more info

## AUGUST 9

**What:** The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach

**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000 and up

**About:** The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach will be a night of classical music masters. The concert will bring together Vietnamese classical virtuosos from HBSO, VNSO and VNAM, including famed violinist Mer. A. Bui Cong Duy, People's Artist Tran Thi Mo, Mer. A. Nguyen Tan Anh, Mer. A. Le Hoang Lan, and many others. The program will feature the International Chamber Players from the US. The program is a selection of Bach's masterpieces, including Brandenburg Concertos No. 3 and 4, Concerto for 2 Violins in D minor, Concerto for 2 Pianos in C Minor and Concerto for 2 Pianos in C Major.

**Contact:** Visit [hbso.org.vn](http://hbso.org.vn) for more info



## AUGUST 11

**What:** On Wings of Song

**Where:** HCMC Conservatory of Music (112 Nguyen Du, D1); 8pm-10pm; VND250,000 and up

**About:** *On Wings of Song* features a program that will take the audience through music from the Baroque period to the Romantics and 20th century. The concert borrows its title from a poem by German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine: *On Wings of Song, Sweetheart, I carry you away, Away to the fields of the Ganges, Where I know the most beautiful place.*

The annual Saigon Chamber Music event, a not-for-profit collaboration between Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory and Transposition Programme Norway, provides training, international exposure and in-depth understanding of music to inspire young musicians to set and achieve higher goals in their careers.

**Contact:** Visit Facebook: [SaigonChamberMusic](https://www.facebook.com/SaigonChamberMusic) for more info

## AUGUST 17

**What:** 50th Anniversary Long Tan Concert

**Where:** Maxim's (36 Nguyen Thai Hoc, Vung Tau); 6pm; USD80

**About:** On August 18, 2016 it will be 50 years since the Battle of Long Tan and 50 years since the Australians and New Zealanders entered Phuc Tuy Province. This resulted in seven years of continual operations in the province until the withdrawal in 1972.

The package includes a banquet, drinks and the concert commencing at 7:30pm. Special guests at the concert will include Sister Trish Franklin, Patron, Founder and former CEO of Loreto Vietnam Australia Program, and Ha My, CEO of Loreto Vietnam. All funds raised from the concert will go to Loreto Kids Charity.

**Contact:** Email [greggdickson110@hotmail.com](mailto:greggdickson110@hotmail.com) for more info

## AUGUST 18

**What:** Dance Away Time | Young Virtuosi Vol. 3

**Where:** HCMC Conservatory of Music (112 Nguyen Du, D1); 7pm-10pm; VND100,000 and up

**About:** Thirty-two young and talented musicians from cities around Southeast Asia (including Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Bangkok and Yangon) come together for an intensive week at Saigon Chamber Music 2016, where they will train with internationally-acclaimed artists and play in one of the most energy bursting concerts of the season. Since the inaugural edition in 2014, the concert has always been a much anticipated event that leaves the audience with an inspiring and emotional musical experience.

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## AUGUST 19

**What:** Ballet in Ravel's Bolero

**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000 and up

**About:** The HBSO's Ballet in Ravel's Bolero will present two famous and frequently performed ballets: choreographer Maurice Béjart's Bolero with music by Maurice Ravel, and choreographer George Balanchine's Serenade with music by Piotr Tchaikovsky. Both works will be staged by young French choreographer Chloe Glemot.

The program will also present new ballet Pas de Six by choreographer Julien Guérin, who will directly work with HBSO ballet dancers. Monte Carlo's Julien Guérin has worked with many internationally ballet groups, including the English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet, the Ballets de Monte-Carlo and the Opéra National de Bordeaux.

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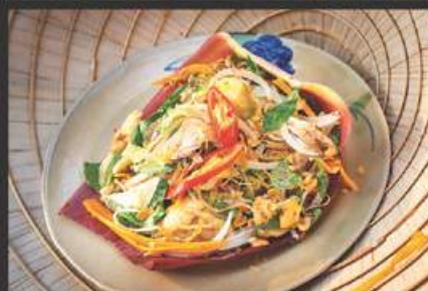
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## AUGUST 20

**What:** Geeky Weekend

**Where:** The Ventures Co-Working Space (Level 3, 9 Nguyen Trai, D1); 9am-6pm

**About:** *Geeky Weekend* is a weekend open space for tech people. Aside from the working space, they also have activities such as training, meet-up, seminars and hackathons.

**Contact:** Email [tuan@geekyweekend.com](mailto:tuan@geekyweekend.com) for more info

## AUGUST 29-SEPTEMBER 1

**What:** Vietnam Consumer Digital World Expo

**Where:** SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7); 9am-5pm

**About:** *Vietnam Consumer Digital World Expo* focuses on telecommunication, electronics and computers. Visitors will get a chance to get hands-on experience with telecommunications equipment, digital equipment, network devices, office and home equipment, entertainment equipment and Green IT.

**Contact:** Visit [www.secc.com.vn](http://www.secc.com.vn) for more info



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## AUGUST 29

**What:** Bui Cong Duy & Trio Fugu

**Where:** Saigon Opera House (7 Lam Son Square, D1); 8pm; VND200,000 and up

**About:** Classical music lovers will have a chance to meet Trio Fugu's three talented artists Ming Tsu (piano), Lorenz Gamma (violin) and Joon Sung Jun (cello) in *Bui Cong Duy & Trio Fugu*. The three artists, individually and together, have performed in many prestigious concert halls in the US and Europe to great acclaims. The trio will perform L.v. Beethoven's Triple Concerto for violin, cello and piano with the HBSO Symphony Orchestra. Mer. A. Bui Cong Duy, winner of the 1997 international Tchaikovsky competition, will also join the program, performing J.S. Bach's Concerto for 2 violins with Lorenz Gamma. The concert will be led by Maestro Mer. A. Tran Vuong Thach.

**Contact:** Visit [hbso.org.vn](http://hbso.org.vn) for more info



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# The Bulletin

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...

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## LATIN RHYTHMS BACK AT CARAVELLE SAIGON

Saigon Saigon Bar on the rooftop of Caravelle Saigon (19 Lam Son Square, D1) is welcoming a new star attraction this month, as five-member band Living Cuba prepares to bring a fresh new sizzle and excitement to the storied rooftop watering hole. All hailing from Cuba and having studied music there, five members of Living Cuba have taken their show on the road to venues around the world to such stops as Jamaica, Angola, Venezuela, South Korea, and have made a reputation for themselves here in Southeast Asia playing in Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia and now Vietnam. The band will get the party going 9pm till late every evening from Tuesday to Sunday.

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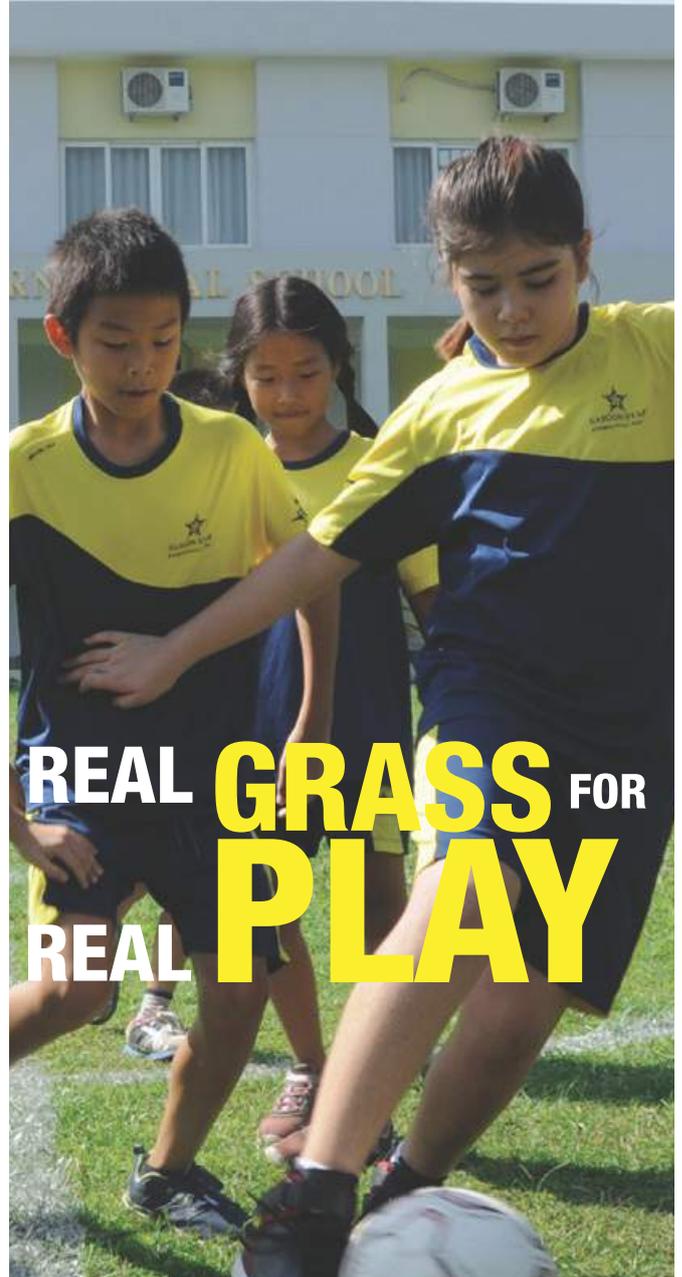
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# TROI OI!

## The country in numbers



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per liter is now the reduced price of gasoline grade 92-RON. Last month, Vietnam reduced fuel prices by around four percent as the global downtrend continued. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Industry and

Trade are tasked with reviewing pump prices for adjustment every 15 days. The bio-fuel grade E5's price has been cut by VND604 per liter to VND14,843. Diesel and kerosene have stayed unchanged, retailing at VND12,298 and VND10,667 per liter. In Singapore, Vietnam's major import source, 92-RON dropped around 9.8 percent to USD50.14 per barrel in the past 15 days, according to the ministries. Vietnam has made seven cuts and five hikes to retail fuel prices this year.



USD 44,500

fine imposed on a man in Hanoi for manipulating stock prices. According to the securities watchdog, besides his two own stock accounts, Mr. Dung used 24 accounts belonging to many other people to simulate demand

for Tai Nguyen JSC's shares by buying a large quantity between June 9 and July 24 last year. Tai Nguyen JSC, headquartered in Hanoi, is engaged in real estate and the mining and processing of minerals. The firm's stocks are now traded at around VND28,700, up from VND2,000 in early 2015.



USD 98,000

crown was revealed last month for the 2016 Miss Vietnam contest. The winner of this year's Miss Vietnam beauty pageant will be honored with the handcrafted pearl-and-sapphire crown. According to

the organizers, this year's crown has been handcrafted by 40 artisans from 63 white pearls and 3,260 sapphires.

Established in 1988, Miss Vietnam is the longest-standing beauty pageant in the country and is held every two years to select the most worthy contestants to represent Vietnam in international beauty contests. This year, an additional title of Miss Compassion will be given to the contestant with the most active participation in charitable projects across the country.



9

foreign funds have acquired more than 4.4 million shares, or a combined stake of around three percent, in one of Vietnam's biggest mobile retailers—The Gioi Di Dong (Mobile World Group). The funds, including the US's Chambers Street Global Fund and Thailand's Thanachart Securities Pcl, bought the shares from British Virgin Islands-incorporated CDH Electric Bee Limited. The deal was reportedly worth around VND334 billion in total. Electric Bee, which bought nearly 20 percent of the company in 2013, now owns a stake of 5.27 percent, following several sales over the years. Reports by market research firms and The Gioi Di Dong suggested the company now controls around 30 percent of Vietnam's mobile retail market with 646 stores around the country.

3G

subscriptions soar to 38 million. The number of 3G subscribers hit 38 million at the end of last month, or 41.3 percent of the population, according to data released by the Ministry of Information and Communications. It represented a 30.5 percent increase year-on-year from 29.1 million in June 2015. The ministry is likely to license local operators to fully launch high-speed 4G services sometime in September-October this year, depending on the results of their trials.



123-YEAR-OLD

**Nguyen Thi Tru** died of natural causes last month. Tru was born into a farming family in Long An

Province. She migrated to neighboring Saigon after marriage and settled down in Binh Chanh District on the outskirts. She was confirmed by the World Records Association as the oldest woman in April last year. Her secret, she once said, was to eat healthily, love people, and be helpful and easygoing. Tru had 11 children, nine of them have died, and the other two are now both over 80 years old. She is survived by 20 grandchildren and 50 great grandchildren.



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# MEET MISS FRIENDLY

---

“Asia’s Sexiest Female Vegetarian”  
on Buddhism, beauty and  
her Cambodian heritage

*Text by* **MICHAEL ARNOLD**  
*Image by* **LE THIEN VIEN**

I first met Truong Thi May at the Vietnam International Fashion Week in 2015, and she made an impression on me that I haven’t been able to forget. It was all big names on the catwalk that night; the celebrities and VVIPs were out in attendance, and there were plenty of obligatory flashing bright lights and thumping soundtracks as the beauties and the wannabes strode out in their swanky designer garments. May was one of the headliners; modeling a billion VND’s worth of diamonds for jewelry design group PNJ—which fit her like a Cinderella slipper—she had no reason to be anything but confident.

Yet May stood bowed in prayer; the baubles dangling from her shoulders could just as easily have been a ring of beads and the hood of a saffron robe. Her behavior backstage was entirely different from that of any of the other models, who were all fussing over their hair and making last-minute adjustments to their costumes. Like it or not, there's a certain vanity and self-involvement that all such events are soaked in; a false glamor that can undermine the genuine celebration of art and beauty that makes the fashion world so compelling. There's none of that falsehood in May, and there never has been—as a devout Buddhist of Khmer nationality, her worldly career in the modeling industry has never been as important to her as the spiritual truths of her faith.

“Only inner beauty is permanent,” quips Truong Thi May, something rarely heard on the lips of a national beauty icon, pageant winner, golden-kite awarded actress, or successful model—all of which are true of May. Don't imagine that this is some kind of celebrity fad, either: May's Buddhism is both sincere and well-informed, rooted in devoteism since childhood. “I'm lucky that my mom took me to the temples, and to have been a vegetarian, since I was very young,” she says, “to receive the teachings and the *Tam Lac* (“happy mind”) Dharma by our Master. All of that has helped me to keep my life balanced—as the Buddha taught in Dhammapada, ‘the mind leads, the mind controls, the mind creates.’ Applying the Buddha's teachings in my life, I'm very conscious of what should be, and what should not be. Religion is our spiritual support, and it gives us a moral foundation. I believe that when your moral foundation is good and your ethics and morals are cultivated on a daily basis, you're able to keep balance in whatever circumstances. It's like the lotus, which doesn't smell like mud although it stands in the mud.”

How a disciple of the Buddha became a noted fashion model is probably something that needs to be explained. Most people understand Buddhism as teaching that a focus on beauty is a distraction brought about by the illusory nature of the physical world, and that to escape from the cycle of rebirth, one must cast beauty aside—this is partly why Buddhist nuns tonsure their heads, to rid themselves of the distraction of the beauty of their own hair. May is quick to disabuse me of this amateurish assumption—the teachings, as she explains, are far more subtle than that.

“Buddhism does not teach that beauty causes a neglect of the spirit,” she instructs patiently, “but instead, that neglect is the effect of one's karma. Buddhism teaches us to reflect on our



Image by Xuan Anh

mind, and it teaches us that ‘a pure mind and a moral life are the ultimate beauty.’ So we need to learn how to live beautifully—both physically and mentally—since physical beauty is impermanent, and is dominated by the law of impermanence: birth, aging, sickness and death.”

## Good Girl

Truong Thi May was born in Phnom Penh, the eldest of five children who actually led a relatively affluent life in Cambodia, having a father who was particularly skilled in business. The family were based in a beautiful house with a large property and lovely garden, and life was very comfortable until May's father passed away when she was just nine. He'd pampered his wife and children, something that worked to their disadvantage when they were left with no ability to run the family business without him; they were soon bankrupted and migrated to live with relatives in Vietnamese An Giang.

“I was the good girl, the lovely one,” remembers May. “At a very young age, I could help my mother with her errands, and looked after my great-grandmother, feeding her, changing her and bathing her when Mom was away from home. You would never recognize me as a little girl, I was an ugly child, thin and dark-skinned, and it wasn't until I won 1st runner-up in Miss Vietnam Photogenic that I dared to believe the compliments I was starting to get. Maybe I was blessed by my great-grandma; that was in 2006, and by 2007 I had gone on to once again place as 1st runner-up in the competition for Vietnamese Ethnic Minorities.”

By 2013, May was chosen to represent Vietnam in the Miss World competition, by which time she'd

become a household name for somehow manifesting a definite purity while standing abreast of an industry that many Vietnamese people regard with suspicion. Perhaps part of what grounds Truong Thi May is her very conspicuous relationship with her mother, who acts as her manager and mentor in every way—as a constant presence in May's career from tailoring outfits to negotiating film contracts, she has kept May focused on the fundamentals. While at Miss Universe, May had what has to be the most innocuous nickname in the history of the competition: “Miss Friendly.” Even now, her good-girl public image continues to give her a platform to represent her beliefs in public, as well as providing a publicity platform for her extensive charity work—she has campaigned for animals, the environment, and for child heart surgery funding, as well as stood as an ambassador against human trafficking, HIV and LGBT discrimination. In 2014, PETA named her “Asia's Sexiest Female Vegetarian.”

“I have found beauty in honesty and sincerity in accordance with the law of nature, summed up in the word *fate*,” she says of the connection between her life as a model and as a person of faith. “Everything comes to me as fate, I embrace it naturally, and everything I do, I do it wholeheartedly. The beauty of the soul is permanent. The reason I follow a vegetarian diet is that I hope to cultivate a compassion and love toward animals. All of us love to live; the lower animals do too. Moreover, being a vegetarian gives me good health and a good shape with nice skin. I understand that when the soul is beautiful and honest, the face will be naturally bright. Just as our ancestors said, ‘the mind is reflected in the appearance.’” ■



# GO ROUND AND ROUND

From dodging erratic motorcyclists to transporting live animals, the life of a bus driver is never boring

TEXT BY **JOHN DAVIS**

IMAGE BY **NGOC TRAN**



**THE JOB OF A BUS DRIVER IN SAIGON** has long been one of the most stressful and hazardous gigs in town. If staying on schedule or fighting through traffic or remaining in a seated position for hours doesn't get you, then fending off a loudmouth, drunken passenger will.

Working as a bus driver for 10 years, 45-year-old Huy gives us a rundown of his day.

### My Morning

My morning routine varies depending on which shift I'm on. If I'm on the early shift I get up just after 3:30am, take a shower, grab a quick *banh mi* and am on my motorbike at 3:45am. I'm at the 23/9 Park depot by 4am. My first 15 minutes is spent checking the bus—inside and

‘NO TWO DAYS ARE THE SAME AND THAT’S WHAT I LIKE MOST ABOUT THIS JOB—THAT AND THE PEOPLE YOU MEET.’

out—to make sure it's roadworthy and generally clean and tidy. Then I get my schedule for the day; I have to stick to it no matter what. The schedule sets out the route for me and also gives me the timetable of when and where I need to be at any time during the day.

I leave at 4:30am for *Ben Xe Mien Tay* (the final stop) then more or less just turn right round, departing *Ben Xe Mien Tay* at 6:35am and arriving back at 23/9 Park just after 8:30am. The first morning runs are usually the shift workers going to work and some school kids. I tell folks, "If you like people and driving then you'll make it as a bus driver!" and it's true. On any given day I'll have about 200 to 250 people through my bus. Most will be really good folks, but you'll also get the odd grump and sometimes even two on the same bus, then life can get interesting!

I can have up to 60 people on a busy run, sometimes they'll all be speaking so loudly that I can't hear the passengers requesting their stops. Some will be have suitcases, boxes and baby strollers, while the old ladies will be carrying bags and bags of fruits and vegetables on their way to the market, and once I even saw a young guy with a cage full of baby birds!

I've got a break until 10am and as I live close to the depot I go home for a while. When I'm on the early shift I finish at 2pm which leaves my afternoon and evening clear.

