



VIETNAM

04-2018

The Environmental Issue



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Ditch the Plastic and Opt for Eco-friendly Bags

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- Director **HUYEN NGUYEN**
- Managing Director **JIMMY VAN DER KLOET**
jimmy@oivietnam.com
- Managing Editor & Art Director **CHRISTINE VAN**
christine@oivietnam.com
- Online Editor **JAMES PHAM**
jpham@oivietnam.com
- Staff Photographer **VY LAM**
vy@oivietnam.com
- Graphic Designer **LAM SON VU**
lamson@oivietnam.com
- Online Intern **TAI FOSTER-KNAPPE**

For advertising, please contact:

Account Managers **QUAN NGUYEN** 🇺🇸 🇩🇪
quan@oivietnam.com
0122 277 3538

General **advertising@oivietnam.com**

Inquiries **info@oivietnam.com**



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Photographer: Boris Lopatin
(www.lightlinephotos.com)

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Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản:

Giám đốc, Tổng biên tập

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Datebook

What's on this month...

APRIL 11

What: Boost Your Admissions Chances At Top Universities

Where: Liberty Central Saigon Citypoint Hotel (59 Pasteur, D1); 6pm

About: A workshop by Crimson Education's top Ivy League admissions consultants. Consultants will be holding a free workshop for students and parents to:

- Gain first-hand information on how to boost your admissions chances at top US universities
- Schedule your personal strengths assessment consultation
- Experience an in-depth workshop on either school selection or extracurricular activities and leadership building

Contact: Visit www.crimsoneducation.org for more info



APRIL 14

What: TEDxYouthAISVN

Where: American International School (220 Nguyen Van Tao, Nha Be); 8:30am to 12:30pm

About: TEDxYouth@AISVN is an independent TEDx event operating under the license from TED. The first event is called Under The Microscope, where remarkable discoveries and ideas will be unveiled. The event empowers and urges youth to recognize the significance of uncovering the unseen. Speakers will evaluate ideas "under the microscope," and for those keen on embarking this journey with them, follow the group on Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook page @tedxyouthaisvn to be updated on upcoming news and speakers recruitment events.

Contact: Visit www.ted.com/tedx/events/27825 for more info



APRIL 14

What: Lotus Japan Festival 2018

Where: Nguyen Du Stadium in D1; 9am-9pm

About: Starting up as a handcrafts export company, after 20 years of development, Lotus Group has gained its own reputation as a reliable and mutual cooperator of more than 20 leading brands in both Japan and Vietnam from various industries, such as food & beverage, distribution and cosmetics. At the festival, you'll get a chance to take part in outdoor activities: Yosakoi dance, Awa Odori, pop-up Udon workshop, performances and special contests. Special guest singer Vu Cat Tuong will also be joining the festival.

Contact: For more info, visit lotusgroup.talentnetwork.vn



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APRIL 20



What: Ill Beats Saigon Presents Ryan Hemsworth

Where: The Observatory (5 Nguyen Tat Thanh, D4)

About: With a production range spanning across the spectrum of hip hop, R&B, dance music in its many forms and even indie rock, Canadian artist Ryan Hemsworth has landed himself in the eye of today's musical storm, navigating smoothly across genres and making it all fit in his inclusive imaginative world.

Having originally explored his musical voice as a singer and guitarist in his teens, Hemsworth rose to fame soon after his love affair with drum loops and samples took flight. A couple critically-acclaimed R&B albums, a vast catalogue of underground rap collaborations, and a string of landmark mixes and remix work took him on the road to the four corners of the world- all becoming important ingredients to define his approach and lay the ground work for his singular vision.

With his sophomore album, *Alone For The First Time*, Hemsworth keeps sailing to new creative adventures and explorations, digging even deeper into unexplored genres, and coming back to his songwriting roots with his most thoughtful and layered record to date.

Contact: For more info, visit www.facebook.com/The-Beats-Saigon-207148399324751/

APRIL 25-27



What: Automechanika Ho Chi Minh City 2018

Where: SECC (799 Nguyen Van Linh, D7)

About: The three-day fair has now become Vietnam's leading regional trade fair for the automotive service industry, which is complimenting the country's position as a frontier for growth within the sector. Organized by Messe Frankfurt, Chan Chao International Co Ltd and Yorkers Exhibition Service Vietnam, Automechanika Ho Chi Minh City 2018 is expected to house 360 exhibitors and welcome 8,500 visitors to the event.

Contact: Visit automechanika-hcmc.hk.messefrankfurt.com for more info

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THE BULLETIN

Promotions and news in HCMC and beyond...



Taste of Australia

Now in its third year, Taste of Australia is back bigger and better than ever in April 2018. Taste of Australia 2018 will augment its program of culinary events by also introducing music as a focus, and feature a number of musical events. A one-of-a-kind music and wine pairing event on April 3 in which Australian classical crossover performer Van-Anh Nguyen will pair her compositions with matching premium Australian wines—a sensory experience that unites the senses.

You can also enjoy Van-Anh Nguyen's performance alongside premium Australian produce and iconic Australian dishes at the Taste of Australia Epic Aussie Brunch on April 8 at Hotel des Arts. Why not come along to the Taste of Australia Danang Community BBQ on April 22 to hear Aussie 80s singer-songwriter Nick Barker perform all of his classic hits. Or catch snap a selfie with Aussie superstar Deni Hines as she performs at this year's Hue Festival.

The Taste of Australia NOSH Supperclub Dinners are back in 2018 on April 7 and 14. Be treated to an intimate evening as HCMC's best Aussie chefs cook up their favorite Aussie produce live in front of diners to create a fun, interactive and delicious dining experience, all matched to premium Australian wines. Or if you want to learn more about Australian wine and the diverse range of quality varieties available in Vietnam, join us for the second Taste of Australia Food and Wine Journey on April 14 in HCMC.

For more info, visit www.tasteofaustralia.com.vn.



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TROI OI!

The country in numbers



VND20,000-VND40,000 PER HOUR INCREASE OF PARKING FEES FOR CARS ON SOME SIDEWALKS

and roadsides in the city centre starting June 1. The hike aims to reduce the number of cars parked on pavements and roads. Automobiles will be categorized into two groups and charged accordingly. The fee for vehicles that have less than nine seats and trucks weighing up to 1.5 tons will be VND20,000-VND25,000 per hour for the first and second hours, VND25,000-VND30,000 for the third and fourth hours, and VND30,000-VND35,000 from the fifth hour or more. Automobile owners can pay parking fees via their mobile phone accounts or bank accounts. Parking fees are currently around VND5,000, irrespective of the length of time.



5,200 RESETTLEMENT APARTMENTS AND LAND LOTS WILL BE UP FOR AUCTION.

Of the apartments up for auction, 3,790 units are part of the 12,500 resettlement apartments in the Thu Thiem New Urban Area in District 2, according to the Department of Construction. Others include 1,000 units in the resettlement area of Vinh Loc B Commune in Binh Chanh District and 200 units in the Phu My resettlement project in District 7. The rest, which includes more than 8,500 apartments and land lots, will be used for resettlement in 460 urban renovation projects and emergency evacuation, the department added.



~96,500 FOREIGNERS APPLY FOR E-VISA IN 2017

through Vietnam's immigration portal at evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn in the Feb-December period of 2017, according to the Administration of Immigration under the Ministry of Public Security. Procedures for granting e-visas on the website are implemented simply, ensuring transparency. The time for processing e-visa applications is within three working days. Vietnam began allowing tourists from 40 countries to apply for e-visas from February 1, 2017, with China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the US, the UK, Germany and Sweden—all major target markets for its tourism sector, among the 40. The government recently decided to expand e-visa issuance for visitors from six more countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the UAE, India and the Netherlands. Visitors with e-visas can enter through eight international airports, 13 international border gates on land or seven ports.



114 WILL BE THE ONLY EMERGENCY NUMBER AS HCMC TAKES ITS FIRST STEPS IN ITS MAKEOVER AS A SMART CITY.

It has had 113 (security and order), 114 (rescue and fire fighting), 115 (medical) for emergencies since 2015 but without effective co-ordination between various agencies in receiving and processing calls. Besides, having multiple numbers causes confusion when people face emergency situations. Following the merger, there will be only 114. The department is in the process of completing the technical design for the 114 center and will transfer it to the fire and police department by September this year. The city plans to build a data warehouse and a smart city management center and traffic, security and order will be the first to be tested at the latter place.



~1,500

CYBER ATTACKS, IN THE FORMS OF DEFACE, malware and phishing, reported in the first two months of 2018, according to the Vietnam Computer Emergency Response Team (VNCERT). The team unveiled the information in an annual drill to test the response capability of computers security incident response teams from 20 countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, Taiwan, Australia, India, Mongolia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and ASEAN member states – many of which are members of the Asia-Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team.

2030

IS WHEN HANOI AIMS TO BECOME A SMART CITY.

Phan Lan Tu, director general of the Hanoi Department of Information and Communications, said that the four priority sectors chosen to build the smart city are health, education, transport and tourism. Since 2017, all four of these sectors have been developed in combination with the development of e-government and administrative reforms to lay the foundations of a smart city. Based on smart cities established over the world, experts have concluded the core tasks Hanoi needs to complete. First, the city needs to be built on modern information technology and communication (ICT) infrastructure utilizing the Internet of Things. People will be connected to their houses, as well as equipment, traffic and vehicles, among others. Thereby, it is necessary to set up modern infrastructure in transport, healthcare and education.



8-29%

OF VIETNAMESE YOUTH HAVE MENTAL HEALTH problems, 2-3% commit suicide, according to a study by Unicef. Unicef researchers, after surveying Vietnamese youth aged 11-24 in four cities/provinces (Hanoi, HCMC, Dien Bien and Ha Giang), said that 8-29 percent of Vietnamese youth have problems with mental health, from mild to severe levels. Meanwhile, 2.3 percent commit suicide, which is lower than the global average level of 9 percent. However, the figure is on the rise. Of the 409 individuals who thought of committing suicide, 102 tried to commit suicide. Trinh, 19, one of the surveyed students, said: “Parents now are too busy with their work. They tend to leave children alone with smartphones or iPads. Children don’t have many opportunities to talk to parents.” He said a counseling division should be set up at school. In Da Nang, five schools have psychology counseling teachers under a program supported by Dr. Bahr Weiss from the US.



A Sunny Outlook



An exclusive interview with the director, star and producer of *Thang Nam Ruc Ro* - a Vietnamese remake of South Korean hit movie *Sunny*

Text by **Michael Arnold**
Images by **Hi Nguyen**

“THE PROBLEM WITH Vietnamese cinema is that there’s a lack of good scripts,” breathes Hong Anh, lead actress in CJ HK Group’s latest Vietnamese cinematic offering *Thang Nam Ruc Ro*—a remake of the popular Korean hit *Sunny* put together by seasoned local director Nguyen Quang Dung. She’s just spent a gruelling fortnight promoting the surprise crowd-pleaser, prompting

many to ask if she has a financial stake in the film herself—but the truth is that she’s doing all this because she sees the movie as an important milestone in Vietnamese commercial cinema, where quality production values financed by a strong Korean backer have brought forth a well-crafted, quintessentially Vietnamese story based on the foreign source material.

“We’re in need of great scriptwriters, while Korea has it all,” she says. “Its cinematic industry is very well developed. It has a generation of scriptwriters who were fully trained; of script doctors who know just how to create the right twists for a movie; of film directors who know how to tell stories, how to divide the movie into different and interesting structures.”

The extent to which any national film industry should rely on influence from abroad is of course a moot point, although in Vietnam there has been a very clear evolution of movies built on a melding of cinematic traditions. Twenty years ago, a concerted effort to explore the culture of its former colony came out of France, with a series of moody art films (such as Tran Anh Hung’s *Cyclo* and *The Scent of Green Papaya*) exploring the contrasts between the exotic Oriental fantasies of the West and the realities of contemporary Vietnam. A decade later, a wave of Vietnamese-American actors and filmmakers swept into the country armed with a background in Hollywood techniques—films such as Charlie Nguyen’s *The Rebel* and *Fool For Love* sought to serve local audiences with home-grown blockbusters. With the gathering confidence within the Asian region of the *hallyu* entertainment model and the way the Korean Wave has served to support Korea’s cultural and economic interests, the potential for Korean/Vietnamese collaborations seems lucrative on both sides.

“Why not remake movies from other countries?” poses Hong Anh. “As you see, most Asian countries have similar cultural aspects, especially between Korea and Vietnam... we Vietnamese have long been interested in Korean movies and dramas, ever since the *Medical Brothers* drama series was introduced here in 1997. They portray cultural and social issues that Vietnamese people are familiar with.”

“*Sunny* and *Thang Nam Ruc Ro* are different,” she continues. “Even though it’s a remake, Vietnamese people can feel that this is a Vietnamese story, about Vietnamese people—thanks to the music, the mannerisms, and so on.”

Thang Nam Ruc Ro’s producer Vu Quynh Ha is quick to downplay the foreign cultural influence over the movie. Relaxing in an inner-city café a fortnight after the release of the film, Quynh Ha sits with Director Nguyen Quang Dung as they reflect on the process of making a Vietnamese film while spending Korean money.

“I don’t think it’s strongly influenced by Korean production values,” she says cautiously. “You see Korean names in the credits, but most of them weren’t directly involved, most were international sales figures... the Vietnamese team had the complete freedom to make the best movie with a Vietnamese crew. The Koreans brought their experience, especially in film marketing, because that is something very new in Vietnam—but in terms of production, they didn’t really get involved.”

“[Foreign influence] is good for Vietnamese cinema,” affirms Quang Dung. “It encourages Vietnamese filmmakers to improve themselves to do better. When the Viet Kieu movie wave came to Vietnam, their technical level was much higher than the movies here, but their weakness was that their movies, stories, and characters were not very local. Recently Vietnamese filmmakers have tried to improve a lot on their technical side, and at the same time the VK directors have tried to localize themselves so that their movies can touch audiences here. Vietnamese filmmakers want to make movies that can go beyond the border and find audiences outside of Vietnam, but VK filmmakers want to make movies for local audiences. So I think that both sides have to work together to develop Vietnamese cinema.”

“I also think that foreign influences affect Vietnamese audiences, who are changing too,” he continues. “It used to be that they only cared about the story and the actors—they didn’t really mind if the sound and the color weren’t so good. Now they’ve been seeing movies from all over the world, so you can’t make a movie with bad sound and bad images any more.”

This being said, Quang Dung is also keen to distance his creative work from the Korean original. “The film was chosen to be remade in Vietnam because the production company felt there are similarities between Korea and Vietnam—for example, the role of women in society, or in historical terms, the wars that separated the two parts of the country. But of course there are differences. I think that compared to the Vietnamese, Korean people are more extreme. I feel Vietnamese people are more emotional; we find it easier to forget the past and work toward the future. So there is a psychological difference between the cultures.”

“I’ve heard from many people that they find the remake is lighter than the Korean original,” adds Quynh Ha, “more upbeat.”

Double Ensemble

The story revolves around Hong Anh’s character Hieu Phuong, whose chance encounter with a long-lost friend (a terminally ill cancer patient at a local hospital) prompts her to seek out other figures from their shared childhood in Dalat. The plot shifts between 2000-era Saigon and the Dalat of the early 70s, with a different troupe of actresses playing the six women in each age—allowing *Thang Nam Ruc Ro* to feature a core cast of mature film talent while simultaneously building a story that introduces promising new faces.

The mirror ensemble cast format naturally involves a broader and more nuanced storytelling element than is usual in this genre, but this also makes for a more challenging and potentially frustrating cinema experience—a



dangerous gambit for a commercial feature. In the case of this film, something in the chemistry seems to be resonating very well with audiences, so much so that the immediate success of the film has come somewhat as a surprise.

“I really loved the original,” admits Quang Dung, “but I was also afraid that it wasn’t going to be a very successful commercial movie here because of the multiple storylines. I think that

there was a similar situation when the original movie came out—when they saw the first cut, the producer and production team were afraid that the movie would not be as commercially successful as they hoped. When it did come out though, it was a big success in Korea because the original story is really something that people can relate to, and they can find themselves in this movie. Of course it’s a very female-oriented film, but the strange thing is



that I found myself really moved when I watched it. Even though there's nothing in the actual details that matches what I did with my guy friends back in the day, it still made me think about being with my friends when I was young."

"From my perspective, I could see that this story would really be something," says Hong Anh. "I could predict how Vietnamese it would end up being. So I approached my character differently to the way the Korean actress

portrayed her. If you watch the two movies, you can see that my version of the lead role is more lively."

In fact, a careful reading of the contrasts between the character of Hieu Phuong as played by Hong Anh and as approached by the younger actress Hoang Yen Chibi (who plays the 70s-era Hieu Phuong) affords deeper insights into the film's hidden context as an historical piece spanning National Liberation in 1975. Hieu Phuong is the

daughter of a Thieu administration officer whose brother sympathizes with the Northern Army, and the stark change in fortune between child and adult speaks volumes about the effect the war has had on her family.

The adult Hieu Phuong finds herself stuck in an unsatisfying marriage to a high-ranking officer; although the issue is never brought up directly, sensitive audience members may guess the compromises she has had to make to preserve the stability of her family following the country's political changes. Her husband's affection is limited to providing spending money and awkward kisses on the forehead; she dresses in professional office wear although her role in life is clearly limited to that of a housewife.

"It's a reality in Vietnam," reflects director Quang Dung. "I think it's a reality in many Asian countries—deep inside the life of each person who you think looks happy there's always some dream... In Vietnamese society there are many couples who stay together not because they're in love with each other, there's no more fire in the relationship but they still stay together and can spend the rest of their lives together based on that. Vietnamese women think it's right to stay at home and take care of the children, but is that really what they want, or is there another dream that they dare not pursue?"

In the case of Hieu Phuong, an unrequited love story from her past (the film's sole romantic subplot) reveals itself as the source of the dramatic tension that prevents her from overcoming her lonely marriage. Her turning point comes when she rediscovers the suave beau of her childhood to have become a disappointing figure in his middle age. In a cleverly orchestrated sequence, Hieu Phuong metaphorically returns to the past to shelter her heartbroken younger self.

"I think at the end of the movie, after Hieu Phuong affects a departure from her first love, she will pursue her dream to be a writer or a painter," muses Quang Dung. "The love story is only a small part of it, just like one element of life, but the movie is not a romance movie. You can say it's a movie about friendship."

For actress Hong Anh, the project represents a departure from her more usual role as a director and producer in her own right—her own work focusing on indie productions that she hopes will work towards a more artistic cinema culture in Vietnam.

"If it were my money, I'd rather to do arthouse or indie," she smiles. I don't care about how many people like it. Of course I still have to think about making money. In a perfect world, I'd like to make profitable arthouse movies. But if I'm involved in a commercial film, I'd like it to be as *Thang Nam Ruc Ro*." ■ ***Thang Nam Ruc Ro* is currently screening with English subtitles at cinemas throughout HCMC.**

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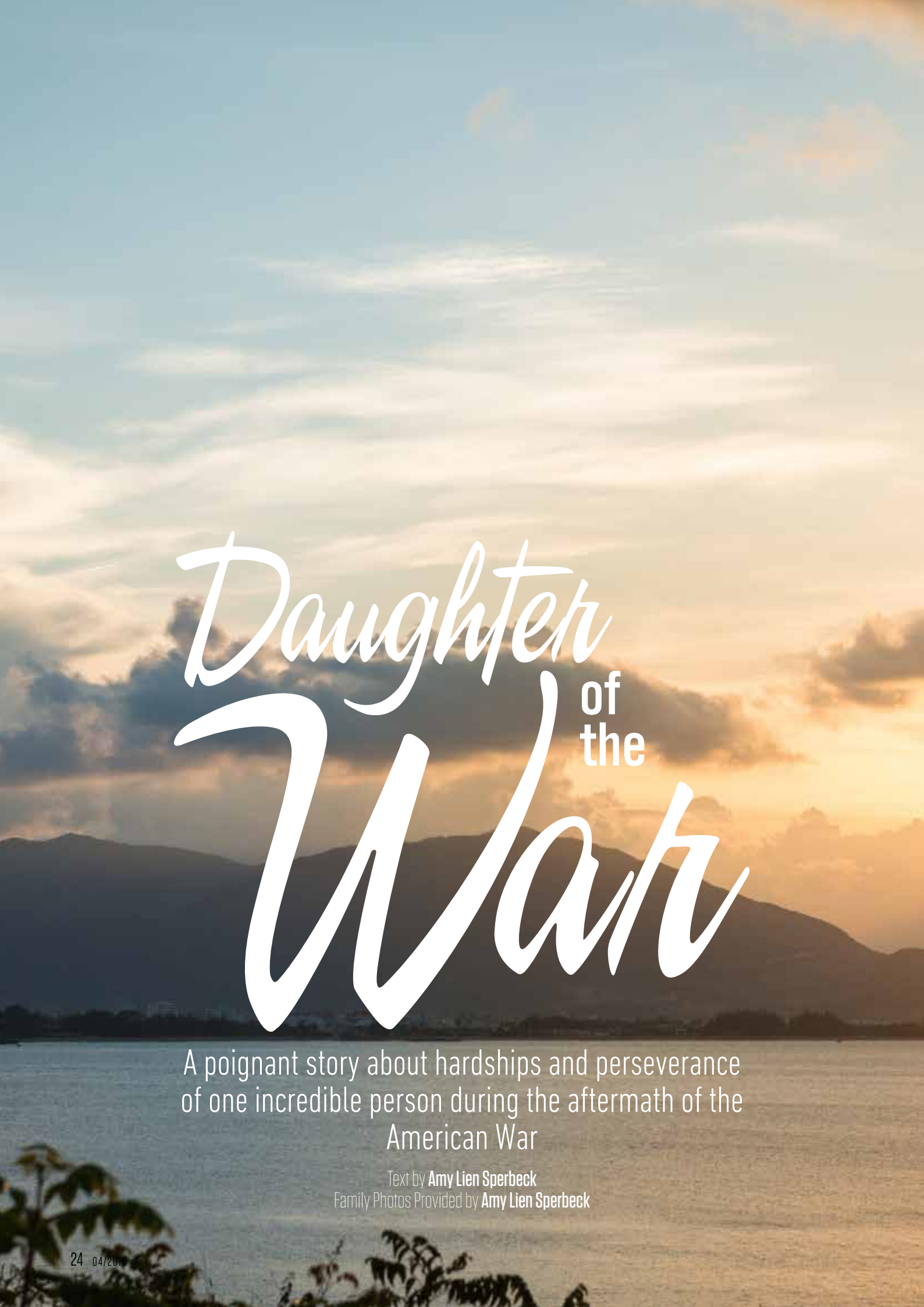
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Daughter of the War

A poignant story about hardships and perseverance
of one incredible person during the aftermath of the
American War

Text by **Amy Lien Sperbeck**
Family Photos Provided by **Amy Lien Sperbeck**



Nobody in the family told me why I had to live apart from my parents until I finally figured out the reason," I was half-American". It was the outsiders calling me "Half" that made me question myself. Even though I was just a young girl at the time, I knew there was more to my life story, there had to be.

