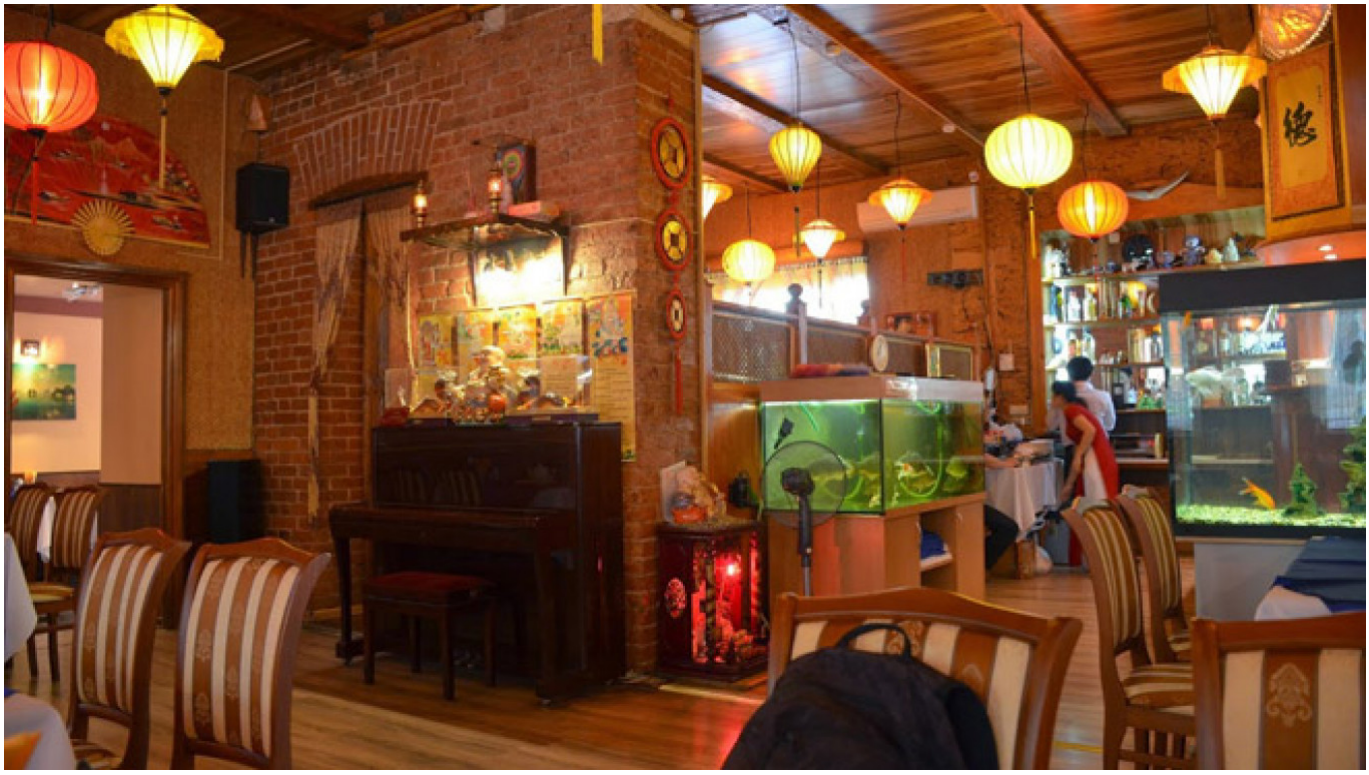
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5 Vietnamese Restaurants in Moscow to Get Your Pho Fix

By Andrei Muchnik

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Aromatnaya Reka restaurant, which is not far from Kursky railway station, has some of the best pho bo in town.

Until recently, Vietnamese cuisine in Moscow was mostly restricted to dingy markets far outside the city center. Today, however, those in need of a bowl of pho or some summer rolls can take their pick from an authentic dive where the staff barely speaks Russian to the stylized outpost of a trendy chain.