### My Afternoon

Lunchtime depends on what time I start. My route, which passes through District 1, 4 and 7 complements the more direct service route. No two days are the same and that's what I like most about this job—that and the people you meet. I've been a driver for 10 years, most of them

on this route, so you really get to know a lot of the regulars and their routines.

There have been a lot of changes over the years. Traffic is horrendous now compared to when I started—they were talking about the bypass then and we still don't have it. Peak time traveling adds almost an extra hour to the journey and if we're stuck in traffic we have to call the operator to let them know that we're going to miss our scheduled stops.

Traffic in Saigon can get really bad and driving at an average speed of 5-10 km/hour is very depressing. But luckily we do not have a target of how much money we have to make from the passengers every day, unlike other bus operators. So that helps my stress level.

If the traffic is at a standstill, I just wait. This job requires a lot of patience. If I wasn't patient, I would go crazy!

When I've finished working the early shift I try to make the most of my afternoons. I have 3 grandchildren so I spend time with some of them or I might go for a walk or go have coffee with my friends.

### My Evening

If I'm on the late shift I start at 3:30pm and am finished by 8pm. Last thing at night you check the bus—similar to what you do first thing in the morning—looking for any damage and also checking for lost property: gloves, hats and garbage are the most common things people leave behind.

I don't mind working in the evening because it gives me flexibility during the day. This is a great job for anyone who likes driving, and there's more to it and a lot more skill involved than I think people realize. Driving a bus is all about precision and forward planning, not just driving from A to B. ■

# #NOFILTER

Many children in Vietnam live along rivers and waterways that are often extremely polluted. Daily exposure to contaminated water causes serious health effects, although these are not always directly visible. In desperate need for a strong campaign, Unicef has decided to call on the most vulnerable victims—children—to help shock people into awareness of their situation. To this end, Happiness Saigon and Unicef have joined creative forces to launch their first campaign together called #NOFILTER.

Photographer Teo Chai Guan took portraits of Vietnamese children living along polluted rivers, developing the pictures in the traditional way in a darkroom—using polluted water from the river in their own neighborhoods. These are the results.

If impure water does this to a picture, imagine what it does to the health and wellbeing of a child. Clean water matters.

## #nofilter

Người mẫu:	Nhiếp ảnh:	Sống:
Bao Xuyen	Tro Chai Guan	Sống Saigon, Vietnam

Sự khác biệt duy nhất giữa bức ảnh này và một bức ảnh thông thường chính là nguồn nước dùng để tráng rửa. Bên đó xin hãy đừng giả ra trên hạn hạn nặng nề nhất ở Việt Nam trong 100 năm qua. Thiếu nước khiến hàng nghìn trẻ em như Bao có nguy cơ mắc phải nhiều căn bệnh do dùng nước bẩn hoặc nước miễn. Nếu nước bẩn đã làm cho hai bức ảnh thế này, bạn hãy thử nghĩ tác động của nó đến con em chúng ta.

**Nước sạch là nguồn sống.**  
Tìm hiểu thêm những ảnh hưởng của biến đổi khí hậu tại UNICEF.ORG

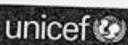


## #nofilter

Người mẫu:	Nhiếp ảnh:	Sống:
Duc Hào	Tro Chai Guan	Sống Ngai Bay, Vietnam

Sự khác biệt duy nhất giữa bức ảnh này và một bức ảnh thông thường chính là nguồn nước dùng để tráng rửa. Bên đó xin hãy đừng giả ra trên hạn hạn nặng nề nhất ở Việt Nam trong 100 năm qua. Thiếu nước khiến hàng nghìn trẻ em như Duc có nguy cơ mắc phải nhiều căn bệnh do dùng nước bẩn hoặc nước miễn. Nếu nước bẩn đã làm cho hai bức ảnh thế này, bạn hãy thử nghĩ tác động của nó đến con em chúng ta.

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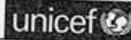


## #nofilter

Người mẫu:	Nhập ảnh:	Sống:
Du Thu	Tèo Chai Guan	Sông Bến Nghé, Vietnam

Sự khác biệt duy nhất giữa bức ảnh này và một bức ảnh thông thường chính là nguồn nước dùng để trang trí. Bên dù khi nào đang gây ra hiện tượng hạn hán nặng nề nhất ở Việt Nam trong 100 năm qua. Thiếu nước khiến hàng nghìn trẻ em như Du có nguy cơ mắc phải nhiều căn bệnh do dùng nước bẩn hoặc nước mặn. Nếu nước bẩn đã làm hư hại bức ảnh thế này, bạn hãy thử nghĩ tác động của nó đến con em chúng ta.

**Nước sạch là nguồn sống.**  
Tìm hiểu thêm những ảnh hưởng của biến đổi khí hậu tại UNICEF.ORG



## #nofilter

Người mẫu:	Nhập ảnh:	Sống:
Minh Nguyễn	Tèo Chai Guan	Sông Đồng Nai, Vietnam

Sự khác biệt duy nhất giữa bức ảnh này và một bức ảnh thông thường chính là nguồn nước dùng để trang trí. Bên dù khi nào đang gây ra hiện tượng hạn hán nặng nề nhất ở Việt Nam trong 100 năm qua. Thiếu nước khiến hàng nghìn trẻ em như Minh có nguy cơ mắc phải nhiều căn bệnh do dùng nước bẩn hoặc nước mặn. Nếu nước bẩn đã làm hư hại bức ảnh thế này, bạn hãy thử nghĩ tác động của nó đến con em chúng ta.

**Nước sạch là nguồn sống.**  
Tìm hiểu thêm những ảnh hưởng của biến đổi khí hậu tại UNICEF.ORG



AS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S EDGIER YOUNG

**DESIGNERS** with a startlingly unorthodox back catalogue of genre-defying outfits, about the last people on the planet Leroy Nguyen expected to hear from were Sanrio—the creators of Hello Kitty—proposing a collaboration. When his ecstatic PR agent called with the news that the owners of a label that sells to well over half of the world's female population wanted to talk, Leroy's reaction wasn't so much surprise as utter mystification. The resultant collection—a gorgeously dark array of garments featuring a sullen, defiant Kitty—is one that Leroy Nguyen is evidently very proud of, and he's eager to clarify his respect for the brand.

"It was an amazing collaboration," he enthuses, "I got free rights to their imagery and text. When they first approached me, it was a strange proposition—because we're used to the candy pics, and the pastel pics, the big letters and the red bows. For me as a designer, it just didn't correlate. But upon meeting them, they were such beautiful people to work with. They're hugely passionate about their brand, and they were so open to new interpretations and new angles taken on Hello Kitty, which is when I couldn't sign the dotted line fast enough. So there's no hatred in it, I was just trying to do a tougher edge that no one's seen before... that is something I had to explain to them. For me, it was about finding strength within being a part of the Hello Kitty gang. In a lot of JPop and KPop culture, they have this term where they go 'FIGHTING!', and it's that kind of mentality that I wanted to explore. It's loosely based on Americana and cheerleaders and being part of the pack."

In retrospect, what Sanrio most likely saw in Leroy Nguyen was something their brand was lacking, particularly in the Australian market—an edgy, fresh energy all bundled up within an uncommonly mature design aesthetic for an emerging designer, something that has seen Leroy Nguyen turn heads since before even graduating. One of Sydney's The Fashion Design Studio's more memorable alumni, by the time Leroy left the school, he was being recognized by the Design Institute of Australia as design graduate of the year; his subsequent exposure at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week saw such an immediate and intense media reaction and demand for his product that he was compelled to launch his own label without delay. A glance through his collections online can be disarming—Leroy's work in women's fashions spans both conservative and the more daring ends of the design spectrum,



Renowned Australian designer **Leroy Nguyen** talks about his unexpected collaboration with Hello Kitty and Vietnam's fast-growing fashion industry

TEXT BY MICHAEL ARNOLD  
 PORTRAIT BY NGOC TRAN  
 FASHION IMAGES COURTESY OF LEROY NGUYEN

with the unifying factor being a simple respect for comfort and wearability. By designing for the body rather than trying to enhance a woman's shape, Leroy manages a sensual flattery of the figure without resorting to overt sexuality.

"I'm not into super-tight cocktail dresses that you see at one o'clock in the morning!" he laughs. "That's not my thing, I'm very much more inspired by shape. Whether it's sexy, whether it's conservative, whether it's cutting edge, sculptural, for me it's about comfort. I'm very much influenced by movement, how she's going to move within the fabric, how the shape is going to move with her throughout the day."

"Prior to studying arts and fashion design, I actually did a year of physiotherapy," he explains. "I was fascinated by anatomy and playing with cadavers. How the human body

moves, and all the different connective tissues and muscles and joints, I found that quite fascinating. It's that kind of comfort and ease of movement which I think is somewhat translated in how I design around the woman's body."

Pink and White

Born in Australia as the youngest child of a Vietnamese immigrant family, Leroy Nguyen (whose older brother is celebrity chef Luke Nguyen) was in Ho Chi Minh City last month to participate in a three-day fashion colloquium held at RMIT. It wasn't his first visit; he was here three years ago with Elle Vietnam to show in one of their Spring/Summer Collection events. "I didn't get it," he confides. "Back then, the industry was very much 'great, here's an event where we can all get dressed up together as



pretty people and get photographed.' It wasn't about the designs on the runway. I didn't understand, coming from Australia where it's so nurturing of young talent, and it's all about promoting and publicising new young talent, and putting them to the forefront. It was a completely different world here that I wasn't quite prepared for. But in the short time of three years, coming back, we suddenly have a new wave of talent. It's early days, but they're being celebrated. We have advocates within the industry like Ha Mi, other magazine editors. You've got educational institutions that are all really gunning for a new wave of young talent and trying to push innovation and individualism, because yes, Zara is coming in at the end of the month, and it's only going to grow and grow and grow."

Leroy's take on local fashion focuses on the need within the industry to cultivate a sense of self-belief among the Vietnamese youth—a difficult ask in a culture where conformity is considered virtuous. "The only way self-relevance can be cultivated is to bring the industry within defined avenues like *Project Runway* and *Next Top Model*," he observes, "which brings them to a level that is international. When they see their own talent and their own peers within this kind of franchise, it just helps to cultivate a sense of self-belief."

"It's encouraging to see that within the industry," he adds, "we do have advocates who are hoping to steer the massive sponge that is the youth of Vietnam in a direction where you can be an industry of real substance."

Following his participation in the colloquia panels, Leroy has developed

a new appreciation for the potential of the local fashion industry, particularly in garment manufacture. "I think one thing that's opened my eyes is the possibility for production, manufacturing, and the technology—and the possibilities that are here are endless," he says. "I've seen a couple of factories—I'm not going to lie, I did have my prejudiced views beforehand, but it took my breath away. The technology that we do not have in Australia is crazy—we forget that Adidas, Nike, Ted Baker, huge global labels are produced in Vietnam. Yes, it's probably not incredibly relevant to me as a small, emerging label that's not doing thousands and thousands of units, but the possibilities of what is here have been incredibly inspiring; on a completely opposite scope, the artisans who are here have been incredibly inspiring as well, like getting in touch with Fashion 4 Freedom and Lan Vy—her business is all about connecting emerging small businesses to incredible artisan talent that you just don't have in Australia. We're such a young country of migrants, we don't have anything like that there. So the possibilities of collaborating with Vietnamese talent here has been quite inspiring and eye-opening for me."

The extent to which Leroy's own Vietnamese background is influenced by the culture of his parents is somewhat more subtle. Many commentators on his work note a certain Asian quality to his unique design DNA, although this isn't something he consciously draws on. "When I take a step back, I can see why people feel that there is an Asian element to my design," he admits. "For me, I think that's just part of my heritage, and I'm naturally drawn to those shapes and lines. A unique brand aesthetic is so important as an emerging designer, because that's the only way your consumer, your buyer, can connect with you and understand what your brand is about. For me especially, that kind of multicultural background as a designer—as a human being—and how that translates within my designs, has helped reach a unique global audience."

In a sense, Leroy Nguyen's approach to the potential for individuality and self-actualization within Vietnamese fashion mirrors his work on the reinvention of Hello Kitty. Presented with the ultimate icon of Japanese *kawaii*—the antithesis, perhaps, of his own aesthetic—Leroy managed to build his own interpretation of the brand while still managing to convey its core values of "purity, happiness and love."

"It's a positive notion of strength, even though it's presented in a darker manner," he says affectionately. "Strength and positivity comes in all forms, it doesn't always have to be white and pink." ■











# The Barefoot Boogie

Expressing yourself through *dance*

TEXT BY LORCAN LOVETT  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

**IF YOU FIND OPENING UP** to your friends and family a sometimes daunting experience, then opening up to a group of strangers through the medium of dance should be a definite no-go. Except if you're at The Movement Kitchen (Facebook: *The Movement Kitchen*), a twice-monthly workshop challenging and inspiring people of all backgrounds in a studio in District 1. Launched by artist Emily Navarra, 35, in March 2015, the workshop initially taught mainstream styles of dance and gradually moved into more adventurous territory; now it's two hours of freeform movement.

"I said screw this, I'm going to just do what I do," says Emily. "I'm just going to leave it out there and if people start to come then they come and if not I'll give it six months. Since then people are coming from all over. They're really curious. I tell them immediately this is not a dance class; you will not be learning any steps. It's all about expression and then exploring these methods I give them."

Fortunately, people without any history of professional dancing are welcomed, hence my first workshop—Chance Dance. As one of the handful

of workshop themes, it combines the philosophies of two 20th century artists—a composer and a dancer—and an ancient divination text along with Vietnamese cement tiles.

This curious mixture lays the foundation for a choreography game and, ultimately, a performance, but first comes the warm up, a series of exercises that provide gentle introspection and a chance to break the ice with the group. Focusing on my breathing, I followed the others in shaking the whole of my body and then propelling my arms around the room; the ice was well and truly broken.

Thirty-five-year-old Ben Watkins, a soft-spoken Englishman sporting a black vest, bumped into me as we leapt around. He had traveled from his job in a furniture factory in Binh Duong Province to make this, his third workshop. "When you are moving with people in day to day life you do not get that intimate," Ben said afterwards. "You generally keep a little bit of distance, even with friends."

A matching of patterns we selected from a bag split the nine of us into three teams, each one tossing a coin to decide whether we should face the wall or the mirror. Two rolls of a dice decided which way to move

and how many times, for example vertical, three times. The process drew inspiration from ancient Chinese book *I Ching* that people consult by tossing coins for guidance to its answers.

My team, two very capable dancers, and I created an abstract routine of which my only suggestion was to pretend to wash our faces.

Unsure at first, I began to feel at ease working with the guys and could see the session being conducive to creativity in everyday life as well as opening up minds. In the next stage we picked out a Vietnamese tile pattern that had to be incorporated into our moves. Our hands gestured the shape of a diamond mirror that reflected our washed faces, thanks to the diagonal lines of the tile print.

If there were any feelings of judgment in the room, someone would have seen my lumbering rehearsal and asked me to leave before it was too late... for everyone. There was, however, a warm atmosphere full of good energy where people could unleash movements that they kept bottled up on the streets.

"There is not one ego that walks through that door," says Emily. "I do not say to come without your ego, it's just natural."

## Empower Others

Emily, a professional dancer and choreographer who comes from a town near Chicago, has made a name for herself in Saigon's art scene. She founded The Melting Pot, a regular collaboration of musicians, dancers and artists, in Saigon Outcast in 2012. Her next project, Standpoint Theories, involved a reenactment of the myths behind six Vietnamese legends that showed in Saigon and Quest festival near Hanoi.

Before coming to Vietnam, Emily essentially danced her way around the world, touring around the US, Africa and European countries. When she settled in her father's homeland of Tunisia, dancing at a resort, it seemed like a fulfilling job in a beautiful country. Then a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor struck a match to his gasoline-doused body in protest against the daily extortion he faced from local authorities. It led to the Arab Spring; protests rippled throughout the country, the government cracked down, and more people were injured or killed every day. After a terrifying encounter with gunmen in a train station, Emily says she left for Saigon on a friend's recommendation. She supplemented her art by teaching English and is now using her passion for dance to empower others.

The choreographer took up dance

at the age of 22, later than most other professionals, after her dreams of achieving in sports were dashed when her knee was dislocated in a softball match. Being older than most, many teachers told Emily to quit, while fellow students gossiped about her lack of experience.

After one teacher took a gamble and put her in a big concert, she overheard two girls questioning why she was chosen. She says it's this memory that drives her to help people like myself, without technique or experience, feel confident and at ease when expressing themselves in the workshop.

For the final stage we have no idea what music will be played during our performance. This is the 'acceptance' segment, of which we can thank choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham and his lover, the avant-garde composer John Cage, who worked together from the 1940s to the 1990s. When Merce would collaborate with Cage, his dancers learned the intricate series of steps in silence and only at the first performance would dance and music collide for the first time.

In the workshop, gangster rap accompanied the previous group's performance. It went surprisingly well with the dancers' efforts although the biggest surprise was yet to come.

My team, made up of three men,

shot out their hands, backs against the audience, as the sound of The Supremes filled the studio. I was about as graceful as a dog trapped in a cat flap and forgot the majority of steps, but none of that mattered when compared with the fun of the experience.

Ben, the furniture factory worker, admitted he was nervous in parts of the session, "especially at the end of it when you do a performance and do not know what music you are going to be doing it to."

Some of these nerves stemmed from what choice of music his group would have after watching us jive to The Supremes, though it was all in vain as his group's dreamy glides to Sigur Ros looked almost too good.

On the theme of chance and acceptance, Ben adds, "Being in a multilingual country, you have to accept everything anyway. "There are some things you just can't control. The more time I spend here the more I just think you have to go with the flow."

The workshops have not only helped people overcome shyness, but also created friendships that exist outside of the studio. Although intimidating to some, and at times surreal, The Movement Kitchen is a tool for development, or at least an activity that will make the odd Sunday a lot more memorable. ■





Se sitting on the windowsill beside So, who is getting ready for another trip to the vet

# Nine + Lives

An entertaining story about  
rescuing and adopting stray cats in Vietnam

TEXT AND IMAGES BY **DAVID JOINER**

**DURING AN 18-MONTH STAY IN VIETNAM**, my girlfriend and I become sidetracked by an orphaned kitten suffering from a broken leg and living by a bridge where dog- and cat-thieves roam. After rescuing the kitten and arranging for it to be sheltered, however, we grow increasingly attached to it and take it into our home, only for its real battle for survival to begin. But this isn't the only cat in need of our help.

*Stray Cat City* came about during that odd time between finishing one novel and starting another, in a time when I wasn't writing anything else. I'd long thought that a book about the stray cats we encountered in Vietnam, including the two we ended up adopting, would make a good story. There was plenty of conflict and drama involved, an interesting setting, likable characters (feline and humans both), one or two interesting coincidences, and a happy ending. I also thought the book might be instructive to potential adopters of stray dogs and cats in Vietnam, and I wanted to do something that might bring more positive attention and funding to Animal Rescue and Care (ARC), which does such important but largely unheralded work in Vietnam. It doesn't take much to provide a better future for unprotected animals, and the resources to do this effectively are beginning to appear more frequently in Vietnam.

*The following is an edited excerpt from Stray Cat City:*

In January 2014, after returning from Christmas in California and the *Oshogatsu* (New Year's) holiday in Japan, Haru and I signed a one-year lease at a riverside apartment complex in District 2's Thao Dien neighborhood.

The complex, aptly called Riverside, was one of those rare finds in an urban sprawl: lots of open, soft grass; beautifully maintained trees and flowers; a long stretch of the Saigon River always dotted with water hyacinth and birds of every description; and fish so big that a 200-kg carp was caught not far upstream while we lived there.

We moved into the only apartment there that we could afford: a first-floor, one-bedroom unit with a full kitchen, combined dining and living room, and a back porch hemmed in by flowers, knee-high ferns, and shady coconut palms.

Almost immediately we discovered that Riverside also had stray cats. It wasn't clear where they all came from or where they disappeared to, but they left no doubt in anyone's mind that Riverside was their nighttime base. The other residents never complained about them, for they mostly stayed hidden and rarely risked human encounters.

