

Contributors

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What's your favorite app when you travel?



BEN CHIN

Writer, *Brew horizons*, p.26

When Ben isn't crafting stories about cities, you'll find him daydreaming about life on a small farm in the not-too-distant future.

"I love to venture off the beaten path, so I rely on Google Maps to navigate new areas. Music lets me enjoy Miles Davis while I'm on the road, and of course, I collect all my memories on Instagram."



JOSHUA ZUKAS

Writer, *3 days in Saigon under \$150*, p.55

Joshua has called Vietnam home for more than a decade and has covered the country for *Lonely Planet*, *Tripadvisor*, *Wallpaper*, *The Economist*, *Insider* and more.

"As soon as I arrive somewhere new, I check out VoiceMap, which has a huge catalogue of in-depth audio guides written by experts. I'm currently working on one for Hanoi – it will be Vietnam's first!"

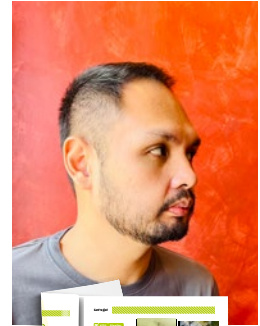


PIERRA LABRADOR

Stylist and writer, *Bag 'em up*, p.33

Apart from writing and styling, Pierra has two poetry books (the self-published *The Heartbreak Diaries*, and Anvil Publishing's *Dear Universe*), with a third volume in the works

"The first thing I do is check weather apps/sites like wunderground.com to know how to pack for a trip – capsule wardrobe planning is already part of the fun! Google Maps and Google Translate always come in handy, too."



DATU SHARIFF PENDATUN

Writer, *Have a field day*, p.22

Datu is a writer and chef from Manila. His favorite destinations are Bangkok, Bukidnon and Bali.

"Google Translate is a lifesaver. I find that the app is most useful in markets, restaurants and transportation. It has also protected from me from cringey mispronunciation."

#HoChiMinhCity

#TipsFromALocal

#SpendSmart

B

Days in Saigon for under \$150

Packed with rich history and habit-forming cuisine that can be enjoyed on every street corner, a weekend in Saigon is always a cheap thrill

TEXT BY JOSHUA ZUKAS



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lashbacks from a whirlwind weekend in Saigon, aka Ho Chi Minh City, will linger for weeks. This is undoubtedly one of the most dynamic cities in Southeast Asia, but it's also one of the most affordable. Sights, museums and temples cost little more than one or two dollars (if anything), and while the city is cultivating fine-dining and artisanal café scenes, cheap eats and streetside coffee still reign supreme.

The city doesn't just have two names, one official and one colloquial; it also has two personalities. While first impressions are likely to be of its cacophonous anarchy, buried within buildings are calm and sophisticated oases. Here's how you can navigate the storm without depleting your energy reserves (or breaking the bank).



(Left to right)
Notre Dame Cathedral;
Pho Thin by SOL; Saigon
Central Post Office



Day 1
COLONIAL DISTRICT 1 AND FOODIE DISTRICT 4

Start at the beginning in District 1. The French bulldozed much of the ancient city, but it's hard not to appreciate what they constructed in its place. The red-brick Notre Dame Cathedral (free), built in the 1870s, is one of the city's oldest and grandest colonial buildings.

Make sure you take a close look at the statue of the Virgin Mary in front: many believe she sheds tears.

After a quick visit to the adjacent Saigon Central Post Office (free), built in the 1880s with French and Khmer motifs, stroll southeast down Dong Khoi Street. After passing the Opera House, it's time for coffee. Look for 151 Dong Khoi, squeeze past the art stalls and climb the stairs to find Okkio Caffe, a new design café, and try their

small-batch roasted coconut coffee (75,000VND). Then stroll over the Nguyen Hue Boulevard and settle in for lunch at Pho Thin by SOL. You can embellish the pho (88,000VND) here with an onsen egg (12,000VND) and some crispy fried dough sticks (12,000VND).