I lived in Can Tho with my Aunt at the time. Her family was nice and kind to me and I had a normal childhood. After reunification, our lives suddenly turned chaotic. My guardian, Aunt Hai lost everything including her house, forcing me to move back home to my parents in Saigon. I was happy to reunite with my mom, but sad to learn the new life I was immersed in was nothing but hardship. Like Aunt Hai, my parents lost everything too, they were now dirt-poor. It was almost impossible for them to raise nine children with no jobs. My stepfather was a wounded soldier, he lost one of his legs in the war. He became an alcoholic and often turned angry toward us if things didn't go his way. My mother, a tiny 4'10" woman had to work so hard to provide for us. The situation forced me

grow up quickly to help my mother raise the large family.

Eventually my mother revealed the family secret and I learned more about myself than I could handle. For years I dreamed to unite with my biological American father, but after the story my mother told me I just crawled into a ball and cried, I was devastated. Thank goodness for the Amerasian program. My family and I were able to immigrate to the US.

We struggled in beginning like most refugees, but in the end all my siblings are doing well in America. They are business-owners, homeowners and we are proud to be Vietnamese-Americans. Over time my inner wounds healed. I now have two beautiful children and a wonderful husband who gave me (and still does) tremendous support and love. I decided it was time to share my story and wrote a memoir called Journey of the Half hoping the readers would understand more what it's like to be Half-American. It's a story of survival and forgiveness and in the end love will always win.

*For a physical copy of Journey of the Half order online at https://www.amazon.com/Journey-Half-Amy-Lien-Sperbeck-ebook/dp/B06Y3L8612/ref=cm_cr_ar_p_d_product_top?ie=UTF8
The following are excerpts from the book*

Part 1
Chapter 1
1972
Can Tho, Vietnam

This was the day I had been waiting for, the day Aunt Hai promised would happen. I didn't know how or why I had been separated from my parents, but finally we were going to meet for the first time. At that point I didn't know what my parents really looked like. Aunt Hai had some blurry black-and-white pictures of Ba taken in front of an airplane, but she had no pictures of Ma to show me.

Neighbors often asked, "Where are your parents?"

Friends would question, "Do you miss them?"

I didn't know how to answer those difficult questions. How could I miss someone I had never met? But I had created an image of my mother in my head.

"She has long black hair, delicate skin. My ma is beautiful," I told my classmate at school.

"Do you miss her?"

"Of course," I lied.

My cousins and I went to the same privileged Catholic French school where Aunt Hai used to teach before she got married. Naturally, she always made sure we worked hard at school and at home. Aunt Hai was a good parent, but she wasn't my mother. It was true Aunt Hai was really nice to me, but in my mind she saved true tenderness for her own children. I was always longing for that kind of affection and dreamt a lot about Ma.

I was told my parents lived in Saigon. It was a mystery to me why I didn't live with them. Every time I tried to ask questions about them, my aunt either changed the subject or made up some excuse.

"How far is Saigon from here?" I asked Aunt Hai. "How come my parents don't visit me? Do they miss me?"

"Of course they do. They are just very busy running their business."

"What kind of business?"

"They manage a gas station. Do you know how hard that is for your ma? Remember, your ba is handicapped, and all of your siblings are younger than you. Nannies and maids can help only so much. I'm sure when they have time, they will come to visit."

"How did Ba become handicapped?"

"He was an officer in the Air Force," Aunt Hai said. "He was injured in an off-duty accident by driving over a land mine while he was on leave. He lost his right leg but is very lucky to be alive. It was hard for him to find a job after that, so Uncle Su and I decided to set up a gas station for them. Your uncle knows how it works and helped your parents become successful business owners."

Aunt Hai's husband indeed knew how the gasoline business worked. He was the president of ESSO. He was smart—he spoke four languages—and a kind man. My grandparents loved him like he was their own son. This was another reason I envied my cousins: they had perfect parents.

Aunt Hai kissed her husband goodbye, helped my cousins get in the car, and waved as the driver took them to school.

Watching her do that this morning, it made me wonder if my parents did the same for my siblings.

"Are you going to eat your breakfast, Lien?" She pointed at my now cold breakfast that the cook had prepared.

"I'm not hungry."

"Too excited to eat?"

I nodded. Yes, I was excited and nervous at the same time. What should I do when they got there? How should I act? Should I be polite but distant, or should I cry for all the years we had been apart? I had so many questions in my head, but which one should I ask first?

They arrived at the Mekong River port in the afternoon, and the driver went to pick them up. I was pacing nervously back and forth, checking myself in the mirror. I ran to the front door when I saw the car entering through the gate. Aunt Hai was by my side. There they were finally; this was the moment I had been waiting for.

The driver opened the car door and helped my ba to get out. He took tiny steps and limped slowly past me into the house. I wondered if he even saw me. A few steps behind him came a tired-looking woman. She stared at me and gave me a little sad smile, and I knew it was her. My ma looked sad; she didn't have the long black hair like I had imagined. She was not at all like I had dreamt her to be, but somehow I felt the love, and I couldn't wait to talk to her.

Everyone surrounded Ba, asking him many questions. "How was your journey? Have you gotten used to the artificial leg? How is the business?"

He said he hated traveling, business was good, and that was the reason for this visit. He just wanted to talk to Aunt Hai about renovating the gas station. He wanted to build a house in the back of it but needed Aunt Hai's signature. He said he could buy another house somewhere else, but it would be easier for him to watch over the business by living next to it. Aunt Hai gave him the approval, of course, as she always did, but Grandma didn't like the idea. She thought living next to the business was dangerous, especially a gas station. Ba said it was none of Grandma's business, and her opinion didn't matter. Grandma and Ba ended up arguing, and Aunt Hai told the maid to take me upstairs.

Ma came up about an hour later, sat down next to me, and said she was sorry Grandma and Ba didn't get along. That was why it was hard for them to visit.

"Am I going home with you?" I asked.

She looked at me with her sad eyes and said, "I think it's best for you to stay here."

"Why can't I live with you, Ma? I'm seven years old. I can take care of myself."

She said, "It's complicated. One day you'll understand."

I had so many questions to ask and things to say, but the maid came in the room and told Ma that Ba wanted her downstairs.

That night at dinner, Ba wanted a drink, but Ma had forgotten to pack his favorite liquor. He grabbed Ma's wrist and



Amy on the left at her uncle's wedding

twisted it.

"I asked you to pack one thing, and you forgot. You're so useless." He was loud and angry, "Can't you do anything right?"

She was holding back tears. "I'm sorry. I was busy with the children."

"What do I pay the nannies for?" he shouted.

"There were so many things I had to do before we left. It won't happen again. Please let go of my hand. You're hurting me."

I could tell she was in pain, and I was terrified. Aunt Hai asked him to stop, handing him a bottle of brown liquid, and he let go of Ma's hand. He was still angry and started to drink heavily. He yelled at Ma some more while my aunt took me upstairs.

I was so disappointed with the way the day turned out. I was really afraid of Ba now. I didn't have a chance to talk to Ma again that night and felt so bad for her.

The next morning I got up early and went downstairs hoping to catch Ma alone before I went to school. Everyone was still asleep except for the servants, who were just getting up. I went into the kitchen and

found my favorite maid, Sen, helping the cook with breakfast.

"I'm sorry about yesterday, Lien. Are you OK?" Sen asked.

I shrugged, wanting to say I was not all right. I wanted to start over; I wanted a peaceful visit from my parents, not a terrifying one.

"Do you want something to eat, child?" the cook asked.

"Can I have some coffee?" I felt grown up all of a sudden.

"You know coffee is not for children. How about some hot milk?"

"All right."

Aunt Hai entered the kitchen, and when she saw me she let out a sigh and sat down next to me.

"You're up early today." She put her arm around my shoulders. "You don't have to go to school today, Lien. Why don't you sleep some more?"

"Can I go to school? Please. I don't want to stay home."

She looked at my sad face. "All right, if that's what you want."

Later, when I came home from school, my parents had already left. Ma



Amy's family the day before they left Vietnam

and I hadn't had a chance to talk, and my questions for her were left unanswered. I felt a little guilty that I hadn't stayed home to say good-bye to Ma. I just didn't like what Ba had done and felt very uncomfortable around him. When I told Aunt Hai about how afraid I was of him, she asked me to forgive him and pray for him. She told me that now that Ba was handicapped, everything was more difficult for him, and that was why he had acted that way. I thought, 'I would rather pray for Ma.'

Chapter 30

Saigon 2016

We took a seven-seat taxi to our old neighborhood. I sat next to Anh so I could talk to her, making up for lost time. It was Sunday, but the traffic didn't seem any better. Thao and her boyfriend were fascinated with all the scooters snaking through traffic with ease. Some of them carried huge amounts of merchandise on the backseats. We saw people on the scooters carrying boxes, plants, chairs, and mirrors. It looked so dangerous, but this was normal everyday life to the Vietnamese. Things needed to be delivered, and this was the only way they knew how.

"At least everyone is wearing helmets, though, so that's good," Thao said while she was taking pictures.

"Are there a lot of scooters in America?" my nephew asked.

"Mostly cars. We have winter, and it's really cold, so cars are more practical," Thao said.

I was so proud of her speaking Vietnamese to her cousin. She spoke with a thick American accent, but they understood her, and Thao understood even more Vietnamese than she could speak.

We got closer to my old neighborhood, but I didn't recognize it at all. The area used to be so green, with houses and big properties. It had become busy blocks of businesses, and houses were built more narrow and tall, as land was so expensive. None of the houses had yards anymore. Anh pointed out our old school when we passed by; it looked so different now. It used to be more spread out, like a California campus. Now it was one tall building with a tiny little front yard. Ma pointed out a couple of houses where our old neighbors' still lived. The rest had moved away.



Amy's mom and her in Hoi An 2016



Dinner at Chi Hoa restaurant Saigon 2016



2016 return to the old neighborhood in Saigon, Amy's mom, Di Hue, Amy, daughter Lisa, sister Anh, Anh's sons and Amy's husband Don

The taxi dropped us right in front of Di Hue's house. We got out, and Ma started to get emotional as we stood there staring across the street. Our old house was gone. Six new houses had been built on our old property. The water spinach pond was gone too, replaced by a couple more houses. My sister had made a mistake in listening to her ex, and she'd sold the house when real estate prices were low. Right after she sold it, the government opened the door to doing business with foreigners. That was when the prices of houses and land shot up dramatically. Ma was still bitter about it sometimes, saying Anh could be so rich if she hadn't listened to her ex-husband.

I understood Ma's feelings; it was the house she had risked her life for, fighting with those soldiers. To me it was a sad house of darkness, and I was glad it was gone. Maybe my sister felt the same way and didn't hesitate to sell it.

"Ma, let's go inside. Di Hue is waiting," I said, pulling her away from staring across the street. ■



A member of the Paris Bar, **Antoine Logeay** has been practicing law first in France, mainly in litigation and arbitration, then in Vietnam for three years as an associate of Audier & Partners based at its Hanoi office. Audier & Partners is an international law firm with presence in Vietnam, Myanmar and Mongolia, providing advice to foreign investors on a broad range of legal issues.

Rooms Available

I'm from Spain and have been working over the past years here with the purpose of starting a hostel close to Pho Nha Ke Bang natural reserve. What company structure would best suit this business and what steps should I take to start.

PHO NHA KHE BANG IS SUCH a beautiful place for a peaceful retreat—nice project. Vietnam's legal framework contains specific provisions for foreigners conducting business in the country (called "foreign investors"). There are some essential points to keep in mind.

First of all, the first document to look into is the "Schedule of Specific Commitments" agreed upon by Vietnam for its accession to the World Trade Organization (the WTO) in 2007. This Schedule of Commitments is the list of economic sectors in which Vietnam has pledged to allow foreign investment coming from other WTO members, subject to certain restrictions that Vietnam has reserved the right to impose (most of these restrictions were temporary and expired in 2015).

Regarding "lodging services" (i.e. accommodation services), Vietnam has pledged to open, without restriction, this economic sector 8 years after its accession to the WTO. This means that since 2015, foreign investment from other WTO members (such as Spain) may be made via a 100%-owned company, while, in some other sectors, it is compulsory to establish a joint-venture company with a Vietnamese partner.

It is important to notice, however, that most of the hotel businesses in Vietnam also provide "travel business service," which is defined as organizing tour programs for tourists in Vietnam. Under the Schedule of Specific Commitments, Vietnam has agreed to open this sector but foreign investors must set up a joint-venture company with a local company, with no limitation on the foreign participation (i.e. you may have 99.9% and your Vietnamese partner 0.01%).

This means that you can operate a hotel in Vietnam by setting up a company that you will wholly own. However, you need to find a Vietnamese partner if you want to expand your activity to travel services.

It's Not A Play On Words

Second thing to know: Whether your project falls within a wholly opened sector (like lodging services) or restricted one (like travel business service), all foreign investors are subject to licensing obligations. As a foreigner conducting business in Vietnam, you will be required to obtain an operating license from the competent authority to implement your investment project. Such license is called the "investment registration certificate" and is issued by the provincial level People's Committee (except in certain specific zones, such as industrial parks).

Note that the law uses the word "certificate," which seems less restrictive than "license" because "certificate" sounds friendlier than "license" (to the ears of foreigners who contemplate investing in the country). The "registration certificate" refers to a simple document attesting that you have completed a registration procedure with the authority, while "license" implies that the authority has granted you a specific authorization to conduct a specific activity. The difference might not seem obvious right away, however, "license" usually implies that the authority has discretion to issue or not the license, while "certificate" implies it will automatically issue the certificate. In your case, the Vietnamese authorities retain a relatively large discretionary power to issue or not the said "investment registration certificate" based on the characteristics of each project, despite the friendlier wording use by regulations.

The place to be

In order to request the investment registration certificate, you will need to provide evidence that you have secured premises which fits your project. This could be the most difficult part of your project. Due to regulations, not all buildings in Vietnam may be used as a hotel. For example, a building that is the home of a Vietnamese family cannot be

sold to a foreign individual or a foreign company, or to a foreign-invested company, in order to be converted into a hotel business. You will need to use a building that is permitted for use as a hotel as provided, in particular, in the applicable master planning, construction permit and certificate of land use rights.

Before launching the hotel into operation, you will need to obtain a number of certificates and permissions: the certificate of satisfaction of security and order conditions, the written approval from the police of satisfaction of fire prevention and fighting conditions, etc.

Your business will also have to satisfy a number of conditions provided in regulations applicable to tourism activity. In particular, you will need to obtain a classification of grade of the hotel from 1 star to 5 stars within 3 months from the hotel launching date.

There is an alternative option that you might consider. In practice, most of the major hospitality groups do not directly own the premises of the hotels. They only act as "managers" for the benefits of the owner of the premises. Following this practice, and as a small scale business, you could find the premises or site of your dreams; then sign a management contract with the owner, according to which you help the owner to improve the premises in order to convert it into a hotel or guesthouse. The management agreement should provide you with the right to manage the hotel or guesthouse without interference from the owner, including managing the fitting-out and design of the premises, recruiting employees, drafting the internal rules, setting prices, etc.

In all cases it is highly advisable to meet a legal counsel or someone who has good experience in this field. If you enter into a management agreement, you will not be the "owner" of the premises, but will have more limited rights as the manager of the hotel or guesthouse. ■



Dr. Data Putra Sembiring graduated from Bogor Agricultural University in Indonesia. Before working as a veterinary surgeon at Animal Doctor International Vietnam, he worked with German Primate Center (Siberut Conservation Program) and a private animal clinic in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

To Neuter or Not

Pet overpopulation and euthanasia are a continuing problem. Be a part of the solution: neuter your pets

WHAT IS NEUTERING?

Neutering is the surgical removal of the reproductive tract of an animal, termed spaying for females and castration for males. A 2013 UCLA University data mentioned that neutered dogs were prone to diseases such as hip dysplasia, cranial cruciate ligament disease, lymphoma (lymphosarcoma), hemangiosarcoma and mass cell tumor. But before we become paranoid, we should understand that the data was based on a retrospective study and only Golden Retrievers were used as subjects, which mean that the data can't be used for all breeds of dog, even for large breed dog. In addition, the UCLA University data didn't mentioned lifestyle, body weight, diet and other factors which may give the dogs a higher predisposition for the diseases mentioned.

Instead of looking at the diseases that may happened after neutering, we should understand that there are many benefits of neutering.

Unwanted Pregnancies

The problem with an intact male is that it's hard for him to resist a female in heat. An intact male can run away and follow the smell of a female in heat located miles away. In addition, you may be liable if your male procreates with somebody's prized female. Suddenly, the miracle of life has a bittersweet taste, doesn't it?

Pet Overpopulation

3 to 4 million unwanted pets are euthanized each year; neutering males and spaying females could have prevented some of these deaths. In the shelter world, this is known as pet overpopulation. In essence, sterilizing your pet ultimately makes the world a better place.

Behavior

Unneutered pets have all kinds of behavioral problems. In male dogs, the most common behavior is an aggressive temper. Of course, there are many intact pets that are perfectly sweet. Neutering,

when done early in life, can reduce aggressiveness and improve behavior overall. For example, it decreases the always-embarrassing "mounting" behavior in dogs.

Marking

Few things smell worse than an intact male cat's urine. Some people make their indoor cat an outdoor cat when they can't tolerate the smell anymore. This increases the risk of the cat being hit by a motorbike. Neutering, when done early enough in life, virtually eliminates the odor of male cat urine and should prevent marking in male dogs.

Roaming And Getting In Trouble

Pets are rarely taught how to cross the street safely. So as they roam, searching for a partner or looking for trouble, they might get hit by a motorbike. In fact, many pets treated for fractures are intact. Neutering decreases the urge to roam or run away from home. In addition, neutering decreases the risk of getting into fights, notoriously in tomcats. They commonly get abscesses from these fights.

Family and emergency vets regularly see wounds from dog bites, and I assure you that it's rarely pretty. I've seen many dogs die after getting attacked by another dog.

Roaming And Getting Lost

Every year, millions of pets get lost. Some are returned to their owners. Most are not. To decrease the risk of such a tragedy happening in your family, neuter your pet, pet-proof the fence in your backyard and always keep your pet on a leash during walks. In addition, talk to your vet about the benefits of microchips.

Prostate Disease

Intact male dogs can have a number of diseases of the prostate including cysts, abscesses and enlargement. The latter is called "benign prostatic hyperplasia," just as in older men. Neutering (of dogs!) prevents these problems.

Perineal Hernia

A perineal hernia is a fixable but annoying problem mostly seen in intact male dogs. Organs from the belly can slip or herniate through weakened muscles in the pelvis. The consequence is a bulge on one or both sides of the anus. The hernia can contain fat, fluid or even the bladder. These hernias classically cause constipation. This condition is believed to be due to testosterone (from the testicles). Neutering dramatically reduces the risk of these hernias.

Testicular Tumors

Neutering eliminates the risk of testicular cancer. This condition, mostly seen in intact male dogs, is believed to be due to testosterone (from the testicles). It's simple, really: no testicles, no testicular cancer.

One more reason to neuter is when a male is cryptorchid, i.e. when a testicle does not come down and remains in the belly. The testicle left in the belly has a much higher risk of becoming cancerous. So this may require 2 surgeries: 1 to remove the "outside" testicle, and 1 in the belly to find and remove the other one. Occasionally, both testicles are in the abdomen.

Genetics

Yet another reason to neuter is to prevent the spread of bad genes. Pets with hip dysplasia, eye diseases, heart conditions and many other genetic conditions should not be allowed to breed.