Vietcafe

The first harbinger of the Vietnamese cuisine fad was Vietcafe, which opened nearly 10 years ago just a block north of the Kremlin on Gazetny Pereulok. Now it's a chain with more than 10 branches in Moscow and is expanding across Russia. The interiors of all the Vietcafe branches are standardized with clean lines, low couches and bamboo curtains. Their fare is far from authentic, but if you are looking for a quick fix of traditional Vietnamese pho noodle

soup, you can find a Vietcafe close to you.

Vietcafe. 3 Gazetny Pereulok. 495-629-0830. Metro Okhotny Ryad; 31 Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka. 499-230-1853. Metro Oktyabrskaya. More locations. vietcafe.com.

Cafe Saigon

When street food became the catchphrase of the Moscow dining scene, the city's hipsters discovered the long-established Cafe Saigon hidden in the maze of the shopping complex behind the Savyolovsky railway station. It's impossible to call Cafe Saigon atmospheric — the decor is reminiscent of a Soviet-era cafeteria — but it is authentic. The main attraction is several types of pho, fresh summer rolls and several types of fried spring rolls, as well as the owner, who can often be found chatting with guests and showing off pictures of his family. The cafe now has a second branch that is only slightly easier to find just off Tverskaya-Yamskaya Ulitsa at Tishinskaya Ploshchad. The cafe is located behind an inconspicuous door right across from the towering monument to Georgian-Russian friendship.

Cafe Saigon. 39 Bolshaya Gruzinskaya Street. 967-021-3579. Metro Belorusskaya. 5 Sushchovsky Val., Bldg. 22. 910-452-7889. Metro Savyolovskaya. cafesaigon.ru.

Aromatnaya Reka

Aromatnaya Reka (Aromatic River) is another Vietnamese eatery popular with those in the know, and, as it doesn't even have a website, is likely to remain a hidden gem. This cozy, family-owned place, which features a Buddhist altar and a huge aquarium in the dining room, is located not far from the Kursky railway station and the new cultural cluster around the Gogol Center. It serves a wide range of Vietnamese dishes, from frog legs and snails to what is probably the best pho bo in town — with mouthwatering broth and all the right condiments.

Aromatnaya Reka. 11 Tokmakov Pereulok. 499-267-3190. Metro Kurskaya.

Rice Symphony

Rice Symphony in the Chistiye Prudy neighborhood is one of the newer additions to Moscow's Vietnamese food scene. This restaurant, which opened in February, seems to be trying to capitalize on the recent popularity of pho and offers a rather Europeanized version of Vietnamese fare. The owners claim that all their chefs are Vietnamese, which is probably the reason that the pho here is just as good as at more authentic places. But you would probably be better off trying one of the many rice and rice noodle dishes, which are — as its name suggests — the cafe's specialty.

Rice Symphony. 25 Chistoprudny Bulvar. 915-095-8844. Metro Chistiye Prudy. rice-symphony.ru.

Vkus Lotosa

Sometimes to get to a really good Vietnamese place you need to go the extra mile (literally)

and venture a little bit further outside the Garden Ring. Vkus Lotosa (Taste of Lotus) is located about a 10-minute walk from Akademicheskaya metro station in southern Moscow opposite the Darwin Museum. Vkus Lotosa looks more like a palace than your usual Vietnamese eatery. It has three floors, compete with pagoda-like wooden structures and aquariums full of carp everywhere. The third floor is more of a conference hall, with high ceilings and a balcony.
The prices are a bit higher than at other Vietnamese places, but the food is worth it.
The shrimp and mango summer rolls are delicious and the breaded frog legs are exceptional. Pho soup here is beyond reproach and Tsingtao beer is available.

Vkus Lotosa. 5 Dmitriya Ulyanova Street. 901-533-0714. Metro Universitet. restorantsen.ru*.*

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