Springtime is sweltering in Saigon, so after lunch, hide from the heat and explore 14 Ton That Dam, two blocks southwest. This former apartment building houses dozens of independent

PHOTOS BY HAMDAN YOSHIDA / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (SAIGON CENTRAL POST OFFICE), NGUYEN QUANG NGOC TONKIN / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (NOTRE-DAME CATHEDRAL), @JAUNTY_JAN (PHO THIN BY SOL)



Great eats, fine value



Ho Chi Minh City is at the forefront of culinary innovation in Vietnam, evidenced by a generous spread of fine-dining establishments. Some of these restaurants, like the newly opened Oryz Saigon, offer extraordinary value for money. Singaporean *chef-patron* Chris Fong has drawn inspiration from the recipes of Cholon for his 10-course spring tasting menu (1,700,000VND), so expect a delicate modern twist on Viet-Chinese favourites including dumplings, *hoan thanh* (wonton) and the rice-noodle dish *hu tieu*. Surely there's no better way to round off a day exploring Chinatown.

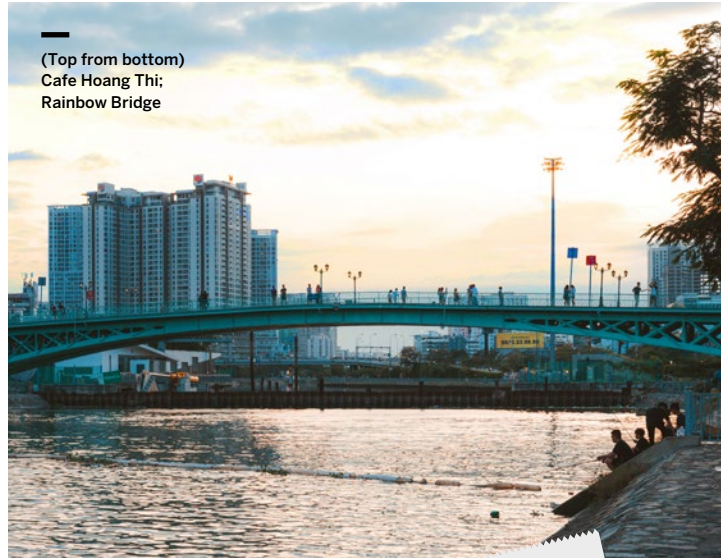
boutiques, and if you need another java break, try Café Hoang Thi. This time, order a *bac xiu* (50,000VND) – a delectably sweet mixture of Robusta coffee, fresh milk and condensed milk.

Exit District 1 by hopping over the pedestrian Cau Mong, or Rainbow Bridge, designed by Gustave Eiffel (known for the Eiffel Tower) in 1882, to District 4. Strike east for a block and visit the Ho Chi Minh Museum (10,000VND) to learn about the

life of the revolutionary leader who gave his name to the city. With plenty of time (and budget) to spare, make your way through District 4's tight alleyways to Vinh Khanh Street – an organised-crime hub decades ago, but now a foodie paradise. Here you'll find rowdy beer halls serving up fresh seafood and snails, a Saigon specialty, and you can get a very decent meal for 300,000VND. Jump in a taxi (65,000VND) home.



(Top from bottom)
Cafe Hoang Thi;
Rainbow Bridge



CASH RECEIPT

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Coffees: | 125,000VND |
| Lunch: | 112,000VND |
| Museum: | 10,000VND |
| Dinner: | 300,000VND |
| Taxi: | 65,000VND |
| Total: | 612,000VND (US\$25) |

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THANK YOU!



Day 2

HISTORIC DISTRICT 3

District 3 is one of Ho Chi Minh City's most desirable residential neighbourhoods, and today you'll see why. Start at Turtle Lake and the modernist lotus-flower sculpture. Get caffeinated in one of the spots overlooking the lake (which is actually more of a pond), such as Cong Ca Phe, which flaunts a Communist-chic theme with wooden lounge chairs and olive-green walls. Sample one of the signatures, like coffee with coconut and green rice (65,000VND).

Meander southwest past the modernist Independence Palace, colonial Archbishop's Residence and peer over the walls of the War Remnants Museum to see some pristine

fighter jets and tanks, a bizarre site in the middle of a big city. Stop for lunch at nearby Hum, which serves vegan versions of traditional Vietnamese dishes in elegant surroundings. Try the pomelo salad with passion fruit (130,000VND) and the deep-fried square spring rolls (270,000VND). Skip dessert and head two blocks southwest to The Cocoa Project, a stylish sustainable chocolatier, to nibble on a chocolate bar enhanced with local flavours (72,000).

