

Bui Thi Xuan

Just minutes from Pham Ngu Lao, Bui Thi Xuan may be the Silicon Valley of Ho Chi Minh City, but it has more to offer than just high-tech treats. Whether it's a meat-fest for dinner, a massage to help you relax or a nice floral wreath to bring home to mum, this road has you covered. Words by Will Peach. Photos by Rico Gonzales.



◉ A Buu Quan

17 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

The rustic feel of this Vietnamese restaurant provides a comfortable setting to dine on the myriad of options available to its patrons. Whether it's vegetarian Buddhist fare you're after or more adventurous dishes like grilled duck's tongue, this place has it on the menu. Although its tofu list is only limited to four dishes, meat-eaters can have a veritable feast on its numerous pork, beef and chicken options. Prices are good, the average main costs about VND50,000. Some of the most popular dishes include steamed pigs brains with clams (VND50,000), baked oysters (VND20,000) and charcoal grilled pork ribs A Buu style (VND55,000). Drinks are reasonable also, ranging from VND20,000 for fruit juices to Guinness at possibly the

cheapest price in town – VND25,000. This should be a definite first stop for those new to Vietnamese food.

◉ Thanh Nhan

174 – 176 – 178 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

Due to the sheer number of computer stores in the area and society's current dependence on the internet, it's probable that you're eventually going to need stuff from Bui Thi Xuan. If you do only make that one-stop shop for computing products then make it Thanh Nhan. This four-storey technological heaven displays the latest wizardry from manufacturers Dell, Hewlett Packard, Sony, Creative, Toshiba and the like. The first floor has all the accessories you could need, be it USB drives, DVD drives, hard disks, speakers, cameras, webcams or TFT screens.

The second floor showcases around 100 notebooks, offering great deals such as the Acer Travelmate 6292 for VND7million. The third and fourth computing floors house the hive-like service centre, which is useful to know alongside the offer of a one year warranty on most products.

◉ K Computer

95 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

K Computer is a family-run business offering piles of copied software titles. Microsoft Office, Encarta Encyclopedia, Vista OS, Symantec Antivirus, Dreamweaver MX and Corel Draw are just a few of the programmes available. If you're like me and a little hazy on using some of the bigger boys like Photoshop Elements 7 or InDesign CS4, there are tutorial packages available to



► HISTORY

One of the best known female generals in Vietnamese history, Bui Thi Xuan was instrumental in the final years of the Tay Son Rebellion as they sought to fend off the advancing Nguyen forces. She led a division of troops on the back of an elephant and had considerable success. Unfortunately, while her own forces were successful, the larger Tay Son armies were less so. She was captured, along with her husband, the general Tran Quang Dieu, by the Nguyen forces. She was jailed briefly before being executed along with her young daughter through trampling by elephants.



teach you. There's even a *Learn Vietnamese* programme for VND20,000. Prices are standard but a little top-end; all DVD titles are VND30,000 while CDs are VND20,000.

◦ Co-Op Mart

274 Cong Quynh, Q1,

On the opposite end of this street is an outlet of this western-style supermarket chain. Behind its silvery blue and white façade lurks a two storied house of groceries and fashion. Food is the primary reason for a visit with both western and local brands available in the countless aisles of the ground floor. Upstairs, however, features a surprising number of bargains in casual and formal fashions for both sexes. While the styles aren't particularly chic and sizes are generally for petite locals, the reduction

rails have men's formal trousers starting at VND60,000 and women's blouses range between VND100,000 and VND150,000.

◦ Duc Hanh Pro Photo Studio

81B Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

If you're unlucky/lucky enough to be getting married and narcissistic/nostalgic enough to want to record that once only day, Duc Hanh may be the place to go. With friendly staff and a lovely waiting area, browse the sample albums available to decide exactly what theme you want. A collection of 20cm x 30cm shots of 50 costs VND7 million, with a blown up 60cm x 90cm shot included. Professionalism is what this store prides itself on and some of the shots on display could make any prospective jilter have second thoughts.