It seems, however, that neutering does not decrease, and in fact may increase, the risk of prostate cancer. Luckily, this is a very rare tumor. Therefore, the combined benefits of neutering vastly outweigh the risk of prostate cancer as you can see from this top 10 list.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian—they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets. ■

Rules to Live (And Save) By



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.

I've highlighted 10 easy financial planning principles to guide expats to their financial goals.

Don't downgrade your lifestyle when you retire. Aim to earn at least as much as you do now, adjusted for inflation

We often find that folks are willing to compromise with future earnings and accept that they will earn less on a monthly basis when they retire. We believe this to be a fallacy and have calculated, at least in the majority of cases, that expats can retire usually before their average target retirement age (usually 65) earning at least what they do today on a monthly basis or more, adjusted for inflation.

Save at the beginning, not end of the month

Most people save at the end of the month, after expenses, instead of at the beginning. This means that expenditure is prioritized over saving, and the amount you have left over every month to save lacks consistency. Instead, save at the beginning of every month and budget to spend what you have left over. This means that you target and maintain a fixed savings rate every month and expenditures come second. Some tools to make your monthly savings more convenient are: setting-up automatic debit or standing orders into your savings accounts to automate your monthly transactions and make your life easier. Also, for most effective way to control and manage expenditure try the next principle

Create a daily, not monthly, budget

Micromanaging and compartmentalizing your expenditures can seem daunting, but an easy fix is to budget over the short term (daily) instead of the longer term (monthly). Work out how much you have to spend after saving and your utilities & fixed expenses for the month, divide that by the number of days in the month and you have your daily budget. This will incentivize you to spend under your daily limit in order to increase your daily limit for times you'd like to spend more money, like on weekends or special occasions.

Have sufficient health insurance coverage - it could literally save you hundreds of thousands of dollars

This is of particular relevance to expats who come from countries with universal healthcare systems, like the UK & Europe. When living in, for example, Vietnam, you'll have to use a private healthcare facility as the standard of the state facilities can be inadequate. Using a private facility means you will have to pay for your own treatment. Spending a small percent of your income on health insurance will mitigate these types of risks, as long as you get insured while you are healthy.

Don't rely too much on your defined-benefit pension plan

If you don't know what a defined benefit pension plan is already, it's basically a guaranteed amount that your company will pay you at retirement based on the number of years you've worked at your company, and the salary you've earned during that period. This means that the company takes the risk of financing your retirement, which also means the company has the incentive to reduce the amount it pays you at retirement to decrease operating costs and increase profitability.

Stocks will provide you with the most return over the long-term

Research conducted by Raymond James Investment Management shows that from 1926 - 2017 the compound annual return from small cap stocks = 12.1% & large cap stocks = 9.9%. This is the highest annual compound growth rate among all asset classes. As populations grow, companies will grow, become more profitable and lead to higher stock prices and an increase in your net worth.

Learn to manage your own money

The majority of folk seek counsel from financial advisers to manage their investment and retirement portfolios. The reality is that most financial advisers are product salespeople with no experience managing or investing their own money effectively, and charge you high fees or earn high hidden commissions for their council. Read buy stocks in your own retirement portfolio.

Understand the value of compound interest

Compounding is the process of exponentially increasing the value of your

assets as opposed to linearly. A linear example: you save USD10,000 today, earn 10% interest over that time, and retire after 3 years. After 3 years you will have USD11,000. An exponential example: you save USD10,000 today, earn 10% interest per year over that time and retire in 3 years. After 3 years you will have USD13,310, a USD2,310 difference. A real life example: a 30 year old invests USD20,000 in the stock market for 30 years, earns a 9.2% compound annual return and invests an additional USD1,000 every month. After 30 years he/she will have: USD2,221,523—just about enough to retire for 30 years.

Real estate is not as great as you think

Many savers favor real estate to park the majority of their savings, but don't take the following factors into account: 1) Complexity - pretty much every neighborhood is a totally different market, and selecting the right asset for long-term growth incredibly complex. 2) Illiquidity - it takes a long time to sell a piece of land to realize a profit. During that time your asset could decline significantly in value. It takes a few seconds to sell a stock. 3) Mortgages - many get sold on the ability to use their homes as collateral to obtain financing. Remember that if you get a mortgage on your home, your home technically belongs to the bank. 4) Asset bubbles - because people love the fact that you can touch, see and feel real estate, people tend to crowd the real estate market, creating asset bubbles, like the one currently underway in China and Australia, and the US in the 2000s. Don't pour the majority of your net worth into real estate.

Most importantly - maintain zero debt, if you can

Debt destroys wealth and makes bankers wealthy. It creates unsustainable spending patterns and could lead you to pay double for your home or other assets that you lend against. Avoid having an institution own you and save on the interest costs. ■



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A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a sleeveless, high-necked, black and white vertically striped evening dress. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a soft expression. Her right hand is raised near her face, and her left arm is crossed over her waist.

Good Evening, Ma'am

Prepare to make an entrance in these dresses that are destined for the season's special events. Stand out from the crowd and be on-point for the next occasion in this selection of evening dresses by *LYLA TRAN* (1/11 Pasteur, D1; Facebook: *LYLATRAN*). Whether you're heading out to a glamorous, sophisticated event or out for a few drinks with the girls, we've got you covered.









The Environmental Issue

More than four decades after the first Earth Day, there are still many environmental concerns for communities around the world to address; perhaps none so pressing as man-made climate change. But progress is being made, and it could be argued that awareness about environmental issues is at an all-time high. This issue we're shining a light on the most pressing environmental concerns that affect us all, and showing what you can do to help restore ecological balance to this amazing place we call home.



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the Let's Bag Plastic Bag

Cassava starch bags you can buy today to help stop plastic pollution

Text by **Aliesha Duffin**

Images by **Vy Lam and WAVE**



Steven & Malou



This bag is 100% biodegradable & water-soluble.
It is made from cassava starch and contains zero plastic.
wave-ecosolutions.com



detrimental types of litter that we have on this planet. They overwhelming quantity of plastic bags contribute to buildups in drainage systems, resulting in blockages. This is especially common in developing nations, where sewage systems are substandard.

“Even plastic bags that are being advertised as bio-degradable are not actually bio-degradable. They break down into micro plastics, which is much worse for the environment. We encourage people to do research on the plastic they are using,” says Malou. Many people who use plastic bags assume that you can throw it into the recycling bin. However, even if the bag has the three-arrow-triangle recyclable symbol it is often used as a marketing ploy. There isn’t actually any regulations surrounding the symbol, resulting in plastic bags being picked up by recycling companies who can’t recycle them and they end up in landfills, where they will sit for hundreds of years.

They worked with scientists and specialists who were experts in the environment and sustainability and the results were WAVE zero plastic truly biodegradable, eco-friendly products. A cassava starch bag that is as strong as plastic takes 90 days to break down and when it does it’s a completely natural substance that is released into the environment. This means that the runoff from the bags is completely safe for animals to consume. The logo that is printed onto the bags (this can be customized for any retailers or hospitality companies who want to become more eco-friendly) is made of food dye alcohol-based (don’t worry, no animals will get drunk off the bags).

The bags from WAVE dissolve in water at around 80 degrees Celsius (but not in rain, your stuff will be safe in monsoon season!) and composts naturally in landfills. Traditional plastic is made from fossil fuel-based materials, which is responsible for roughly eight percent of oil production.

This number is only expected to rise, with experts predicting it will be at 20 percent by 2050.

WAVE products are made of 100 percent bio-based polymer compounds, part of a natural closed loop system. This means that when the bags break down, they can safely return to nature in the form of H₂O and CO₂, which in turn feeds our agriculture, and therefore making them part of a true sustainable lifecycle.

“Whether you are using our bags or another fully sustainable and biodegradable bag, our aim is to educate people on the dangers of plastic. Each individual and corporation that we can get to stop using plastic is a win at the end of the day. It’s why we are doing what we do,” says Roberto. ■

For more info on WAVE products, visit wave-ecosolutions.com.

WHETHER YOU ARE BUYING coffee, a book or even just a single candy bar, the cashier would most likely be wrapping your purchase in a plastic bag inside another plastic bag. The excessive use of plastic, from takeout containers and utensils to straws and bags, in Vietnam is dangerous on the environment. Since their creation in the 1960s, plastic bags have plagued cities. Despite their supposed usefulness, their proliferation has interfered with the wellbeing of ecosystems and municipal operations. Because they do not biodegrade, plastic bags have immense longevity, taking as long as a millennium to break down in landfills. They can choke animals, and waterborne bags have carried invasive species to new areas. Because animals cannot digest plastic bags, an ingested bag can kill or interfere with their bodies’ functioning.

Some scientists have campaigned to reclassifying plastic as hazardous waste. However, it’s not just scientists who are looking to address the problem. Startups, formed by concerned divers, surfers,

hikers, nature lovers and people from all walks of life, are coming up with innovative solutions to solve the plastic pollution.

“We started WAVE with a single mission: To help the environment by bringing a product that is within everyone’s reach,” say Malou Claessens and Roberto Guzman, founders of WAVE, a company that produces biodegradable bags from cassava roots. The two started the project several years ago, fueled by the mountains of litter they saw in parks, forests and cities on their travels. After extensive research to find alternative plastic sources Malou and Roberto saw similar ideas—bags made from potato starch—and based on that discover they decided to work with cassava starch.

The results from the research backed up many assumptions they already had: Plastic shopping bags are one on the most

“ We knew that we had to do something, and find a product that would not only be biodegradable but also sustainable,” says Roberto.



It Takes A Village

The ubiquitous bamboo
is forever tied in to
Vietnamese culture and identity

Text by **James Pham**
Images by **Ngoc Tran**



FOR CENTURIES, THE

Vietnamese have seen themselves in the hardy, strong, ramrod straight plant, a fitting symbol for the strength and resilience of the people. The fact that bamboo grows in clusters speaks of the nation's solidarity.

Throughout the ages, the lowly bamboo has found its way into Vietnamese poems, folk tales and idioms. A young, mythical Thanh Giong used sharpened bamboo poles to repel foreign invaders. "Their stems are thin, their leaves slender, but they can become ramparts and citadels," goes the famous poem Vietnamese Bamboo by Nguyen Duy. "When the bamboo is old, sprouts will appear," says another proverb, highlighting the importance of the older generation paving the way for the new. And who can forget the moral of one bamboo chopstick being easily broken, but the strength in numbers of an entire bundle of bamboo chopsticks?

Not only is the plant symbolic, it's incredibly practical, used to make everything from the essentials of housing and furniture, fish and bird traps, utensils and boats, to the artistic, including musical instruments and paper, not to mention its nutritional and medicinal value.

On a particularly muggy morning, we find ourselves walking through a shady grove of bamboo at the 10-hectare Phu An Bamboo Village, guided by Jacky Gurgand, an octogenarian Frenchman. An agricultural engineer, Jacky has been coming to the village several times a year since it was founded by his student, Dr Diep Thi My Hanh, in 1999, to help with the irrigation of the property and the nomenclature of the 350 specimens housed there.

"Feel this one," he says. "We call it Miss Saigon, the Beauty Queen of bamboo." Sure enough, the bamboo is silky smooth to the touch. A little further down, we arrive at another clump, this one with a gritty sandpaper-like exterior.

"Mr. Saigon non rasé (unshaven)," he says with a mighty laugh.

Throughout the morning's visit, Jacky introduces us to many of the 101 varieties of living bamboo at the village, a dual purpose ecomuseum and botanical conservatory dedicated to all things bamboo located 40 km north of Saigon, in Binh Duong Province. He shows us the incredible diversity within the bamboo family: a species that grows sturdy perpendicular branches making it a natural ladder, one that has thorns which villagers use to build corrals for livestock, and a painted variety, yellow with perfectly straight green streaks, looking like drips of paint.

Jacky has personally measured one species on the property which grew 80 cm in one day (bamboo is the world's fastest growing plant, with certain species able to grow 91 cm in a 24 hour period), which leads him to mention Bamboo Torture, the alleged practice of fixing a prisoner above a sharpened piece of bamboo and allowing it to grow straight through the body (affirmed as possible in a 2008 Mythbusters episode).

The Iron Triangle

Armed with a degree in Environmental Ecology from Vietnam and a doctorate in Environmental Science and Technology from France, My Hanh returned to her hometown of Phu An in the late 90s, only to be asked by the villagers why she didn't use her extensive schooling to help her own village. Best known for



being one of the areas (along with An Tay and An Dien) making up “The Iron Triangle,” a stronghold of the Viet Minh during the war, seeing the many varieties of bamboo that grew there sparked a vision in My Hanh—to transform the Iron Triangle into a Green Triangle. With the help of the Rhone Alps Region (France), Binh Duong Province, the Pilat Regional Nature Park (France), and the University Of Natural Sciences of Ho Chi Minh City, the Phu An Bamboo Village was born.

The picturesque complex is divided into two main areas. The botanical garden houses clusters of bamboo collected from all over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos with a view to conservation. To date, 450 taxa have been collected, including 20 threatened or endangered species. My Hanh says her passion for bamboo will have her jump on any transportation available to get samples that the village doesn’t yet have, recalling a particularly arduous trek to Lang Son in Vietnam’s far north, bordering China.

“It was deep into the jungle and the path was dangerous. The locals couldn’t speak Vietnamese clearly, so they didn’t understand exactly what we were looking for. We just had to trust them. But in the end, we got what we came for.”

Back at the village, the bamboo are grown in separate clusters to avoid cross-species contamination, and are used for research in the adjacent museum/laboratory complex. Over the years, My Hanh’s research has led to eye-opening results including finding species that flower regularly but still live (debunking the myth that bamboo dies once it flowers) and that growing bamboo enriches the soil even more so than rubber, yams and cashews.

My Hanh points to bamboo’s role

in improving the soil conditions after the devastating eruption of Mount Pinatubo and re-greening post-atomic Hiroshima, leading to research into phytoremediation, or how certain species of bamboo can be useful for soil decontamination and sewage treatment.

However, far from being an impersonal research facility, the Bamboo



My Hanh

Village reaches out to the local community in meaningful ways. On any given day, groups of students on field trips can be found learning about bamboo and its many uses. The center encourages children not to burn bamboo leaves, but to

leave them on the ground and let them naturally compost, providing nutrients for the soil and for insects and worms, as well as to prevent soil erosion. Information on proper techniques for cutting, transplanting and fertilizing are shared with farmers who previously often cut bamboo too early, before they matured, leading to reduced profitability and sustainability.

My Hanh and her team painstakingly identify each sample, at times requiring DNA analyses back in France, and study their individual characteristics. The results are shared with farmers to help them select the right kind of bamboo for their use, whether it be construction material, handicrafts, paper pulp or even toothpicks. My Hanh is encouraging the use of bamboo for canal construction in the Mekong Delta, as the hardy trees are able to grow even in flooded soil.

In addition to encouraging bamboo farming, training for local villagers on making bamboo products and crafts has contributed, in part, to an 80 percent reduction in poverty in the village since the initiative began. Awarded the UNDP Equator Prize in 2010 for being a model in sustainability, innovation and

community empowerment, it’s estimated that the Bamboo Village has positively affected the lives of up to 3,000 families.

That positive impact has helped fuel My Hanh in some of her darkest moments when she felt like giving up. In 2012, typhoon Pakhar damaged 40 percent of the village’s bamboo trees.

“I was truly in the depths of hell. Everyone saw the destruction and left. It was just me and my dog who stayed. I called everywhere for help. The local authorities were busy helping other homes in Phu An that had been damaged. But then I saw something. The bamboos were bent every which way and the typhoon had stripped them down to their roots, but they were alive. Even among the broken branches, I saw new green shoots. They still wanted to live, so why should I be discouraged? I learned a lesson that day from the bamboo. I had to help them stand up again.”

Help eventually did come from all corners of the globe and all together, it took My Hanh and her team of student volunteers seven weeks to salvage what they could, one grove of twisted trees bent 90 degrees over now a reminder of that event.

Sadly, though, the very existence of the village remains under threat. Every year, the village receives VND200 million in funding from the National University of Ho Chi Minh City, but needs to raise another VND500 million to meet its operating budget. This year, it’ll need even more, as construction has begun on the Green House that will encompass a laboratory, classroom, library, canteen and a place for the workers to sleep, replacing a dilapidated 15-year-old structure.

It is hoped that My Hanh’s win-win conservation and livelihoods model can be replicated elsewhere. There’s talk about building other bamboo villages as well as a village in the Mekong Delta attempting something similar, but with coconuts. She also advocates using fast-growing bamboo instead of other types of wood, lessening deforestation, which in turn slows down climate change. Even growing bamboo in amongst other tree species can rehabilitate degraded land.

Looking forward, 63-year-old My Hanh has bigger dreams for her bamboo. “I want there to be many more bamboo villages. If something happens to one, there’ll still be others left. I also want families, even in the city, to grow a clump of bamboo. I have a species, bambusa multiplex, that can grow in a pot. If even half of the city’s 8 million people did that, we’d have 4 million bamboo trees releasing oxygen, helping to filter the pollution. It just takes a few helping hands. I also want this bamboo village to survive. We’ve had so many successes; we received a UNDP prize, I’ve registered it with the New York Botanical Garden’s Virtual Herbarium... but I won’t live forever. When I’m old and sickly, I want others to carry on my work. Please help protect the Phu An Bamboo Village.” ■



Can Gio - Ngan

Nature Is Calling

Raising public consciousness of protecting Vietnam's flora and fauna

Text by Daniel Spero
 Images by Vy Lam and Gaia

GAIA NATURE CONSERVATION, a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental conservation efforts in Vietnam, is opening a new educational program in cooperation with World Wildlife Fund and HSBC Bank. The program is focused on changing negative behavior towards nature through education and communication programs, and will take place in Tram Chim National Park in Dong Thap Province.

Established in August of 2016, Gaia Nature Conservation is a relatively new organization started by Huyen Do, a person with over 18 years in wildlife education. After years as a member of Wildlife At Risk, another non-profit dedicated to conservation efforts, Huyen branched off and created Gaia. "We set up Gaia to try to empower people to be more harmonious with Mother Earth. What I really want is to empower people, because in Gaia we believe that the people who have created the problem have to be the ones to solve the problem. We cannot follow them everywhere and tell them to protect the environment, we have to empower them, to give them the motivation to change."

In the past Gaia worked with fisherman on Phu Quoc and Con Dao islands to education them on some of the issues regarding marine life, and what steps they can take to help protect the environment that provides



Huyen

their living. Currently, however, much of their effort is centered on educational programs that protect Vietnam's national forest. According to Huyen, "Right now we are focused on education, on bringing secondary school kids, aged 12 to 15, to nature. We bring them to national parks to show them the beauty of nature and how to behave toward nature. For example, if you see a beautiful flower, don't pick it. If you see a wild animal, don't kill it." Huyen teaches the children that a healthy alternative would be to take a photo instead, so that these plants and animals can live, grow and regenerate.

At Dong Nai Culture & Nature Reserve, the destination of many of the current field trips, busloads of students are brought from Ho Chi Minh City area schools, where they first visit a nursery and learn how to plant seeds, grow the plants, and transfer the healthy plants

to the woodland area. The students then go into the forest where they, using guidebooks on local flora and fauna, work in groups to identify various plants and animals. It's a great sensory experience for the children: touching tree bark or ferns, smelling flowers, listening to the birds. And students receive health benefits as well. According to a study by the University of Minnesota, while spending time in nature, "What you are seeing, hearing, experiencing at any moment is changing not only your mood, but how your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working."

Not only does Gaia work with schools, they also work with community groups, university students and companies. Teaching adults to behave appropriately toward nature can be a challenge, as Huyen attests. "For example, a lot of people who go to Can Gio nature reserve, where they have a lot of monkeys, a lot of Vietnamese people feed the monkeys because they enjoy it, but that is not a good thing because the monkeys come to depend on this food, so we have to teach them the harm this behavior causes the wild."

Another group Gaia works with are the residents who live near national parks that do not always understand the benefits of having protected national parks. "They think that the government has tried to steal the land from their ancestors. They set up the park, and don't let the people take the wood or the animals, so we focus a lot on why the park is important." She describes how when locals need money they are still in the practice of going into the national parks to collect honey or to illegally log the forests for wood to build their houses.

Even the people in charge of the national parks often require education on how to sustain the forests. Often national park staff, being governmental employees, are assigned to their post, but are not necessarily educated about the environmental issues impacting the parks, like how to work with the local people to reduce poaching or illegal logging.

Within many of the stakeholder groups, from future generations, to the management of the parks, to the local residents, there is still a lot of instruction needed to help conserve the natural environment of Vietnam. If you're interested in any of Gaia's programs or to volunteer, you can learn more at gaiavn.org. ■



Wellspring SaiGon



Be Like The *Lotus*

Chris Humphrey talks to Dang Thanh Long, Executive Director of Vietnam Green Buildings Council, about how they increase the number of environmentally-friendly buildings in Vietnam and improve quality of life as a result

Images Provided by VGBC

IT SEEMS FITTING TO MEET

Dang Thanh Long in Creative City, one of Hanoi's most progressive office spaces. The building houses cutting-edge design companies, art galleries, hip clothing shops, internet start-ups and also Vietnam Green Buildings Council (VGBC). And while VGBC, an organization working in construction, may seem an odd addition, environmentally-friendly construction is still so new and vital in Vietnam that it makes sense.

