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# Hai Ba Trung

*Hai Ba Trung stretches from District 1 into District 3 and is home to some of the most popular restaurants, cafes and shops in the city. We decided to travel away from downtown to show you the lesser known places. Words by Christine Van and Will Peach. Photos by Rico Gonzales.*

## ◦ Liquid Club

104 Hai Ba Trung, Q1

The type of place where attractive, scantily-clad ladies pour your drinks and talk with you (if you're a man) in exchange for a seven-dollar tip, Liquid is one of the city's longest running nightclubs. cavernous and with a modest dance floor and not so modest loud, booming hip hop, house or techno, several strip poles are scattered across the dance floor for those who desire to do a tease. Here, prices are high (meaning the drinks of course) and the lights are very low. Closing time varies between midnight and 1am.

## ◦ Mon Hue

302 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

Almost blending into the tapestry of neon that shimmers over Hai Ba Trung, Mon Hue is a good place to dine with a large group of friends with its cool, roomy interior complete with hanging red lanterns. Specialising in Hue cuisine, this restaurant remains busy throughout the day, with patrons enjoying a variety of noodle soups and other central Vietnamese dishes while sipping on unique Vietnamese beverages made from tapioca and coconut (VND11,000), lotus seeds (VND16,000) and French beans (VND13,000). The menu, complete with pictures and English, is a helpful accompaniment for non-locals. Be sure to try the *chao tom*, prawn terrine



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wrapped around sugar cane and served with fine rice vermicelli (VND65,000).

◦ **Trung Nguyen**

349 – 351 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

The name Trung Nguyen should be familiar to any coffee drinker in Vietnam, and this particular three-storey branch provides the perfect stop for a brief intermission from a bout of Christmas shopping. Whether it's traditional Vietnamese coffee you want or a simple Americano, their large English-language menu provides you with the necessary information to get that ultimate coffee buzz. If you're feeling particularly jaded, pick up an option from the five choices of weasel coffee - a perfect complement to a wide range of ice cream starting at VND20,000. But if you just want to kick back then try out their wide range of fresh juice smoothies ranging between VND20,000 and VND30,000.

◦ **Hien Christmas Decorations**

265 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

Like a glittering shrine to all things December 25th, Hien Xmas Decorations sticks out like old St Nicholas' thumb along this strip of trendy fashion boutiques and restaurants. Everything you could ever want to decorate your lonely tree with is available, from tinsel, baubles and candy canes to bells, all coming in a variety of sizes and colours. If it's not only the tree that needs

attention, then other larger decorations are on offer as well. Large wreaths cost around VND120,000 while Christmas lights start from as low as VND30,000. OK, so a five foot robotic chuckling Santa may not be an essential purchase, but at just VND2million would it be that much of a regret?

◦ **Nguyen Toy World**

223 Bis Hai Ba Trung, Q3

Ever fancied commandeering your own helicopter or monster truck and running it over and above the streets of Ho Chi Minh City? Nguyen Toy World makes such fantasies come true by putting control directly at your fingertips. The latest remote technology imported from Japan is available with brands such as JR, Hyundai and Thunder Tiger topping the list. Handsets can be tested using the in-store computer technology, while buyers can pick out just how big or small they want their brand new toy to be. A ready-to-fly JR Airshipper helicopter may set you back US\$1,000 but wait until you fly that joyous vehicle in those crystal clear skies. A Ho Bao Hyper ST monster truck that reaches above your knees is more affordable at US\$410. The store also provides all the parts and services necessary to keep your dream alive.

◦ **Vietgreen Foods**

176 Hai Ba Trung, Q1

Offering local organic produce at reasonable

prices, Vietgreen Foods is the first stop for any ecologically-minded buyer. Its heavily adorned exterior with large signage and product display makes it particularly difficult to miss. Inside the store lurks row upon row of the freshest, most exotic produce and friendly English-speaking staff are on hand to explain the Vietnamese listings. Oranges, lemons, limes and strawberries start from VND22,000, while meat is on sale by the kilo at the counter. Chicken starts from VND40,000 a kilo while beef is more expensive at VND90,000. Additionally, Vietgreen plays host to a popular juice bar where its fine produce provides the ingredients for one of the best smoothies in town. Large refrigeration space ensures that the goods are stored properly and remain fresh.

