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ALANGO
Mangrove coffee

LYCHEE
Litchi chinensis

REDUCE FOOD MILES

SUPPORT "LOCAL"

PASENGIPUNT
Paseño coffee

SEASONAL

SAM SOON HOOC
Vietnamese coffee

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SPREAD
The World

-LIME-
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No Artificial Preservatives

CHILLI
Capsicum annuum

SPREAD THE WORLD

Labour OF Love

Locally produced sturgeon caviar and jams aren't usually the first things that come to mind when people think of Asia. But as these four companies show, producing artisanal products isn't determined solely by geography, but passion. BY USAH KIM LEE

As recent as a decade ago, talking about coffee grown in China or beluga caviar produced in Vietnam would have, depending on the company you were with, resulted in an incredulous shake of the head at best, or a putdown at worst. How times have changed. Thanks in part to technology as well as the growth of a Do-It-Yourself ethos, we are seeing the emergence of a new breed of entrepreneurial artisanal food producers who are blazing a trail by making their own rules.



In the rarefied world of haute cuisine, the beluga caviar holds the record for being the world's most expensive delicacy, with prices reaching as much as USD10,000 a kilo. Iran has long been recognised as the world's leading producer of the luxury food item but if Le Anh Duc, chairman of the Vietnam Sturgeon Group, has his way, that monopoly may well be broken in the not-too-distant future.

Set up in 2007, the Vietnam Sturgeon Group breeds the Russian and beluga sturgeon species – it now raises more than half a million sturgeons on its five farms, and in 2010, launched the country's first domestic caviar label, Caviar de Duc.

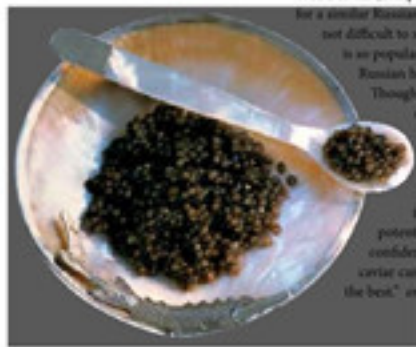
Breeding sturgeon outside its natural habitat might seem like a high stakes gamble, but it is also lucrative if done right. As Le points out, current demand far outstrips supply – during the 1970s-90s, the world market consumed around 3,000 tonnes of caviar a year. Currently, the overall world production is around 100 tonnes. Le, who grew up in Russia, was inspired when an initiative by the local Vietnamese government succeeded in breeding trout, a cold-water fish, in local waters. Enlisting the help of a team of Russian specialists and Russian-trained engineers, the group eventually found a way to recreate the ideal environment for breeding the fish, one that would prove to be even more successful than methods practised by Russian producers. The company's accomplishments can be attributed in part to Vietnam's climate – while it normally takes the beluga sturgeon eight to 10 years to mature in Russia, it takes

just half the time in Vietnam due to warmer weather.

Good caviar, explains Le, should have a smooth, almost buttery taste with a scent redolent of sea borage. To achieve this, the sturgeons have to be bred in very clean waters – the group's farms are situated in hydropower reservoirs, which ensure a clean environment and a rich supply of oxygen. The consistent climate also results in the sturgeon producing caviar year-round. This means that no preservatives are needed to extend the shelf life of the caviar as it can be harvested on demand.

Today, Caviar de Duc is found in hotels like the Park Hyatt Saigon and Hanoi's Sofitel Metropole, and has a private VIP clientele. With prices ranging from USD900-USD1,200 for a kilo of Caviar de Duc Russian osetra caviar (compared to USD1,500

for a similar Russian product), it's not difficult to see why the brand is so popular with visiting Russian holidaymakers. Though currently only available in Vietnam, Le has no doubts of Caviar de Duc's international potential. "I can confidently say that our caviar can compete with the best," says Le. www.caviardeduc.net





Having studied photography and graphic design at university, Sahra Malik (below with brother, Safi) always thought she'd work as a designer in advertising. However, when her father's job with the United Nations brought the family to Beijing in 2003, little did she know that the

foundation, Malik and her siblings got to know the region's coffee farmers, who were trained in international growing and roasting techniques. They realised that contrary to China's reputation for "cheap products", the farmers were producing beans of very high quality using artisanal farming methods. The problem? They were barely making a living, even with help from foreign NGOs, most of whom rarely stayed

long enough to offer them any long-term benefits. And so Shangrila Farms was set up in 2008.

