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THAT COUNTRY CHARM

There's a town north of Hanoi that's famous for rubbing people up the wrong way. So we sent a reporter with one mission: to stay cool

Cover photo: Viet Hung

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One year begins as another one ends

It's almost happy new year time, again! Tet (Lunar New Year) Festival is coming, and needless to say, there'll be drinks galore. But there will also be a lot of strategic "buttering up" of bosses. Minister of Finance Nguyen Sinh Hung hopes to lead the fight against this trend. Last week, Hung requested the ministry ban officials from bringing gifts to the private houses of their superiors. In addition, no unit would be allowed to use public assets to buy or grant gifts to agencies or individuals in any shape or form. The document also stresses officials are banned from using public cars for personal use before and after Tet.

Recently sentenced to death for trafficking heroin, Tran Xuan Ha, the drug baron, said he wanted to donate his internal organs to medicine after facing the firing squad. Besides wondering whether his organs will be in one piece after being shot, his humane generosity has raised an important question for the relevant authorities concerning the management of bodies executed. Currently, there are suspicions people have been stealing the deceased for trading of body parts.

Under FIFA ruling, two recently disgraced Vietnamese national footballers, Van Quyen

and Quoc Vuong, may face a total fine of \$11,000 for match fixing during SEA Games 23 in the Philippines. If the two men cannot pay the fine themselves, the Vietnam Football Federation (VFF) will have to take charge. There is an old Vietnamese saying to reflect this dilemma: *Tien mat, tat mang*, which means money has been lost while the negative effects remain.

A trail of the dead: A buffalo on the dyke road along Thai Binh River, which runs through Cam Van Commune, Hai Duong Province, was being dragged to a slaughter house by two men, but perhaps it sensed danger as the

buffalo suddenly refused to budge. One of the men whacked it with a stick and then threw stones at it to get it moving. Incensed, the buffalo charged through one man and head butted the other over a fence. Then, the enraged beast swam over the Thai Binh River, ran through the countryside in Hai Duong taking out three more men along the way. One day after the one-buffalo stampede, the animal was put down, leaving two men dead and three injured.

*Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe*  
- Lewis Carroll

ON THE STOOL



NAME PHIL JOHNS  
AGE 39  
NATIONALITY AUSTRALIAN  
OCCUPATION COMMUNICATION ADVISOR

What brought you to Vietnam? I'd never been here before.  
What's keeping you here? The prospect of debuting in an international match for the Hanoi Swans' Australian Rules Football team. So far, I've spent just two years in training and have come to grief prior to each of our matches.  
Where do you go to escape? In the office: headphones on. Outside, it's a kick of the footy.  
Your favourite Vietnamese

expression? "Maybe" - as in, we might be stuck in the middle of a sea of swirling motorcycles, the scheduled start of the meeting was 20 minutes earlier and I'm told, "Maybe we will be late". Yes. Maybe.  
Favourite local food? *Pho bo*.  
And what gives you a belly-ache? Dodging the dodgy dish and then having a helpful colleague deposit a serve of it in my bowl with his chopsticks.  
What's the one thing you've always wanted to do here that you haven't done yet? In the dying moments of a titanic international football match, to kick the winning goal, be carried off the ground by my teammates and then face the media scrum to declare, "It was a team effort".  
If you suddenly won VND1 million, what would you do with the money? Pretend I was Vietnamese: let it burn my hands for two seconds and then announce to the office that I will take them out

for lunch.

What's in your pockets right now? An ageing mobile that distresses my Vietnamese colleagues and an increasing number of VND1,000 coins.  
Where would we find you at 10pm on Friday night? In the Bobby Skilton Room of the Barracuda Bar. Always.  
... and 10am on Saturday morning? Demonstrating my recovery powers by toiling selflessly for the boss.  
Favourite nocturnal beverage? Beer on, not with, ice.  
Who would be the first person you'd invite to your birthday party and why? The Hanoi Swans' Coach. Imagine the scenes of devastation if I was to miss the next international match against Malaysia on 4 March because I upset the Coach.  
...and the last? My neighbour with the yapping dogs.  
Who is the person you most admire in Vietnam? The electrician who can find the fault in the spaghetti wiring that dangles from the street poles.