Long appears relaxed and happy to discuss developments in the market, as we chat in the co-working space beneath their office. "They support the LOTUS rating system," he says, when I ask him about the response of the Vietnamese government. "They emphasised that they still support LOTUS... But when I asked for one step further, that is they may officially endorse LOTUS as the rating system for public funded projects, they said they support LOTUS but also other systems like LEED."

Founded in 2007, the organization gained full support from the Ministry of Construction in 2009 and has gone on to support over 40 projects in Vietnam through their LOTUS rating system. LOTUS itself was based on various other



international rating systems, such as LEED or BREEAM, and aims to set a benchmark in Vietnam's construction industry and guide developers toward a more efficient use of natural resources.

A LOTUS assessment rates a new construction using ten categories, including energy efficiency, waste and pollution, materials, impact on the environment and the quality of life of residents. Certification levels range from Good, to Silver, Gold and Platinum, although it is not just a test carried out post-construction, VGBC supports



any product related to green buildings... maybe people say they should develop their own rating system. They still see VGBC as a foreign organization. On the other hand, the ministry did try to create their own rating system, but nobody used it. People choose VGBC and LOTUS because it is foreign and they trust it.”

One of the distinctive points about VGBC, though, is that it’s available in Vietnamese. And although its parent company is California’s Green Cities Fund, which initially played an important part in the organization’s genesis, VGBC is now managed almost entirely within Vietnam.

They’ve clearly made progress, but Long freely admits that Vietnam still has “too few projects” and suggests they need more case studies and reports to prove the benefit of LOTUS specifically in Vietnam. Some people, it appears, are still sceptical. In the next couple of years, cities like Da Nang or HCMC are actually considering offering some incentives for green buildings. If this happens it might be a game changer. For now, VGBC will have to stick to growing organically.

So what are the benefits of using a rating system like LOTUS? “The first thing is the client can save money,” says Long. “The building is more energy efficient and costs will be less in the long term. A better environment protects your health and comfort too. Indoor air quality improves. For some developers they also want to have green building as a marketing tool. It can help them to increase their sales or rental price.”

The ratings themselves are not cheap. Cost depends on the size of the project. For small-scale projects where the building area is below 2,500 square meters, the fee will be VND15 million. For bigger projects it can increase to 50,100 or even VND300 million. It’s impressive that even if a company spends 300 million on the assessment, they will still make savings due to energy efficiency. That said, the cost of the assessment, together with consultancy fees, is still very small compared to the soft and hard costs of construction.

Long adds that LOTUS can also be used as a budgeting tool. “Which green features are most applicable for my project?” he asks. “Whether building a factory or building a school, each of those project types demands or requires different green features. They can choose which features are most affordable and most suitable to their project.”

It’s interesting that Long mentions profit first, before mentioning the perhaps more obvious benefits such as energy efficiency, improved indoor air quality, better ventilation and saving the environment. “The largest number of projects using LEED and LOTUS are factories. Not because the project owners are so in love with protecting the environment,” he concedes, “but because of what I call institutional mandate. They have to do it to work with foreign companies.”

VGBC’s work is not limited to rating systems. They have also trained over 700



people in green building standards. And while these people can’t offer training themselves. They are now ready to discuss the issues. They have also entered academia.

“We work with some of the main universities in this sector in Hanoi. The National University of Engineering and also the University of Technology in HCMC. At the moment the programmes are still quite simple—one or two day seminars. We introduce building ideas and concepts to the students. Most of the lecturers told me that the programs are interesting but they want longer training programs and more exercises for the students.”

So it would seem, then, that things are changing. Particularly after such interest from the academic world, and with VGBC recently seeing some of their first private housing projects being taken out. “We just recently launched our LOTUS home schemes. We have one or two private house projects now,” Long informs me. The number of enquiries they receive has also almost doubled every year for the last three or four years, although Long is ‘not sure if it is because of increased awareness of LOTUS, or just because of the booming construction market in Vietnam.”

Either way, with pollution levels rising alarmingly in Vietnam, one would hope that the number of LOTUS projects also continues to rise. Long believes the Formosa environmental disaster will help to “change the mind” of the government. “I think if we can have more incentives for green buildings, LEED and LOTUS can help to shape the market a lot.” And in a country with so few regulations in the construction industry, that might be exactly what’s needed. ■

developers from the design stage right through to the build.

Despite his efforts, Long is unequivocal about the government’s decision not to officially endorse VGBC. “Using a rating system is essentially a voluntary choice by the developer,” he adds, “so it is okay if we have many rating systems.” Although, having said this, the response from customers in Vietnam is not so clear.

“We are an international NGO, so we cannot be a part of the government system or program,” reflects Long. “For example, the Ministry of Construction... If they have





Tie Round

A Green Ribbon
The Ole Oak Tree

Spreading the “be green” trend in Vietnam

Text by Jonathan Ma
Images Provided by Vietnam Sach & Xanh

“IT STARTED WITH JUST ME and a few students,” says Nhan Nguyen, one of the founders of Vietnam Sach & Xanh (Vietnam Clean & Green), a non-profit organization working to make the country litter free and environmentally friendly. Of course, this was an enormous responsibility to take on, the need to educate and bring awareness to the benefits of living in a cleaner and greener country had to start at the grassroots level.

“We wanted a way to reach a large number of people quickly,” he explains. The first initiative that Nhan started was the Green Ribbon campaign back in 2013. These small, bright green ribbons could be tied on people’s wrists, motorbikes, backpacks, etc. It may not mean much to others at first glance, but the green ribbons represented a promise to not litter. With limited funding, it was the best idea Nhan could come up with that didn’t cost a fortune. So, how did this low-budget campaign fare?

The campaign distributed over 66,000 green ribbons at 15 different universities throughout Vietnam in the course of only two years. It’s still running strong today—any organization, company or group is welcome to join the cause and pick up green ribbons for their own members.

Shortly after the Green Ribbon campaign picked up traction, Rohan Barks, a resident on Phu Quoc reached out to Nhan. “It was another boost to our cause,” says Nhan. Rohan explained that he would like to organize what would eventually become the next major initiative in the “green” cause. Officially named Community Clean Ups (CCU), they were organized by like-minded individuals coming together to help clean the island.

The CCUs were a big success—the events helped educate people of all ages and backgrounds, while spreading awareness about an issue that has gone



Nhan Nguyen

under the radar for so many decades. Today, Community Clean Ups are still organized regularly in Phu Quoc, and, unsurprisingly, the island has in recent years become known as one of Vietnam’s cleanest tourist destinations.

Steve Mueller, owner of Vespa Adventures, heard about the CCU events on Phu Quoc. Steve runs a motorbike tour company, which no doubt leaves a negative environmental footprint. Nhan

says, “Steve wanted to give something back to the community.”

And that’s what he did. Steve began to organize Community Clean Ups in his own area. He also began to train his Vespa drivers to not litter but instead to pick up trash. Steve’s efforts have had an amazing ripple effect—both tourists and other members of the community have noticed and followed the trend of cleaning up after themselves and others.

Since the start of CCU, many large organizations have taken part. Nhan mentions Intel, KPMG and Samsung have all participated in Community Clean Ups. These events are great for teambuilding. They provide a great opportunity for colleagues to work together in a different atmosphere. This helps build closer relationships, resulting in better cooperation in the workplace.

Eventually, Nhan, Rohan and Steve saw the need to form Vietnam Sach & Xanh. In 2016, the NGO started their third campaign, organizing annual cleanup days on Earth Day. Earth Day is celebrated worldwide on April 22nd through events that demonstrate support for environmental protection. How successful has Earth Day in Vietnam been?

Nhan answers, “In 2016, there were about 600 people that came; in 2017, about 1,500. This year, we’re going for 2,000!” Everyone is welcomed to join. This year, it’s scheduled for Sunday morning on April 22nd. Registration forms are available on their website and

Facebook page.

March Of The Green Turtle Army

Although having community events involving adults is important, more is needed to keep Vietnam clean. This is where their fourth campaign comes in: educating the younger generation. In 2016, Nhan challenged a group of RMIT University students to create a character that would help raise awareness among children on the topic of environmental protection.

As an example, Nhan showed them Woodsy Owl. The owl was an icon used by the United States Forest Service in the 1970s. “Give a hoot—don’t pollute!” was the owl’s motto, and it was an effective way to connect with children and spread the message.

“Everyone knew Woodsy Owl in the 70s,” Nhan continues. “I wanted the students to come up with something similar.” They came up with the Biet Doi Rua Xanh (Green Turtle Army), complete with a backstory on how the turtles are fighting evil-beings by protecting the environment. “The whole idea is to get the kids to join the Green Turtle Army. We have stickers, handbooks and crafts for the kids. Biet Doi Rua Xanh is like the Special Forces. You know, like the Navy Seals. It’s badass.”

Nhan wants to incorporate the Green Turtle Army into Vietnam’s primary school curriculum. He has researched environmental protection awareness



lesson plans from schools around the world, from the US to Canada and Australia. Although the lesson plans are in early stages, Nhan has been talking to schools about it. “There has been some interest from private schools,” he says. Eventually, he hopes to discuss the finished curriculum with primary schools throughout Vietnam.

What’s the best way to help? “Check out our website or Facebook page. We have four campaigns going currently. Of course, we’re not opposed to other ideas as well,” says Nhan. “However, one area we are really lacking in is Vietnamese teachers.” He explains that having Vietnamese teachers in the organization would speed up the development of the curriculum and they are also needed to teach the information to the children.

“We also organize Community Clean Ups once a month, but we can always send the information on how to organize one if someone is interested,” he continues. Moving forward, Nhan says their goal is to lock down more sponsorships to help fund the events. La Vie has been a big sponsor on Earth Day in the past, providing free water bottles for all participants.

Vietnam Sach & Xanh is spreading awareness and most major cities in Vietnam have active members doing all they can to preserve nature’s beauty in this beautiful country. ■

For more info, visit Facebook: [vnsxw](#) or www.vietnamsachvaxanh.org



The Dry Fruits of Labor

An initiative to help farmers improve income, health by drying fruits and vegetables with solar dryers

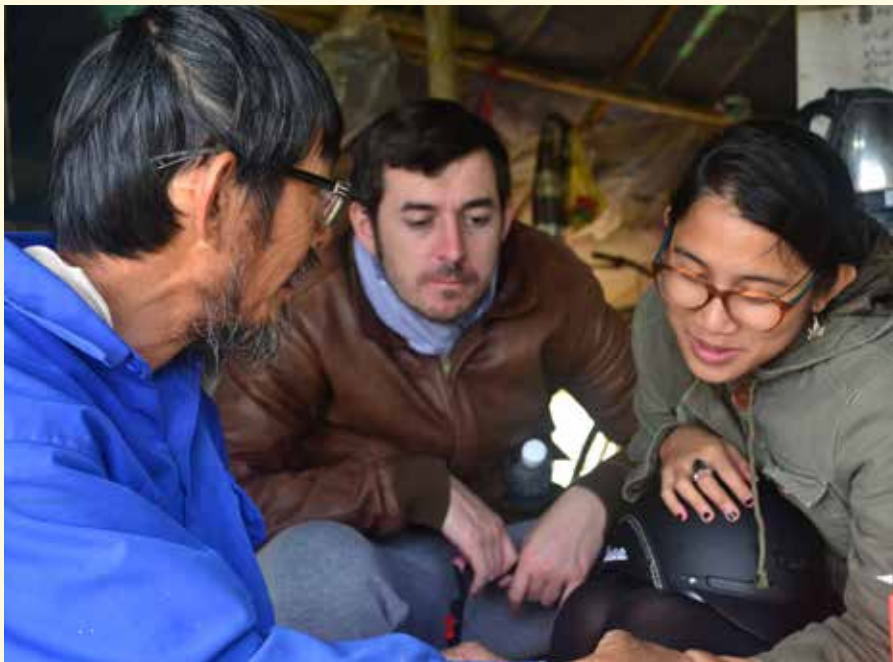
Text by **Mike Wakely**

Images Provided by **Alison Kwan**

VIETNAM HAS A DEEP LOVE affair with fruit. Everywhere you go—city or countryside—you are overwhelmed by the sheer variety. From the more common mango and coconut, to the (relatively) exotic longan, lychee and dragonfruit. The tropical weather, and fertile soil has always ensured a plentiful bounty.

And the Vietnamese tuck in—eating 11kg of fruit per person every year. And there seems to be a million ways to consume it.

Fresh pineapple or mango sliced on the street as a refreshing, tasty snack or



berries and yogurt blended in one of Ho Chi Minh's every-increasing smoothie shops. Or in more traditional desserts like *che chuoï* (chopped bananas, served with tapioca pearls and a hot coconut soup) or a *banh xoai* (mango cake). Indeed, in a recent survey of Vietnamese consumers, fruit was revealed to be the nation's favorite snack, and the quantity of choice on the streets clearly reflects that.

There are limitless ways to get your fruit hit in Vietnam, but one of my favorites (packets of which I stuff my suitcase with when I travel to the UK) is dried fruit. Sweet and delicious mango. Soft and succulent apricot. It tastes so much better than the packets I buy in London, and is a far healthier alternative to crisps and fried snacks.

If you wander through the markets you will see stalls piled high with all kinds of dried fruits and vegetables. Many of the crops that Vietnam

produces are fruits that produce a seasonal glut—like plums and apricots—and farmers have long used drying slowly in the sun as the main method of preserving fruit throughout the rest of the year. Traditionally, the fruits were left spread out in the sun to gently lose their moisture before being packaged and often sold to provide additional income, or used by families.

The technique of drying the fruit hasn't altered in thousands of years in many villages, but that could all be about to change thanks to a lucky encounter. "I saw the Evergreen Social Ventures office by chance and walked in to ask what they were doing, and when I heard about their work I asked for a job," says Alison Kwan, who is driving a project to bring cheap and efficient solar-powered dryers to the rural communities of Vietnam. "Farmers are already sun drying and selling their produce. The solar dryers just improve this process by reducing

drying times and improving quality." One of the problems of traditional sun drying is that the fruit is more susceptible to contamination by fungus or airborne pollutants, and the levels of wastage tend to be higher.

Evergreen Social Ventures (ESV) is a Vietnam-based social enterprise that develops practical, innovative and profitable solutions to many of the challenges facing Southeast Asia. After months of talking to farmers, local communities and testing prototype dryers Alison hopes to have the first solar dryers up and running in September, "The farmers I've worked with are excited about the power of the dryer to dry things faster, but they are understandably reluctant to invest in the technology right away because they are unfamiliar with it, and want to see the machines for themselves." ESV plan to open a showcase farm where farmers can see the machines first-hand, and Alison and her team can calculate the direct benefits for the farmers and the environment as a case study.

She is convinced that the ability to raise quality will have a positive impact on farmers' lives, "With higher value products to sell (like teas and herbs, in addition to fruit), farmers have greater opportunities to improve their livelihoods and support themselves through entrepreneurship."

There is certainly a market for high quality dried produce, and an increasingly savvy consumer is driving demand for healthy and sustainable foods. Half of all Vietnamese consumers say that sustainability is important to them when choosing foods, and that trend is only likely to grow.

Shops like La Petite Epicerie in Ho Chi Minh City are already specializing in high-end dried fruits and teas, and ESV run their own shop and online business called Healthyfarm, supplying locally grown produce. "I think the key to this project will be providing farmers with direct market links to Healthyfarm and other off takers because it will ensure that they can sell their first products and begin to measure their increase in income," says Alison. There is also the potential to export to surrounding countries—30 percent of all Vietnam's fruit exports currently go to China—and other more established solar-drying projects in Northern Pakistan now export to the US, UK and Europe.

ESV plan to create a simple package that provides farmers with the technology, funding, training and access to market in one place—making the process far easier and more affordable. Alison then aims to keep spreading the word, "I am hopeful that with a showcase example of what the dryer can do, I can scale the project across the whole region."

So next time you're sat in a little café picking at a plum O Mai, washing it down with a cup of lotus tea, remember that you might just be enjoying the fruits of Alison and the farmers labors. ■

Wine & Dine

THE HAVEN RESTAURANT / IMAGE BY VY LAM







Saigon's newest restaurant dishes up the best blend of French and Vietnamese cuisines

Text by **Michael Arnold**
Images by **Vy Lam**

LOCAL CHILDHOOD FRIENDS Phuong and Long have teamed up to introduce Saigon's latest fine dining restaurant **The Haven** (37A Tran Khanh Du, D1), an experimental French/Vietnamese fusion venue inspired just as much by Long's former experiences at Stoker's (where he studied under Head Chef Julien Thibault) as it is by the authentic traditional home cooking that the pair remember their mothers preparing in years gone by. The restaurant itself has been slowly cooking as a concept venue since opening in last October, a testing ground for a proposed central location that the two co-founders plan to open once the menu is

complete and the staffing and resources are all in place.

In the meantime, The Haven remains a go-to spot for wearied workers in a tough city seeking a "safe haven" from their nine-to-five. It's located a short hop north of the business district in a quiet little enclave, close enough to remain accessible but well-concealed enough to still feel like a getaway. The venue features a punchy lounge bar downstairs, while dinner is served in a more low-key space on the first floor, a cozy little world unto itself with subdued lighting, mood music, and a smoke-free environment.

The menu presents a confluence between the French and Vietnamese cuisines, focusing on gourmet meat dishes served sliced up on carving boards to maximize flavor and visual appeal. Importantly, all ingredients are purchased fresh either locally or from abroad as non-frozen imports. Long has been working continuously on the menu since opening, refining



Warm chocolate brownies



Tiramisu



Salmon Fillet with honey mustard sauce

each dish to more perfectly match the Vietnamese flavors of his childhood with the gourmet meat preparations he has absorbed from French techniques. The fusion cuisine he is developing as The Haven's signature brand is intended to introduce international subtleties to the local palate, while gently drawing foreign patrons into the complexities of favorite Vietnamese herbs and sauces.

We tried a fairly broad selection of fine meat dishes, notably consistent in preparation and plating so as to present well as a collection; each is cooked medium rare at ideal temperatures and flushed in healthy colors, paired with custom salads, sides and dipping sauces.

Cycling through the main courses, we started with a New Zealand lamb tenderloin with betel leaves (VND385,000), which was an immediate standout for its innovative take on a much-loved Vietnamese preparation—beef *la lot*—using imported lamb instead. The aroma will immediately summon up memories among diners who grew up with the original beef dish, while the quality of the lamb is well-paired with its soy balsamic garlic sauce (standing in for mint sauce in the Western tradition) and cassava. The dish was matched with another Kiwi import, the New Zealand grass fed rib eye steak with mushroom sauce (VND365,000, particularly well-priced against other venues serving NZ beef). The Haven's offering is strong in flavor; the beef this season is notably richer and more marbled for the cattle having gorged themselves on New Zealand's lush spring grasses.

We move on to Haven's roquette salad with salted egg yolk (VND110,000). The yolk is used as a deliberate alternative the parmesan cheese and is a well-conceived localization that adds an Asian character to this French dish, bringing a velvety richness to the crisp salad, which also features hunks of pickled radish. The salad is nicely set off by a salmon fillet

with sautéed spinach (VND315,000) that has a perfectly crispy skin, dried before frying to give it a nice crackle on the tongue. It comes served with a wholesome honey mustard sauce, but be sure to ask for a twist of lemon to bring out the inherent fresh flavors of the dish.

A new item that has yet to be added to The Haven's menu is the duck breast with fermented tofu sauce, bamboo shoots and watercress (the price isn't set yet, but it's likely to sell at around VND285,000). Duck, of course, is immensely popular in Vietnam, and this approach is unique in that it is prepared like beef. Long is particularly proud of this new creation: "This is my childhood right here," he says, "it brings out all my memories of eating duck hotpot with fermented tofu." A prime example of good French/Viet fusion, the

watercress is crisp and green, and serves as a contrast to the flavor of the sauce so that it's not overwhelmed by the fat content of the meat, making for a delicate balance.

The meat range is really the focus of the menu; it's supported by a concise list of beverages and a small range of desserts depending on the day, each priced at VND65,000. We finished off with a brownie and chocolate ice cream and authentic tiramisu mascarpone, both prepared with the delicious richness and fullness of taste you'd expect from either the classic French or Viet traditions.

The Haven is enjoying a growing reputation for its well-priced and fascinating fusion menu among those who've stumbled upon the venue in the months since its opening, and word is spreading. Be sure to experience it in these early days in anticipation of the flagship restaurant we expect to see in central District 1 before too long. ■



New Zealand lamb tenderloin wrapped in betel leaf



Rice is Life

Highlighting the pure, delicious simplicity of rice and comfort food

Text by **James Pham**
Images by **Vy Lam**

IN VIETNAM, RICE IS LIFE.

Even a map of one of the world's top rice-exporting countries looks like two rice baskets hung on a long pole, anchored by the rice-growing regions of the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south. Much more than a staple, a Vietnamese meal simply isn't a meal without some type of rice on the table.

Recently opened in December 2017 by entrepreneur Le Bao Duy, **Rice Restaurant & Bar** (Ground floor of the Landmark 3 Building in Vinhomes Central Park, 208 Nguyen Huu Canh, Binh Thanh) celebrates this most basic of grains. Before even picking up the menu, the star of the eatery is evident in young rice plants used as table decorations and votive candles set in

bowls of unmilled rice.