Guided by fair trade principles, the company works closely with coffee

The company offers four coffee varieties, including a Mandehing and Brazilian roast. It also works with more than 300 beekeeping families, who label and test the honey they produce, to offer a wide variety of single-source products produced from flowers such as chasteberry, motherwort and honeysuckle. Unlike commercially produced honey, which are blended from different varieties to produce a uniform taste, single-source varieties reflect the unique flavour profile of the plant from which they derive their names. In terms of quality



and nutritional properties, Malik adds that the company's products are similar to premium honey like Manuka.

Shangrila Farms also has its own preservative- and chemical-free soap and skincare line, started by Malik's sister, Alia. Collaborating with a Canadian specialist trained in essential oils, the company develops its all-natural range of balms, bath salts, soaps and face mists. Moving forward, there are plans to launch new products like jams, which it currently supplies to hotels such as the Mandarin Oriental in Shanghai. Though the products are now in 80 locations across mainland China and can be ordered online, the Maliks' have an even bigger goal in mind - for Shangrila Farms to eventually be recognised as "China's high-quality brand". shangrilafarms.com



move would eventually lead her and her siblings to set up Shangrila Farms, China's first all-natural products company.

On their first trip to Shangri-la, the family loved Yunnan so much that Malik's mother set up the Yunnan Mountain Heritage Foundation with the aim of preserving the local cultural heritage. Through the

farmers and pays them above-market rates so they can continue practising sustainable farming. Not only is the use of pesticides and harmful chemicals banned, you'll also find imported coffee trees from countries such as Indonesia, Jamaica and Brazil, alongside the local variety. Add to that factors such as altitude and soil, and southern Yunnan is possibly one of the best places in the world to grow coffee, according to Malik.



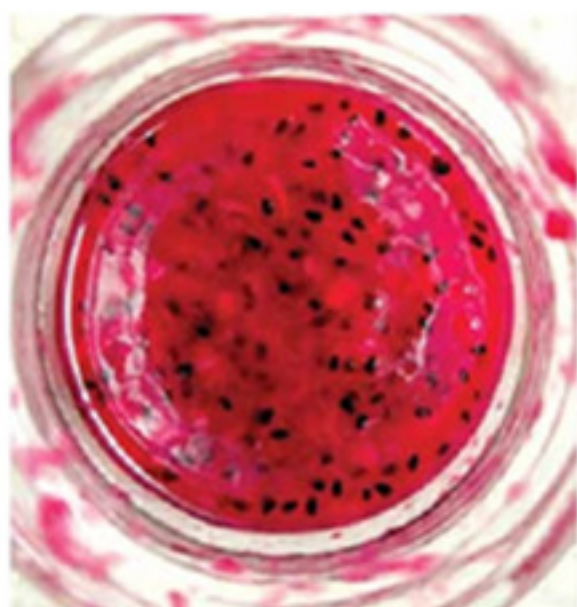
While there's no shortage of fruit grown in Southeast

Asia, you'll be hard-pressed to find jams made with local fruit and produce. Enter 31-year-old Joey Gan, who decided to rectify the situation by quitting his job to set up his own jam company, GSH Conserves (the acronym stands for his dialect name) last October.



"My goal is to make GSH Conserves a well-known Singapore company that takes pride in being involved with food that is grown, made or sourced sustainably," says the former conservation manager. For the plucky jam maker, who currently runs as a one-man operation, recipes are perfected the old-fashioned way - through trial and error. His wife, a cooking and baking enthusiast he dubs his "unofficial creative director", also pitches in with ideas for new flavours. The result? Jams that boldly go where no traditional conserve - at least not in Singapore - has gone before. Gan's offerings of seven flavours range from passion fruit (his personal favourite) to exotic combinations such as dragon fruit and lychee, and sweet potato and ginger. In short, flavours that make these jams - priced at SGD4 for a 50ml jar and SGD10 for a 180ml bottle - more than just spreads. Some, like the spiced pumpkin jam and sweet chilli dip, can also be used to give savoury dishes and salads an extra kick, says Gan.