What was your most embarrassing moment in Vietnam? Prior to a practise match last year between the Victorians and Rest of World at Hoang Cau Stadium, I inadvertently pulled my groin while tossing a three-legged dead cat (from the playing surface).  
Can't live without? Slipping a Tiger (beer) into the tank.  
What period of history would like to have lived in and why? Now. Living in different countries makes me realise that the differences between people and cultures are dwarfed by the similarities: family, friends, work, triumphs, tragedies. And the internet.  
Humanity's best invention? Humour.  
Worst? Programming that makes people use guns against each other.  
What would be your dying words? In the near future, by popular demand, VTV3 will televise Hanoi Swans' matches - live. Maybe.

WHAT'S ON

EXHIBITIONS

Nguyen Minh Thuyet's paintings at the Centre for Exhibition and Art Exchange, 43 Trang Tien, Hanoi, till Jan. 3.

Huyhn Phu Ha's paintings ongoing at Zen Plaza Gallery, 83 Nguyen Van Troi, Phu Nuuan district, HCM City.

Spring Love from the South - photo exhibition to raise funds for children at HCM Journalist Association, 14 Alexandre De Rhodes, D1, HCM City.

Natural Scenery - spaces of nature exhibition with contemporary Vietnamese art by Nguyen Thanh at Continental Hotel, 132-134 Dong Khoi, D1, HCM City, till Jan. 5.

Ceramics by Gomviet Fine Art in Ly Tu Trong Park, HCM City,

till the end of January.

Music from an unknown source by German



painter Sigmar Polke at Vietnam Fine Art Museum, 66 Nguyen Thai Hoc, from Jan 4-16.

Lotus by Tran Anh Quan ongoing at Salon De Hanoi, 4 Ha Hoi alley, Tran Hung Dao, Hanoi.

Street Colour by Phung Quang Duc and Ngo Huy Thanh at Art Centre, 5 Ngo Gach, Hanoi, till Jan. 3.

Me va con: paintings by Lau Phuong Mai and her daughter at Blue Space

Gallery, 1 Le Thi Hong Gam, D1, HCM City, till Jan. 10.

Paintings to celebrate 20 years of Thanh Nien Newspaper at Ben Thanh Theatre, D1, HCM City, till Jan. 3.

Paintings by Tran Quang Minh and Nguyen Quang Tiep ongoing at Hang Gallery, 32 Tran Phu, Hanoi.

National art exhibition 2001-2005 at the Vietnam Art Cultural Exhibition Centre, 2 Hoa Lu, Hanoi, till Jan. 9.

Vietnam: Journey of Body, Mind & Spirit at Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Nguyen Van Huynh, till Feb. 25.

Korean sculptures from Diary in Prison at Ho Chi Minh City Exhibition Hall, 92

Le Thanh Ton, D1, HCM City, till Jan. 2.

Interior design and décor with hand-made bamboo, rattan and wooden products are on display at Four Seasons Art, 37 Hang Manh, Hanoi.

PERFORMANCES

Gugak film music festival to commemorate Vietnam-South Korea diplomatic ties at Hanoi Culture Friendship Palace and the Unification Palace in Ho Chi Minh City. Until Jan 29.

Spring of New Century conducted by Tetsuji Honna and the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra at Hanoi Opera House, 1 Trang Tien, Jan. 6-7. Res: 0914322961.

A special concert for children by ballet troupe and Vietnamese children's choir

organised by the Vietnam National Opera and Ballet Theatre at Hanoi Opera House, 1 Trang Tien, Jan. 8. Res: 0914322961.

Butterfly: ballet by Yggdrasil, a Danish Dance Ensemble, directed by Birgitte Bauer at Hanoi Opera House, 1 Trang Tien, Jan. 10-11. Res: 091 4322961.

Dinner with Vietnamese traditional music entertainment at Ly Theatre Hall, 51 Ly Thai To, Hanoi, Tuesday to Friday, 19:30 pm to 21:30 pm.

An extract from a Vietnamese traditional performance & show every Thursday from 19pm. 50 per person including one house cocktail or mineral water at Ly Theatre Hall, 51 Ly Thai To, Hanoi.

Contact us about upcoming events: timeout@vie.com.vn

HANOI CLUB

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