



POLITICS AND LAWS

Cases

Government in Action

Talking Law

BUSINESS

Banking-Finance

Business Beat

Infobytes

Stock Market

Talking Shop

INDUSTRIES

AGRICULTURE

SOCIAL ISSUES

Education

Health

Labour

Owner of the Future

Population & Development

Religion

Talk Around Town

CULTURE

Antique & Relics

Arts & Craft

Awareness is answer to poaching problem

(05-08-2007)

A Vietnamese saying goes, "We can eat anything with four feet except the table, anything in the ocean except submarines and anything in the sky except planes." **Alex Kaeslin** takes a journey to investigate how to stop wild animals from ending up in restaurants, traditional pharmacies and souvenir shops.

For the last 14 months I have been travelling through Asia at a slow pace to get in touch with its people, environment and culture. I am from Switzerland, where I was able to attend school for many years for free and learn four languages, so on this journey my mission is to give something back.

In Indonesia, I followed the labourers in a sulphur mine on Mount Ijen in Eastern Java, Malaysia's Taman Negara got my attention for its stunning wildlife and in Thailand I did a documentary about a place called Elephants and Friends where they look after suffering animals. In Myanmar, I documented the lives of monks, then in Siam Reap, Cambodia, I heard the sad testimonies of landmine victims. Now, I am in Viet Nam, where illegal animal trade is common and needs to be addressed until public awareness has prompted action.

I set out to do some research in HCM City with my guide Mr Nam (his name has been changed) and his driver as my companions. My goal was to find places (restaurants, bars, industrial areas) where animal products were sold or animals were suffering in cages. We had been given the address of a zoo project in a notorious province outside of HCM City, where I hoped to find out more about the precious bear bile that brings pleasure to the dealer and pain to the animal.

We arrived at a construction site that soon will be turned into a US\$200 million zoo and family entertainment park. We made our way into the main office and administration centre, where I told the general manager that I was a big investor from overseas with many rich clients interested



Natural Viagra?: Vials of bear bile are ready for purchase in HCM City's Chinatown, where many shops also sell tiger penis and other animal products said to have medicinal purposes.



Tight quarters: A bear reaches through the bars of its tiny cage at a riverside restaurant that houses its own zoo, in Binh Duong Province, outside of HCM City. — VNS Photos Courtesy of Alex Kaeslin

→ Sacred frangipanis don't belong on the plate

→ The victor

→ Corporate events are fun for the first time

→ Cycling trip puts youths to the test

→ Awareness is answer to poaching problem

→ From printer to palm

→ Old trees get new look under artist's hand

→ Ha Noi to expand green spaces in city

→ Thanh Hoa gallop past Long An in injury time

→ Judokas strike gold in City tourney

→ Today's special (06-08-2007)

→ Virtuous cops dazzle fans in recent TV series

→ Tchaikovsky prize-winning violinist to play in HCM City

→ Job fair recruits recent graduates

→ Healthcare sector seeks solutions to shortage of skilled technicians

→ Science education under microscope

→ Number of malnourished kids under age five drops

→ Health ministry announces nation's first cancer institute

→ Teenage gold panners raise child welfare concerns

Books
Fashion
Festival
Film
Interview
Music
Photography
Theatre
In History
Kaleidoscope
Ong Tao's Kitchen
Restaurant Review
Traditional Miscellany
SPORTS
Teed Off
National Focus
OPINION
Outlook
ENVIRONMENT
DOMESTIC PRESS HIGHLIGHTS
TRAVEL
Travellers' Notes
SUNDAY
Features
Short Stories

in bear bile. With sparks in his eyes, the manager suddenly became very helpful and showed us around the gigantic, half-complete complex. A white tiger and two rhinos were already housed while workers finished cages and compounds next door. The manager assured me that they would have 20 or so bears when the place opens in December so that we could do some 'side business' with bile.

I wanted to take photographs but I had the permanent company of a staff member who did not want me to do so at all (unsurprisingly). I didn't want to put my driver and guide in danger, so we left the place, but I planned to go back with some serious backup.

After 10 minutes on the road, we had lunch at a resort with lovely staff, atmosphere and food, as well as many tropical animals in cages. There were many kinds of snakes, three gibbons (even a rare white one) and bears they use for special occasions like banquets, when they sell the bears' bile for good money, perhaps not knowing that they are illegally harming a beautiful animal.

Two days later, I returned with a friend and a four-man security team. I wanted to take more photographs and provoke the karaoke bar people to see how far they would go. They recognised me, and whenever I took my camera out, they blocked my lens, pulled on my shirt or tried to push me away. Luckily I had my buddies to back me up — I hope the photos contribute to helping the animals.



Reach out: A gibbon stretches under his cage at a restaurant in Binh Duong. The restaurant sells crocodile meat and has several different monkeys in cages.

Back in the city we stopped in Chinatown, where one chemist wrote down the ingredients I needed for "good, long sex", which included tiger penis. He gave me the number of his friend who could arrange for me to get everything I needed, and in fact any tropical animal at all, within 24 hours — for the right price.

A recent survey by WWF and TRAFFIC found that nearly half of Ha Noi's residents had personally used wildlife products, a trend the groups plan to tackle with a public awareness campaign. In HCM City, a survey of 1,600 restaurants by the group Wild Animal Rescue found 15 wild species on the menus, among them deer, snake and turtle.

With virgin rainforests now reduced to patchwork, fewer than 100 tigers, 100 elephants and 10 rhinos are believed to live the wild in Viet Nam, and more tigers here live in captivity than in the wild. Viet Nam banned hunting without a permit in 1975 and has signed several treaties, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, yet as long as demand grows, the illegal trade will continue to threaten the biological heritage of Viet Nam and the rest of Southeast Asia. If my story isn't enough to convince you, go to these places yourself – they're often just outside of well-known tourist areas. — VNS

→ Former drug user helps others fight addiction

→ Ministry reviews job training in northern, remote areas

→ Dike damagers face hefty fines under new decree

→ Japan offers its hand in preserving heritage sites

DESTINATIONS

ADVERTISEMENT

Technical Analysis
Competitive Spreads.
 Forex trading is risky!

Opentour
Sinhcafe
HANOI
www.sinhcafe.com.vn

B2B marketplace

Bizviet.net

The way travel should be!

Vietn
Package Vacation

Outlook
 Youth of today
 Working for a brighter future

::Politics ::Socio-Culture ::Economy ::Comment ::Miscellany

Copyright by Viet Nam News, Vietnam News Agency

11 Tran Hung Dao Street, Hanoi, Vietnam

Editor in Chief: Tran Mai Huong

Tel.  **84-4-9332316** ; Fax: 84-4-9332311

E-mail: vnnews@vnagency.com.vn

Publication Permit: 599/GP-INTER

Granted by the Ministry of Culture and Information on April 9, 1998.