Saigon is a difficult place to walk

because traffic there is treacherous, and the condition of streets and sidewalks is often appalling, not to mention the fact that most of the latter are blocked by parked motorbikes and people selling things, drinking coffee, or just watching the world go by. Oftentimes the sidewalks become an extension of the road and fill with motorbikes detouring around jammed traffic in the street. Where we lived, traffic outside wasn't terrible except when the international school next door started and ended and the small road became choked with automobiles, but even during calmer hours it was still too dangerous for our tastes, or just too hot, for walking.

We came up with a walking course within the large confines of our apartment complex, and late every afternoon, as the sun descended and the temperatures finally dipped, we spent an hour or longer getting a bit of exercise. That time of day, too, was when the strays showed up. They had their hiding spots and their hunting spots, and were occasionally bold enough to steal leftover food from atop tables at Blu,

Riverside's restaurant. No one ever fed them—they never came close enough anyway—but not even Blu's staff seemed to mind when they climbed onto the tables to scavenge. When it happened, we usually saw only one or two culprits.

It took us a month or two to learn to distinguish between the different strays, of which there were perhaps ten we regularly saw, and Haru eventually gave them all names. But because several looked much like the strays we'd seen in Mui Ne, they ended up with the same name—Kaito—followed by different letters: Kaito A, Kaito B, all the way to Kaito F. There was also a scrawny orange female tabby that we named Marmalade. Marmalade and one of the Kaito males, who often lay beside each other atop the long wall between the complex and filthy stream, or hunted fish together on the riverside when the tides brought the river level safely down, ended up profoundly impacting our lives.

Over time, several of the strays disappeared. We would cross the small bridge behind our apartment, which led over the stream to a parking lot



So-chan recovering after being treated with an IV for dehydration yet again



Su standing on our back porch where he waited out a hard rain

that looked half-bombed, and search for some of the cats we no longer saw, but there was never any sign of them there—only the parking lot's two guards and the domed wire cages where they kept two roosters. It was now the former dwelling place of those strays.

And somehow, when one or two strays disappeared, a week or two later another one or two would take their place. Several times we saw kittens following their mother like ducklings, and other times we saw kittens hiding together among the clustered brush and ferns or under the bridge that crossed the stream. Sometimes they could be found in the hollows of long, reinforced concrete pipes that lay along the stream banks—which were there both before we moved to Riverside and 14 months later, after we moved out.

In late April Marmalade and three of her skinny, orange-and-white kittens, which couldn't have been more than six weeks old, started hanging out on our back porch. Why they chose us when there were 38 other such porches to choose from I couldn't explain.

Marmalade was visibly underweight, so we took to giving her a bit of food each day, usually a saucer of milk or extra meat we saved for her from our meals. Once we realized that giving her food was a habit we didn't particularly want to stop, however, we started buying packs of Whiskas. Soon one small serving of wet cat food was enlarged with a handful of dry cat food. It wasn't long before we were feeding her small plates of wet food twice a day with a midday snack of kibbles. We knew we were encouraging her and her kittens in ways we shouldn't, for we couldn't take any of them in—after all, we were planning to move back to Japan in less than nine months. But we couldn't help ourselves; we felt sorry for them. We thought that if we fed them well they'd

grow strong enough to survive in a place where stray cats rarely survived for more than a few years, at the very most.

A month later, in late May, we were saddened to discover that Marmalade had disappeared. We looked all over for her and asked some of the Riverside staff if they'd seen her, but no one had. Probably half of the people we asked surmised that she'd been caught and eaten. However, the three kittens we always saw with her continued to appear on our back porch. Following their mother's disappearance we worried about them more every day.

These kittens, all males, which Haru named Su, Se, and Shi—a cute succession of syllables in Japanese, she explained—kept coming around, so we continued feeding them, wondering what to do. Eventually only one kitten, Su, made our back porch part of his regular routine (i.e., he adopted us), and occasionally the other two would appear there, too, but mostly they just hung out by the bridge behind Riverside.

Su was the biggest of the three kittens. Braver than the other two, in the beginning he consented to let us pet him, which always left our hands black with grime he carried in his fur. Sometimes we opened our porch door and let him wander around inside, but our apartment seemed to unnerve him and he rarely ventured far. He was playful, but mostly just hungry all the time, and took to sleeping wherever the sun blanketed our back porch and exterior windowsills. When kids at Riverside spotted him and rushed to pet and pick him up (they never succeeded, luckily), he disappeared in a flash, bolting into the surrounding vegetation.

At one point we gifted him a box we'd received in the mail from Japan. This allowed him to hide from his would-be terrorizers, not to mention from the gardeners who seemed to find

the strays a nuisance and sometimes yelled at them, aimed their water hoses at them, and stamped at them to scam.

Again, Se and Shi sometimes accompanied Su to our back porch, eating what we gave them but not staying the way that Su would. By this time Su was spending half the morning and afternoon, when Riverside emptied of its many school-age children, on our back porch.

Haru warned me about the direction things were heading, explaining that we couldn't feed Su indefinitely. We would move back to Japan, or simply go away on a trip somewhere, and he'd be left without the food he now expected from us every day. He needed to learn to fend for himself.

It was then that I began thinking we might adopt him. But Haru wasn't particularly keen on the idea, and who could blame her? I dropped the fantasy, and though we started to give Su less food every day, we didn't stop feeding him completely.

One day something made me go outside—a vague, gut feeling, really—and search for the kittens by the bridge. I'd started to do this more often in the hope of finding Marmalade, though she'd been gone for two weeks already. I normally went in the mornings or evenings when it was slightly cooler outside and the strays were most active. That day, for some reason, I went there at around noon.

When I arrived at the bridge, which was sweltering in nearly 100-degree heat, I was shocked to find a fourth kitten, orange and white just like Su, Se, and Shi. It was smaller and skinnier than them, however, and I saw immediately that it could barely walk. It had a broken foreleg that, when it tried to come toward me, forced it to place much of its weight on the stump where its paw bent sharply, unnaturally beneath its leg. I knelt down as it approached me, limping badly and mewing, and I wondered if this was not a fourth kitten but rather one of the three I'd often seen. Perhaps one of them had recently been injured...

Get the full copy of *Stray Cat City* to find out what happens next:

Kindle version (USD2.99):

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A minimum of 20 percent of the book's royalties will be donated to *Animal Rescue and Care* ([www.arcpets.com](http://www.arcpets.com)). ■



Dr Anna is one of the veterinary surgeons at Animal Doctors International ([www.animaldoctors.vn](http://www.animaldoctors.vn)). Anna's special interest is neurology in which she gained experience in referral hospitals in Germany and Switzerland. Anna has moved to Vietnam following a successful stint as senior veterinarian for an animal charity in Thailand.

# THE GOLDEN YEARS

## HANDLING THE PROBLEMS OF OLD AGE IN YOUR PET



**IT IS NOT UNUSUAL** for the behavior and habits of our pets to change—just like people—as they get older. While some of these are consistent with old age, such as declining activity levels and reduced hearing, there are other signs that may indicate something more sinister is occurring and may warrant further investigation by a veterinarian.

The age at which a pet reaches "old age" varies greatly depending on breed and species. In general, cats and small dogs are considered elderly between the ages of 7-10, while some larger breed dogs, because of a shorter lifespan, are considered geriatric at approximately six years old.

To aid your pet in living as long and healthy a life as possible, it is vital that pet owners communicate openly and directly with their veterinarian. As pets get older their immune system starts to wane and so keeping up-to-date with vaccinations and deworming protocols is vital. This is also a great opportunity to discuss with your veterinarian about how to care for your aging pet and important signs to look out for that may indicate age-related diseases. On your veterinarian's part, they will perform in-depth examinations and bloodwork as well as other vital laboratory tests to help check for

warning signs of changes that might be markers for bigger problems.

Taking note of behavioral changes will help alert both you and your veterinarian to potential problems. Many of these changes are early indicators of diseases that, if caught early, can be managed and extend the lifespan of your pet. Easy things to keep an eye on that could be worrisome are:

- Increased thirst and urination
- Loss of urine control
- House soiling
- Increase/decrease appetite
- Skin and haircoat changes
- Lumps and bumps
- Bad breath or excessive salivation
- Stiffness, soreness, intermittent lameness
- Excessive panting
- Coughing
- Weight change (increase or decrease)

Common age-related diseases associated with the above include diabetes, heart disease, osteoarthritis, dental disease, prostate disease and cancer.

Nutrition plays a key role in the health of an elderly pet. Obesity is a common health problem in pets and can be especially problematic in older animals. Obesity can put strain on already arthritic joints leading

to pain and reduced mobility. The demand and amount of calorie-dense food reduces as our pets age, and it may also be worthwhile to consider a prescription diet or supplements for your pet. There are many different types available that can help with weight loss, dental disease and arthritis.

Keeping your pet active is a very important part of senior care. A lean, fit dog is better able to withstand disease and, should it be necessary, a better candidate for surgery or any other procedures that a pet may require as they get older.

Similar to people, pets may also require some adjustments be made to their living environment: beds on the ground floor so stairs can be avoided, ramps if steps are unavoidable, placing feed bowls or litter trays in an easily accessible location, and avoidance of major and sudden changes to the environment of a visually impaired animal.

Euthanasia is, of course, a sensitive topic and can be a very difficult decision to make. Sometimes euthanasia is obviously the best thing to do for your pet, but at other times it may not be so clear. An open discussion with your veterinarian regarding quality of life and all other factors should help make the decision a little clearer. It is also a good idea to discuss with a veterinarian the process of euthanasia well in advance of its occurrence: which family members will be present, when and where it will take place and options for handling the pet's remains are all important issues which should be discussed.

Older pets require regular veterinary care to prevent disease and/or diagnose it early in its course. Good communication between owner and veterinarian is important to ensuring your pet's senior years are happy years! At the end of your pet's life, your veterinarian can help you in making decisions, provide support, understand and share your grief, and celebrate the life of your pet. ■



**Sven Roering** is a Managing Partner at Tenzing Pacific Investment Management. He holds an Economics Degree from Rhodes University in South Africa, and is a candidate in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, having successfully completed level 1 and is currently working towards the level 2 exam.

# ESTATE OF AFFAIRS

## Navigating the pros and cons of investing in the real estate market

Hi Sven,  
I'm a French citizen currently living in Ho Chi Minh City. I would like to invest in local assets. I've tried to open a stock trading account with a local brokerage but it seems like the stock market is extremely volatile, and asset prices do not often reflect company fundamentals. I've been looking at buying some physical real estate as there are many new projects popping up around the city. Do you have any insights into the local real estate market and are there any projects that you would recommend as an investment?

**THE LOCAL REAL ESTATE MARKET** has been in a sort of "honeymoon" phase when it comes to foreign investors, as the state allowed foreigners to purchase property for the first time in July 2015. The fact that you see so many new projects showing up around the city obviously shows that local developers are expecting foreigners, and obviously locals, to pounce on their new supply of developments.

It is relatively easy to purchase property as a foreigner at the moment. All you would require is a valid passport and Vietnamese visa, which could be a tourist or business visa. You would be required to sign a purchase agreement and transfer funds, either the entire value of the property upfront, or through a payment schedule dictated by the developer. If you would like to purchase a unit in a development where the basement level has not yet been completed, you would have to sign an additional deposit contract. You might ask "why would I want to buy an apartment in a development where the foundation has not yet been completed?" The truth is that there is so much demand for units within new developments around the city that many will have sold 80 percent of the total

units before the second floor is even finished, a problem which I will address further on.

There are many positive economic aspects that could drive more foreign and domestic investment into the local property market. Firstly, neighboring countries like Hong Kong and Singapore have been experiencing issues within their own property markets. Residential sales have decreased around 70 percent in Hong Kong since the beginning of 2015, and Singapore's residential property price index has decreased by 14 points since the beginning of 2014. Secondly, gross yields received on properties in Vietnam (the amount of money you receive from letting your unit relative to the price you pay) are higher than most cities in Asia, except for Phnom Penh, at around 8 percent. Thirdly, there are a few monetary positives: the central bank has kept its benchmark interest rate the same since 2014, the Vietnamese dong maintains a stable currency peg to the US dollar, and inflation for 2016 is forecast at around 3 percent—which all means that there should be no shockwaves to the credit market in the near future, which is important as more and more investors buy property on

credit (loans to home buyers increased 22 percent in 2015). Lastly, urbanization is increasing and demographic shifts are taking place. More and more properties are being bought by younger individuals and families, on credit, which will drive prices positively going forward.

There are many inventories available, from apartments, penthouses, retail spaces to villas and office spaces. Residential space is usually priced around USD2,300 per square meter. There are also many new units around the city known as "officetels," which are essentially hybrids of office space and residential, designed for young entrepreneurs working for small companies. These are usually priced at USD3,700 per square meter.

One of the more trusted developers is Novaland. They have over 20 projects available around the city, comprising penthouses, apartments, officetels and retail spaces.

If you are looking for something more luxurious, look no further than the Sanctuary Residences near the Ho Tram Strip, a 1.5 hour drive from Ho Chi Minh City. These are beachfront villas located close to The Bluffs Ho Tram golf course.

There are, however, a number of pitfalls when it comes to participating in the local property market. It is often difficult to obtain accurate market data, as with any frontier market. Speculative activities by local investors could lead to dramatic property price increases in the near term, resulting in boom and bust cycles (see China). Also, it is often difficult for foreign investors to obtain mortgages from local banks unless they are married to a Vietnamese citizen.

I believe this is a relatively risky real estate market. However, if you have a long horizon ahead and have a portion of your capital held in safer, less volatile investments, why not take a punt? ■

## TAXATION ELIMINATION

### The European Union-Vietnam free trade agreement, what's in it for me?



**Marijn Sprokkereef** is an associate of **Audier & Partners**, an international law firm with offices in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi), Myanmar and Mongolia. Audier & Partners provides advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Dear Marijn, I am an importer of dairy products from Europe. Initially, I focused on butter and buttermilk, but more recently I have started importing dairy spreads and blue-veined cheese as well. I saw an item on the television about a new free trade agreement between the European Union and Vietnam and I was wondering whether this agreement will bring any benefits to me and my business.

**TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION** about the new free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union and Vietnam, let's go back a little bit in time. Ever since the Vietnamese government launched its economic reforms in 1986 (commonly referred to as Doi Moi), Vietnam has been on an impressive journey of development and integration into the world economy. In 1995, Vietnam became a member of ASEAN, and the year 2007 was an important milestone for Vietnam as it acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO). More recently, Vietnam has concluded various trade agreements: sometimes with one other country, such as the economic partnership agreement with Japan in 2008; sometimes with several countries, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the FTA with the European Union.

It is not very surprising that Vietnam is only the first ASEAN country after Singapore to sign an FTA with the European Union. Political and economic ties between the two parties have been strong for many years. To give you an example, Eurostat has estimated that in 2015 the mutual trade between the European Union and Vietnam was worth over EUR38 billion! Vietnam notably exports goods such as garments and textile, telephones, footwear, coffee, seafood and cashew

nuts to the European Union. In return, major imports from the European Union into Vietnam include machinery, aircraft, vehicles, dairy products and pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, Vietnam's Foreign Investment Agency has estimated that the European Union was one of the biggest investors in Vietnam in 2015, with a total of 1,730 investment projects and a total registered capital of USD23 billion.

The two parties concluded their negotiations for the FTA in December 2015. It took the negotiators more than three years and 15 rounds of negotiations to achieve this result. The provisional text of the agreement has been published, lawyers are currently dotting the i's and crossing the t's, while translators are preparing the final text of the FTA in all the 23 official languages of the European Union. Considering that the final text will also need to pass the European Commission and the European Parliament, it is expected that the FTA will enter into effect sometime in 2018.

But what is the FTA all about, and what could it mean for your business? Well, the name already kind of gives it away: the free trade agreement is first and foremost about liberalizing trade. This means that gradually, over a total period of 10 years from its entry into force, more than 99 percent of all the

import duties will be eliminated. Relevant to your business, the current 10 percent import duty on blue-veined cheese shall be eliminated in six equal steps over a period of five years from the entry into force of the FTA. Buttermilk, currently at 3 percent, shall be free from import duties after three years. And both dairy spreads and butter, currently at 15 percent, can be imported freely into Vietnam after five years. If you want to know what you can expect for other products, just have a look at the text of the agreement.

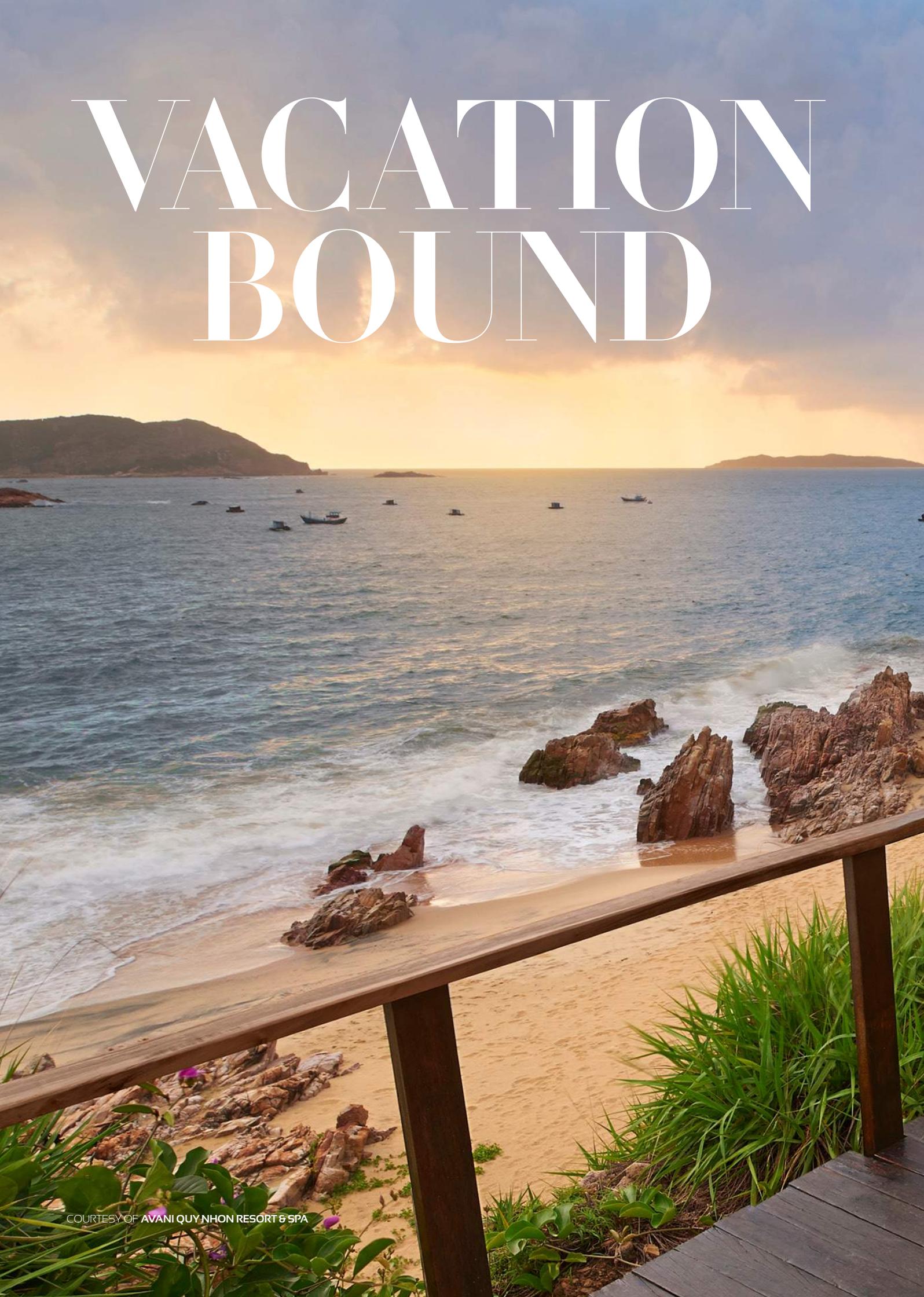
But the FTA is more than just about the elimination of import duties. For example, several sectors that have been (partially) closed for service providers from the European Union, such as banking, insurance, maritime and certain air transport services will be (further) liberalized. There is also a chapter on investment, which covers principles on non-discrimination between domestic and foreign investors, most favorable nation treatment and investment protection. Additionally, the agreement will give more access to public procurement for bidders from the European Union, it will strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights, and it will establish a new tribunal for the settlement of investment disputes.