At just four pages, Rice's menu is blissfully simple, showcasing rice in all its glorious forms as well as dishes from Bao Duy's home province of Nghe An in North-Central Vietnam, and more traditional fare with a cosmopolitan twist. Bao Duy spent three years living in Melbourne, known for its multi-cultural fusion of cuisines, and his worldliness, along with flavors picked up in fine dining kitchens including Park Hyatt Melbourne and Saigon's own Shri and Sorae, find their way into unexpected



with ginger and palm sugar syrup goes down smooth and silky, not cloyingly sweet like usually found elsewhere. The potatoes in the Three potato pudding are steamed, mashed with a bit of butternut squash for natural sweetness, then reconstituted into chewy balls, for a much better mouth-feel than the usual straight up chunks of potatoes that look and taste like they have no place in a dessert. Wash it all down with a tartly sweet Green tea with calamansi and lychee or a refreshingly light Pandan tea with basil seeds (both VND30,000) for a pleasant ending to the meal.

The only entrepreneur in a family of academics, owner Bao Duy feels like he has a lot to prove with his first foray into the culinary world. Thankfully, early signs say he has acquitted himself well in putting forward a casual-chic cafe with value-for-money offerings that showcase the very essence of Vietnam. ■

combinations throughout the menu.

An example is the Sun-dried squid appetizer (VND180,000). Normally a one-dimensional, jaw-aching snack, the preparation of the dried squid here takes a page from Japanese cuisine, using rice wine instead sake to tenderize and remove the fishiness of the squid, before grilling and coating it with a butter and garlic sauce for some pleasingly intense flavors.

Other appetizers are elevated versions of street food favorites, taken up a notch thanks to superior ingredients, as with the beautifully-folded and generously-sized Deep-fried crab spring rolls (2 for VND50,000) with big chunks of crab meat and the Deep-fried fish cakes (VND140,000) with spicy mayo. Rice's version of fish cakes is barely recognizable compared to the oily, flour-enhanced version usually found in markets. Here, they're incredibly meaty to the point of being dense, and lightly fried with a coating of bread crumbs. The mild-tasting fish is an excellent vehicle for the fresh, grassy notes of dill, all too often overlooked here in the south.

The appetizers pair well with Rice's innovative cocktails, some with Vietnamese rice alcohol, notoriously difficult to use in cocktails because of its overpowering presence. Gao tempers the rice alcohol with creamy homemade rice milk along with a fruity splash of Midori for a breezy concoction while Com (both VND100,000) ups the ante with the addition of bourbon whiskey and a slice of fresh ginger for heat. In both, the unexpected yet delicate flavors of young rice really do come through.

The *Banh canh bot gao* (VND60,000) also allows the udon-like rice noodles to shine through with the inclusion of quail eggs, tender pork meatballs, and slices of pork feet that have been stewed 3-4 hours, all in a thick, almost gravy-like broth tinged with turmeric.



Even plain white rice tastes better at Rice. The owner refuses to serve fried rice, or anything else that overwhelms the earthy goodness of their premium-quality grains. Instead, the rice shares center stage with Vietnamese favorites with Western twists like in the Salmon *luc lac* (VND120,000), 100g of cubed, sushi-grade salmon in a tart, creamy sauce that resembles lemon butter but is in fact passion fruit-based and the Chicken rice with a savory sweet sauce flavored with five spice and apples (VND95,000).

While Vietnamese savory dishes can compete with any other cuisine, typically it's the desserts that are a letdown. Rice serves up traditional sweet puddings (VND30,000 each) that cleverly accentuate universally-loved elements while downplaying or all together altering the textures and flavors of Vietnamese desserts often found unpalatable by foreigners. The refreshingly cold Tofu pudding



Gao Cocktail



Hanoi,
Haiphong
in
Hong Kong



In search of the flavors of Vietnam within the bright lights of Hong Kong

Text by **Sam Sinha**

YOU'LL FIND LITTLE SAIGONS and Little Hanoi all over the US, Europe, Australia and Singapore, but not in Hong Kong. A punishing immigration policy that favors those who will contribute significantly to the economy, coupled with the lack of space mean that the Vietnamese who came to Hong Kong were somewhat scattered. Without a home Vietnamese food struggled to become a mainstay in a city that loves foreign cultures, but times are changing. Can the Vietnamese-born chefs returning to Asia help put Vietnamese cuisine on the SAR's map?

A Tough Start

Forced to flee their birth country from years of war and persecution, waves of Vietnamese refugees started to arrive in Hong Kong in the mid 1970s. They were accepted but officially labelled as illegal immigrants. Eventually many were able to gain refugee status and settled in Western countries, hence the prevalence of expat enclaves in other major cities.

In Hong Kong is was a different story. Many immigrants were held in closed camps, effectively imprisoned behind barbed wire, even though they were seeking freedom. Many were sent back to Vietnam but some were allowed to remain and settle.

All of this upheaval and multiple waves of immigration meant that the Vietnamese population was scattered. Many found themselves living among the Thai community around Kowloon Walled City where the customs and ingredients were perhaps more familiar. Others settled wherever they could afford to and many were left homeless and destitute.

The names of Hanoi and Haiphong roads in Kowloon are some of the only clues to the history of the Vietnamese in Hong Kong, although you won't find many Vietnamese restaurants on these streets. High rise shopping malls and posh hotels have forced all but the most stubborn of Cantonese *sui mei* shops out of the area.

A relentlessly resilient people, having been through so much hardship, they persevered and did open restaurants, just not all in one area, and unlike other Asian cuisines, Vietnamese food was not a major part of the food scene until more recently.

In order to survive some restaurants

have been driven underground, serving up dishes from the homeland in their own homes. Locations are secret as the restaurants are operated without permits, but within the communities, everyone knows where to go and they surely serve up the most authentic Viet food in the city.

A New Wave Of Vietnamese Restaurants

As Vietnam's food and culture has become more recognized globally, in Hong Kong restaurant concepts have sprung up that aim to rectify the lack of cohesion in the Vietnamese food scene.

These are not typically run by Hong Kong's Vietnamese population, they tend to be opened by restaurant groups that see an opportunity to fill a gap in the market. Rather than 'Mom and Pop shops,' they are more focused concepts concentrating on one aspect of the food culture or one particular dish.

These are typically headed by Vietnamese chefs whose families had settled in other countries like Canada, Australia, the US and UK, aiming to bring the best of their experience of Vietnamese food to Hong Kong and start a conversation in the city.

Over the years more restaurants have opened, and the quality has improved with the increased competition. These openings tend to be in the more affluent areas on Hong Kong Island or Tsim Tsa Tsui, but there's still no Little Vietnam.

The Key Players

For a long time, Hong Kongers could be heard complaining that the only Vietnamese food you get in the city was *pho*. Perhaps restaurateurs were playing it safe, knowing that Cantonese, Japanese, Taiwanese and Thai noodle soups are always popular, and that *pho* would be too.

Restaurants like Co Thang, Nha Trang and Bep followed, and helped to popularize the cuisine with a broader range traditional dishes of more consistent quality.

Last year, Australian-Vietnamese chef Luke Nguyen caused a major buzz when he announced the opening of Moi Moi in Hong Kong. The restaurant in Central aimed to showcase traditional dishes using the best ingredients available.

Nguyen had experienced refugee camps in Thailand and Australia, before his family settled in Sydney. His

experience instilled in him a mighty work ethic and an entrepreneurial spirit. He told the *South China Morning Post*:

“My parents opened a Vietnamese noodle house. Coming from a refugee migrant family, we were all forced to work really hard, as soon as we could walk. I knew I would open a restaurant at a very young age.”

Indeed Nguyen opened his first restaurant, Red Lantern, in Sydney at the age of just 23 and went on to make a name for himself with book deals and numerous television appearances.

He gained a passion for real food, “Every morning before going to school I helped buy kilos of chillies, green mango, all the fresh ingredients. I was taught how to buy fresh produce and to not settle for anything less than the best. I also tended to pots of broth simmering for hours on end, to make sure they were clean and clear as water. I’d stand on a blue milk crate, skimming and skimming, watching the temperature.”

“Initially a kid doesn’t want to work like this—it’s slave labor. But what I’m getting from this broth is achieving something fantastic and seeing customers get a kick out of it.”



Pho roll from Chom Chom



Salt and pepper squid by Chom Chom

Nguyen has since moved on from *Moi Moi* but the influence of his TV chef status has had a lasting impact on the way Vietnamese food is seen in Hong Kong.

Another chef making a difference is Bao La, who leads the line at Black Sheep Restaurants’ *Le Garçon Saigon*. Like Nguyen he came to Hong Kong via Australia, he was in fact born in Brisbane, but growing up working in his family’s restaurant, he never lost touch with his roots. He explains why he thinks Vietnamese food is so popular in Hong Kong:

“Firstly, Hong Kong people relate to noodle soups—it’s such a main part of their staple diet. Secondly, expats are very well-traveled. Many of them have grown up eating Vietnamese food, especially in the US and Australia, so they’re used to the cuisine.”

His dishes are characterized by smokey meat and fish elements straight from the charcoal grill, inspired by the Southern Vietnam style. Mounds of fresh herbs and sweet, sour and funky sauces are the accompaniments and round out the flavors. He doesn’t serve *pho*, and says there’s more to Vietnamese food than noodle soups.

“Vietnam is opening itself up to more people traveling in. Cheap flights and the exchange rate make it a popular destination. These last few years travel to Vietnam has seen a big bump, meaning more people are introduced to the wider Vietnamese cuisine. There’s so much more to it than *pho* and people are exploring hidden gems which are exposing them to a different side of Vietnamese food.”

Steve Nguyen, another Vietnamese-



born chef heads up Chom Chom, a restaurant and bar based on the *bia hoi* tradition of Vietnam; all about fresh beer and street food served up in a casual setting. Growing up in Toronto, Steve was exposed to all kinds of cuisine but enjoyed traditional Vietnamese dishes at home with his family.

When he started cooking professionally, it was anything but Vietnamese, in fact, he ran a German beer hall, and worked in business development prior to that. Steve thinks Vietnamese food in Hong Kong is in a really exciting place:

“I think it’s at next stage of evolution, but still in its infancy. With a new generation of chefs like Bao and myself, and the folks who opened up Co Thanh—there are hungry and ambitious Viet chefs who want to represent and take it to the next level.

“I’m really impressed with what Helen Ngo has done with Bep and Nha Trang, bringing quality and authentic Viet food but also making it accessible. Luke Nguyen has really done well with promoting Vietnamese food, but we also need more chefs to become more visible and be actively promoting the cuisine.”

Vietnamese people and the cuisine itself didn’t have the easiest of starts in Hong Kong, but as the world has become wise to the delicious variety and freshness of the food of Vietnam, a new wave of restaurants has come and taken advantage of the gap in the market.

Happily with more chefs returning to Asia and reinventing the cuisine of their ancestors, the quality and variety of dishes is getting better and better, and it looks like Vietnamese food is here to stay. ■

Top Picks in Hong Kong

Vietnamese food is on the up in Hong Kong. Gone are days of moaning that you can’t get a good pho, or conversely, complaining that all you can get is pho. Vietnamese chefs are returning to Asia and reinventing the cuisine they grew up eating, bringing traditional recipes bang up to date. Here are three of the best restaurants in the city and their signature dishes.

Le Garçon Saigon, (G/F, 12-18 Wing Fung Street, Wan Chai)

Le Garçon Saigon is headed by Vietnamese-Aussie Chef Bao La. Bao loves adding smokiness to meat and fish by grilling over charcoal and has developed unconventional techniques for tenderizing the flesh.

One of his signature dishes is yellowfin snapper, roasted in a banana leaf with lemongrass and chilli paste. The dish comes with a mountain of Vietnamese herbs and house-made sauces which add freshness and balance to the succulent main event. There’s plenty of rice paper to wrap everything up in for many a satisfying mouthful.

He explains, “this is the type of cuisine and food I wanted to show Hong Kong. Mainly focussed on grilling, Southern Vietnam style.”

Saigon Pho (42-56 King Man Street, Sai Kung)

Saigon Pho specializes in bowls of steaming noodle soup that are certainly worth a slurp. Located out in Sai Kung in the New Territories, they had to earn their reputation, but hungry *pho* fans still travel out to the beach side town to get their fix.

There’s a range of options from angus beef to chicken, and a vegetarian *pho*, to one topped with squid cakes. It also serves rice and vermicelli dishes and typical Vietnamese appetizers like summer rolls and papaya salad. If you’re on the hunt for unpretentious Viet food made with passion and skill, it’s well worth the trip.

Chom Chom (58 Peel Street, Central)

Chom Chom, under the leadership of Canadian-born Steve Nguyen, provides Central Hong Kong’s hip Soho with the *bia hoi* experience. The carefully selected Vietnamese craft beers on tap may not be day-

fresh or cost VND5,000 a glass but sitting out on the terrace is the closest you’ll get to sipping a fresh beer on a street corner in Saigon or Hanoi. The best part is you can enjoy your beer without worrying that it’ll lose its fizz.

The menu features typical *bia hoi* accompaniments optimized with modern tweaks and top notch ingredients plus Chom Chom originals. The *pho* roll is a masterstroke. Tender braised beef, rich and full of umami, is offset with sharpness from pickled carrots and rolled up with rice noodles and thai basil with crunchy peanuts scattered on top. The whole thing is wrapped up in rice paper and is as satisfying a morsel as you could wish for with a cold beer. As is the salt and pepper squid, salty and crispy with a creamy kick from the funky fermented flavor of kimchi mayo.

Steve explains what he’s trying to achieve at Chom Chom: “Right now I’m trying to focus on reinterpreting classic Viet dishes my way, through my perspective. I’m trying to take the experiences and techniques I’ve learned to help modernise some aspects of the cuisine.”

His inspiration comes from his family. He grew up in Toronto cooking all kinds of food, but it was his native country’s cuisine that they ate at home.

“As a chef who now gets to cook his native food, my family is my source of inspiration. I get to draw from a vast well of food memories I had growing up.”

“For me, Vietnamese food at its foundation strives to strike perfect balance in its experience. It can be light and healthy but also full of flavour and depth at the same time. Fish sauce and fermented flavors are the backbone and foundation of Viet food, that’s really the secret weapon in Viet cuisine.”



Saigon Pho



Luxury Lunches



Fried rice in Lotus leaf



Beef Pho



The perfect excuse to skip work and while away a Saigon afternoon

Text by **Daniel Spero**
 Images Provided by **Hôtel des Arts Saigon**

FOR ANY FOODIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, you'll definitely want to check out **Saigon Kitchen** located in the beautiful **Hôtel des Arts Saigon** (76-78 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, D3; www.hoteldesartssaigon.com). Saigon Kitchen focuses on serving authentic, high quality dishes in an upscale, yet cozy atmosphere. Shortly after arriving I realized that this was not going to be just a meal, this was going to be a gastronomic experience.

The lunch buffet has a diverse selection of cuisine, from sushi and sashimi to customizable stir-fry to order, to roasted pork and mashed potatoes. For each course, be it a salad or an entrée, there are dishes from Asian culinary cultures like Korea, Japan or Vietnam, to some of the finest European cuisine from France, Spain and Italy. I tried the papaya salad and the fresh spring rolls as appetizers, which were fresh and delicious. However, it was the European cured meats and cheeses, and the arugula salad with fresh strawberries, raspberries and grated cheese that really shined. For the first main course I had freshly prepared squid and prawns, which were so tender that a second helping was ordered. There's also the option of marinated pork or chicken that can be cooked to order as well.

After that, I split my plate between baked sea bass with young vegetables

and a lemon hollandaise sauce, and roasted pork with sour cream and mashed potatoes. Both were succulent choices. The house specialty is a unique salmon pho with tender pieces of cooked salmon in a traditional broth that should not be missed. While I was already pretty full, I managed a small bowl and was glad I made room. For dessert I tried a chocolate mousse and banana pastry that were both rich and creamy. I finished the meal by cleansing my palate with a bowl of chocolate ice cream with a touch of caramel sauce and white chocolate chips. It was a fantastic lunch.

Take the elevator up to the penthouse level to the Social Club Restaurant & Rooftop Bar where diners can have a cocktail and watch the chefs prepare the dishes in an open kitchen. The panoramic view is especially stunning during sunset. There's a nightly happy hour from 5pm-8pm when cocktails and glasses of wine are 50 percent off. Tuesday through Saturday, after happy hour stay for live jazz from 8pm-10pm.

The Hôtel des Arts Saigon's soothing décor has touches of Saigon's past, from French colonial architectural features to the feel of a traditional street food market, replete with tailor-made light installations and a great view of the surrounding trees and cityscape. ■

The lunch buffet is VND588,000++ person and VND888,000++ with free flow of house wines. From 6am to 10:30am (11am at the weekends), Saigon Kitchen also has a breakfast buffet, which is set up like a traditional Vietnamese food market. The pastries, breads and desserts are made in-house by trained pastry chefs, which are baked fresh daily. For any breakfast connoisseurs, this is one of the best breakfasts being served in Ho Chi Minh City. I know I'll be going back to try it. The breakfast buffet is VND 525,000++ per person. For seafood lovers, Thursday through Saturday, you can indulge in lobster, crab, oysters and much more during their Extravaganza Seafood Buffet. This is available for VND1,088,000++ per guest (for food only).



Duck Curry



Chole Bhature

I grew up in New Delhi and the city is very popular for its food, especially street food. *Chole Bhature* clearly tops the list as it makes its way into breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner meals and snack time.

I am a diehard fan of *chole bhature* and I can eat them anytime of the day, seven days a week. My mom used to joke that when I get married and have

children if they develop the taste for *chole bhature* too then it runs in their genes. And she was right because both my boys also share the same taste for this wonderful dish. In fact, they are bigger fans of this dish than I am.

Sort of the unofficial dish of New Delhi, though it's popular elsewhere in North India, *chole bhature* is a Punjabi concoction of spicy curried chickpeas

(*chole*) and puffy fried white-flour bread (*bhature*), most often eaten together for breakfast (it's also known as *chana bhatura*). Come mornings, popular *chole bhature* spots are crowded with everyone from local rickshaw drivers and shopkeepers to university students, all looking for a delicious cheap meal. Tell a local you ate this for breakfast and you'll get the widest grin imaginable. ■



Ruchita Obhan was a former advertising professional and is now a self-styled home cook by passion. She recently won the "Home Chef" category in a charity cook off event in Saigon. Having hosted countless house parties across four countries, including Vietnam, she became passionate about culinary art.

Follow Ruchita: Facebook Page: ruch bytes and Instagram: ruch.bytes.

INGREDIENTS

Chole (Chickpeas)

- 200 grams of chickpeas
- 1 tablespoon ginger paste
- 2 tablespoons of **garam masala** (mix of various spices)
- 1 ½ tablespoons of coriander powder
- 2 tablespoons of tamarind paste
- ½ lemon juice
- 3 teabags (black tea)
- Salt to taste
- 1 teaspoon of red chili powder
- Few coriander leaves (for garnish)

- 2 teaspoons of dried fenugreek leaves
- 3 tablespoons of oil for tempering

Instant Bhature (Deep Fried Indian Bread)

- 2 cups of all purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- 2 tablespoons of refined oil
- 1 can of soda water
- ¼ cup of semolina
- ½ liter of oil to deep fry the bhaturas

Instant Bhaturas

Chole

1 Mix flour, semolina, sugar, salt and 2 tablespoons of oil. To this mix add plain soda water (club soda or carbonated water) little by little at a time and knead into a soft, smooth dough for the bhatura. Don't add plain water when making the bhatura dough.



2 Divide the dough equally and make small balls out of it.



3 Line a plate with paper towels to place the fried bhatura on later; this will help soak up excess oil.



4 Lightly flour a clean dry surface, place one ball of dough on it. Roll it into an oval shape bhatura.

5 Heat oil in a frying pan on high heat. To check if the oil is hot enough, drop a small piece of dough into the oil and it should float immediately to the top.



6 Drop the rolled out bhatura gently into the hot oil. After 5-7 seconds, with a slotted spoon press it gently in the center, this will make the bhatura puff out like a ball. Turn the bhatura and fry it on both sides to make it slightly brown. Take the bhatura out and place it on the plate lined with paper towels.

1 Soak the chickpeas overnight in sufficient water. They should be soft by the morning.



2 Pressure-cook the soaked chickpeas with salt and 3 teabags (black tea) till they are mushy.



3 For tempering, heat 3 tablespoon of refined oil over medium fire. Add **garam masala**, coriander powder, tamarind paste and ginger paste. Let it sauté for 2-3 minutes.



4 Add this tempering to the mashed chickpeas and add lemon juice.

5 Let it boil to get a consistency where chickpeas and water blend together into thick gravy.

6 Add dried fenugreek leaves and garnish with coriander.





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.

Asian Food & Wine

From chilli crab to *char siu*, from Thai fishcakes to pho when it comes to matching Asian food with wine, the usual rules don't always apply

IF YOU DINE AT VIETNAMESE restaurants often you will notice that most, unless you visit the top-end, fine dining venues, don't have wine included in their drinks list. This is also true with other Asian restaurants like Thai or Japanese.