◦ Le Vy Beauty Salon

98 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

Boys watch out! Le Vy is the place that Hugh Hefner himself commissioned to look after all your grooming needs. The angels in question are Le Vy's heavily dolled up staff who cater to your every whim – well almost. Relax on their comfy recliners and settle down for a relaxing shave, massage, ear cleaning, hair cut and then some. You need only ask gents. Have a lovely two-hour scrub down shampoo for only VND80,000 or enjoy a sensuous shave at the crazy price of VND20,000. If you want your mane tamed, get the girls to straighten it out for VND400,000 or dyed for VND200,000. Friendly English speaking girls will crowd you on entry, pamper and settle you in. The brochure says for "men and women", but



you'll be hard-pressed to find a single female client in there. Just remember to leave a tip.

◦ Flower Section

120-130 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

Along this little strip can be seen sweaty men and women busy crafting elaborate floral wreaths that both smell and look fantastic. As the shop fronts display their wonderful day's work, they become effective traps for any curious eye. Happy to break from their toils to talk to any would-be customer, the staff, although speaking little English, are more than happy to explain prices and offer a close up smell. The larger more intricate weaves cost around VND200,000 while smaller alternatives go for VND150,000.

◦ Lamode Café

118 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

With a decidedly French feel one would expect shrouds of tourists and the pitter patter of Anglo chatter at Lamode Cafe. This is not the case for this hotspot of the Vietnamese elite. Lamode Café, home of the red lantern and a thousand fishes, is a good place to avoid the backpacker crowds and sample true Vietnamese café culture. Thriving at the weekend, punters flock here to make use of the free Wi-Fi and take advantage of the cheap drinks and snacks on offer. The downstairs is separated into two areas, with the wood-paneled decor on the right side and a floor

tiled, sofa-chaired area on the left. Live piano performances are held at 9pm on weekends and complement the cheap drinks (ranging between VND20,000 to VND30,000) perfectly.

◦ A Little Self Indulgence

35 Luong Huu Khanh, Q1

At 80 Bui Thi Xuan the road opens up to the quiet dusty street of Luong Huu Khanh. The road is host to a number of odd little stalls all specialising in shop and hotel furnishings. The goods on offer are unavailable in supermarkets or department stores, Luong Huu Khanh therefore, may be the only source in town for stamp machines, display fixtures, shop signs and plaques. Perhaps, most importantly of all, is that among all this are little treasures useful for a bit of self congratulation. Whether you fancy yourself as the next footballer, karate or table tennis champion, there are decadent trophies available with engraving included in the fee. Starting at VND200,000, but open to haggling, you could have the perfect mantelpiece adornment to pretend you earned to your friends.

◦ Brazil Churrasco

56 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

If you want to go fill yourself to bursting point within the city, Brazil Churrasco is an excellent place to do it. With its fusion of Vietnamese-Brazilian cuisine and a large

indoor seating area, the restaurant provides a swanky setting for any special occasion. As Brazilian go-go dancing montages pepper the walls, traditional dining furniture and a white light space provide the atmosphere for a marathon feast. All-you-can-eat buffets featuring 11 types of meat cost VND330,000 for each person, or if you're a little less hungry, a lighter meal costs VND270,000. The service is excellent and an extensive wine list befits the wide array of food on offer. They open at 3pm.

◦ JNC WineCo

9 Bui Thi Xuan, Q1

With a large selection of wine from many regions on display, WineCo nails both presentation and product well. Its cosy interior complete with velvet seats, ageing barrels and wandering vine leaves, provides a good place to pick out your tipple. Stocking brands like Glass Mountain, Chou Chou and Julian means that prices aren't too cheap, but nonetheless reasonable. A price of Californian Julian 2002 Chardonnay can be found at VND200,000 while other imports from Australia, Chile and France compare. Alongside all the wine are 200-gram hulks of seductive Vietnamese milk chocolate at VND100,000 each. The staff speak little English, so unless you're already familiar with wine, it's best to brush up before heading here. 