It may still take some time before the FTA will enter into effect. But, Brexit or not, the FTA certainly promises to bring real opportunities for trade and investment.

*Every month, **Marijn Sprokkereef** answers legal questions from OI readers.*

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

# VACATION BOUND



COURTESY OF AVANI QUY NHON RESORT & SPA

Vietnam's history of wars and colonization has begun to fade, and the country is awakening as a desirable travel destination. Vietnam's landscape is full of contrasts to explore, from sandy beaches at the shoreline to mangroves in the Mekong Delta to romantic mountain retreats. This month, you don't have to go far for that perfect vacation.



# Mom, Are We There Yet?

Families who vacation together, stay together

TEXT BY CLAUDIA THAI  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



**THERE'S ONE CRUCIAL INSIGHT** that is often ignored when planning for a vacation with young children. Many parents, exhausted from their duties as indentured servants to their preschool masters, can't wait to set off on a family holiday and stretch out while their kids are happily digging in the sand or looking out over the beautiful scenery. What they fail to appreciate is that parenting obligations actually multiply once you're on the road or staying over for a weekend at a resort. As you squat there trying desperately to calm your three-year-old who is suddenly "scared of shells" before he throws up all over your swimsuit, or kneel while fishing pieces of lego out of the jammed curtain-raising mechanism in your hotel room while your teenager is experimenting with the maximum volume setting for the TV in the toilet, you come to appreciate that a trip with the children is one of the purest acts of love you can ever muster up for their sake—because it's all about them and not at all about you.

Yet family travel still stands firmly among those experiences that become the fondest of memories later on, and they are rites of passage that any family with the means to take their children on holiday should go through for the sake of bonding with their kids and providing them with enriching experiences to look back on as they mature. Being in

Vietnam provides plenty of room for this, in a country where family unity is so important that going on trips without children is somewhat rarer than it is overseas. Making a family vacation work is possible when the best venues are neither all that far away nor particularly expensive, and there are plenty of great resorts in the neighbourhood with much to keep the young ones interested—not that this lets you off the hook with the parenting, but at least it can still be fun.

The key to making a Vietnam family holiday work is all in the planning. A little thinking ahead can make all the difference between a sleepless drama of just wanting to go home and actually having a good time. Here are a few tips to get the most out of the journey.

## Choose the Right Resort

It's not enough to decide that a place looks awesome and presume that your children will feel the same excitement as you expect them to; neither is it guaranteed that they'll have any interest in the activities you plan for them. Don't be surprised if you decide to devote an afternoon to the pool only for your blessed offspring to sit pouting at the water's edge because you took the iPad away. Involve your kids in the decision-making process when you're thinking about where you want to stay, and try to choose a hotel with good

amenities for children. Plenty of resorts have playrooms and activity stations specifically with children in mind, and some go the extra mile—Six Senses Con Dao, for example, has a free ice cream parlor with bakery items that is a dream come true for parents and kids alike.

If you can afford a room with a private pool (or at least a massive bath—Princess d'Annam is one resort that has rooms with both) you're likely to be in for a pleasant stay. The size of the room you choose corresponds precisely with your sanity levels during your holiday, so if at all possible, book a suite or two connected rooms. Don't forget that you can always beg for an upgrade when you arrive at reception, and occasionally you will end up with a better room if they take pity on you—it helps to have a crying baby with you when you ask, if you can arrange that.

## Sweet Dreams

A rookie mistake in planning family travel is to only think about the fun things you're going to be doing while you're awake. As any panda-eyed parent can tell you, however, the battle of the bedtime is part of the daily struggle of bringing up children, and it's no different on holiday. No matter how classy your hotel is, there's almost certainly going to be weird noises sounding all through the night, and

some rooms are pitch dark or have lighting systems that are difficult to control. Bring along sleeping aids—things like nightlights and favorite pillows or blankets to make the nodding off process a little easier. Be very particular where you end up storing things like blankets at the hotel—if you leave them on the bed, they may end up lost in the laundry. For infants, most reputable Vietnamese resorts will have cribs—An Lam Saigon River provided one for us without even having to ask for it—but pack your own if at all possible.

If you have more than one young child, you're well-advised not to let them sleep together in the same hotel bed, unless you want to deal with trampoline jumping, incessant giggling at 10 pm, and argument resolving past midnight after one has woken up with the other's foot in their face. Kids do love holidays, but the irregularities of sleeping in a strange bed are always a challenge for young children.

When (if) you do manage to get them to sleep at a reasonable hour, you'll need something to amuse yourself—sadly it's inadvisable to leave the children in the room while heading off to the hotel bar, tempting as that might be. Your best tip here is to make sure you've booked a room with a balcony and a view for moments of peace at any time of day.

### Pack for Parenting

If your kids are very young, bring some safety hacks with you to counteract the less obvious room hazards—covers for electrical outlets and table corners, plus some tape and rubber bands for anything unexpected that needs padding.

Do not forget to bring snacks that your kids love—there's no guarantee that they'll like the overpriced offerings of the minibar. As for drinks, take plastic cups with you and don't let them touch the hotel glassware—smashed glass tumblers are inevitable if you ignore this step. Keep the wine glasses safe for your balcony time.

### Prep the Room

After arriving at your hotel room, do your basic checks for kid hazards—and that includes a scan for unpleasant surprises under the beds, which are not uncommon in any country. Fully unpack your suitcases and keep things in very obvious places—there's nothing worse than digging through luggage for urgently-required wet wipes. Your empty suitcases can double as storage boxes for kid-clutter, allowing rapid clean-ups after playtime: messy toy-littered rooms are the antithesis of stress-free weekends away.

One of the more under-appreciated features of a hotel room has to be the lock on the door. Make sure the latch is

good as soon as you get in there—it pays to ask about this in advance, as kids tend to be inexplicably fascinated by hotel-room doors. There may be times when you wonder if your little one is destined for a life of crime, but this suspicion is never so strong as when you see how quickly he or she manages to crack the secret of opening those hotel doors and wandering out to loiter in the hallway.

### The Golden Rule

There's only one rule that absolutely must be followed if your trip with family is going to end up in smiles, and that is to be flexible with your routines. If you try to stick to a rigid schedule for sleep, meals, and playtimes, you are going to be setting yourself up for a lot of frustration. Even if kids are having the time of their lives, the adjustment to a new environment, even for just a couple of days, can be difficult. You're going to have to play things easy and not expect them to fall in line just because you say so. The point, after all, of a family holiday is to go out and enjoy spending time together—so no matter how hell-bent your children are on ruining everything, just try to stay focused on the happy part and don't let anything else bother you. This is a great country to travel in, and they'll never forget the trips you take together here. ■





# MANGROVE MADNESS

Can Gio is a family friendly escape from the city with something for everyone

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

**HEADING SOUTH** from the Bach Dang Pier in District 1, a cruise along the Saigon River is an exercise in serenity. City life incrementally gives way to country. Bridges get less ornate, more utilitarian. The familiar view of tall Phu My Hung apartment blocks morphs into stilted houses in an oddly pleasing

geometric patchwork of unintentionally colorful metal siding. In mere minutes, we suddenly realize that not only are there no high rises, but no buildings whatsoever break the low treeline. We are out of Saigon.

A stiff breeze rushes through the speedboat, carrying away with it

motorbike honking and urban smells as we leave the haze of the city behind. In its place, family groups pull up nets from their small boats, a haphazard collection of fish, eel and the occasional monitor lizard their reward. Repurposed styrofoam coolers mark where the 30 meter long nets have been left overnight. As the river widens and narrows, we slow down so as not to disturb barges laden with fresh water servicing local families who only have access to the brackish river water. In a play on words, they refer to it as *doi nuoc* or "trading water," instead of the more treasonous "selling water" which also translates to "betraying your country."

We stop for a quick walk around the market of Can Giuoc where the vendors are refreshingly unjaded by the presence of tourists. Old women smile their toothless smiles for the cameras, egging each other on with playful banter across the aisles about making it onto television (even though there are no TV cameras in sight). In this riverside market, fishing nets are as much at home as feather dusters and kitchen utensils. The people here are the salt of the earth; a woman nonchalantly snips the heads off still

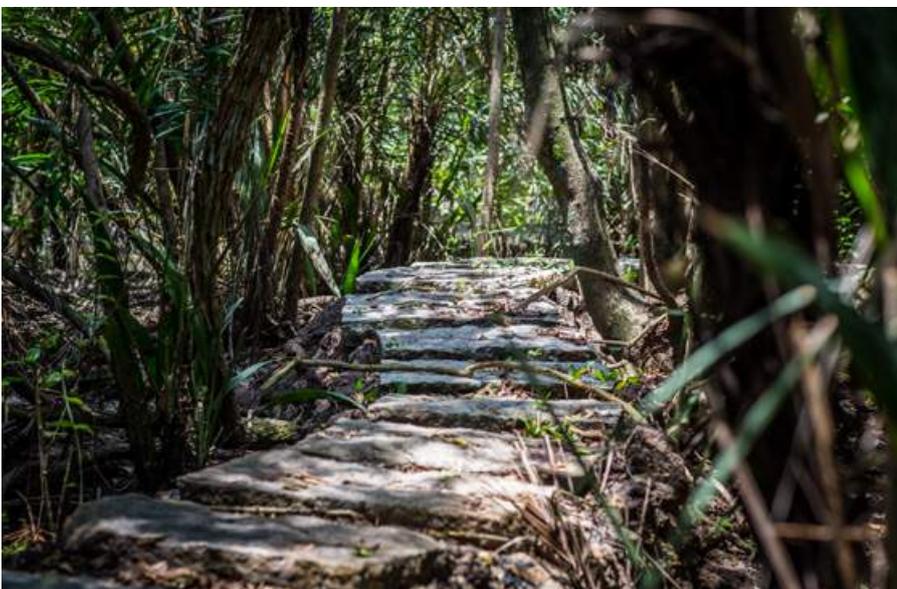




IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN

the profitable birds whose nests fetch up to USD3,000 per kilo, popular with Chinese ladies recovering from pregnancy.

### Forest Fun

By late morning, we reach Can Gio, the only trapezoid of green on a Google map of the area. A 714 square kilometer expanse of mangrove forests connected by 800km of waterways, Can Gio was declared a world biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 2000. Previously a battle zone then a re-education camp, the government-owned site is now home to a Noah's Ark of animals, great and small. We pull into the jetty at Vam Sat Nature Preserve and set on a walk of the dense, woody forest, exposed roots protruding downwards like so many discarded umbrella frames. Rustic wooden bridges built over a maze of canals recall every *cai luong* karaoke video ever made. The air positively hums with bird calls of every kind. But only when we climb the 10m tall viewing tower does it become apparent that practically every treetop is heavy with migrating waterbirds.

Dark cormorants, snow white hurons and snake-eating crow pheasants (often found in medicinal wines, feathers and all) provide a raucous soundtrack so conspicuously missing from city life. A short walk takes us to crabbing ponds where we try our hand at slowly lifting the baited rods, gleefully scooping up our prize which is later steamed for lunch.

Before this trip, I was somewhat dreading what I would find at Can Gio. "There's a beach, but it's very dirty. You can't swim there," my Vietnamese friends told me. For them, sea equates to swimming. "The animal abuse at the monkey circus is horrendous," warned my foreign friends. As an animal lover, I was pleasantly surprised to see the atypical tasteful restraint displayed in the parks and sanctuaries that dot the area. We wisely avoid the animal circus at Monkey Island, instead opting for a visit to the crocodile enclosure where we take a pontoon out to see the animals up close. I am thankful for the security railing when the surprisingly agile crocs launch themselves out of the water, twisting in tight coils, making multiple snaps in search of a snack. The powerful jaws clap shut with a thunder-like bang. Being that close to the wild animals is at once terrifying and exhilarating.

Soon enough, we stop for lunch at the Nghe Doi Bat Sanctuary. While a feast of claypot dishes and seafood, including the mud crabs from the morning's expedition, is being prepared, we're rowed in small boats to see the red and black mangrove forest up close. Furry fruit bats with 1m wing spans hang from the trees, watching the boats silently glide through the forest.

After a late lunch, we make our way back onto the boat. Too soon, the jungle greens and avian whites are replaced by steely grays and urban browns. It's been good to have spent the day where the river meets the sea. ■

live frogs while chatting to a neighbor. Another tends to her crates of fluffy chicken and duck chicks.

The journey itself is every bit as engaging as the destination. We pass high concrete structures totally unadorned and unfinished with a solitary window at the top. They're nesting sites for swallows, complete with loudspeakers which play chirping sounds to attract





# LOVE IS IN THE AIR

A change of scenery is often just what it takes to put a little magic and mystery back into a relationship

TEXT BY TAYNE EPHRAIM  
IMAGES BY THOMAS CRISTOFOLETTI AND NGOC TRAN

**WHEN THINKING OF ROMANCE AND TRAVEL,** the big ticket destinations that pop up time and time again are your usual suspects: Paris, Santorini and the Maldives. Vietnam may not initially register high up on the list but stop for a moment and take a closer look, for this is a deeply, sappy romantic country, and it's not in the least ashamed of it.

Walk into just about any café from Saigon to Hanoi and count the couples sipping tentatively at their *ca phe sua da* across the table from one another, sentimental folk ballads serenading out of the speaker system. While out on the streets, in the parks and along the beautified waterways, it's couples canoodling on their parked motorbikes. As I pen this very piece right now young couples cavort in prized seclusion by the banks of the river over the road under lowered beach umbrellas as boats slink by in the dark.

However, it's romance in travel, not culture, that I wish to draw your attention to. In Vietnam, all the cinema clichés are here, the candle-lit dinners, the after-dinner walks along the beach, the hand-in-hand strolls around a picaresque lake in mist, but the difference is, they take on Vietnam's distinctly tropical tone and flavor. There's no lack of choice, from dining

on ocean-fresh seafood on white sand under coconut palm trees on Phu Quoc, kayaking through hidden coves in Ha Long Bay, or island hopping along the coastline of Nha Trang, Vietnam has it all. Up and down the length of the dragon's spine coastline of Vietnam, the intrepid couple will find something to tickle the romantic sensibilities. And this is all very whimsical and sedate, but for those hankering to push the envelope a little bit further, a look farther afield reveals barely-tapped reservoirs of ardent possibility, and ones quite unique to these shores.

Just the other day I came across an article of an adventurous young couple looking back over a two-year stint of travel from Thailand to Turkey and featuring, amongst other left-of-field heavy hitters, camping beside an active volcano in Turkmenistan and visiting the oh-so-rare Tsaatan reindeer herders of Mongolia. Vietnam featured in this list no less than three times, the centerpiece of their entire journey centering on one bended knee and a ring in the spectacular setting of Son Doong, the world's largest cave located right here in Vietnam. Vietnam has an awful lot to offer, especially for those looking at getting a little more bang for their buck, both in terms of the monetary and the memories. Whether it's spelunking in

the world's most extensive and majestic cave system in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, motorbiking through karsted wonderlands in the frontier regions of Ha Giang, or clambering up the flanks of Mt. Fansipan.

But let's bring it back from the extremes. Vietnam is as much about the little moments and details as it is about the big. For some, an idyllic romantic gesture may entail little more than sharing and enjoying a bottle of wine on an empty beach in a fishing village, or perhaps finding refuge from the rain under a café awning. Sometimes it's the simplest, unscripted moments that end up filtering their way back to us as some of the happiest of our lives.

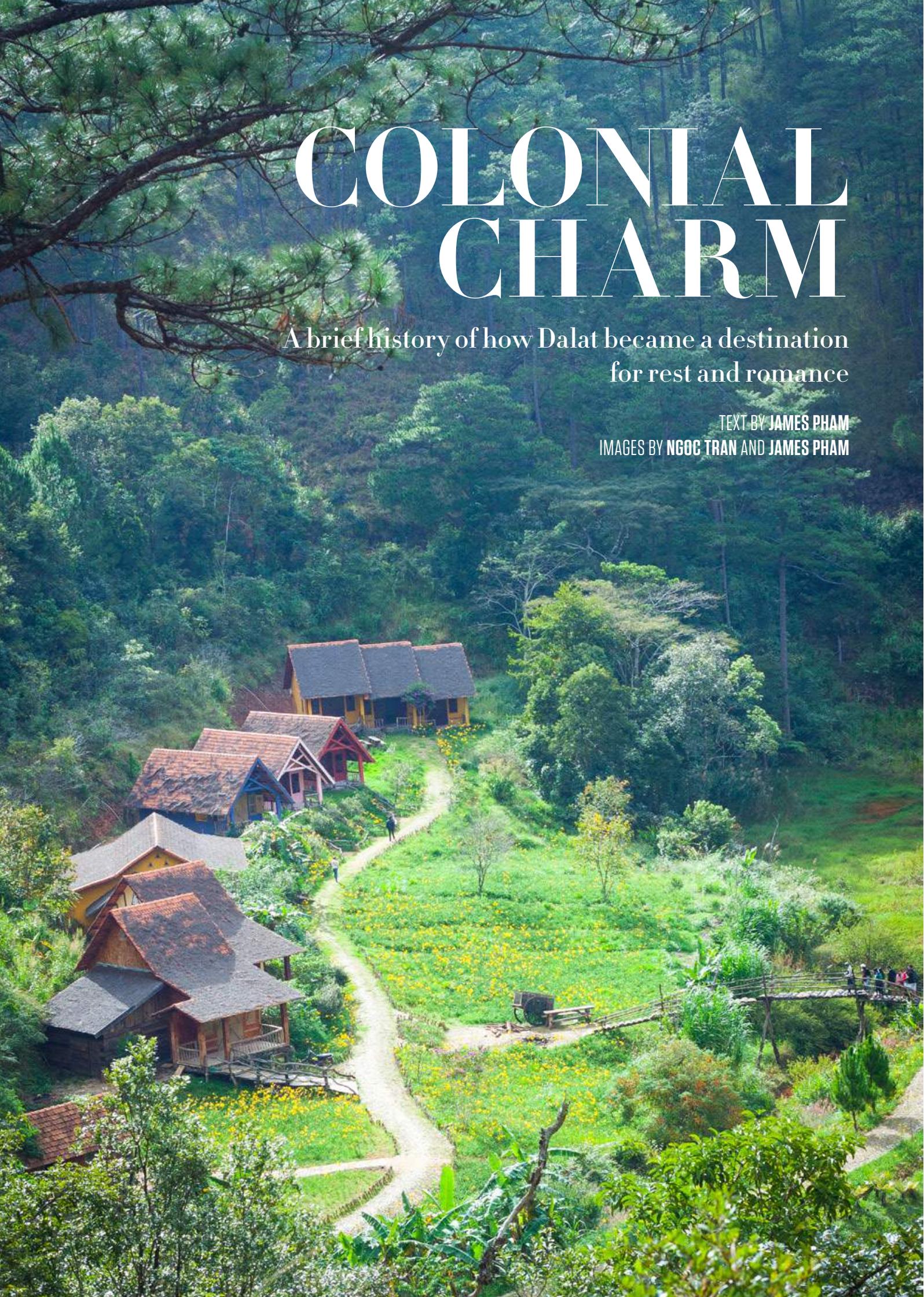
And while we're talking romantic gestures and travel in Vietnam, there is one destination which simply cannot be ignored, and deserves a special mention in its own right—the honeymoon capital and city of eternal spring—Dalat. Number 1 on many relationship wishlist, Dalat, with its flower festivals, tandem bicycles, cool climes and horse-drawn carriages is high on romance. Regardless of where you choose to stay in Dalat, nestled as it is in an idyll of pine forests and rolling tea hills, with waterfalls and lakes abounding, the “City of Flowers” really makes the perfect setting for a few day's indulgence for romance's sake. ■



# COLONIAL CHARM

A brief history of how Dalat became a destination  
for rest and romance

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN AND JAMES PHAM





**INDOCHINA** in the latter half of the 19th century was not a good place to be a colonist. In fact, it was downright deadly.