The common explanation is because Vietnam, and other Asian countries, are not wine producers, and the locals there are not used to drinking wine. Although this is partly true, a large number of people in these countries not only know what wine is, but they even drink it regularly. So why do the Vietnamese restaurants keep limiting the drink list to beer and spirits?

One of the reasons is that although some diners ask local restaurants for wine, the majority stick to old habits and they know that most restaurants don't stock wine so they don't even bother asking for it. Also, and the biggest reason, is that most guests are uncertain on how to pair wine with the local cuisine because they have never done so before.

While Western food is relatively easy (not really) to pair with wine, most wine lovers can get a decent pair when following a few simple rules. However, when faced with the herbs, spices and different flavors that Asian cuisine has to offer, many don't dare to take the risk.

Another problem, one with a pretty easy solution, is that many Asian dishes pair better with white wine, while most



Asian people prefer to drink red. But if you do a little research on food and wine pairing, and a little experimenting, you can find good reds that go great with the local cuisine.

For example, let's look at *pho bo*, one of Vietnam's famous dishes. Although my first pairing choice would be for either a Chardonnay or a dry Riesling, you could also pair it with a Rioja Crianza, and neither would overpower the taste of the dish.

Vietnamese cuisine is very rich in fish and seafood, making it ideal to pair

with crisp white wines like Albarino, Chablis, an unoaked Chardonnay and a few more. But some dishes, like grilled fish and grilled seafood, will also go nicely with a young Garnacha, a Pinot Noir or an unoaked Nero d'Avola.

Vietnam also has lots of pork dishes in its cuisine, and what better for a roasted pork than an aged Grenache like those from Priorat; and if lamb (or goat) is your preferred dish try a Tempranillo from Ribera or Toro, or an Australian Syrah, and be in paradise.

Above all, experiment! ■

>>THE LIST

Wine & Dine

ROOFTOP BARS



Liquid Sky Bar

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

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



Rex Hotel Rooftop Bar

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

141 Nguyen Hue, D1



Social Club Rooftop Bar

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

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

SUNDAY BRUNCHES



Indulgent Sundays @ Nineteen

A legendary buffet in the Heart of Saigon. Sensational cooking and an intimate, lively atmosphere are guaranteed. Authentic cuisine from around the globe, prepared by award-winning chefs, with fresh seafood as the highlight of the brunch. From noon to 3pm, with options from VND 890,000++ without drinks to VND 1,490,000++ with a free flow of Champagne, cocktails, house wine, and beer.

19-23 Lam Son Square, D1
hotel@caravellehotel.com / 028 3823 4999



Le Meridien

Centered around three distinctive dining venues - Latest Recipe, Bamboo Chic and Latitude 10 - Le Meridien offers three brunch packages, prices range from VND1,500,000 to VND2,500,000 and include Oriental and International cuisine.

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1
028 6263 6688 - ext. 6930
www.lemeridienhanoi.com



MICROBREWERIES & CRAFT BEER BARS



BiaCraft

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

90 Xuan Thuy, D2



East West Brewery

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

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



Rehab Station

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

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

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



Café RuNam

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

96 Mac Thi Bui, D1
www.caferunam.com



Chat

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

85 Nguyen Truong To, D4



K.Coffee

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

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



La Rotonde Saigon

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

77B Ham Nghi, 1st Floor, D1



The Workshop

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

27 Ngo Duc Ke, D1



Le Bacoulos is a French brasserie located in the heart of Thao Dien. Following the brasserie tradition, Bacoulos serves typical French food at affordable prices.



French Restaurant

Daily Set Lunch
at **VND180.000**

2 courses + 1 soft drink

Le Bacoulos french bistro,
13 Tong Huu Dinh
Thao Dien, Q2, HCMC

02835194058



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

FRENCH



Le Terroir

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

30 Thai Van Lung, D1



Le Bacoulos

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

13 Tong Huu Dinh, D2

028 3519 4058

www.bacoulos.com



Le Jardin

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

31 Thai Van Lung, D1



Ty Coz

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

178/4 Pasteur, D1

www.tycozsaigon.com



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

028 2229 8882

La Nicoise

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

56 Ngo Duc Ke, D1

028 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

028 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

028 3744 4585



ITALIAN



Carpaccio

Rebranded "Carpaccio" after many years under the name Pomodoro, this Italian restaurant still has a simple, unpretentious European decor, sociable ambiance and friendly welcome. A small corner of Italy in Saigon.

79 Hai Ba Trung street, D1
+84 90 338 78 38



Ciao Bella

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

11 Dong Du, D1
028 3822 3329
tonyfox56@hotmail.com
www.ciaobellavietnam.com

Ciao Bella



La Forchetta

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

24 Hung Gia, PMH, D7
028 3541 1006



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
028 3823 1080
www.lahostaria.com



Also Try...

Casa Italia

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

86 Le Loi, D1
028 3824 4286

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
028 3821 8181

Pizza 4P's

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

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



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

JAPANESE



Chaya Restaurant

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

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



Gyumaru

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

8/3 Le Thanh Ton
028 3827 1618
gyumaru.LTT@gmail.com



Ichiban Sushi

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

204 Le Lai, D1
www.ichibansushi.vn



Kesera Bar & Restaurant

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

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



Sushi Dining Aoi

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

53-55 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, D3
028 3930 0039
www.sushidiningaoi.com



Yoshino

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

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



VIETNAMESE



Five Oysters

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



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



Ngoc Chau Garden

Generally, Ngoc Chau Garden is genuine authentic Vietnamese Restaurant with simply beautiful food. They concentrate on traditional food of South Viet Nam, especially home-cooked, value for money. There for, the food, drink and the atmosphere make you comfortable during family's meal time. It's a really nice blend as you're setting into Ho Chi Minh City and Viet Nam.

116 Ho Tung Mau, phuong Ben Nghe, quan 1, Tp.HCM.
028 6687 3838
<https://facebook.com/ngocchaugarden.hotungmau>



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



River Restaurant

Tasty Vietnamese food by Saigon River side. The River Restaurant has its' own vegetable garden and a play area for kids. There is a pool table and a futsal table.

199bis Nguyen Van Huong, Thao Dien Ward, D2, HCMC
Tel: 0907 65 66 67



The Hue House

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

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



Also Try...

3T Quan Nuong

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

Top Floor, 29 Ton That Hiep, D1
028 3821 1631

Banh Xeo 46A

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

46A Dinh Cong Trang, D1

Cha Ca La Vong

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

36 Ton That Thiep, D1

Com Nieu

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

59 Ho Xuan Huong, D3
028 3932 6363
connieusaigon27@yahoo.com
connieusaigon.com.vn

Cuc Gach Quan

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

10 Dang Tat, D1
028 3848 0144

Hum

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

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

May

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

19-21 Dong Khoi, D1
028 3910 1277

Nha Hang Ngon


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

160 Pasteur, D1
028 3827 7131
www.quananngon.com.vn
8am - 10pm

Temple Club

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

29-31 Ton That Thiep, D1
028 3829 9244
templeclub.com.vn

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

INTERNATIONAL



Bamboo Chic

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

Level 9, Le Méridien Saigon Hotel

3C Ton Duc Thang, D1

028 6263 6688

www.lameridien.com/saigon

For restaurant promotions go to fest.vn or Call 1900636997



Blanc Restaurant

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

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

02862663535

www.blancrestaurant.vn



FORK Restaurant

Open from 11 am till 11 pm everyday, Fork Saigon gathers Spanish tapas and asian one going from 50,000 VND to 160,000 VND. It offers an expensive list of international wine and 16 available by the glass. A mixologist corner is also present with Gin and Vodka base in addition to local craft beers and seasonal white or red sangria. A set lunch at 190,000 VND served Monday to Friday from 11 am to 3 pm is also available. It allows you to pick any 3 three items between a large selection (Montaditos, meat, fish and vegetable), iced tea and dessert of the day included.

15 Dong Du, D1

028 3823 3597

info@forksaigon.com

www.forksaigon.com



Hotel Equatorial HCMC

New Vietnamese Bistro & European Grill Menu At "Chit Chat at the Café"

The new menu features the Chefs' flair for creativity with international inspiration from Europe and Asia. This special execution can be experienced in the new a la carte menu which includes imported steaks, meats, and seafood.

242 Tran Binh Trong St, Dist. 5

028 3839 7777

https://hochiminhcity.equatorial.com/



Madcow Wine & Grill

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

30th Floor, Pullman Saigon Centre

(0)28 3838 8686



Hungry Bunny

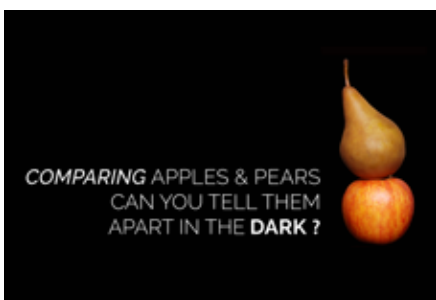
Hungry Bunny is a new American Bistro situated in the heart of Thi Nghe neighborhood in Binh Thanh district. The restaurant's main focus is gourmet Burgers such as the Bacon Clubhouse and Bacon & Blue burger. Other offers include breakfast, soups, salads, sandwiches and pastas. There is one main dining area downstairs with two smaller rooms upstairs that offer guests with more privacy and great views. Come enjoy our great selection of American diner food with a glass of cold beer.

8am-10pm / Tel 028 2229 0011

01 Nguyen Cuu Van street, Binh Thanh district

www.hungrybunnybistro.com

www.facebook.com/hungrybunnybistro



Noir - Dining in the Dark

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

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

02862632525

www.noirdininginthedark.com



Tomatito Saigon

This sexy tapas bar is Chef Willy's casual interpretation of the prêt-à-porter concept. Willy has a very personal perception of style, that is reflected in all his creations. His universe is colorful, funky and eclectic.

171 Calmette, Dist 1, Ho Chi Minh City

www.crhcmc.com/tomatito

www.facebook.com/crhcmc

+84 (0) 2862 881717



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 street-side, and a terrace by the pool out back).

21 Ngo Thoi Nhiem, D3



Travel & Wellness

IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE IMPERIAL HOTEL VUNG TAU







How to Beach

in **6** Easy Steps

Getting away to the Beach Club at The IMPERIAL Hotel Vung Tau

Text by James Pham

Photos by James Pham & IMPERIAL Hotel

MOST OF US WHO CHOOSE TO call Saigon home have learned not only to live with its quirks—the incessant traffic, the shark-plagued internet, late-night, off-key karaoke from the neighbors, and the heat and humidity that’s especially intolerable this month—but to embrace them as all part of the wonderful experience that is HCMC.

The secret to happiness (and sanity) are quick getaways every now and then. Thankfully, in a country with 3,260 kms of coastline, the beach is never far away, even in landlocked Saigon. The French were on to something when they developed the small port town then known as Cap Saint Jacques as their colonial playground, just 125 kms southwest of Saigon. A hundred years on and Vung Tau is still the place to go for some quick R&R by the sea. Here’s our guide on how to beach like a rock star without breaking the bank.

If You Go:

Full- and half-day passes for The IMPERIAL Beach Club start at just VND250,000 for weekdays. A single cabana (including club access for 4 adults and 2 children) starts at VND1.3m. For more, visit www.imperialhotel.vn or call (+84) 254 362 8888.

Hoa Mai (www.hoamaivungtau.com.vn) provides shuttle service every 15 minutes between Saigon and Vung Tau starting at VND90,000 per person/way with various pick-up points around the city. VIP minivans are also available from their D1 office as is the option to charter entire minivans with home pick-up.

Step 1: Grab a group of friends willing to play hooky on a random weekday. While Vung Tau's beaches are great any day of the week, the crowds peak on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Sneak away during the week and practically claim your very own stretch of sand. As a bonus, fewer visitors means better service and even reduced prices.

Step 2: Travel in style. Thanks to the 2015 opening of the Ho Chi Minh City-Dong Nai Expressway shaving the distance to Vung Tau down to just 95 kms, the road option takes about 2 hours, the same as the fast boat, but with the convenience of stopping wherever you want and even getting dropped off at a specific location. We booked out a minivan at just over USD5 per way per person. Settle in with headphones, a tablet and snacks and you'll be from door to beach in less time than it takes to watch a movie. Or get the party started early by bringing blue tooth speakers and letting the DJ war commence.

Step 3: Be treated like a celebrity at the Beach Club at The IMPERIAL Hotel on beautiful Bai Sau Beach. Skip the ratty lounge chairs in front of the sad, overpriced beach restaurants and head directly to what is hands down the best beach club in Vung Tau. Modeled after Roman baths, The IMPERIAL Beach Club is a haven of affordable luxury with a 50m-long infinity pool overlooking the ocean, rows of wrought iron sun loungers under oversized umbrellas, the city's only 100m-long private beach, and excellent facilities including plush beach towels, shower rooms and Wi-Fi, all for a day pass of just over USD10 a person.

Step 4: Splurge on a private cabana. Move up from regular celebrity to rock star status with your own private cabana. For as little as USD9 per person for the entire day, upgrade to your own private indoor space with sofas, bathroom, outdoor

shower, television and more. We found the cabanas great for stowing away our things and for anyone wanting a quick nap in privacy. Pro tip: Book cabana #13 and get double the space with your own private terrace just steps from the sand.

Step 5: Indulge in all-day snacks and tasty, value-priced meals at La Sirena Bar & Grill, the club's on-site restaurant. Order fries, burgers and pizzas right to your beachside lounge, or grab a seat in the contemporary-chic restaurant by the pool. Portions are reasonably priced and exceptionally generous. Everything we ordered got rave reviews, especially the Sweet & sour spare ribs with tri-color peppers, the Sate octopus that was fresh

and tender, and the spicy Tom yum soup with prawns and fragrant lemongrass.

Step 6: Plan for a longer stay. By the time the minivan came to pick us up for the return ride, we all wondered where the day had gone. Between bodyboarding the waves, lounging by the pool, playing cards on the beach and downing copious amounts of tropical drinks, the day had simply flown by. We vowed to make it an overnigher next time with a stay at The IMPERIAL Hotel, Vung Tau's only 5-star hotel with its own private beach, spa, tennis court, gym and more, all conveniently connected to the Beach Club by skyway. ■



The Chocolatiers *of the Mekong Delta*



Exploring the past and future of Vietnamese chocolate

Text and Images by James Pham

THE VIETNAMESE HAVE A

saying: *Phi của Trời, muối doi chang co*, meaning “Waste what God gives you and the next ten generations will go without.” Likely no one has mastered the art of multi-purposing quite like the humble people of the Mekong Delta where absolutely nothing goes to waste.

In a small riverside workshop just outside of Vinh Long, a handsome older woman uses a ladle made from a coconut shell to pour rice flour batter over a piece of cloth stretched over a steamer. Her silvery hair is pulled back tight, revealing flawless skin that belies her seven decades. With practiced flicks of the wrist, she deftly coaxes the delicate rice flour crepe off in one piece, setting it on a bamboo mat to dry.

Nearby, a family member uses discarded rice husks to feed a fire. Over it, she heats up sand in a large wok into which she throws a handful of unmilled rice. The kernels soon explode like popcorn, erupting into a fireworks display of fluffy white projectiles, ready to be mixed with ginger and sweet rice malt to make a tasty puffed rice treat.

In the Mekong Delta, rice is the gift that keeps on giving. The stalks of the rice plant are dried and used as animal fodder, the husks as kindling, the ash as fertilizer and the kernels as food or cooked into malt. It's the same with coconuts, another staple here. Tree trunks are carved into utensils, palm leaves are woven into thatch, and

the juice, milk, flesh and shells of the coconuts themselves have dozens more uses.

While rice and coconuts are familiar sights in the Delta, it's another crop with multiple uses that's brought me here today, one not typically associated with Vietnam—cacao.

While most of the world grows the hardier and higher-yielding variety of cacao called Forastero, Vietnam's finer Trinitario strain is a hybrid of Forastero with the more flavorful Criollo. The green, yellow or red shells can be shredded and used as substrate for growing mushrooms and the tartly sweet, almost mangosteen-like flesh can be eaten or made into alcohol. However, it's the beans inside which command the most value. After fermenting, drying and roasting, the cocoa nibs are then ground and pressed, yielding cocoa liquor (used for making dark chocolate), cocoa butter (used for white chocolate and cosmetics) and cocoa powder.

Originally introduced by the French in the late 19th century, the fate of cacao in Vietnam has waxed and waned over the last century or so. In colonial times, cacao gave way to more profitable crops like coffee and rubber. There was renewed interest in the 80s, but potential European and Russian buyers faded amidst the tumult brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the early 2000s, NGOs, foreign development programs,



Hot chocolate at the Muoi Cuong Cacao Farm - Chocolate Tour by EXO TRAVEL



Harvested cacao pods at Kimmy's Chocolate



Lam The Cuong

local government and even Big Chocolate tried to revive Vietnam's cacao industry by subsidizing seedlings and providing technical support to farmers. Since then, fluctuating cacao prices have led to many farmers in the Delta cutting down their trees to make room for pomelos, the new cash crop.

To better understand cacao's past and future, I travel to the Delta to visit two extraordinary men who have found a way to temper the uncertainty of cacao farming by taking cacao production all the way to the finished product. Both in their late 60s, the two share remarkable similarities in a decades-long love affair with chocolate but also startling differences in outlook as to the future of cacao in Vietnam.

The Fruits Of Their Labor

At the Muoi Cuong Cacao Farm and Homestay just outside of Can Tho, I sit down with Mr. Lam The Cuong, one of the earliest cacao farmers in the area. Easily tired from a stroke a few years back, he's initially surly at having to entertain guests so close to lunch time. However, over shared glasses of rich hot chocolate from his own farm, he begins to relax.

"We first started planting cacao in the early 1960s," he recalls. "Under President Ngo Dinh Diem, cacao pods were obtained from Malaysia. Each fresh fruit was incredibly expensive, worth about 160 kg of rice at the time. We started with 300 plants, but when they started producing fruit, no one knew what to do with them. There was no demand and it's not like you can take them to market to sell. Then came the war. So people started cutting the trees down. My father, however, saw something valuable in these cacao trees. He gave me a book in French called *Le Cacaoyer*. From then on, we simply used the cacao at home, making chocolate at Lunar New Year and on other special occasions."

More than 50 years on, his small 1.2 ha farm is still home to 2,000 or so cacao trees, a couple from the 60s. With the help of some rudimentary machines including a wood-burning hand roaster, he produces a small quantity of chocolate bars, cocoa powder, and roasted cacao nibs, just enough to sell to guests at his homestay and the odd tourist who wanders in.

"I've tried to quit cacao many times, but have always come back to it," he says over a sip of homemade cacao cider, a sweet, lightly alcoholic beverage made from the flesh of the cacao fruit. "A few years ago, cacao prices bottomed out and it wasn't even worth it for farmers to hire people to pick the fruit; they just rotted on the trees. Foreign companies pulled out. Now everyone's abandoning cacao for pomelo."

"I'm getting old now and my own children aren't interested in cacao. A cacao tree takes up to three years to produce fruit. My children belong to the 'instant noodle' generation. They'd



Weaving palm leaves

rather have money now by working construction or having a regular job. In a few years, I'm afraid there will be no cacao left in Vietnam."

While cacao may have lost its chocolatey-brown luster for some, others continue to be drawn to its timeless allure. "I'm not a normal guy. I do the opposite of what others do," says Bui Durassamy, owner of Kimmy's Chocolate, a small upstart chocolate company in Tien Giang.

"When I moved to Canada 40 years ago, I started out doing odd jobs—washing dishes, delivering pizza, doing janitorial work. Since it was mostly night shifts, I had time during the day to take short courses and one of them was on food manufacturing, including chocolate."

When "Samy" moved back to the Mekong Delta three years ago, he noticed his neighbors were all cutting down their cacao trees. Pairing his background as an engineer with what he remembered from the course he took decades ago, Samy decided to build his very own chocolate factory in his backyard, making his machines from scratch.

"Why not?" he says with a toothy smile. "People can open a restaurant without knowing how to cook. I thought that if I did something that no one else was doing, I'd have no competitors," he laughs. "Why can we Vietnamese grow cacao but not process it? My goal is to help my neighbors have income by buying their cacao and showing them it has value. Unlike other fruit, you can store the seeds until the price is right. The fruit doesn't have to be perfect because you're only using the seeds. They also need shade, so cacao trees can be planted on the same piece of land as coconuts or mangos, doubling your income. They're also easily maintained, only needing pruning and fertilizing twice a year."

In Samy's spotless home factory, he makes small quantities of cocoa powder, cocoa butter, chocolate bars and a decadent chocolate-cashew spread. He's



Making puffed rice



Bui Durassamy of Kimmy's Chocolate

even experimenting with adding local ingredients like ginger, red pepper and chia seeds.