◦ **Nine West**

156 Hai Ba Trung, Q1

Nine West has been running successfully since 1978. The mark of such success can be seen in its expansion to Southeast Asia and this remarkably sleek store. With accommodating staff and the latest styles to boot, Nine West is a must for women's shoes and accessories. Prices are listed in US dollars with the popular Anne Klein range starting from US\$150 while purses, belts and handbags remain on par with western prices. The store prides itself on smart presentation with TFT screens beaming all

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the latest from the catwalk while offering a long stretch of space to test drive that naughty impulse buy.

#### ◦ Tous Le Jours

180 Hai Ba Trung, Q1

This Korean-based bakery is the newest addition to the bakery scene. With two locations in the city centre, the style is bright and big with all sorts of savoury and sweet delights. It's a self service place where you come in, grab a tray and tongs and start piling on the carbs. They have a wide selection of cakes and pastries, and their croque monsieur is decent if you're extremely hungry. Remember that the place is of Korean origin and tailored to the local taste, so expect plenty of sweet breads and weird pairings like sweet corn kernels and ketchup on a puff pastry. There is also a decent range of coffee-based drinks and juices on offer. Additional indoor and terrace seating on the upper level. Prices range from VND10,000 up to VND300,000 for a whole cake.

#### ◦ Bud's Ice Cream of San Francisco

445-447 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

The draw of this ice cream "restaurant" is in the name itself, promising real American-style ice cream, and it doesn't disappoint. The ice cream is milky and dense, unlike the local brands that are usually airy and laden with ice bits. Their goal is to remain consistent with the brand's reputation of being "one of the world's best ice creams".

It comes pretty close to standard. A scoop of ice cream costs VND18,000 although you can indulge with a Crunchy Cookie sundae for VND42,000. Man cannot live on ice cream alone, so their menu expands beyond ice cream to include hot dishes like Nam Vang noodle soup (VND30,000) and stewed beef noodles (VND34,000) for breakfast as well as a set Vietnamese menu for lunch.

#### ◦ Tib

187 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

Housed in a Sino-French villa down a quiet alleyway, this restaurant does impressive Hue cuisine and a mean jackfruit salad with grilled sesame seeds (VND63,000). Originally opened by the well-known Vietnamese composer Trinh Cong Son, since passing away in 2001 it has been run by his brother. The restaurant carries an air of sophisticated elegance and also recently hosted a meal attended by George W. Bush on his visit to Vietnam. This place is perfect for entertaining friends and business associates while experiencing great Hue food.

#### ◦ Sony Shop

247 - 249 Hai Ba Trung, Q3

Like a shining beacon standing alluringly opposite Van Tam park, Sony Shop has all the goods on offer to have yourself a thoroughly good night in. Showcasing the latest and most popular Sony lines - Vaio, Bravia, Handycam and Cybershot - the quality of hardware is second to none. The

store is worth a visit for some great deals alone, like an HD ready Bravia 32-inch TV at VND17.9 million or a Carl Zeuss 40X optical zoom camera at just VND7.5million. Use the friendly staff to break down those intimidating technological terms; their English is good but their knowledge is even better. If browsing is more your thing however, then make swift use of the sofas and wind down to watch the latest films screened using the finest in home entertainment technology. A good reputation is easily assured in this gigantic space dedicated to all things Sony. **W**

#### ► THE TRUNG SISTERS

Hai Ba Trung literally translates as "two ladies Trung". In 40AD, after her husband had been executed by the Chinese, Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi led an uprising against the Hans. They were able to drive off the Chinese and set up a Vietnamese capital at Me Linh (Phu Tho Province). In 41AD, Han emperor Wudi sent his general Ma Vien and troops to crush the Trung rebellion. After two years of fighting, the Trung sisters were defeated. Now known collectively in Vietnamese folklore as Hai Ba Trung, the sisters are recognised as the first Vietnamese patriots.