"One cannot acclimatize to the colonies: each day brings a further diminution of strength... Cochinchina is a terrible man-eater," proclaimed General Theophile Pennequin. Colonists bound for Indochine (a French portmanteau of India and China, pointing to the region between those two countries) received what amounted to a death sentence, recalling that Parisian doctors "took leave [of us] as if they might never see us again."

An observation published in an 1892 report summed up the dire situation: "The soil is excellent, the water abundant year round... One could become rich in a year, were it not for the fact that one dies in six months." Many succumbed to climate-related illnesses including malaria and death-dealing bouts of nostalgia. With the mortality rate for colonial troops due to disease twice as high as in France's North African colonies, it was suggested that four and a half years was the longest any European could hope to survive in the region. Others deemed this estimate too long, suggesting an inevitable death in no more than two.

The only hope for severely ill colonists was to escape from the very thing making them ill—Indochina itself—a complete change of

environment, whether horizontal or vertical.

Horizontal repatriation involved long and expensive transport, itself a deadly option: a slow steamer to Saigon's hospital; a 12 day, 4,338 km journey to the French convalescence center in Yokohama, Japan; or an arduous 10,000 km ocean crossing back to France in less than hygienic conditions where it was not uncommon for 50-60 patients per sailing to perish en route.

Vertical relocation, seeking cooler climes and living conditions similar to home nearby, was clearly the better

option—cheaper, faster, easier—with hopes of arriving alive. Built on the prevalent presumption of the day, that "like meat, Europeans keep better in the hills," colonial hill stations were already *de rigueur*, like Darjeeling in British India, Bogor in Dutch Indonesia and Baguio in Spanish-colonized Philippines.

All told, the French would ultimately set up a network of hill stations, including Bokor in Cambodia, Sapa in Tonkin and Tranninh (where the Plain of Jars is located) in Laos, but the jewel would forever be Dalat.





In the search for this utopian home away from home, Swiss-born doctor Alexandre Yersin, noted for discovering the bacillus causing bubonic plague, nominated the Lang Bian plateau in the Annam highlands as a site for a future sanatorium, "a vast, barren plateau featuring rounded hills."

Over the next 20 years, other explorers likewise scoured the country for the perfect spa location with places like Ba Ria (near Vung Tau), Bavi (near Hanoi) and Ba Na (near Danang) nominated and subsequently dismissed. In the end, the Lang Bian region won the hill station race, favored for its salubrious climate and altitude and large undeveloped land area allowing for future expansion.

The problem now was converting this inaccessible, high altitude plateau into a corner of France, a disease-free space for European domestic life. The isolated location meant huge convoys of porters were needed to bring supplies to the area. A paved road between Phan Rang and Dalat was built in 1899 but labor shortages were common due to colonial abuse and horrible working conditions. As if that wasn't enough, emerging medical data showed that the malaria-carrying *anopheles* mosquito did not go into shock at 1,500 meters (the altitude of Dalat) as had been believed.

As early as 1898, Yersin predicted that "Europeans will find a climate reminding them of France, mere hours by train from Saigon." It was decided that Dalat would employ cog technology to overcome the steep gradients, emulating the Darjeeling line in India. His vision, though, would have to wait for more than three decades. Only with World War I did Dalat get its mojo back. The U-boat menace and the Great War in general meant colonists were now staying in Vietnam much longer and therefore needed a cool retreat. Over the next few decades, Dalat turned into a thriving resort, offering visitors a cure from homesickness, malaria and anemia, a respite from Indochina itself.

With the increase in families settling down in Dalat, came a culture of leisure and socializing previously unknown, away from the suffocating heat of the lowlands. Rowing parties, tennis tournaments, horse races and hunting (gaurs, tigers, panthers, bears and elephants) marked the heady heights of the 1930s.

Part of Dalat's appeal was in its ability to grow fruits and vegetables reminiscent of home, a welcome change from imported canned goods. So prized was European produce that fresh artichokes were considered the ultimate in hostess gifts as were melons, pears and grapes. In Dalat's temperate climes was seen the potential of turning the area into Indochina's French pantry, with experimental gardens soon yielding red lettuce, Brussels sprouts, radishes and strawberries, not to mention European varieties of flowers along with coffee and tea.

Because the city was basically created from a vast expanse of nothing, it was an urban planner's dream. All public and administrative services could be housed in a single quarter. Houses were electrified and had indoor plumbing and residential

areas were set away from noisy and unclean areas. Early plans stipulated that "all houses for Europeans in Dalat must be surrounded by a garden, and enjoy sufficient aeration and views." Among the city's many planners was Louis-Georges Pineau, a proponent of preservation. His 1932 plan called for "protecting Dalat's natural beauty, enlarging its artificial lake, developing gardens, establishing zones adapted to the site and the climate" and open spaces of all sorts. Providentially, many of the city's villas were built during the time his plan was in effect.

Dalat enjoyed another surge in popularity when world war once again stranded many Europeans in the colonies. It reached its zenith in the first half of the 1940s, aided by a new road putting Saigon just six hours away by car or by daily return train trips. By 1944, the city registered 750 private villas, numerous government offices and the summer estates of Bao Dai, the last emperor of Vietnam, enjoying 20,000 permanent residents and the same number of annual visitors. After decades of backbreaking work, death and disease, a little piece of France had finally emerged in the hills of Dalat. ■



# PARADISE WITHOUT END

## Escaping to Anantara Mui Ne Resort

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JAMES PHAM

For centuries, Mui Ne has lived up to its name as the “Cape of Escape”, a promontory creating two natural bays to provide shelter for fishing boats during raging storms. Desperate to escape the literal storms that come with Saigon’s rainy season, but even more so the rage that constantly boils just beneath my skin caused by chaotic city living, I head to Anantara Mui Ne Resort seeking solace.

Just four hours door-to-door from Saigon, Anantara Mui Ne Resort features 65 hotel rooms, 5 suites and 19 pool villas. Looking to get away from it all, I choose a one-bedroom pool villa, an indulgent 92 square meters of indoor/outdoor living space. The villa itself is minimalist chic in gorgeous dark wood and stone. I melt into the king-sized canopy bed, swathed in dreamy fabric. After a restorative nap, I explore the villa and its stunning outdoor rain shower and gigantic stone tub, already anticipating a long, hot soak. Outside, a wall of pretty foliage outlines the villa grounds with sun chaises, a sunken gazebo perfect for lazing around, and the crowning jewel, a sparkling plunge pool.

Only hunger forces me out of my private kingdom, and I head to Thung, the beachfront al fresco restaurant by the enormous infinity pool. The lunch menu features poolside favorites of sandwiches, burgers and salads and because it’s comfort I seek, I scan the menu for bacon, finding it in the Anantara ground beef burger, loaded with grilled bacon, Emmental cheese and a side of crispy french fries. It’s still afternoon, but the wind rustling through the palm fronds and the waves lapping against the wide stretch of powdery white sand combine to usher in an early cocktail hour.



I skip over the classic cocktails and go straight for the signature drinks infused with the flavors of Vietnam, starting with a kumquat mojito. Taking advantage of Happy Hour, my second cocktail is more daring, the Phan Thiet Spirit, a concoction of Pampero rum, pineapple juice and a dash of Phan Thiet's famed *nuoc mam*, the acid from the pineapple balancing out the sweet-salty fish sauce for a delectable finish.

Sufficiently lubricated, I set off on my own version of Pokemon Go, but instead of Mewtwos and Charizards, I'm searching for relaxation and tranquility. I wander the beautifully landscaped property, with 50 types of flora, including 18 fruit-bearing. I notice several gnarly dragonfruit cacti, looking like a wildly uncombed head of hair, and pass by mango trees and star fruit. Guests, especially the younger ones, are welcome to sample the fruit. There's even a fresh coconut stand with complimentary drinks every Tuesday. I stop at the Library, a cheery room with plush white sofas and pick out a thriller I've been meaning to read. Later, I skip the gym and head straight to the Anantara Spa, a haven of tranquility in wood, stone and silk. I opt for the Aromatic Massage and choose the coconut oil made by the spa's own staff every week in the resort's kitchen, a time-consuming task that involves grating the coconut flesh, extracting the milk and boiling the solids down to a fragrant, moisturizing oil. After a footbath in lime-infused water and a salt scrub made earthy with ground cinnamon, the massage begins and I can literally feel the tension being kneaded from my weary muscles with every movement of my therapist's palm, forearm and elbow. Relaxed, I finish off the day with a late night dip in my villa's private pool, floating on my back, gazing at the stars, the softest of sighs escaping from my lips.

Mui Ne and nearby Phan Thiet are blessed with many day trip options including hikes up Ta Cu Mountain,

ATV rides on the scenic white sand dunes, and leisurely strolls down the Fairy Stream. Today, however, I decide to stay close to home and take a cooking class overlooking the postcard-pretty beach. By the time I arrive, Demi Chef Linh has the station all set up and we get to cooking up a menu that includes fragrant curry chicken, a crunchy mango and papaya salad, fresh spring rolls with a knockout tamarind, honey and black bean sauce and grilled beef wrapped in betel leaves. Chef Linh is full of tips and I learn to brown the chicken using only the fat from the skin, dress the shrimp and squid separately in the fish sauce dressing before combining it with the salad, and to wrap the spring rolls with the glossy side of the rice paper down, giving them a more pleasant feel as you eat them. Afterwards, we feast on what we've prepared, sitting under large market umbrellas, the soothing sound of water falling from the edge of the infinity pool as our soundtrack.

I learn that the word "Anantara" is Sanskrit for "without end," pointing to the Thai custom of kind householders leaving out a jug of water on the doorstep for passing travelers to quench

their thirst and feel welcome. In fact, the entire property feels restful and welcoming, from the Cham-inspired pale yellow stucco walls with bits of straw, a nod to the seafaring kingdom which once ruled the region, to the freshly cut aloe vera available around the property for guests who've spent too much time in the sun. Everything conspires to slow me down – the double stone tub that takes forever to fill, carefully rolling the grilled Vietnamese seafood platter in rice paper at dinner, and even the quaint but fidgety wooden latches on my villa's doors. But then I remember that I'm a world away from busy Saigon and there's no need to rush because Paradise is meant to be "without end". Paradise is meant to be Anantara.

*Anantara Mui Ne Resort is located 198km northeast of Ho Chi Minh City and only 11km from Phan Thiet train station. Doubles start at VND2,950,000++, including a sumptuous buffet breakfast. A limousine-style van featuring fully reclinable seats, AppleTV and Pioneer sound system can be arranged for door-to-door service. For more, visit [www.mui-ne.anantara.com](http://www.mui-ne.anantara.com).* ■



Courtesy of Anantara Mui Ne

A sunset over the ocean with a silhouette of a tree in the foreground. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow over the water. The tree's branches are dark against the bright sky.

# BEACH BOUND

Exploring the beautiful island  
of Phu Quoc by motorbike

TEXT BY MIKE WAKELY  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN AND MIKE WAKELY



**AS THE ANCIENT BAMBOO BRIDGE** across the ravine began to creak under the weight of the scooter, I started to regret promising my riding companion "an adventure in Vietnam." To be honest, we probably should have turned around after he had crashed. But with his words of "never go back" echoing in our ears we nervously pressed on. And two hours later we were definitely glad we did.

First, let's rewind to the beginning. As we fly into the airport outside the capital Duong Dong (DD to the locals), it feels like the pilot has alarmingly overshot the entire island, before the plane banks steeply, turns around and descends over the ocean towards the runway. While slightly unnerving, it is a maneuver that thoughtfully gives passengers a breathtaking view of a forested paradise island in a turquoise sea.

The island lies 45km off the western coast of Vietnam in the Gulf of Thailand—only a 55-minute flight from HCMC or a two-and-a-half-hour ferry ride from Rach Gia if you're feeling adventurous. An island of beaches, seafood and waterfalls, however, Phu Quoc is currently an island of two halves. Most tourists stay in the string of hotels south of DD on the west coast, relaxing on the long sandy beach and swimming in the warm ocean. The days are lazy—this is classic beach tourism—but luckily

the majority of places to stay at are still small scale and with personality. The nights invariably consist of a trip to DD's night market to gorge on a dazzling array of cheap, fresh seafood.

The night market sparks into life at about 5pm as the BBQs are lit and the numerous stalls start laying out the day's catch, everything from whelks and snails, through to lobster and prawns the size of... well lobsters. Everyone sells the same thing and it can be a little overwhelming the first time to choose somewhere to eat. Try Quan

Cat restaurant about half way down on the right-hand side if you're heading in from the roundabout. The owner speaks good English and is more than happy to suggest what to try, encouraging you to maybe step outside your seafood comfort zone, which I promise you won't regret. Opt for a whole fish simply grilled with garlic and chili, or for the more adventurous, start with the scallops dusted with peanuts and follow-up with the crab in tamarind sauce.

Now, there is nothing wrong with spending a week lounging on the west





cost of Phu Quoc dedicating your evenings to stuffing your face with seafood (trust me, I've done it more than once and it's a joy). Most people don't venture farther than that, but the rest of the island is one of the few remaining gloriously undeveloped and untouched parts of the world—and it won't remain that way for long.

## Keep North

Heading out of DD on the road to Ham Ninh, you'll soon find yourself on dusty red roads through the rainforest accompanied by the distinctive smell of fish sauce and pepper. Along the way, stop and join the locals enjoying a picnic at the Tranh Stream waterfalls. The more adventurous can cool off by jumping from the bridge into the river below.

Continue on to Ham Ninh jetty. Stop for a cold beer, resist liberating the seahorses in tanks before they get deep fried and take a walk along the jetty from where ferries leave for Cambodia. If you're lucky the boat will be arriving or leaving—perfect for people watching and admiring scooter skills as heavily laden bikes speed up and down the narrow jetty at breakneck speeds.

Refreshed, scoot north along the local dusty track (left just before the jetty) and you quickly find yourself tootling through fishing villages running parallel to the coast with regular glimpses of the sea through the palms. Keep following the road and you'll eventually see a little guesthouse on the right hand side called Coconut Tiki Grove Beach. Stop. My riding

companion and I spent a couple of hours here, drinking cold beers and swimming with the owner's dogs on a completely deserted beach before making the fateful decision to carry on north. It is places like this that make the east coast so wonderful, and it's places like this that will slowly be swallowed up by the onward march of tourism.

From here there are two choices—head back to DD, or (if you are an experienced rider) keep heading north. The second option is not for the faint-hearted and shouldn't be attempted during rainy season or bad weather as the road hugs the coast and you need to traverse at least seven ravines, which are slippery, bumpy and frequently require you to cross bamboo bridges that require a little leap of faith. That said, you'll obviously be passed in both directions by the usual array of locals on scooters laden with half of Lotte Mart who make it look easy. For mere mortals, this is a real taste of adventure scootering, and an experience that reveals a part of Vietnam that would otherwise pass most of us by.

One (gentle) crash, four near misses, a lifetime of incredible scenery and a lot of adrenaline later we emerged unscathed and exhilarated at Thom beach near the north of the island. We stopped at a deserted bar, pulled up a hammock and drank a toast to the other side of Phu Quoc and the road less traveled before heading home on the significantly easier big new road. Vietnam is changing quickly, so go out and explore before the smell of fish sauce is permanently replaced by the smell of tarmac. ■



# Wine & Dine

CARAVELLE SAIGON





IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



# Let's Do Brunch

From delectable seafood and mouthwatering roasts to decadent desserts, the Caravelle's NINETEEN brunch buffet is a-must

TEXT BY JOEL ZORRILLA  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN





**A FOUR-FOOT LONG SALMON** resting beautifully on a platter of buttery white wine sauce, accompanied by over a dozen giant mussels, presided over the entrance of restaurant **NINETEEN** at **Caravelle Saigon** (19 - 23 Lam Son Square, D1), luring me and my companion into a paradise of unlimited indulgence. Once we pass the salmon we find ourselves in an elegant, modern space designed as a culinary tour. One section housed the cured meats and carving station with Spanish ham, salamis and an eye-popping array of French cheeses, including goat, *tomme de savoie* and wonderful brie—spread this on the freshly baked bread that accompanies it to start one of the best Sunday brunches in Saigon.

The highlight of the buffet was strategically placed in the center of the restaurant: cuts of perfectly marbled meats and fresh seafood ready to be grilled or steamed to my liking. Tuna, salmon, oysters, crab, lamb, an assortment of shish kebabs and lobster—all deliciously unlimited! As a fan of surf-and-turf, I ordered a lobster and grilled lamb chops. The lobster was a grandiose buttery, juicy affair, tender and perfectly cooked. The lamb chops were absolutely perfect, with a layer of

golden decadent fat around the edges, complementing the tenderness of the meat itself.

Located behind the raw meats and seafood, we found the artfully arranged cooked meats: American roast beef, honey glazed Virginia ham and stuffed roasted chicken served alongside several sauces and gravies (my favorites were the traditional gravy and the mushroom gravy.) If you're like me and crave the all-American Thanksgivings and Christmas dinners from back home then this is the stop for you. The honey glazed ham was just like my Grandma's ham that I used to wait all year to get my fingers on—it was sweet, it was tender and it melted in my mouth. The roast beef, doused in a ladle full of gravy, was also a mouthful of delicious nostalgia. At this point we decided to enjoy our bottomless glasses of sparkling wine and take a short break from eating.

Before wrapping up our three-hour long brunch, we headed over to the sushi section before ending at the desserts station. The dedicated sushi masters behind the counter rolled and sliced expertly to keep the sushi station continuously filled. There were tuna and salmon sashimi, as well as a plethora of different rolls, all of which tasted out-of-the-ocean fresh. I then ordered

a delicious cup of Lavazza coffee and walked over to the dessert island. The inviting aromas from the red velvet cakes, flowing chocolate fountain, fresh fruits and beautifully decorated puddings were sweetly sinful. Having overindulged on too many savory dishes I opted for a small mango mousse cake that was a masterpiece of taste just as much as it was a visual delight.

Spending an entire Sunday afternoon with friends enjoying delicious unlimited food and drinks surrounded by top-notch service at **NINETEEN** is now on my top five things to do on the weekend.

*The NINETEEN Sunday Brunch buffet is priced at VND1,490,000++ with unlimited flow of champagne, craft cocktails, selected house wine and beer; VND1,090,000++ with unlimited flow of selected sparkling wine, craft cocktails, selected house wines and beer; VND990,000++ with unlimited flow of non-alcoholic cocktails, soft drinks and juices, excluding alcoholic beverages; and VND890,000++ excluding beverages.*

*From now until the end of August, for bookings of five people or more, from two of the four package options (VND890,000++ and VND1,490,000++), guests will receive a 20 percent discount. ■*



# Don't Miss the Boat!

Picturesque river views, ice-cold beers and delicious comfort food this side of District 2

TEXT BY BRIAN JUNG  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN



**A YEAR AGO** owner Jeff decided to take **BoatHouse** (40 Lily Road, APSC, 36 Thao Dien, D2) on as a personal project, utilizing his 20 some years of experience in the hospitality industry to revamp and turn the restaurant into a haven for comfort food with one of the best views in town. Fast-forward to today and the BoatHouse is now considered one of the best spots to take in a river view, beer, and some delicious comfort food this side of District 2.

With a cosmopolitan crowd of expats, teachers, professionals and locals, the place had a vibrant hum to it not in the least matched by the good live music which I'm told they have nearly every day of the week. In addition, it seemed they have chosen wisely in partnering with Pasteur Jasmine IPA (I was told they were one of the first and bestsellers of the beer when it first came out in the market), as well as Meatworks, which provides the restaurant with high quality beef and sausages. A smoker toiled away somewhere out back where Jeff might've gotten a bit misty-eyed talking about their homemade rub and

the possibility of bringing real BBQ and ribs to the table.