Surprisingly, the biggest risk from his chocolate endeavor so far hasn't been dwindling interest in cacao or even the volatile cacao market. It's his wife, Kim, who's due for her first visit back to Vietnam next week. "She wasn't happy when I took our retirement money to invest in this factory," he admits. "That's why I named the chocolate after her. But

I know that once she tastes it, she'll fall in love with it just like I did." ■

These cacao farms can be visited on the 2 day/1 night "Mekong Delta and the Road to Chocolate" tour offered by EXO Travel. Additionally, explore the Delta by boat and bicycle, with visits to home workshops, the Cai Rang Floating Market, lunch in a historic heritage home and more. For more info, visit www.exotravel.com



Heavenly Heat

Text by **Aliesha Duffin**
Images Provided by **Aura & Co**

Inside the infrared sauna that claims to deliver health benefits



CHRISTMAS, NEW YEAR AND TET have all come and gone. The holiday season is now well and truly over. As most people can relate to, I overindulged in honor of the festive spirit and now I needed to detox and cleanse stat. So, a chance to visit a newly-opened infrared sauna here in Saigon called **Aura & Co** (21/1 Duong So 46, Thao Dien, D2; www.auraandco.com.vn) was a Godsend. Infrared saunas are the latest craze in Hollywood, Gwyneth Paltrow promoted them on GOOP, Jennifer Aniston apparently has one installed at her house, and Cindy Crawford and Lady Gaga are both self-confessed fans. There are many health claims to using it: detoxification, clearer skin, producing a natural high to name a few. I was looking forward to seeing exactly what all the hype was about.

On my first visit I was greeted by Ian and Oanh who run the wellness clinic together. What immediately caught my attention was their flawless skin, one of the many benefits I read about online. Ian had started using the Sunlighten infrared saunas back in 2012 in his homeland of sunny Australia, where he fell in love with the treatments and its benefits and began using it regularly.

Ian tells me he left his job in Australia to explore new opportunities in Southeast Asia, and after spending eight months in Indonesia he settled down in Saigon. Despite being manufactured in Binh Duong, Ian couldn't find Sunlighten saunas in any spas or wellness centers in Vietnam. And seeing the gap in the market, he filled it with Aura & Co.

I was curious to find out how an infrared sauna was different to the traditional hot rock and steam saunas, which I find to be anxiety inducing because of the overwhelming heat and humidity in them. A Sunlighten sauna is different as I found out.

Infrared saunas differ from traditional ones in that the heat comes from infrared light waves generated by lamps that heat your body, not the surrounding air. As

a result, you can stay inside longer, 45 minutes is an ideal session and you also have a deeper, more intense sweat than in a traditional sauna. In a regular sauna, 10 to 20 minutes is the generally recommended time to stay in.

Uninterrupted Bliss

I've been told that a deep sweat can help cleanse the skin, soothe sore muscles or simply relax you. Sweating in a sauna can also be beneficial to patients with arthritis, asthma or respiratory infections, and is an effective way to help recover from overindulgence in food or drink. The sweating rids the body of excess sodium and other unwanted substances. It also helps eliminate drugs and some toxins, and by doing so can take some of the workload off the liver and kidneys.

I prepared for the infrared sauna by removing all makeup, ensuring my skin was free from lotions (I wanted to give myself the best chance of detoxing), hydrated myself and went in. I noticed it wasn't hot, it was warm inside but not in an uncomfortable way. Already feeling more at ease, I flicked through Netflix, put on a movie and settled in. About 20 minutes had gone by,

still feeling very comfortable and relaxed, I looked down and noticed a deep sweat happening. This was a pleasant surprise as I wasn't feeling overheated, once the 45 minutes was up, I left the spa feeling noticeably relaxed and refreshed.

Five sessions within a seven-day period is the ideal amount of time to experience some of the many benefits of an infrared sauna, however, after my third session my skin was starting to look considerably clearer—the holiday toxins were last year's problems now. In addition, I left each session feeling very calm. I am a naturally anxious person, so finding something that I really enjoyed and helped to alleviate my anxiety was amazing. It wasn't only the deep sweat and detoxing, it was also 45 minutes of uninterrupted time: No phone, no checking emails and no mindlessly scrolling through Facebook. I was completely relaxed and cut off from the world for 45 wonderful minutes. ■



>> The List Business

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028 3519 4182

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>> The List Travel



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www.anamandara-resort.com



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Cham Garden Restaurant

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>> The List Health & Beauty

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Mini Spa

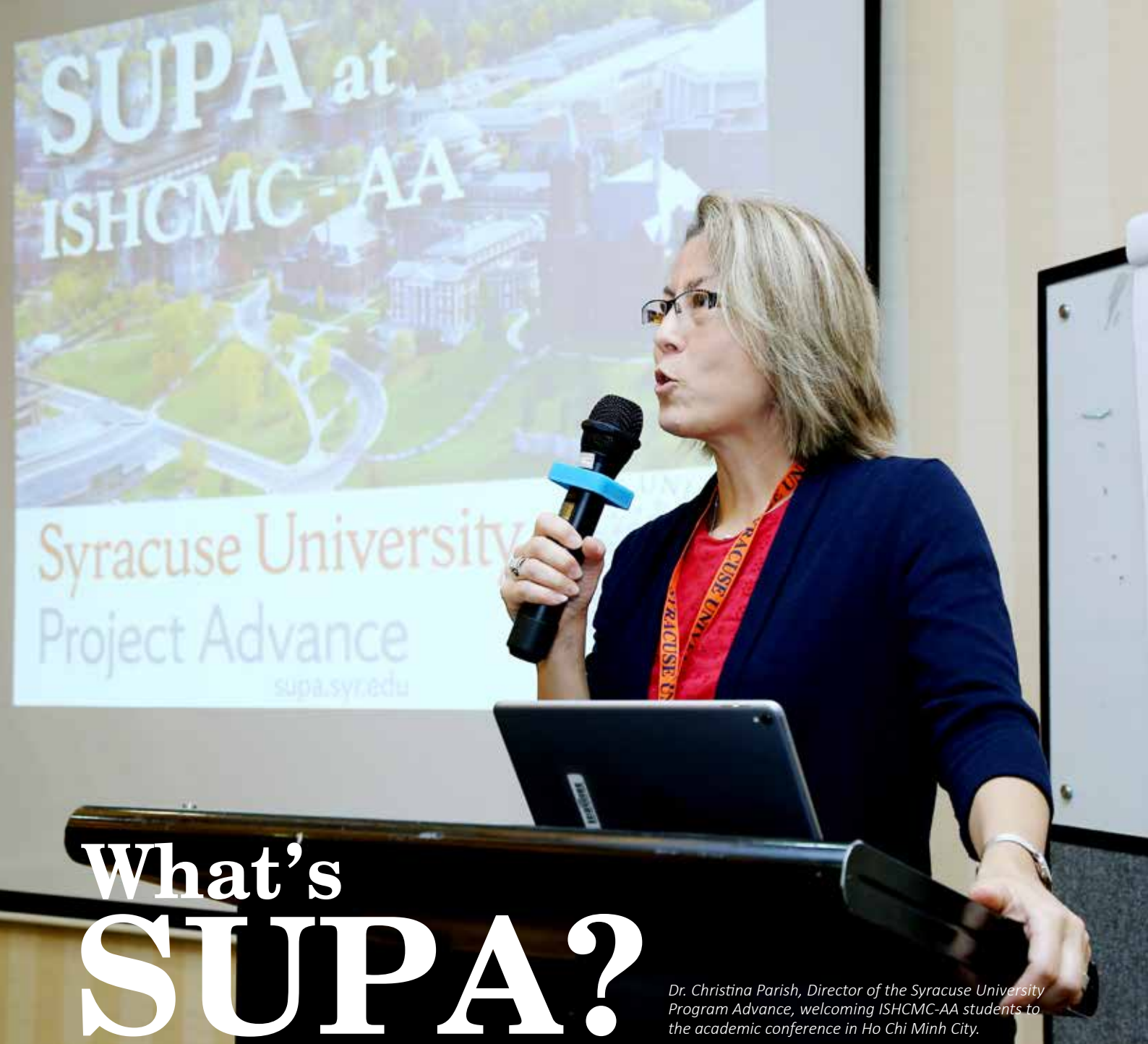
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For full review, please visit: www.oivietnam.com

Kids & Education





What's SUPA?

Dr. Christina Parish, Director of the Syracuse University Program Advance, welcoming ISHCMC-AA students to the academic conference in Ho Chi Minh City.

This month we spoke to a number of International School of Ho Chi Minh City - American Academy's academic staff to learn more about this unique opportunity for the school's students

Interview by **Michael Arnold**

OFTEN TIMES HIGH-ACHIEVING students are not able to reach their full potential with typical high school course offerings. Many students have the ability to undertake tertiary level courses before they even enter university. ISHCMC-American Academy is the only school in Ho Chi Minh City that offers the **Syracuse University Project Advance (SUPA)** program.

SUPA allows junior and senior students the opportunity to take Syracuse University courses for full college credits. This unique program fills the gaps that usually exist for challenging advanced-level high school students.

What is the SUPA Program for, and why has ISHCMC-AA decided to offer it to students?

SUPA offers our students a unique opportunity to earn university credits while in high school, allowing them to experience a college-level course in an

intimate high school setting, and to also save time and money when they study abroad after graduation. ISHCMC-AA students will receive a Syracuse University transcript and an American high school diploma when they graduate from our SUPA program and school. ISHCMC-AA and Syracuse University have been partners since 2014, when we saw an opportunity to offer our students an alternative to the test-based College Board AP courses.

Are the teachers who instruct the SUPA courses specially qualified to do so?

To be an AP or IB DP instructor, you do not need any special certifications, you may just have an undergraduate degree in the area, or attend some workshops or have experience in the subject. To be a SUPA Instructor, you need to have at least a Master's degree in the subject matter and experience teaching higher-level classes. You also need to attend

workshops at Syracuse University in New York so that you will become a certified Syracuse University Instructor with the privileges of a part-time faculty member.

What are the advantages of studying university courses in advance of attending university while still in high school?

This will certainly bolster their college applications to U.S. universities and colleges, enable students to experience university-level course work. The environment is also quite different, since students are afforded small classroom sizes at our campus, which allows them more one-on-one time with their Syracuse adjunct professors. Students taking SUPA classes have an advantage when applying to competitive college programs such as engineering, medicine, business, and computer science. When a student succeeds in a SUPA class, it demonstrates that they are ready for college academics.

College and university representatives sometimes say that it's not enough to get good grades—students who take rigorous classes set themselves apart from their peers.

How should a parent evaluate whether or not the SUPA program is right for their child? What factors should they consider?

When considering whether or not to enroll in SUPA, those children who are enthusiastic and want to study abroad are the best fit for this unique college-course experience in Vietnam. Parents should talk with their child about their interests and areas where the child would like to develop or challenge themselves in. We find that students who get the most out of the SUPA classes such as entrepreneurship, literary writing, chemistry, or psychology are the ones who ask questions and are able to implement feedback from their teachers and professors.

How many SUPA courses can a student enroll in while studying at ISHCMC - AA?

In theory, there are no restrictions as to the number of classes the student takes as long as they are aligned with their graduation requirements—for example, SUPA Chemistry or SUPA Biology for Science credit or SUPA Calculus for Mathematics. However, due to the amount of work these classes demand, experience has shown us that a maximum of four SUPA classes per year is already a great load for any student; therefore it is recommended for students not to take more than this number.

What are the total costs likely to be for a student who fully participates in this program?

It depends on the class and the number of classes per semester or year. For example, there are semester classes with four credits and year-long classes with six or four credits. Semester classes are 3-4 credits with yearlong courses at 6-8 credits. The cost is at lower-price point for ISHCMC-AA students at USD112 per credit versus up to USD300 for students currently at Syracuse University in New York.

How can parents be sure that the SUPA program will not distract students from their regular classwork or put too much pressure on them?

SUPA classes correspond to “regular” classwork at a different level. They are college-level classes taken in the comfort of a high school setting. A SUPA Class simply replaces either a “regular” standard level course or an elective. The load of work and the pressure of these classes are precisely the most important factors to consider when registering for a SUPA class. Students are expected to perform as any other college student, but with the advantage of a more personalized experience with their high school instructors. Students go through a selection process in terms of commitment, personal interest and academic records before being admitted into a SUPA class. Prior to registration, parents and students are informed about the academic demands and “pressure” these classes may pose in order for them to make an informed decision. Once in class, students have a trial period of about one month during which they can drop the class in case they feel it is not aligned with their academic interests or it is too much work to handle. However, parents can be assured that taking a college-level class in high school already lowers the pressure on students and provides personalized learning opportunities not usually found in large university settings. ■

Many thanks to Dr. Alex Aristizabal - Science Dept. Head, Michael Tower - Deputy Head of School & SUPA Coordinator for contributing information for this article. For more information visit www.aavn.edu.vn/curriculum/supa-program online.



ISHCMC-AA adjunct professors welcome Dr. Christina Parish and Mr. Uday Banerjee, Math Department Head, from Syracuse University in New York, USA.



2017 SUPA Symposium: ISHCMC-AA students present their work at the annual academic conference.

Experience the Difference

It is a responsibility that some parents may find daunting: finding the right school for their child. We speak with Ms. Nhung Nguyen, Head of Admissions at International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP) to hear some of the common challenges and questions parents have when searching for a new school.

Text by [International School Saigon Pearl](#)
Images by [Fred Wissink](#)



Where do we start, there is too many choices?

“The first thing to do as parents, before starting your research and visiting schools, is to identify what is important to you and for your child’s education? If your child is old enough, ask for their opinion. Be open and transparent with them as it will affect them the most,” says Nhung. This in itself seems like no small task. “Every family has their own priorities, expectations of a school and aspirations for their child’s future. There are many international schools available in Ho Chi Minh City and it is important to recognize that each offer something different than the next. There are different curriculums, educational standards in place, teaching approaches, campus size, range of facilities...the list goes on! Only once you have a clear understanding of what you would like for your child would I recommend you begin your journey of selecting the school.”

Personal experiences will help your decision-making

“If there is an opportunity to experience school-life or to be part of a schools community, take it. This is probably the best piece of advice I could provide any family looking at selecting a new school for their child. It is only natural that we make decisions based upon our own interactions and experiences,” Nhung continues, “At ISSP, we understand that whether it is your child’s first time attending formal schooling or if your child is transferring during Elementary grade levels, there is still a level of anxiousness within the whole family.

What is the best Experience Day for my family?

To support families during this period of transition, ISSP offers Experience Days. These are events aimed at welcoming the wider community to experience being part of ISSP.

- SMART Steps is available for children 18 months to 4 years old to experience a program which is exclusively available as part of the ISSP Early Education curriculum.
- Little Innovators, aged 5 to 11 years old, are invited to join and experience ISSP’s new Innovation Hub, which incorporates STEAM and includes a Green Screen studio, Maker Space, computer coding, robotics and more.
- Breakfast with the Leadership is an opportunity for parents to meet with ISSP’s Senior Leadership Team in a personal setting to learn about the schools vision for the future and campus developments. This is an excellent forum to ask questions that are specific to your family.
- The Original Mommy & Me Playgroup is a weekly session, every Thursday at 9:30am, set within ISSP’s new Early Education library. Led by Early Education specialist teachers,



the playgroup promotes social and emotional, physical, language and cognitive development.

- Camp Asia is Singapore’s leading holiday camp provider and is launching exclusively at ISSP for children 18 months to 11 years old. Summer schools allow children to become familiar with a new school environment and make new friends before the next academic year begins.

Nhung adds: “During your visit to the potential school, I would encourage you to connect with as many staff members as possible. This will help you gauge school culture and provides an opportunity to ask any burning questions you may have. Facilitating these interactions is an integral part of the school tours and Experience Days that our team offers at ISSP.

The more you know, the more informed you will be

As we have already discussed, with many choices of international schools for families to choose from in Ho Chi Minh City, there is a lot of information available. Nhung advises families to refer back to the priorities they started with, which may have changed throughout the process by seeing different offerings. Mapping the information you have obtained to your wish list of the perfect school can help refine the schools that best meets your family’s needs.

ISSP has launched a Let’s Talk

initiative through their Admissions department that is proactive in engaging families in rich conversations about education and opportunities available to their children. Nhung summarizes by saying: “There is a fine balance between providing new families too much information and not enough. It is important for our team at ISSP to understand the family and child’s individual needs. This will allow us to provide a personalized experience and share information that is relevant to a family”.

Join ISSP’s next Experience Day!

ISSP is holding a FREE Family Fun Day on Saturday 14th April from 9am–12pm. Receive your FREE Scientist Kit including a lab coat, and participate in games and activities inspired by Science. In addition to Science themed activities, children aged 18 months to 4 years old are invited to experience their SMART Steps program which is exclusively available as part of the school curriculum. This is a popular event with limited places available to maintain a personal experience. Families are strongly recommend to register by visiting www.issp.edu.vn/fun, e-mailing info@issp.edu.vn or speak to a member of their multilingual team by phoning (028) 2222 7788.

Alternatively, you can visit www.issp.edu.vn/events to see the next date of the different events mentioned above! ■

Right or Wrong?

Talking about ethical issues in the classroom

Text by **Sasha Emmons**

“THAT’S NOT FAIR!” “SHE HIT ME ON PURPOSE.” “HE’S NOT FOLLOWING THE RULES.”

Issues of right and wrong come up in classrooms all the time, and it can be hard to know how to deal with them. Punching a classmate is obviously a different kind of ‘wrong’ than disrupting a lesson by yelling out an answer, yet these are both things that students shouldn’t do. And that’s not to mention the moral questions that can arise when studying history, science or literature.

How should we think and talk about these kind of issues with our students?

Studies reveal that people across cultures, including children as young as three years old, make social judgments that can be categorized into three “domains,” or types of knowledge. This can be a different and useful way of thinking about rules and “right vs. wrong”:

- The moral domain focuses on things that are inherently right or wrong based on their effects on others. Moral

issues usually have to do with justice and fairness or (avoiding) harm. Hitting, stealing and malicious teasing, for instance, are prototypical moral issues.

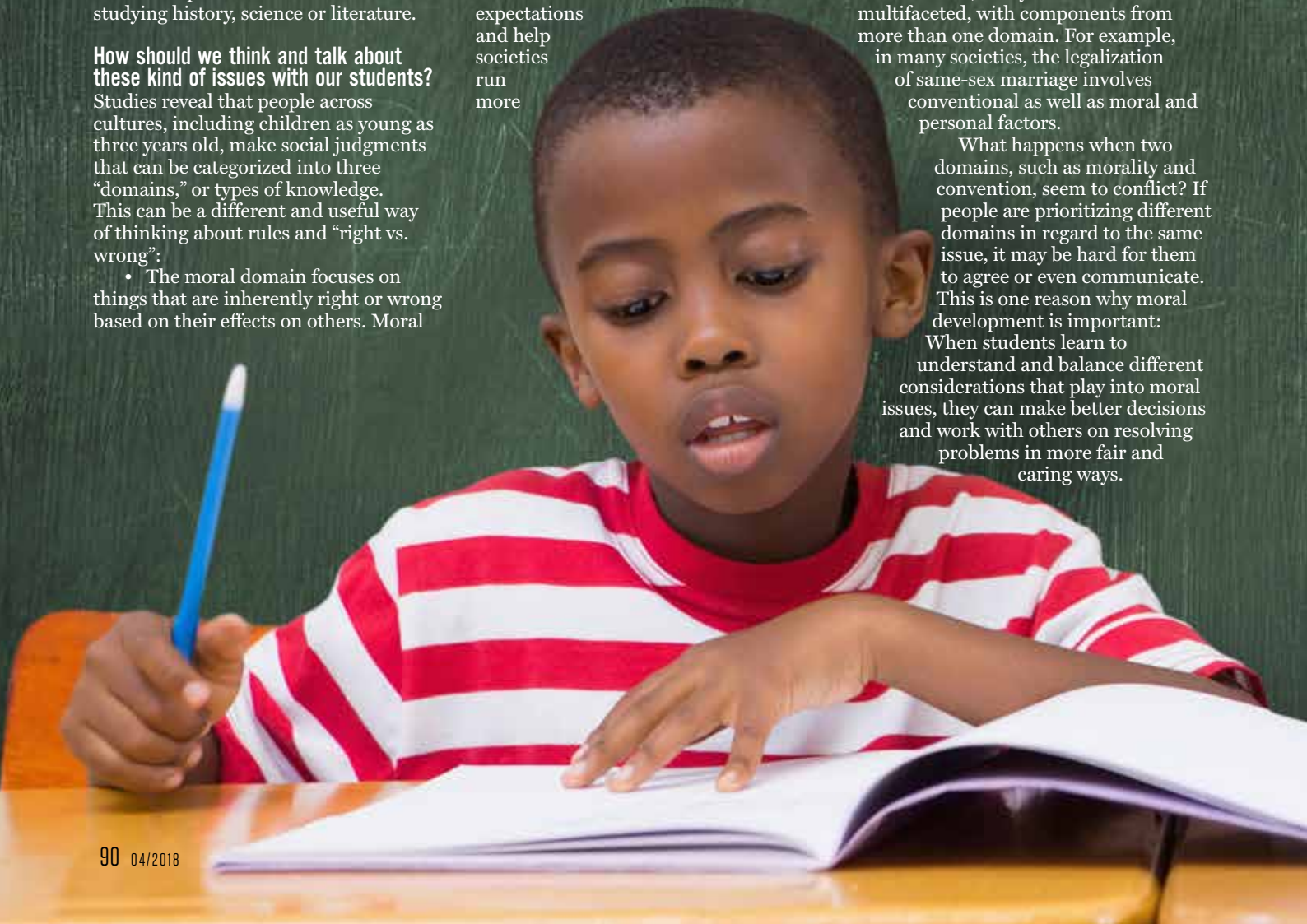
- The conventional domain has to do with social norms, traditions and rules that depend on context, and thus are changeable. Social-conventional rules could include not wearing a swimsuit to school (though it’s okay at the beach), or raising your hand before speaking. Social conventions create common expectations and help societies run more

smoothly, but even young kids rate conventional violations as less serious than moral ones.