With your sweet tooth satisfied, continue southwest to the Secret Weapon Bunker (free), once a private home with a hidden basement that stored weapons during the Vietnam War. Then continue in the same direction to Hu Tieu Hong Phat, which has been around for almost 50

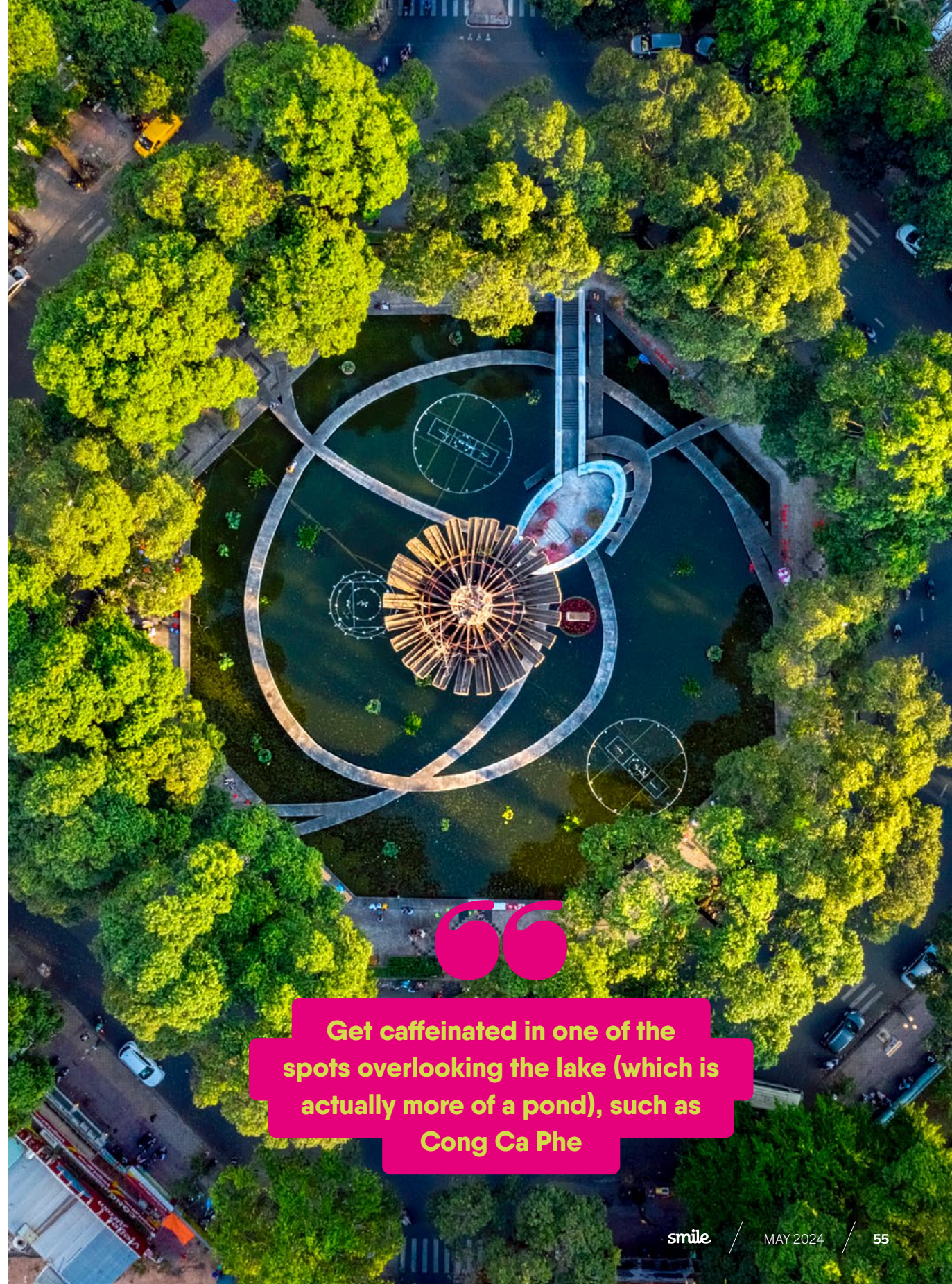
years. Try their signature dish, *hu tieu* (118,000VND) – chewy rice noodles with a dozen or so toppings. After dinner, delve into District 3's tight alleyways as you stroll towards Mua Craft Sake to enjoy a house-brewed artisanal sake flight (160,000VND), then get a taxi back (45,000VND).