I settled down under the newly-built canopy, with soft ambient lighting, and just in time with the distant rumblings of a pending thunderstorm matched by the rumblings in my stomach.

To begin the evening I was cajoled into the BoatHouse frozen margarita (VND125,000), which was a heavenly citrus and refreshing blend of Triple Sec, lime juice and sugar. Sweet and sour flavors combined to make the perfect drink for a hot day.

I was immediately hit with a triple sampler of Jeff's bite-sized tacos. Crispy shredded chicken tacos (VND125,000) on a soft tortilla covered in lettuce, cheese, sour cream, guacamole and chipotle salsa. The Blackened mahi mahi fish tacos (VND85,000) brought to memory slight waves crashing on Southern California beaches with the crunch of the cabbage slaw, and avocado mango salsa. The homemade chipotle salsa gave it a nice little kick with the tang of the mango adding a nice balance of spicy sweetness. The third from the triple sampler was the Beer battered

mahi mahi (VND75,000) that came with spicy salsa—I applaud them for offering it as not many places do.

Next came a multi-punch sampler that came in the form of boneless Buffalo Chicken Bites (VND130,000) or deep fried breaded goodness slathered with a choice of honey BBQ, parmesan or buffalo sauces. I was told their Cauliflower Bites (VND115,000) were really popular and with one bite I could tell why. I'm not a fan of cauliflower in general but with the soft, tender, almost creamy texture of this cauliflower version I could easily see why it was a hit. If only all veggies could taste so good.

One of the more eclectic choices in the appetizer menu was the Crispy duck rolls (VND125,000) where they buy the entire Peking duck and use the meat rolled up with cucumber in a rice paper coupled with hoisin sauce. This was delicious and I was a bit surprised how faithful the taste was to similar things I had in Chinese restaurants in Singapore. The crackle of the Peking duck skin combined with the refreshing cucumber slices has always been a favorite of mine



and I highly recommend you try this.

Keeping with the small bites theme of the night, I had to try one of the many slider choices on the menu. The BBQ pulled pork sliders (VND195,000) brought together the ultimate in American comfort food. The 12-hour smoked pulled pork and the homemade signature BBQ sauce all coalesced in meaty heaven. Not only that but the small touches, like just the right amount of pickle to offset the rich pork flavor, showed me this place is legit to its Southern California core. The mac n' cheese (VND95,000) was buttery but

perhaps a bit heavy on the butter side. I would have preferred more cheesiness, however, I was told it was meant to be topped with pulled pork as well, which probably would've offset the strong butter flavor.

I finished the night with the baked lava cake (VND135,000) which came soft and warm. My sweet tooth yearned for more caramel and more chocolate sauce. With only three dessert options, I'm hoping that they put a few comfort food dessert items on there as well. A good pecan pie, cheesecake or lemon tart would be my suggestions.

There's so many things BoatHouse is doing right. They have ongoing specials like Margarita Mondays, Taco Tuesdays, Wing Wednesdays, daily Happy Hour and they can cater to large group events as well as a nice romantic date. Flexibility and a menu that has something for everyone seems to be hardwired into their DNA and from what I'm told there's even better things to come. Super friendly with an attitude to continually improve and already a hotspot among locals and expats, BoatHouse just may need to get a bigger boat. ■





# COUNTRYSIDE COOKING

## VIETNAMESE COUNTRYSIDE DINING WITH A VIEW

TEXT BY YOORI KOO  
IMAGES BY NGOC TRAN

**WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT** that in the middle of downtown Saigon, amongst the high-rises, noise and cars is a little countryside oasis. Located on Le Loi, **Mountain Retreat** (Rooftop, 36 Le Loi, D1) offers what it says on the tin, “a retreat in the mountains”— the “mountains” being the city in this case, and probably the location as well because you have to climb five flights of stairs to get to the “retreat”—consider it a workout to earn your dinner.

The space is divided into several areas: the main floor with a half indoor, half outdoor dining area, a back patio and the kitchen. Everything is open plan and unless you sit right in front of the air-conditioning unit you'll have to rely on the occasional breeze that comes by to cool you down.

The restaurant has a cozy countryside atmosphere. Clay covered walls, vines and ivies crawling everywhere, ceiling covered in bamboo and antique chairs and tables complete the Vietnamese hut feel. Everything is kept in simple muted earthy tones, even down to the staff uniforms. This is definitely what I imagined the idyllic side of Vietnam to look like— Buddha statues, claypots holding stalks of lemongrass, old books, beautiful pottery and sculptures complemented by relaxing instrumental music in the background. With its come hither pull, it's easy to plop down here and miss the rooftop dining area one floor above. Persevere up one more flight and you'll be rewarded with a view of the Bitexco Tower, Chill Sky Lounge and the rest of the city's skyline.

The menu is traditional Vietnamese with claypot dishes, salads, barbecued meats and seafood along with vegetarian options. With such a broad selection to choose from, you can either go with the staples or get a bit more adventurous. As we felt pretty hungry we ordered seven dishes between two of us and came out stuffed.

The chicken salad with banana flower (VND75,000) was very fresh and the herbs used gave it a cool, summery taste; however, it also had a spicy kick to it so make sure to order a side of rice to put out the fire. We chose the Fried rice with garlic (VND75,000), which had a hint of garlic so as not to overpower the rice (or the entire meal). My favorite was the steamed rice roll with grilled pork (VND75,000), a light, flavorful dish that had extra crunch with its generous peanut and roasted garlic toppings. It was a nice balance to the meat dishes we ordered.

The braised pork with lemongrass (VND65,000), for example, had a nice subtle ginger taste. The pot-braised mackerel fish with tomato sauce (VND65,000) came as a whole chunk of fish while the braised mushroom and tofu (VND65,000) had plenty of delicious sauce that we ended up pouring onto our rice.

Our waiter also recommended we try the fried back ribs with lemongrass and chili (VND85,000), popular among diners, and we weren't disappointed. On the drinks menu you'll find pineapple and watermelon juices, of course, and some more unusual choices like amberella and gourd (each at VND45,000). Mountain Retreat definitely comes to shine in the evening and I recommend visiting for dinner and making sure you're seated on the rooftop for the great views. You'll come out refreshed and ready to climb any mountain. ■





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](http://www.wineinvietnam.com).



# Value for Money

## Tasty but lesser-known grape varieties and names to add to your cellar

**LET'S IMAGINE** that you're a football coach looking to discover a new top player, where would you start looking? You definitely wouldn't go scouting at the top clubs because the players there are already well-known and would cost a lot.

The same applies to importers who are looking for a new top wine or wine region. They would avoid Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rioja and Piedmont, and wines like Barolo and super Tuscans because these wines and regions are already very popular, which have made their prices skyrocket so there's no point in looking there.

However, there are many wine areas all over the world producing exceptional wines, quite often from grapes whose names not many people

are familiar with-and because they're not popular they sell at low prices even though the quality is very high.

An example of this is the Monastrell grape, also known as Mourvedre, grown mostly in the Mediterranean parts of France and Spain by small family-run wineries, who for the last 10 years have been producing top wines, as is the case with Bodegas Castano in Murcia, whose wines you can find for around VND300,000 or less and are rated 91 Parker points.

If we move to Portugal, Alentejo is a great example of producing amazing, beautiful aromatic white wines from Verdehlo grapes, an alternative for lovers of Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier.

Even France has some hidden gems, if you look for wines from the

Languedoc area, and Corbieres in particular, you will find amazing surprises at great prices. Again not a Bordeaux blend, rather Syrah, Grenache and Carignan, but fresh beautiful wines full of fruit and complexity.

Italy is no exception either. If you want to enjoy some amazing good value for money wine, give Sicilian wines a try, especially those made from Nero de Avola grapes, offering rich and dark wines similar to Cabernet Sauvignon but with their own particularities, aromas and flavor.

Next time you are about to buy some wine, why not experiment with some new grapes and areas? Not much risk to take, and many jewels to be discovered! ■

# Wine & Dine

## BARS



### 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**

22-23 floor, Ben Thanh Tower,  
136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1  
[www.air360srybar.com](http://www.air360srybar.com)



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



### La Vie En Rose

Combining sophisticated decor with live music and a extensive vintage wine, La Vie En Rose is the go-to place to while away your worries.

**0936 933 833**

21st floor, Ben Thanh Tower, 136-138 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1  
[www.lavieenrose.com](http://www.lavieenrose.com)



### O'Brien's

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

74/A3 Hai Ba Trung, D1



### The Deck Bar

The Deck Group is proud to announce the opening of The Deck Bar, right next to its famous pan-Asian sister restaurant The Deck Saigon in Thao Dien, District 2.

**38 Nguyen U Di, Thao Dien, An Phu, D2**  
[info@thedecksaigon.com](mailto:info@thedecksaigon.com)  
**3744 6632**



### The Fan Club

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

**The Vista, 628C Hanoi Highway, An Phu, D2**  
[www.dtdentertainment.com](http://www.dtdentertainment.com)  
Facebook: The Fan Club

## Also Try...

### Broma Saigon Bar

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

41 Nguyen Hue, D1

### Donkey Bar

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

119 Bui Vien, D1

### Game On

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

115 Ho Tung Mau, D1

### onTop Bar

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

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

### Purple Jade

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

1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon  
[dine@icasianasaiigon.com](mailto:dine@icasianasaiigon.com)  
6pm until late

### Saigon Saigon Bar

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

Rooftop, 9th floor,  
19-23 Lam Son Square, D1  
**3823 4999**  
[www.caravellehotel.com](http://www.caravellehotel.com)  
11am till late

### Xu Bar

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

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
[www.xusaigon.com](http://www.xusaigon.com)



# CAFÉS



## Bach Dang

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

26-28 Le Loi, D1



## En Tea House & Restaurant

En replicates the feeling of the old Saigon by modern Saigonese, complimented by authentic Vietnamese cuisine and deluxe teas, for anyone who wants to look for Saigon's sense of nostalgia and friendliness.

308 - 308C Dien Bien Phu, Ward 4, D3  
3832 9797

Facebook: Enteahouse



## MOF Japanese Dessert Cafe

Tet Yokoso New Menu (12/28 - 3/13). Ring in the Japanese & Lunar New Year with vibrant & wonderful flavors at MOF. Using traditional and all-natural New Year ingredients like rice, yuzu, and matcha. MOF is proud to present Tet Yokoso. Rush into MOF to try these auspicious & authentic desserts to help you start 2016 with a lucky charm!

Somerset Chancellor Court, GF, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai & Mac Dinh Chi Corner, District 1, HCMC  
(08)38239812  
www.mof.com.vn



## The Library

The Library recaptures the romance of a bygone era while offering an all-day snack menu as well as the finest tea, coffee, wine and spirits in an elegant setting.

Ground Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon,  
Corner Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1  
3520 9099  
dine@icasianasaignon.com



## The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1



## Also Try...

### Caffe Bene

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

58 Dong Khoi, D1  
3822 4012  
caffebenevietnam.com

### Ciao Cafe

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

74-76 Nguyen Hue, D1  
3823 1130

### Du Mien Garden Coffee

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

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

### LightBox Cafe

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

179 Hoa Lan, Phu Nhuan  
3517 6668  
www.lightbox.vn

### Masstige

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

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

### Mojo Cafe

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

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

### Vecchio Cafe

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

39/3 Pham Ngoc Thach, D3  
6683 8618

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

# CHINESE



## Dragon Court

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

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



## Dynasty

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

**New World Hotel**  
**76 Le Lai, D1**  
**3822 8888**  
[www.saigon.newworldhotels.com](http://www.saigon.newworldhotels.com)



## Kabin

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

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



## Li Bai

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

**Level 2, 88 Dong Khoi, D1**  
**3827 2828**  
[www.libaisaigon.com](http://www.libaisaigon.com)



## Ming Court

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

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



## Ming Dynasty

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

**23 Nguyen Khac Vien, D7**

## Also Try...

### Hung Ky Mi Gia

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

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

### Ocean Palace

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

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

### Seven Wonders (Bay Ky Quan)

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

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

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

### Shang Palace

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

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

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

### Yu Chu

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

**1st Floor, InterContinental Asiana Saigon, Corner of Hai Ba Trung & Le Duan, D1**  
**3520 9099**  
[www.intercontinental.com/saigon](http://www.intercontinental.com/saigon)



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

# SPANISH



## Olé

With all the warmth you'd expect from a decent venue in this category, Olé serves authentic and tasty Spanish favorites with great tapas and highly-recommended paella. Family-run venue with a passion for great food and good service without undue fuss. Feel at home.  
**129B Le Thanh Ton, D1**  
**012 6529 1711**



## Tapas Saigon

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

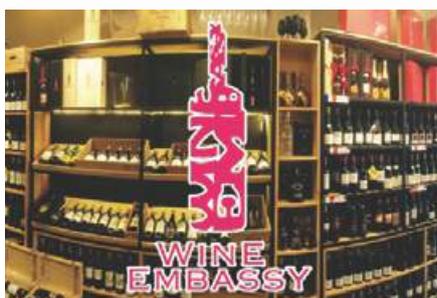


## VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill

VIVA! Tapas Bar & Grill only uses the freshest ingredients, many imported from Spain, for the most authentic tapas experience in Saigon, starting from under VND50,000/plate. Cool décor, indoors and outdoors eating areas, a well stocked bar, and great wines from VND60,000/glass (sangria just VND130,000 per HALF liter). Delivery available.  
**90 Cao Trieu Phat, D7**



# WINE



## RubyRed Italian Wine Store

The only one Italian wine store in Ho Chi Minh City, with over 200 labels of wine from all regions in Italy, Nardini grappas, Sambuca Molinari and Marsala, Passiti and Bellavista Franciacorta (official sponsor of Armani, Zegna, Gucci and La Scala Theatre of Milan). Cozy design with friendly staff and professional expert of Italian wines managers (Mr. Mirko and Mr. Christian Boarin).  
**206 Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien, D2**

## Wine Embassy Boutique

Established in the heart of Thao Dien since October 2014, Wine Embassy aims to offer wines for all budgets and from all over the world carefully selected by our Resident Sommelier.  
**41 Quoc Huong Street, Thao Dien, D2**

## Also Try...

### An Phu Supermarket

Large supermarket stocking a wide range well-known international brands of dry goods along with fresh groceries, frozen meat and fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, wine, toiletries and more.  
**43 Thao Dien, D2**

### Annam Gourmet

An upscale deli and grocery chain offering gourmet groceries, cheese, organic products, gluten-free products, fruit and vegetables, gourmet deli, wine and other beverages. All locations have a coffee

lounge that serves breakfast, lunch, drinks and early dinner.

**41A Thao Dien, D2.**  
**16-18 Hai Ba Trung, D1**

### The Warehouse

A premium wine importer, distributor, and retailer supplying wines from all over the world, the Warehouse also offers spirits, wine accessories, glassware and refrigeration to complement their customers' choices.

**15/5 Le Thanh Ton, D1**

### Veggy's

A specialized grocery store carrying imported products, Veggy's offers wine, a wide range of international food imported from abroad and fresh produce grown in Vietnam.

**23A Le Thanh Ton, D1**

### Vinifera

Established in 2002, Vinifera is one of the most reliable wine distribution companies in Vietnam. Offering prestigious wines from around the world at a great value.

**7 Thai Van Lung, D1**



# FRENCH



## Augustin

Augustin is a romantic and charming French restaurant located just steps away from the Rex Hotel. Serves lunches and dinners and offers 10 percent discount on la carte menu items.

10D Nguyen Thiep, D1  
www.augustinrestaurant.com



## La Creperie

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

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



## L'essentiel

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

98 Ho Tung Mau, D1  
094 841 5646



## Le Bacoulos

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

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



## 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



## Le Bouchon de Saigon

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

40 Thai Van Lung, D1  
www.lebouchondesaigon.com

## Also Try...

### La Cuisine

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

48 Le Thanh Ton  
2229 8882

### La Fourchette

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

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

### La Nicoise

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

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1  
3821 3056

### La Villa

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

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

### Trois Gourmands

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

39 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2  
3744 4585



# INDIAN



## Ashoka

A small chain of slightly more upscale Indian restaurants serving both Northern and Southern Indian cuisine including curries, naan and tandooris.  
**17/10 Le Thanh Ton, D1**  
**33 Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2**



## Ganesh

Ganesh serves authentic northern Indian tandooris and rotis along with the hottest curries, dandas and vada from the southern region.  
**38 Hai Ba Trung, D1**  
[www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com](http://www.ganeshindianrestaurant.com)



## Natraj

Known for its complete North & South Indian cuisine, Natraj's specialty is its special chaat & tandoori dishes. Parties, events & catering services are available, with Daily Lunch Thali and set menus. Available for delivery. Complete menu on Facebook.  
**41 Bui Thi Xuan, D1**  
**6679 5267 - 6686 3168**  
[www.facebook.com/natrajindiancuisine](http://www.facebook.com/natrajindiancuisine)



## Saigon Indian

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

**1st Floor, 73 Mac Thi Buoi, D1**



## Tandoor

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

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



## The Punjabi

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

**40/3 Bui Vien, D1**



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[issuu.com/oivietnam](http://issuu.com/oivietnam)

# ITALIAN



## Ciao Bella

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

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

*Ciao Bella*



## Inter Nos

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

**26 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2**  
**090 630 1299**  
[info@internos.vn](mailto:info@internos.vn)  
[www.internos.vn](http://www.internos.vn)  
 Facebook: Internossaigon



## La Bettola

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

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



## La Cucina

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

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



## La Hostaria

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

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



## VIII Re

VIII Re Eight King Italian restaurant is an open space setting serving grilled dishes, pastas and wood oven pizzas. Internationally known chef Roberto Mancini brings his vast experience at five-star hotels to his restaurant.

**R432 Le Van Thiem, Phu My Hung, D7**

## Also Try...

### Casa Italia

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

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

### Opera

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

**2 Lam Son Square, D1**

### Pendolasco

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

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

### Pizza 4P's

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

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

### Pomodoro

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

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



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

# JAPANESE



## Gyumaru

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



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



## KESERA CAFE BAR

Café Bar KESERA is an ideal space to offer you fresh meals. We are here cozy and friendly serving specialist coffee, Japanese beers, fine wines, freshly baked homemade cakes, bagels and delicious Western and Japanese fusion foods. Live music every Saturday night.

26/3 Le Thanh Ton, Dist 1.  
0838 270 443



## Lavastone BBQ

Modern Japanese Yakiniku restaurant combined with a classic cocktail bar located right in the heart of buzzing Ho Chi Minh City. Juicy BBQ in the restaurant's homemade sauce to mind-blowing signature cocktails, you can find them all at Lavastone.

96B Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, D1  
6271 3786  
Facebook: Lavastone BBQ



## Monde

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

7 bis Han Thuyen, D1



## Sushi Dining Aoi

Sushi Dining Aoi is one such restaurant, where the whole atmosphere of the place evokes the best of the culture. With its typical Japanese-style decor – the smooth earthen tones of the wooden furniture and surrounds, the warmth and privacy of the VIP rooms – it's possible to believe you're in a more elegant realm.