- The personal domain includes issues that people believe should not be governed by universal moral rules or societally determined conventions, but instead should be up to personal choice. Issues in this category include such things as who your friends are or the contents of your journal.

Of course, many real-life issues are multifaceted, with components from more than one domain. For example, in many societies, the legalization of same-sex marriage involves conventional as well as moral and personal factors.

What happens when two domains, such as morality and convention, seem to conflict? If people are prioritizing different domains in regard to the same issue, it may be hard for them to agree or even communicate. This is one reason why moral development is important: When students learn to understand and balance different considerations that play into moral issues, they can make better decisions and work with others on resolving problems in more fair and caring ways.



How can this framework be applied in the classroom, to help foster social and moral development, and to sort out conflicts and misbehavior? Here are three suggestions:

1) Respond to transgressions in the appropriate domain

If a student breaks a moral rule—for example, by hitting or insulting another student—don't just say, "That's against the rules." It doesn't hurt to remind students that behaviors like these contradict classroom or school rules (if they do), but it's also important to reiterate *why* there are rules about these kinds of things—namely, because they hurt people.

On the other hand, if a student breaks a conventional rule—such as by speaking out of turn—don't respond with moral language (e.g., *bad*, *wrong*, *hurtful*). Instead, emphasize norms and classroom order by saying something like, "Remember, we agreed to raise our hands to keep our classroom calm and organized."

Studies with third- to ninth-graders have shown that students evaluate teachers more positively when their responses to classroom incidents match the domain of the transgression. In other words, students can tell something is off if a teacher indicates that it is morally wrong to break a conventional norm, or that it is wrong to hurt someone simply because it is against the rules.

2) Integrate the different domains into the curriculum

Consider the subject matter you're teaching through the lenses of the different domains. For instance, students in an American history class could be prompted to think about an issue like women's suffrage from both a moral point of view and a conventional one. You could discuss fairness and justice—e.g., whether it is fair for one

group of people, but not others, to have a say in policies that affect everyone—as well as the changing role of women in everyday life—e.g., how suffrage coincided with increases in women's economic and political power.

It may be easiest to imagine incorporating this kind of discussion in a subject like social studies, but domain lenses could be applied in many other subjects, as well, such as science and technology, language arts, foreign languages, or even physical education. In sports, for example, some rules are there to prevent harm or ensure fairness, while others are conventional, serving to keep games organized and keep all the players on the same page.

In support of this approach, research indicates that teaching with attention to the different social domains of academic content helps develop students' capacities for critical moral reflection. In one study, conducted in eighth-grade English and American history classes, teachers either framed everything as moral, treated all topics as conventional, or incorporated both perspectives as appropriate.

When assessed later, students in the convention group didn't pay as much attention to the moral implications of situations, while those in the moral

group mostly didn't consider the social-conventional ramifications—which, in real life, can be very

important. Only the students in the third group, who were guided to consider both domains, were able to coordinate between them in their reasoning.

3) Encourage students to really consider each other's perspectives

When covering a potentially controversial topic like colonization, nuclear power, or race in *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, ask students not only to formulate their own opinions, but also to share with classmates and respond—specifically and respectfully—to others' thoughts.

Gaining a better understanding of how others see the world and why they make the judgments they do can help students develop their cognitive skills, including the ability to break arguments into parts and to articulate why they agree or disagree with certain parts. It can also develop their moral insight as they learn how different interpretations of reality inform people's judgments and how circumstances affect people different from themselves.

A recent study with middle school social studies classrooms showed that students who were taught how to engage in "transactive discourse"—a type of discussion in which students reason about each other's reasoning, by (for instance) agreeing or disagreeing with something a classmate said, then extending or qualifying their statement—improved their abilities to reason about both morality and convention and to integrate the two.

Especially now, as our world seems to become both more connected and more divided every day, the ability to think and talk with others about ethical issues is more important than ever. As educators, it may not be our job to give students all the answers about right and wrong. But we can raise questions, and we can offer tools to help students in constructing their own answers. ■





Stop, Focus, Thank You

How photography can help cultivate mindfulness and gratitude

Text by **Emily Campbell**

IF YOU WERE TO THINK ABOUT teaching both mindfulness and gratitude to students, photography might not be the first method that comes to mind. But mindfulness is, at its core, a state of open awareness and attention—and to feel gratitude, we first have to truly notice the good things in life.

Looked at that way, it's easier to see how photography could be used as a tool in classrooms to promote mindfulness and gratitude—and the benefits they both have been shown to bring to young people. As French photojournalist Marc Riboud said, "Taking pictures is savoring life intensely, every hundredth of a second."

The Center for Healthy Minds (CHM) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has long been studying the teaching of mindfulness in elementary school classrooms. Over the past few years—with a grant from The John Templeton Foundation in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center—they developed and tested a five-week mindful photography curriculum. Their project manual explains:

One can say photography is a physical manifestation of mindfulness. It is about stopping/pausing, observing, framing, focusing, and capturing/receiving... Basically, photography is about a relationship to the present moment. Relating to the present moment with joy and gratitude is a choice we can make. Slowing down, we can access joy by shifting the focus of our awareness to what

uplifts us.

CHM offered the mindful photography curriculum to fifth-grade teachers who were already involved in the mindfulness-based curricula study, which included both a ten-week training in the fall for them to establish their own mindfulness practice and an eight-week mindfulness curriculum for students in the spring. All six teachers who were given the chance to participate in the mindful photography training accepted, and five of them were able to continue with the project into a second year with new groups of students.

The first week focused on students using the mindfulness concept of pausing to notice what was around them in the present moment, and then appreciating the visual elements of what they noticed, such as colors, lines, shapes, textures, light, and shadows. In the second week, students learned to use their own eyes like cameras. They noticed what caught their attention and practiced nonjudgmental awareness, realizing that different people may see the same thing differently.

Then, in the third week, each student received a disposable camera and was specifically instructed to focus on photographing things that they felt grateful for and that brought them joy. In the fifth and final week, students reflected on the experience and shared their images. Each student received a small album to decorate and fill with their photos, thus creating a physical gratitude album that they could keep and look back on to remind them of their awareness and appreciation.

Based on participant feedback,

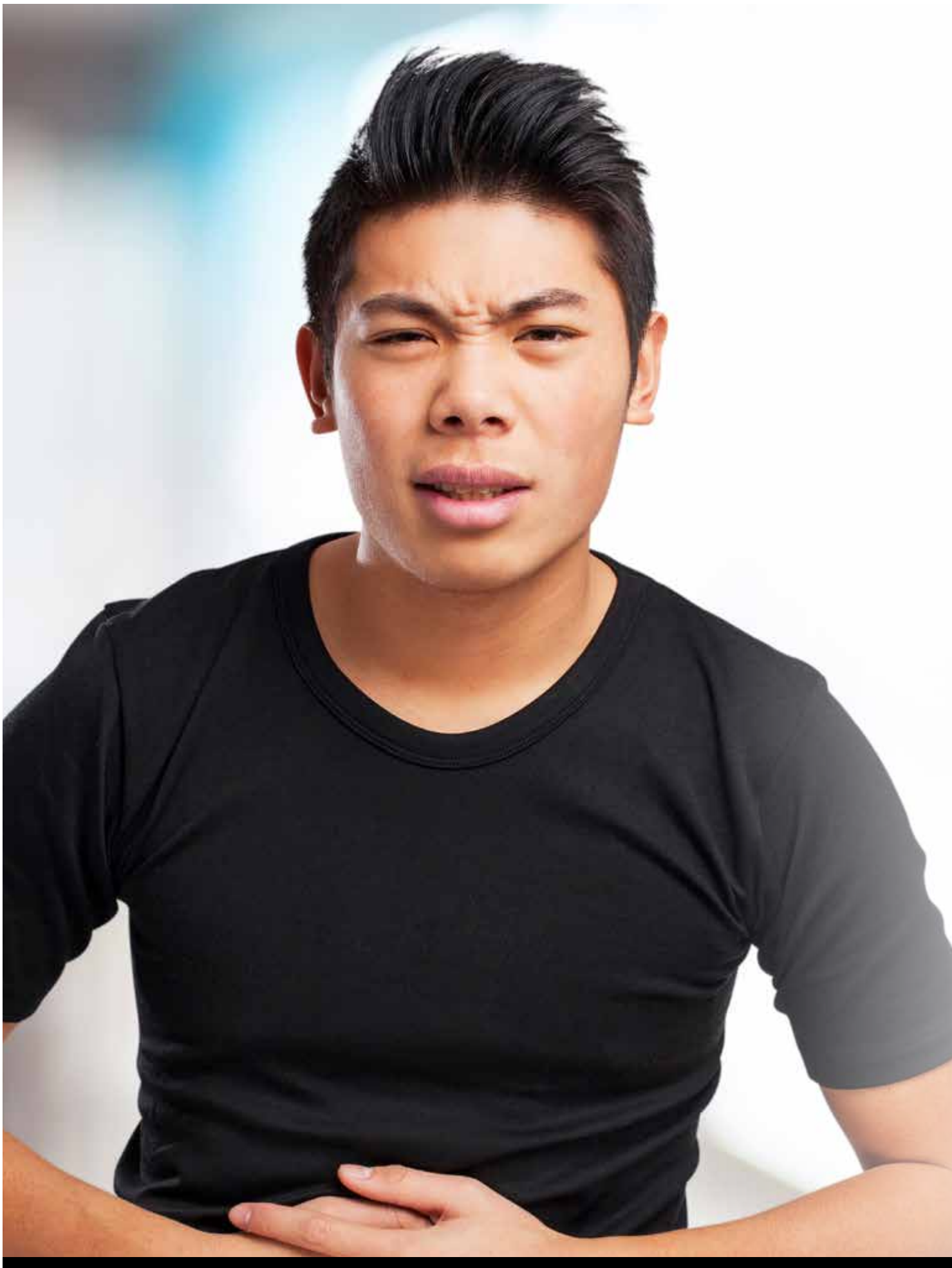
teachers and students alike seemed to enjoy the curriculum and find it engaging and meaningful, especially the connections with both mindfulness and positive emotions. "This project re-emphasized the importance of slowing down and being present in the moment," said one teacher. Others noted the beneficial effects of seeing beauty all around us and cultivating gratitude.

Students expressed similar feelings. "Mindfulness is all about knowing your emotions and staying calm, and photography can really keep you calm and keep you focused," said one. Another stated that mindful photography "helps you stay calm and happy and helps you notice what you are grateful for." Or, as another put it, "We got to take pictures of people and stuff that we cared about." (When CHM looked at the content of the fifth-graders' photos, the two categories of subjects that appeared the most were peers and nature). One student's response was simple but profound: "It shows me that the world is colorful."

We often rush through our busy lives without truly noticing or appreciating all the beauty that surrounds us. As CHM found, mindful photography is a creative way to cultivate focus, deep seeing, and gratitude that both students and adults can carry with them into the rest of their lives.

In the words of Dorothea Lange, whose iconic photographs put a human face on the Great Depression: "The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera." ■

Emily Campbell is a Ph.D. candidate in education at UC Berkeley.



Gut Reaction

Learn about *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacteria that infects the stomachs of roughly 60 percent of the world's adult population



Dr. Masato Okuda works as a gastroenterologist for Family Medical Practice. Before coming to Vietnam, Dr. Masato worked in Sumimoto Besshi Hospital in Japan for seven years and conducted gastroenterological endoscopy such as esophagogastroduodenoscopy, colonoscopy and ERCP. He also worked as an oncologist in his field.

AROUND 50 YEARS AGO, EVERY doctor in the world believed that no bacteria could survive in such a hostile and acidic environment as the stomach. Even when pathologists and other doctors saw bacteria in stomach tissue samples, they presumed that those tissues were contaminated after removal. Eventually, two Australian doctors proved that there is a genus of bacteria—*Helicobacter*—that can survive in the stomach by neutralizing the acid around themselves with a special enzyme. This important discovery rightly won them the Nobel Prize, because it is now presumed that a very high proportion of stomach cancer is directly caused by *Helicobacter pylori*.

If you're from a Western country and have lived most of your life there, you will probably never have come into contact with *Helicobacter pylori*. In those countries, cancer of the stomach is quite rare. If you're living in Vietnam or Southeast Asia, your chances of being infected with this pathogen are greatly increased. This represents a significant problem, because most Westerners (as well as local Vietnamese people) have never heard of this threat and never get tested for it.

In my country, it is a well-known health concern. In Japan, about 80 percent of people over 80 have a *Helicobacter pylori* infection, and most likely they acquired it in their infancy from their mother, meaning they have carried this invader within them their entire lives. Accordingly, we have a very high prevalence of stomach cancer in Japan. Thanks to modern testing regimens and improved hygiene, fewer than 20 percent of people in their 20s have *Helicobacter pylori*.

So what does *Helicobacter pylori* do? Infected people are more likely

to develop a peptic ulcer, which is an ulcer in the stomach or the duodenum, or stomach cancer. This doesn't mean that you will surely develop an ulcer or cancer by having *Helicobacter pylori*. It just means that having this infection increases your risk. If you have a duodenal ulcer, there is a 90 percent chance that you have *Helicobacter pylori*. In addition, within a week or two after infection, you may experience minor discomfort or even severe stomach pain.

How do we find *Helicobacter pylori*? There are a variety of tests: blood, stool, breath, urine, and by running an endoscope. My professional opinion is that neither the stool nor the urine tests available in Vietnam are trustworthy. The blood tests are reasonably accurate, but the catch with those is that you can't use them to evaluate the success or failure of eradication, because it takes the blood more than a year to change after the infection is gone. The breath test is the least invasive and most accurate test for *Helicobacter pylori*, however it will not work if you are taking specific medications.

If you have *Helicobacter pylori*, you should certainly eradicate it, in the same way as you would any parasite in your body. There is nothing good about having *Helicobacter pylori*. Eradication is relatively simple; you merely take a combination of antibiotics. However, being such resilient creatures, it takes at least two antibiotics to get rid of them, with supplemental acid medicine to control the method. Even so, the success rate is only about 70 percent. So after the eradication attempt, we must check again to see if you still have *Helicobacter pylori* or not. If the attempt was unsuccessful, we have to try a different regime, another combination of drugs.

Our clinic is the proud owner of a state-

of-the-art BreathID breath test machine of the sort rarely seen outside of a large external laboratory. You don't have to draw blood; there's no pain—you just blow into a couple of bags before and after drinking a special agent that reacts with *Helicobacter pylori*, and then you can get the result immediately. Everyone concerned about their exposure to *Helicobacter pylori* should take this simple test, especially if you have had symptoms of abdominal pain or discomfort.

After eradication, you should also undergo an endoscopy. The reason for this is that we need to assess how much accumulated damage you have sustained to the stomach lining, and whether or not you are already in a high-risk category for stomach cancer or have already developed it. In my country, it is considered a malpractice to eradicate *Helicobacter pylori* without running an endoscopy.

By looking at the stomach lining through the endoscope, you can see if blood vessels are visible through the lining of the stomach, indicating some degree of atrophy or thinning. In more advanced cases, you can see strange growths—if you take cell samples from these areas, they look like cells from the intestine. These growths can be benign, but when they cross the border into malignancy, that is cancer. In the early stages we can remove it by endoscope, but at certain depths, it has to be a surgical operation.

In my country, we can now decrease the incidence of stomach cancer significantly—probably, we are already doing so. Local people and Westerners who are living long-term in Asia should at least know that *Helicobacter pylori* is a risk and consider testing. Those from Western countries wouldn't even have to worry about this at home, but by living here, they have a different risk. ■

>> The List Education

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



ABC International School (ABCIS)

Inspected and judged an outstanding school by British Government Inspectors (January 2017), the ABCIS is one of the few schools worldwide awarded this Department for Education rating. Progress of students puts the ABCIS among the top 8% of schools in the world. Providing education for 2-18 year olds in a supportive and friendly environment, it delivers a culturally adapted version of the British National Curriculum supported by Cambridge & AQA IGCSE and AS/A levels. Students are prepared for Universities in the UK, USA, Australia, Korea and Canada.



Foundation & Early Primary Campus:
4, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC
Primary & Secondary Campus:
2, 1E Street, KDC Trung Son, Binh Hung, Binh Chanh, HCMC
84 28 5431 1833/34/35/36
office@theabcis.com
www.theabcis.com



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028 6287 0804/ 0904 938 666
www.etonhouseanphu.com



International School Saigon Pearl (ISSP)



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

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



Kinder Academy

Kinder Academy is a Reggio Emilia approach and STEM concept inspired preschool, where you can find the best integration of the above philosophies and practices.

Our Vision: "Inspire and nurture your child to be a thinker with a global mindset."

Our Mission: "Passionate about the development of your child, we provide the right environment to play, learn and grow. Our team is child centric."

47/11/09 Quoc Huong, Thao Dien, District 2
093 878 00 76



STEPS Special School

STEPS (Support Teach Encourage Person with Special Needs) Special School caters to children with Autism, ADHD/ADD, Speech Delay, Intellectual Disability, Behavior Difficulty and Deaf. Our mission and vision is to nurture all children with Special needs in a safe inclusive and supportive environment through education, therapeutic interventions and community acceptance. We offer full - day, half - day, after school program, and school assistance.

18A Vo Trung Toan, An Phu Ward, D2, HCMC.
(028) 2253-4728
www.steps.edu.vn
Steps2017vn@gmail.com



The International School Ho Chi Minh City - American Academy

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

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





The International School Ho Chi Minh City (ISHCMC)

ISHCMC is a leading school in HCMC with a rich history, yet is always innovating. Students from over 50 nationalities are taught in modern learning environments by trained IB educators specializing in inquiry-led teaching. This, paired with international-standard safeguarding policies ensures that all children are safe and supported to reach their potential. ISHCMC students develop a life-long passion for asking questions and searching beyond what is asked in the classroom ultimately becoming true 21st century citizens equipped for the future. The 2017/18 academic school year will see the new Secondary Campus open and the continued refurbishment in the Primary Campus.

28 Vo Truong Toan, D2
+84 (28) 3898 9100
admissions@ishcmc.edu.vn
www.ishcmc.com



The American School

The American School (TAS) is an international school that has been accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), representing 21 nationalities. TAS provides an American-based curriculum with rigorous performance standards and a variety of academic offerings including Advanced Placement courses, university credit courses through our partnership with Missouri State University, and an Intensive ESL Program for English Language Learners. In 2018, The American School will open its new, sprawling mega-campus in District 2's An Phu Neighborhood. This purpose-built facility will house up to 1200 students from pre-nursery through grade 12. This is an exciting time in the growth of the school!

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



WONDERKIDS MONTESSORI SCHOOL (WMS)

School ages: 18 months to 9 years old. WMS is a standard international Montessori school offering nursery, kindergarten and lower elementary program by North America Montessori Curriculum covered with 100% English environment (for children from 18 months to 9 years old). Where the best integration of this philosophy and practices happen, we are proudly an active member of American Montessori Society. "Free the child's potential and you will transform him into the world." Maria Montessori

Campus 1:
3A Tong Huu Dinh, Thao Dien, D2, HCMC
0938 909 268 / 028 22534999

montessori-office@wonderkids.edu.vn
www.wonderkidsmontessori.edu.vn

Campus 2:
4-6 Road No.20, My Gia 1, Tan Phu, D7, HCMC
0977299288 / 028 54141416

info@wms.edu.vn
www.wms.edu.vn



Also...

Aurora International Preschool of The Arts



Aurora International Preschool of The Arts (Aurora), a school inspired by Reggio Emilia, fully embraces "childhood" as a magical time of life for our citizens from 18 months to 6 years olds.

13 Tran Ngoc Dien, D2
www.aurorareggio.com

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.aivietnam.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

Renaissance International School Saigon

Renaissance is an International British School offering the National Curriculum for England complemented by the International Primary

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

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. SSIS 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





Taste of Australia

April 2018

Now in its third year, **Taste of Australia** is back bigger and better than ever in 2018! The annual celebration of Australian produce, cuisine, culture and lifestyle in Vietnam has even more exciting events to experience this year as Australia and Vietnam celebrate 45 years of diplomatic relations, including:

- Taste of Australia Perfect Pairings (3 April, HCMC)
- Taste of Australia NOSH Dinners (7 & 14 April, HCMC)
- Taste of Australia Epic Brunch (8 April, HCMC)
- Taste of Australia Food and Wine Journey (14 April, HCMC)
- Taste of Australia Family Barbecue (22 April, Danang)
- Taste of Australia culinary competitions (nationwide; open to current culinary students)
- and many restaurant, retail and hotel events and promotions nationwide throughout April.

For information about all these delicious events and more please see the website and facebook page:

 [tasteofaustralia.vn](https://www.facebook.com/tasteofaustralia.vn)

 [tasteofaustralia.com.vn](https://www.tasteofaustralia.com.vn)



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• Achieving Student Success

Giúp trẻ thành công

• Student Time Management & Organization Skills

Đạy trẻ quản lý thời gian & tổ chức việc học tập

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**COLLABORATORS
INVITED**

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