(Left to right)
Independence Palace;
War Remnants Museum;
Turtle Lake



PHOTO BY XUANHUONGHO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (WAR REMNANTS MUSEUM)



Get caffeinated in one of the spots overlooking the lake (which is actually more of a pond), such as Cong Ca Phe



STYLISH STAYS IN CENTRAL SAIGON



M Village Hai Ba Trung, which opened last October, is ideally located just a few blocks northwest of Notre Dame Cathedral and Turtle Lake, the starting points for days 1 and 2. The modern hotel, tucked away from the main road, offers a series of spacious studios and suites with elevated views and plenty of natural light at very reasonable prices. For something even more affordable, check out M Village Nguyen Van Thu, which is just around the corner.

(Clockwise from left) Ba Thien Hau Temple; St Francis Xavier Church; Quan Am Pagoda

Day 3

DISTRICTS 5 AND 6: CHINATOWN

A century ago, Ho Chi Minh City was two cities: Saigon and Cholon. The Chinese mercantile neighborhood of Cholon was absorbed into the city in 1931, and today is divided between Districts 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11. Districts 5 and 6 hold most of the action.

Hop in a taxi (75,000VND) and head out to S'mores Saigon Caffè - Cho Lon. Sample one of their cold brews (65,000VND), which will both caffeinate and hydrate. Then cross the

road and duck into Hoa Sy Phuong Alley (free), surely one of the city's most picturesque micro-neighborhoods. Then strike west along Nguyen Trai Street to Ba Thien Hau Temple (free). Constructed in the early 19th century, this temple is dedicated to both Buddha and Thien Hau, the patron god protecting sailors. Another block northwest on Lao Tu Street is the multicolored Quan Am Pagoda (free) with its white ceramic statue of Guanyin, Goddess of Compassion.

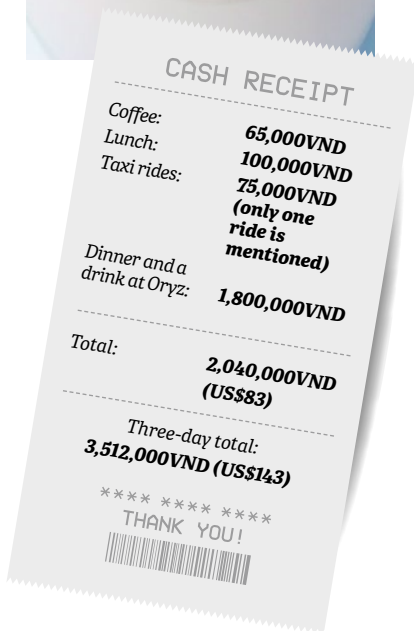
Continue west to St Francis Xavier Church (Cha Tam, free), a small Catholic church built in



PHOTOS BY BEN BRYANT / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (BA THIEN HAU TEMPLE), DAVID BOKUCHAVA / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH), SIMON VU / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (QUAN AM PAGODA)



(Clockwise from left)
Binh Tay Market;
banh canh cua



the early 1900s, and take a break in the quiet courtyard before the final stop: Binh Tay Market. Seek out a light lunch in the food court at the back of the market, where you'll find a full range of Vietnamese dishes for under 100,000VND, including a rich and hearty *banh canh cua* (tapioca noodle soup with crab) at Chau Lan. Then wander

around the market taking in all the sights and sounds, and don't miss the temple in the central courtyard. In the evening, stop by Oryz Saigon, one of Asia's best-value fine-dining restaurants, and blow the rest of your cash. You may be on a budget, but that shouldn't stop you from ending the trip in style. ☺



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