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



## Yoshino

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

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

## Also Try...

### Blanchy Street

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

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

### Chiisana Hashi

Serves authentic Japanese cuisine including sashimi, sushi, tempura, sukiyaki and shabu shabu.  
River Garden, 170 Nguyen Van Huong, D2  
6683 5308

### K Cafe

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

74A4 Hai Ba Trung, D1  
3824 5355  
www.yakatabune-saigon.com

### Osaka Ramen

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

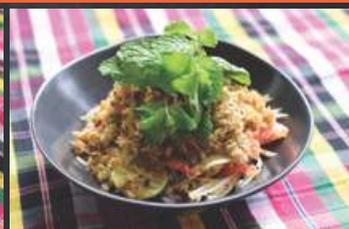
SD04, LO H29-2, My Phat Residential Complex, D7





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Tel. +84 902 942 457

## 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**  
3823 4423

### Lac Thai

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

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

### 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**  
3521 8513 / 090 688 6180



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

# STEAKHOUSE



## Canada Steakhouse

We are proud to be the first restaurant to serve imported Alberta beef Vietnam. Alberta beef is world renowned for its tenderness, flavor, and texture. Come try our steakhouse. You will be amazed!  
**219C Pham Viet Chanh, D1**  
**6294 8787**  
[www.canadasteakhouse.com](http://www.canadasteakhouse.com)  
 Facebook: Canadasteakhouse219c  
 10am - 11pm



## Corso Steakhouse & Bar

The steakhouse boasts an open kitchen with private dining areas. With an extensive wine menu, contemporary Western and Asian cuisines and a wide range of sizzling steaks cooked to your liking, this is the ideal choice for a special celebration or formal business dinner.  
**Ground Floor, Norfolk Hotel, 117 Le Thanh Ton, D1**  
**3829 5368**  
[www.norfolkhotel.com.vn](http://www.norfolkhotel.com.vn)



## New York Steakhouse

New York Steakhouse is definitely in the upmarket category and serves exclusive American imported beef dishes, with a whole range of steaks from rib eye, New York strip steak and tenderloin being popular options.  
**25-27 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, D1**



## Nossa Steakhouse

A stylish restaurant featuring Italian cuisine and Western steaks with a wide selection of imported steaks from Australian and the US. Nossa brings food and decor together to create a cozy ambiance. With an attention to bringing authentic flavors, we provide good food, good prices and good taste.  
**36 Pham Hong Thai, D1 / www.nossa.vn**



## Pho 99

Not a traditional steakhouse per se, but Pho 99 is known for its excellent filet mignon steaks made out of Cu Chi beef. Also serves great pho.  
**139 Nguyen Trai, D1**  
**536-1 Bui Bang Doan, D7**



## Wild Horse Steakhouse

The restaurant offers grilled pork, barbecued chicken and steak dishes along with a wide selection of cocktails as well as a number of smaller dishes.  
**8a/1d1 Thai Van Lung, D1**  
[www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com](http://www.wildhorsesteakhouse.com)

## Baba's Kitchen

164 Bui Vien, District 1  
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# VIETNAMESE



## Quan Bui

Leafy green roof garden, upmarket restaurant with reasonable prices and a wide menu of choices. Open style kitchen advertises its cleanliness. Designer interior with spotlighted artwork and beautiful cushions give an oriental luxurious feeling – augmented by dishes served on earthenware crockery. New Quan Bui Garden just opened in District 2.

[www.bui.restaurant](http://www.bui.restaurant)

17A Ngo Van Nam, D1

First Floor, 39 Ly Tu Trong, D1

55 Ngo Quang Huy, Thao Dien, D2



## Frangipani Hoa Su

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

26 Le Van Mien, D2

[frangipani.restobar@gmail.com](mailto:frangipani.restobar@gmail.com)



## 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



## 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



## Time Bistro

Timebistro – a tiny little restaurant will bring you back to Saigon 1960s. Visitors will be impressed by romantic atmosphere with elegant and simple style which is close to your heart.

44 Nguyen Hue, Ben Nghe, D1

09 8910 4633

[www.en.timebistro.vn](http://www.en.timebistro.vn)



## Also Try...

### 3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1  
3821 1631

### Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

### Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

### Com Nieu

Famous for its inclusion in the Anthony Bourdain *No Reservations* program, the venue is best known for its theatrics. Every bowl of rice is served in a terracotta bowl that is unceremoniously shattered upon serving. Unforgettable local food in a very pleasant traditionally-styled venue.

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3

3932 6363

[comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com](mailto:comnieusaigon27@yahoo.com)

[comnieusaigon.com.vn](http://comnieusaigon.com.vn)

### Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1

3848 0144

### Hum

Hum is a vegetarian restaurant where food are prepared on site from various

fresh beans, nuts, vegetables, flowers, and fruits. Food are complemented with special drinks mixed from fresh fruits and vegetables.

2 Thi Sach, D1

3823 8920

[www.hum-vegetarian.vn](http://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

3910 1277

### Nha Hang Ngoc

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

160 Pasteur, D1

3827 7131

[www.quananngon.com.vn](http://www.quananngon.com.vn)

8am - 10pm

### Propaganda Bistro

Spring rolls and Vietnamese street food with a Western twist. Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant features

hand-painted wall murals in an authentic propaganda style.

21 Han Thuyen, D1

3822 9048

### Temple Club

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

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1

3829 9244

[templeclub.com.vn](http://templeclub.com.vn)

### Thanh Nien

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

11 Nguyen Van Chiem, D1

3822 5909

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

# INTERNATIONAL



## Bamboo Chic <sup>®</sup>

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

**Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel**

**3C Ton Duc Thang, D1**

**6263 6688**

[www.lemeridien.com/saigon](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)



## Boat House

With amazing views of the Saigon River, the restaurant's open seating plan is the ideal space for business lunches, romantic dinners and lazy weekend brunches. The menu is international with focuses on Mexican and American comfort food. There's live music almost every night of the week.

**40 Lily Road, AP5C, 36 Thao Dien, D2**

**boathousesgn@gmail.com**

**+84 8 3744 6790**

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

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



## Cuba la Casa del Mojito <sup>®</sup>

Bienvenido a Cuba, The first Cuban Bar, Restaurant & Lounge! Come enjoy some fine Cuban Cuisine, Authentic Mojitos and flavorful Cigars! Music and Ambiance will transport you to the Old Havana where Salsa never ends.

**91 Pasteur, D1**

**3822 7099**



## Eleven

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

**29 Le Anh Xuan, D1**

**08 38222605**

**Mail : [info@elevencafe.com.vn](mailto:info@elevencafe.com.vn)**

**Facebook : ElevenCafeVN**

**Website : [www.eleven.com.vn](http://www.eleven.com.vn)**



## Latest Recipe <sup>®</sup>

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

**Level M, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel**

**3C Ton Duc Thang, D1**

**6263 6688**

[www.lemeridien.com/saigon](http://www.lemeridien.com/saigon)



## Ngon Asia House <sup>®</sup>

Contemporary three-storey bistro that welcomes you with style and leads you into a house of sumptuous colorful food cultures, rich in both in flavors and inspirations. More than 350 savory street dishes from Korea, Japan, China, Thailand and Vietnam come together in one designer space. The drinks menu includes a great selection of wine, cocktails and smoothies. If you can, grab a table by the tall glass windows overlooking the Nguyen Hue Pedestrian Walkway – a great spot for people watching.

**Facebook: "ngonasia" / [www.ngon-asia.com](http://www.ngon-asia.com)**

**2nd - 4th Floors, Saigon Garden**

**99 Nguyen Hue, D1**

**08 3821 3821**



## Noir. Dining in the Dark <sup>®</sup>

Diners choose from a selection of set menus served up by visually impaired waiters completely in the dark. Choose from one of three set menus (East, West and Vegetarian) with four or five tasting portions per course (starter, main, dessert). Purposely, not much more information is provided.

**178/180D Hai Ba Trung, D1**



## 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**



## Villa Royale Treasures <sup>®</sup>

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

**3 Tran Ngoc Dien, Thao Dien, D2**

**[www.villaroyaltreasures.com](http://www.villaroyaltreasures.com)**

# Travel & Leisure

CAN THO



IMAGE BY NGOC TRAN



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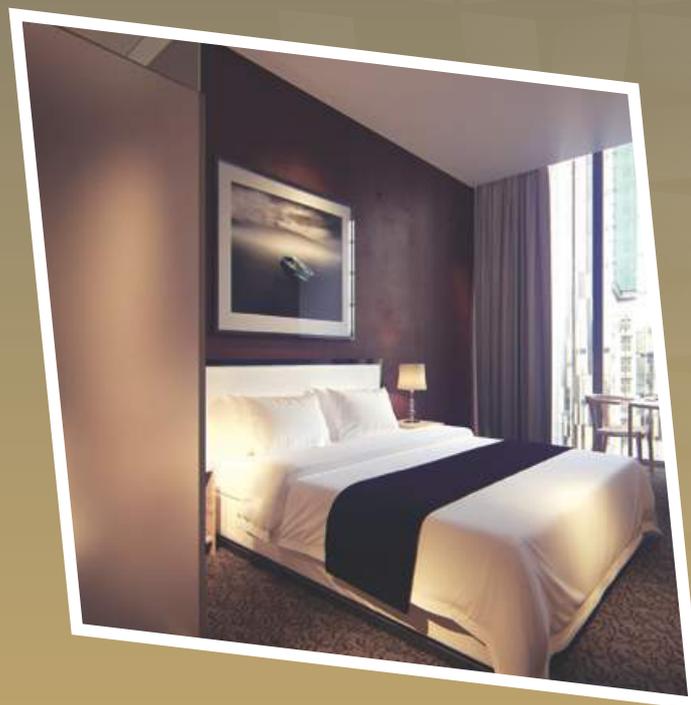
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# Mekong Mania

With its meandering waterways and flourishing farms,  
the Mekong Delta is a place not to be missed

*Text by* **LORCAN LOVETT**  
*Images by* **NGOC TRAN**



**THE MEKONG DELTA** is a maze of rivers, arroyos and canals, providing a much calmer alternative to transport than the roads. This complex network spirals off a split in the river in Cambodia and fertilizes the lush landscape on the way to its thriving capital, Can Tho. As the biggest city in the Mekong Delta, Can Tho offers visitors a glimpse of Vietnam's riparian life, but the delta's importance runs deeper than scenery; it produces more rice than Korea and Japan combined.

Can Tho (the name comes from '*cam thi giang*' meaning 'river of poems') is a great jumping off point to explore the region. Not only is it an attraction in its own right, celebrated for its fruits, pagodas and floating markets, it's also the perfect rest stop for those traveling to and from Ho Chi Minh City.

We opted for a seven-hour boat trip, a scary prospect for late-risers, as the fast canoe, or *vo lai*, sets off around 4am, but a must-do for anyone looking to experience the Mekong. Sitting comfortably on the boat, we watched the sun crack through the clouds on the low-lying landscape as we chugged along a tributary of one of the most famous rivers in the world. Life was already stirring; boats filled up at floating gas stations, traders ploughed their fruit towards the action and woman directed their wooden boats at whoever wanted coffee or noodle soup.

We arrived first at the bustling market of Cai Rang about 6km southwest of Can Tho Pier, marked by hundreds of boats stretching at least half a kilometer downriver. Little boats weaved around the obstacle course

created by anchored fishing hulls, each deck packed with coconuts, grapefruits, dragonfruits, vegetables, bananas, and more. Others sold clothes, spices, and even cosmetics.

The fruit was cheaper than anywhere else I'd seen, attracting local traders to buy everything in bulk and resell at markets or to wholesale dealers afterwards.

My love for a bargain overcame a commonsense approach to traveling light and I bought two large durians, something that my fellow bus passengers would resent later on. The energy of trading in this unique environment is a thrill and there are questions of how long it will last as more roads are built everyday.

About 15km away, Phong Dien Market appeared, a huddle of peddlers

standing in rowing boats in a much quieter atmosphere than the previous market. Above them were tall poles that held up the goods they were selling. As the market wound up, we left for an island commune, a place of perpetual easy living. Perhaps it was the way of life there, or the promise of passing money, but the locals seemed thrilled to see visitors.

One of the most voracious greeters, a man in green-striped pajamas beaming a huge grin, linked arms with our guide and lead us to a patch of ripe pineapples.

Beyond the fruit was a bamboo footbridge known as a *cau khi* (or monkey bridge) and common in the area although daunting for those without much balance.

The final stop, Sau Hoai's rice noodle factory, was situated on the banks of the Rau Ram canal about 8km from Ninh Kieu District. The family-run factory snubs the idea that all noodles are made by machines, instead relying on human ingenuity to produce the chewy and transparent *hu tieu bot loc* (tapioca rice noodles) for tourists and local restaurants. We watched the noodles being washed and soaked, and rice being husked to make thin sheets with starch.

Like big flat pancakes, rows of the sheets dried outside and then were cut into strips.

Hoai learned the recipe many years ago at Sa Dec Town in Dong Thap Province, home of *hu tieu*. Dishes of the noodle were available for VND30,000. One of the bowls holding a broth made from dried shrimp and squid, pig bones and lean pork as a topping, provided a much-needed breakfast. There were also samples of *hu tieu chien*, a noodle-based round cake that's fried into a crispy yellow. Along with the mangos and other fresh treats, the tour was turning into a culinary adventure.

## Back for More

After leaving for Ho Chi Minh City later that day, I'd promised myself to return and see more of Can Tho. I was fortunate enough to fulfill that thanks to an invitation to a Catholic Vietnamese wedding. A rental priest with an ample capacity for drinking hard spirits conducted the service in a cavernous church in Vinh Thanh District. An engagement ceremony and Buddhist wedding had already taken place in the bride's home near Hanoi where she wore a traditional red *ao dai*. Her husband's family brought five gifts: a pig's head, sticky rice, tea, cake and wine.

During that ceremony, the families agreed on a date for the southern wedding and now everyone was here; Catholics, Buddhists, both molded by Taoism and Confucianism, slotting with the Mekong's mesh of beliefs, along with four oddball foreigners at the back. Religious fanatics are sparse in Vietnam, especially in the south, as belief systems hedge their bets. Look at Cao Dai, for instance; Victor Hugo and Julius Caesar stand among its saints, Roman Catholicism shapes its hierarchy and reincarnation its afterlife. The priest—a veteran of the circuit—compensated for an anonymous deity just outside the church by dragging out his service. The man had clearly racked up decades touring the southern provinces.

The reception took place at the groom's house 3km up a straight road from the church. Once we'd ducked under the gaudy canopy, we passed the couple a cash envelope, as is customary, and enjoyed the overwhelming generosity of the Mekong.

The first of seven courses, chicken in a baked rice ball, was placed in the middle of the table, encouraging

everyone to cross chopsticks and start conversation.

Amid the flowing drinks and mingling revelers, two guests distinguished themselves as voracious socialites: the clergyman and a policeman. The priest had become a riotous joker, batting away food and clutching a bottle of Red Label. He gulped the juice and grinned wildly at whoever came near.

A fast-burner, the holy man had to be carried away by two helpers before the dancing began. He would be escorted to a bed and then to another gig. The following day would have more condoling, baptizing or marrying in store, the only certainty was his Red Label afterwards.

On our way back to the celebration in the morning we waved at an elderly couple sitting at their porch. They beckoned us in with smiles and coffee. The grandmother made sweet rice while her husband rolled tobacco. Families in the Mekong are strong contenders for some of the warmest and most open on earth. The grandfather gave me rolling paper, suspiciously toilet roll-like in appearance, and we arrived back at the wedding. There the policeman downed his beer as if it was his first, and hugged us one by one. They were odorous hugs, stale, boozy and smoky, but he had kept the party alive, perhaps single-handedly at one point. He shared a flow of local dishes and beer with us, looked at his watch and left for work.

As a parting gift, the groom lent us his canoe for two hours. Eager to tour the Mekong by boat again, I happily floated past a paddling of ducks, spotted nets cast behind stilted huts and stopped at banks flanked with stretching rice paddies. In the same way it has done for many others, Vietnam's rice bowl will always keep me coming back for more. ■



# >>The List

# Travel



### Ana Mandara Villas | Dalat

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[www.anamandara-resort.com](http://www.anamandara-resort.com)



### Cham Garden Restaurant

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

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[maidadang.fusion-resorts.com](http://maidadang.fusion-resorts.com)



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**0583 989 666**

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

[info@mianhatrang.com](mailto:info@mianhatrang.com)



### Pullman Danang Beach Resort <sup>R</sup>

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3926 0561-62-63-64

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90 Le Lai, D1  
www.saigondep.net

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# >> The List Business

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www.sasakihospital.com 2253 1179**



# Live Long & Prosper

Skimping on health insurance today may be a costly regret tomorrow

TEXT BY NPD KHANH



## “BEFORE THE MOTORBIKE ACCIDENT

I didn't think health insurance was important to have. I thought of getting something cheap, maybe even taking local alternatives to save money. After seeing the bill at the hospital and ending up only paying a nominal fee, it goes to show that it pays to have good insurance just in case. I'm glad I decided to renew," says David, an expat and business investor who has spent the last four years living in Saigon.

David's accident happened last month. While driving from his office to District 2 on a gray rainy day, a collision with another motorist on a road, made slippery by the rain, resulted in significant injuries to his body—luckily he was wearing a strong helmet. His forearm and elbow, on the other hand, were not so lucky—there were several deep lacerations and extensive bleeding. Extricating himself from the accident, he continued home where his partner cleaned and bandaged his wounds. When it became clear that the injuries were too severe for DIY homecare, David sought professional medical attention. After a lengthy tour and several rejections (the doctors had already left for the day) later, he found a 24-hour emergency clinic. It was here that David was told he needed surgery and how much it would cost. “The consultation, minor surgery and two weeks' worth of medicine totaled USD1800. That was a bit more money than I had on me at the time. Even though I had insurance I was worried because I had dropped the deluxe plan last year and was unsure what the new one covered and what I can claim.” Fortunately for David, his insurance provider covered 95 percent of the hospital bill, and once the paperwork was sorted, he only paid USD90 out-of-pocket.

David's arm has since completely healed and his medical bill, while ending on a fairly positive note, serves as a cautionary tale. Accidents and health issues are problems shared by everyone, everywhere. In Vietnam, expats may not know the healthcare system well or where to go, or have their usual network of family and friends to rely on. On top of that, there are tropical diseases their bodies may not be used to, mysterious pains and sicknesses, and, unfortunately, frequent road-related accidents. Health insurance gives peace

of mind knowing that in the event of health problems, trauma or concerns, they have the resources to cover them financially, physically and, in many cases, emotionally.

There are a handful of insurance providers available to expats in Vietnam—among them are Pacific Cross Vietnam and Liberty Insurances—with many option plans. The first factor driving the cost of any insurance plan is your age. Second is your health history. Third is what services are covered. Fourth is the deductible. When you compare plans you need to make sure you are comparing apples to apples. The plans vary (maddeningly) from point to point so you have to read through them carefully. You do, however, want to make sure whatever company you choose is experienced in Southeast Asia.

“It's a tough math question,” says David. “You have to decide between the price of an annual subscription and the even pricier cost of just one trip to an international hospital. I think most of us ignore the risk we take every day driving in Vietnam. You never know when you are going to have a rainy day and need that emergency plan.” ■



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# Kids & Education





# MUN's The Word

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## My first Model United Nations experience

TEXT BY GEOFFREY DANIELS

A Model United Nations (MUN) conference was something new and intriguing to me, so I grabbed the first opportunity I saw to participate in one. A Model United Nations is basically a replica or a small-scale real-life working copy of the actual committees held in the United Nations. Here, students represent various countries by becoming the delegate of a country. There are debates on agendas currently affecting the world, resolutions are passed and various steps are taken. A MUN is an education simulation that is genuinely better than any history or political lecture.

Since I have quite a few MUNner friends, I had heard a lot about MUNs, however, experiencing one is very different from hearing about it. The grand atmosphere of a conference hall, the look of gravity on the Chairperson's face and the manner in which the delegates carry themselves is something that has to be experienced in order to truly understand. And one thing is for sure, once you attend your first conference, you would never want to miss a MUN for the rest of your life.

To be honest, I was scared as a cat attending my first conference. I thought that maybe my research was not up to the mark, or that I would not be accepted by my fellow MUNners there, or that I would not be able to follow the procedure, or worse that I would not be able to speak in front of others. With all these fears in mind I attended the opening ceremony. I don't know what sorcerer worked his magic but the first day was great. I made so many new friends, did a lot of (what the MUNners call) socializing and met a ton of fun people. I actually started to open up and tried to overcome my characteristic shyness. It felt truly amazing surrounded by so many people sharing the same passion. Gradually the first day's enthusiasm waned with 'secret pacts' for the days to come.

The next day started with me being late for the first debating session of the committee (as I was just too

engrossed in doing my research). But the Chair was kind enough to start the committee five minutes late. As soon as the committee started, my enthusiasm (and nervousness) reached its mark. My committee was the (Futuristic) Security Council, with me being the delegate of Luxembourg, and the agenda at hand was the Ukrainian Crisis.

I knew Luxembourg played a very small part in this crisis, and that was one of the reasons it made me even more nervous. The main fight was between the US and the Russian Federation with Ukraine caught in between. So what part exactly did Luxembourg play in all this? I was quite skeptical of that but still I spoke whenever I got the opportunity.

Making allies (and frequently changing them) was what everyone wanted to do. Since Luxembourg supported the US, I mainly stuck with them (though at times I went to support Russia). All in all, the day was jam-packed with fights, challenges and crises. The second debating session ended with the same intensity as the first had started. After that came the best part of the day, the delegate dance! It was the most action-packed, grooving, energetic, enthusiastic and fun part of the whole MUN. The dance floor was the stage where every delegate could let loose and enjoy themselves. This is exactly how a tiring 'work day' should end.

After the better-than-expected second day, I stepped into my committee more

optimistic and confident the third day. I gave four speeches along with having questioned a few delegates (in the Q&A session) and had even mapped out our next 'secret' moves. Even though in the end I failed to execute them, I had taken a more active part in the proceedings.

The third day was all about reflecting on the crises and making resolutions to tackle the problems. But making resolutions was one of the most difficult tasks because we had to keep in mind the interests of both Russia and the US (which were never the same). So we ended up taking an hour and a half to complete one resolution. By the end of the day, we passed two resolutions and rejected one (Russia vetoed it). The third day marked the end of three of the best and unforgettable days of my life. The day ended with lots of laughter, disappointment (for not having won) and hope for more such MUNs.

So what did I learn from these three hectic days? A lot! I learned how to open up in front of others, the MUN boosted my courage and morale, it made me a bit more confident, but moreover it made me aware... aware of all that is going on around the world, aware of how difficult it is to sit down and solve global problems in a conference room, aware of how history is made, and aware of how the future is (un)secured. I believe that everyone should do themselves a favor and participate in a MUN. ■



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Connecting Learning To Life






# THE NEW *Extended* FAMILY

The importance of friends as the extended family when becoming new parents in Vietnam

Text by SOPHIA CHEN  
Images by NGOC TRAN

**WHEN MY SON** was born in Saigon, there was no long line of relatives waiting breathlessly outside the delivery suite. When he came home, the three of us looked after each other without any help from grandparents, sisters or cousins, and we liked it that way: no houseguests to worry about, no unwanted advice and no inconvenient pop-ins. We came to terms with being parents without any input from our parents, and without the overwhelming whirlpool of family attention that so often surrounds new babies. This also meant, however, that our crash course in parenting was harsh and uncushioned by the sage experience of the kin who had gone before.

Our experience as new expat parents was typical of a growing number of couples who now find themselves, for a variety of reasons, having to raise children without the traditional support of their families. This isolation has encouraged the rise of alternative ways to help parents create a strong and loving environment for their children.

Both my husband and I have relatively little immediate or extended family, and much of that family is

scattered across the world in our respective home countries: Canada and the US. Life has taken us all in different directions, stretching our connections to each other into the thin lines of emails and Christmas cards. This is not a new situation and we were aware of the impact this would have on the realities of raising children. The truth formed a large part of our discussions as to how, when and if we should in fact have children. In many cultures, especially Vietnamese culture, the extended family plays a central part in raising the new generation, and in some countries, this means that a child is largely brought up by a relative.

The family of the new millennium is made up of independent and self-aware individuals who pursue their own lives, often with little reference to family togetherness. Travel now features heavily in many careers and life plans and begs the questions—has shrinking the globe actually increased the distances that families must bridge in order to stay connected? Children often pursue their own lives and careers, and are so busy they lose touch with parents and siblings. Some families simply

grow apart through their different life experiences. The irony appears when these same offspring yearn to create another nuclear family with the birth of their own children. This can result in new parents who feel isolated and overwhelmed, as they feel the reality of being estranged from the traditional family structure. However, the ever-increasing range of community and support groups, which exist in Saigon, help to substitute for this. Mothers' groups such as *Breastfeeding Support Group of HCMC*, kid-dedicated centers and the scores of online support groups (for example, Facebook: *Daddies and Mummies in Saigon*) show that one thing is clear: society is attempting to provide what the lack of an extended family is not providing from within.

In my case, creating my new family initially meant long days alone with my new baby. I still remember how loud the closing of the front door seemed on that first day of my husband's return to work. I suddenly felt truly alone and scared of how I would cope once my eight-day-old mystery package awoke. Would I be able to stop him crying? What if he wouldn't feed? What would happen if

I suddenly dropped into a coma from some rare metabolic disorder? No one would find me until my husband returned that night, with no one to call, I did what a growing number of mothers are doing—I jumped online. The great myriad of websites with information and, more importantly, with chat forums, provides parents with instantaneous knowledge and access to other parents. These sites act as a virtual mid-wife, child welfare nurse and mothers' group, and they provide a path to reassurance for any mother with a computer. They can help ease the burden of expectation that new mothers place on themselves, and can serve to make her feel that she is indeed part of a wider community.

As great as the information age is, however, it can't provide two important things: the reassurance and confidence of another person close by; or a break. Nothing prepares you for the fatigue of caring for a new baby, and nothing will ease that tiredness other than rest. Without the free and available childcare provided by grandparents, aunts and cousins, arranging childcare means just one thing—money. Whether it's hiring a doula to help during delivery and on arriving home, or the scouting of local childcare centers, or even the option

of a nanny, it requires organization, planning and extra expenses. Whatever form of childcare couples choose, in the absence of family backup, this plan must include redundancies to cater for any unexpected happenings, such as illnesses, business trips and late meetings. While it is important to prepare as much as possible, it's equally important to realize that no one can prepare for everything, and sooner or later the unexpected is going to blow the most inventive plan out of the water. This happens to all parents, and despite the fact that it is a little harder to deal with on your own, most manage.

Part of the shift that has come with less intimate family relationships because we live as expats in Vietnam is the increased importance placed on friends. For many, friends are the new family and as the saying goes, "You can't choose your family, but you can choose your friends." Many people have surrounded themselves with a close-knit group of trusted friends and have learned to rely on them far more than any family member. Often these friends are at a similar stage of life, and these shared events can form a strong bond that allows them to help each other through difficulties along the way. Many people are

making these modern friendships into tight circles of trust, forming groups that gather to share their joys and sorrows. Together they build up the scaffolding of support previously provided by the extended family.

I have, however, pondered whether my son will suffer by growing up without the input of a large family network and whether his environment will be any less nurturing for it. Will I somehow have to compensate for this gap in his emotional development or will he, like me, never miss what he hasn't had? It falls to my husband and me to enrich his world in other ways and with other people, and to teach him about love and relationships without the aid of a large, close family. His role models will not come from his grandparents or cousins but from other people within his world in Saigon. We will show him the unique gifts of each family, no matter its form, and will ensure that he reaches out to people whether they are blood relatives or not.

When my husband and I made the decision to have children as expats living in Vietnam, we knew we'd be going it alone and I am at peace with the form that our family will take because the key lies not in its size, but in what binds us together as a family—shared experiences. ■





Grace Collantes is an Early Years teacher at Saigon Star International School.

# Speaking in Tongues

## The benefits of raising bilingual children



**AS A BILINGUIST**, I often get asked: “How did you learn English so well?”, “When did you start learning English?” and “Did you live in America at some point in your life?” I giggle and think to myself, “Here we go again.” So, over the years of being asked these questions, my standard answer became, “The curriculum in the Philippines was adapted from the Americans and that’s one of many things (like Spam and Starbucks) that they left us after the war.”

I attended two private schools in Manila that taught major and minor subjects in English. Most state and private schools offer this curriculum as well. I would then continue to explain that my family speaks Filipino at home (also known as *Tagalog*). To those of you who have visited the Philippines, you will have instantly witnessed that bilingualism has become embedded in our culture, the media and our everyday lives over many decades. I would proudly say that I am only one out of millions of bilingual Filipinos.

Since the beginning of my teaching experience within the international-school education, I have taught bilingual children who have either bilingual parents or parents who aim to have bilingual families. In February 2014, Dr. Peeter Mehisto’s presentation of *Bilingual Education* in Ho Chi Minh City shed light on my understanding of bi-

lingualism. Through personal accounts and notes, I have composed quick FAQs that will hopefully answer some questions from concerned parents.

**What are the benefits of bilingualism?** According to Dr. Mehisto, author of *Excellence in Bilingual Education*, bilingualism has several cognitive benefits, especially when it begins at an early age. One of them is that bilingual learning can strongly affect the brain, particularly in the corpus callosum. He adds that bilingual education enhances thought-process control, boosting focus and problem-solving skills. Dr. Mehisto speaks about the flexible mind having more pathways of understanding, which allows it to see embedded images. He further explains that bilingual learning develops interpersonal communication, and it has greater potential to communicate creatively and socialize. Bilingual individuals are adaptable social beings who can see the world from different cultural perspectives, as they tend to have more avenues of thought.

**Can a dual-language environment cause language delay?** While many parents fear that their children will experience language delay when learning two languages at an early age, current research indicates that bilingual and monolingual children develop their speech at the same rate.

**What can we do about language confusion?** Experts recommend the ‘one-parent one-language’ method, considering the community to be a language educator as well. In my second year of teaching, I had a student with a German mother and an Italian father. From the beginning of her language development, both parents decided to use this method effectively and consistently. Her mother speaks to her in her first language, and the father does the same. She then develops English language at school and in the community. Many researchers have published models like this one that inform parents what language to speak and the exposure their children need based on their language preferences. Dr. Mehisto explains that code-switching is highly successful in bilingual learners, as they are able to interpret one language into the other simultaneously.

**We would like our children to speak more in our first language, but since learning English at school, they speak more in their second language than their first.** This is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about. Being in school most days of the week, children will naturally develop more vocabulary and social skills in their second language. To strike a balance between two languages, parents may need to find more opportunities for their children to be exposed to their first language. The quantity of exposure may vary in different communities, but there are various ways to provide it. Parents may consider exposing their children to films, books, songs or afterschool clubs, as well as socializing with other families who speak their first language.

As modern society creates a high demand for bilingualism, families are strongly encouraged to discuss their language preferences openly. In Vietnam, there are a few schools that offer a bilingual education, and the abundance of language schools is evident. Creating a diverse culture requires an entire nation, and it begins in the core of family values, branching out through language and communication. From what I have experienced so far, Vietnam is well on the way to developing the main resources of the country—a rich education and its multicultural people. ■

# Natural Born Philosophers

Give children the opportunity to have open conversations



Catherine Brown is a Grade 2 International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP) teacher at the International School Ho Chi Minh City. She has a P.G.C.E. and M.Ed. from the University of Cambridge.



**RESEARCH HAS SHOWN** that children from as young as four years old can engage in philosophical dialogue. Many people shy away from the idea of doing philosophy with kids, but they are actually the perfect candidates. Philosophy is all about open mindedness, enquiry and being genuinely intrigued by the world. Children are naturally like this—hungry to know more, have very few preconceived ideas and constantly ask questions. In other words, they are natural born philosophers.

Eight months ago, I was introduced to *Philosophy for Children*, a 10 step guided inquiry framework. The basic principle is straightforward. Students start with warm up thinking games and are then exposed to a thought-provoking stimulus (a book, an image or a film). The students identify the major concepts in the stimulus and then they take some thinking time to devise their own questions about these concepts. The class chooses a question that interests them and, with the teacher facilitating, the class discuss it together. At no point does the teacher impart any knowledge. The students share and learn from each other while the teacher's role is solely to monitor their speaking and listening skills, record their thinking and to use this opportunity

to assess student understanding.

The improvements in my students after incorporating philosophy into their learning have been striking, these included improved: thinking skills, conversation skills, conflict resolution, vocabulary and independence. Let me share an example, our current unit is about migration and after watching a refugee share her story, these are some of the key concepts my class identified in the film: resilience, belonging, luck, commitment, home, wise, open-minded, love and separation. As surprising as this may seem, this is all student-generated vocabulary, which has been built through our units in Grade 2. In the same session, some of the students' questions included: How does being resilient affect your life? Do global companies hire resilient people on purpose? How do refugees communicate? How do people know where they really belong? Are all refugees risk-takers? Sometimes, I still can't believe the nature of the topics discussed considering they are 8 years old and how thought-provoking their questions are.

The nature of these philosophy sessions encourages children to examine the world from perspectives other than their own and so help children to develop empathy. It is not surprising that social and behavioral

improvements go hand-in-hand with these democratic student-led discussions. By regularly learning how to discuss each other's diverse opinions, my students are now better able to deal with disagreements on the playground.

Using this philosophy framework regularly has made me reach a new realization. Adults need to value the questions our children ask and to engage them with higher order thinking, because what they have to say is interesting and because our future generations need to know now, more than ever, how to think critically, creatively and empathically to solve many of the world problems which they will face as they grow up.

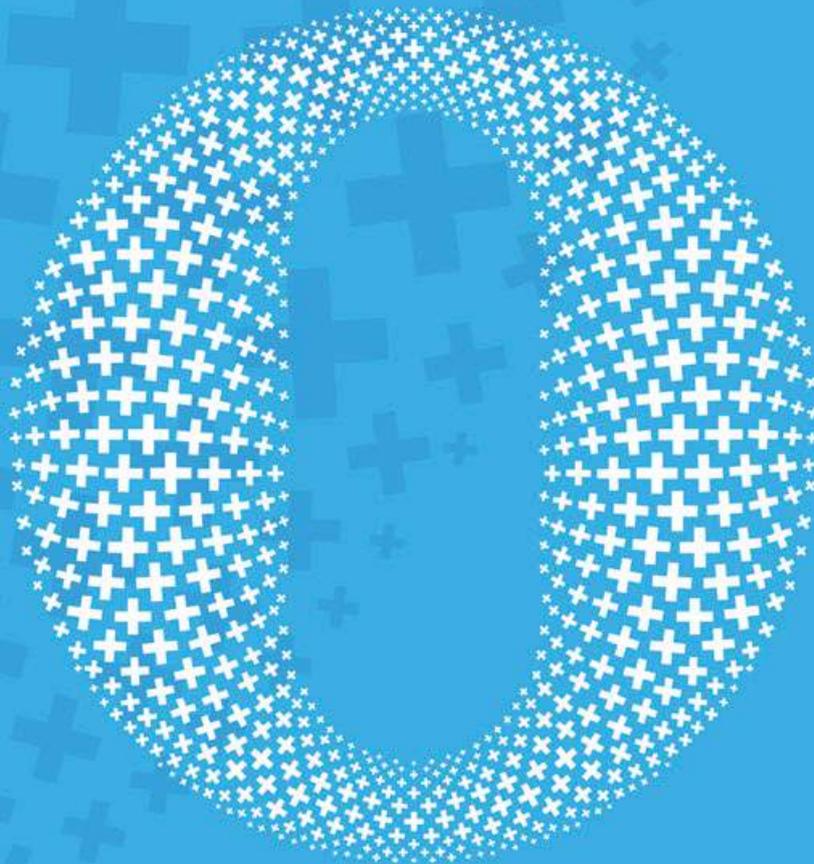
So how can adults outside of school help children develop their thinking skills?

- **Encourage children to be curious.** Rather than avoid that dreaded "Why?" phase, help children to form and test theories in order to try to understand how the world works and to instill a love for learning.
- **Teach problem-solving skills.** When dealing with problems or conflicts, it is important to have the child identify the problem and to brainstorm their own solutions. They will use critical thinking in the process of finding solutions to problems.
- **Learn from others.** Gain multiple perspectives and seek out the answers to your children's "why" questions using friends, family or the internet.
- **Help children evaluate information.** We are often given lots of information at a time, and it is important to help children to think about where or who the information is coming from, how it connects to what they already know and why it is or is not important.

Giving children the opportunity to have open conversations, both inside and outside of school, are vital in shaping their abilities to think critically and to discuss ideas and solutions with compassion. ■

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# The Ta Lai Project

**The Grade 11 students at European International School Ho Chi Minh City rebuild sanitation facilities at Ta Lai village school**



Iain Fish is the Head of School at the European International School Ho Chi Minh City.



**THIS SPRING**, When Grade 11 students at the European International School Ho Chi Minh City learned that primary students in the ethnic minority village of Ta Lai had no functioning toilet at school, they decided to do something about it.

Every Grade 11 student is required to complete a group CAS (creativity, activity, service) project as part of their International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. When this year's Grade 11 students learned that primary students in Ta Lai were missing school because they had to go home to use the toilet, they knew they had found their project.

"The Grade 11 students spent the second semester raising almost VND20 million (around USD900) for the project," said CAS Coordinator Gretchen Greywall. "They organized bake sales, movie nights, dress up days and

motorbike washes. They were extremely creative and committed to achieving their goal."

The funds enabled the students to purchase a pump and other needed materials. Then, at the end of May, they traveled three hours north to Ta Lai, just outside Cat Tien National Park. They spent a week living in a traditional long house, rebuilding the toilet and constructing a path and garden between the school and the new facility. With their remaining funds they bought school supplies to donate to the school.

"The students were surprised at the actual conditions of the toilet and the school," said Ms. Greywall. "The facilities needed a lot of work just to be brought to a basic 2016 standard of plumbing and hygiene."

The European International School Ho Chi Minh City emphasizes

innovation in its curriculum and extracurricular activities. The Ta Lai project challenged the Grade 11 students to perform many building tasks they had never tried before, such as painting, brick laying and installing tiles.

"I think the students were proud of what they achieved, both in raising the funds for the project and in doing all the work themselves," said Ms. Greywall. "They certainly set the bar high for CAS group projects in the future." ■

*European International School Ho Chi Minh City is an IB World School offering an academic and supportive English language education for students ages 2-18 years. For more information, please visit [www.eishcmc.com](http://www.eishcmc.com) or contact the school via email [info@eishcmc.com](mailto:info@eishcmc.com) / telephone number (+848) 7300 7257.*

# Education

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#### Primary & Secondary Campus:

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

5431 1833-34-35-36

office@theabcis.com

www.theabcis.com



### EUROPEAN International School Ho Chi Minh City

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

730 Le Van Mien, Thao Dien, D2

www.eishcmc.com



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### International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)

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92 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh

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admissions@issp.edu.vn

www.issp.edu.vn



### Saigon Star International School

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Thanh My Loi Ward, D2  
3742 STAR / 3742 7827  
www.saigonstarschool.edu.vn



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3519 2223 / 0903 952 223

admissions@tas.edu.vn

www.tas.edu.vn



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### The International School Ho Chi Minh City – American Academy

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## Also...

### American International School

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

### Australian International School (AIS)

The Australian International School is an IB World School with three world class campuses in District 2, HCMC, offering an international education from kindergarten to senior school with the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), Cambridge Secondary Programme (including IGCSE) and IB Diploma Programme (DP). Xi Campus (Kindergarten)  
[www.aisvietnam.com](http://www.aisvietnam.com)

### British International School (BIS)

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

### Deutsche Schule Ho Chi Minh City International German School

Deutsche Schule (IGS) offers a German curriculum from Early Years to Grade 12 which is approved and supported by the German government. IGS is staffed by native German, Vietnamese and English speakers who have many years of teaching experience. We offer a link between Vietnamese and German culture, an international program with German standards and the immersion of German culture into everyday life.  
[www.igs-hcmc.de](http://www.igs-hcmc.de)

### Renaissance International School Saigon

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

### Saigon South International School

Founded in 1997, Saigon South International School seeks to accommodate an increasing need for American education for both local residents and expatriate families. SSSIS enrolls over 850 students in Early Childhood – Grade 12 from over thirty-three countries in a spacious six-hectare, well-equipped campus.  
[www.ssis.edu.vn](http://www.ssis.edu.vn)

### The French International School Saint Ange

Saint Ange welcomes children for their Kindergarten and Primary School. The school follows the program of the French Education Ministry, and includes English lessons every day. Activities and subjects such as arts, sports and school trips are also an important part of their curriculum.  
[www.sa-saigon.com](http://www.sa-saigon.com)

### The Montessori International School of Vietnam

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	NZ268	24 Sep - 29 Oct	9.45pm	2.35pm*1	11.05
<b>Auckland</b> ✈️ <b>Ho Chi Minh City</b>	NZ269	Before 24 Sep	12.45pm	7.45pm	12.25
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