While he eventually hopes to open a brick-and-mortar store, Gan's plans involve more than just physical expansion. A keen supporter of environmental issues, he hopes to get Singaporeans thinking about the provenance of their food through such initiatives as outreach programmes for children. "My interest in how food gets to our plates was sparked off by a PETA video I watched about factory farming practices in the poultry and meat industry," he explains. "It put a lot of questions into my head about what we, as Singaporeans, have done to perpetuate this and what we can possibly do to improve the way we think about food." gshconserves.com





Breaking
away
from the
Herd

Until Ashok Thakuri came along, no one had thought of turning goat's milk into cheese. "The idea to make goat cheese was a really bizarre one," he says. "It's not eaten in [Nepali] culture."

So how did Thakuri, a farmer from the small Nepali village of Chitlang in Makwanpur, about a two-hour drive from Kathmandu, hit upon this idea? That opportunity came when he was sponsored by a French NGO to participate in a cheese-making training session in France as part of a project to help local farmers out of their poverty. Despite not knowing how to speak French or English, Thakuri grabbed the chance and upon returning, immediately put his newfound knowledge to use. He started by making small batches of goat cheese before officially launching his company, Nepal Dairy Goat Farm, in 2011.

Unsurprisingly, business was tough at first. But Thakuri pressed on, supplying his cheeses to high-end hotels and restaurants in Kathmandu, and eventually cultivating enough of a demand to grow his herd of seven goats to 90. Today, his cheeses can be found in the European Bakery in

from either free-range or organic ingredients, he says with pride. His business has also helped create jobs in Chitlang - since there's a limit to the amount of milk his herd can produce each day, Thakuri also buys milk from other villages in the valley, resulting in the formation of the Chitlang Chandragiri Cheese Production Society. Ever the entrepreneur, he also offers homestays on his farm, where visitors can get a first-hand look at the cheese-making process.

Next up for this gutsy entrepreneur: expanding his operations and selling his cheeses in cities such as Pokhara. To do this, Thakuri is exploring ways

to import goats that produce higher volumes of milk than the local breed. Manpower is also an issue - while he is willing to share his knowledge, goat cheese is still an acquired taste for many villagers. Nevertheless, regardless of whether he does it alone, Thakuri is certain of one thing: "I will always make goat cheese, no matter what."



Baharwater and Radisson Hotel, and his business has become synonymous with Chitlang.

Thakuri makes French-style hard and soft cheeses, favouring the latter with herbs and spices he grows in his own garden. Everything is produced

SilkAir flies to Vietnam, China and Nepal. For flight schedules, see SilkAir Postcards on page 58



AD

爱的成品

人们提起亚洲美食时，当地生产的鱼子酱和精品酒一般不会出现在话题里。不过，这四家公司对于手工食品的热忱证明了拥有地理优势不是制造卓越手工食品的全部。IF: WANG

十年前，若提起在中国种植咖啡或在越南生产上等贝鲁嘉 (beluga) 鱼子酱，迎来的是质疑的眉头或冷嘲热讽。不过，时代变了。凭着一股“我们一定行”的干劲和科技的发达，新一代手工食品先锋在各自领域崭露头角。

珍馐美饌

在高级料理界里，贝鲁嘉鱼子酱问题最敏感。伊则是世界公认出产此精品者。不过，若越南鲑鱼集团主席 Le Anh Duc 再接再厉，不久的将来就能突破伊则垄断的局面。

越南鲑鱼集团于2007年成立，擅长培育俄罗斯和贝鲁嘉鲑鱼。2010年，Le 创立了越南首个鱼子酱品牌——Caviar de Duc。

在俄罗斯长大的 Le 受了越南政府成功在当地水质培育鲑鱼 (冷水鱼类) 的启发，与一组俄罗斯专家和工程师成功研究出适合培育鲑鱼的环境。贝鲁嘉鲑鱼在俄罗斯一般需要八至十年才长成。在越南较温和气候下只需一半的时间。

Le 分享道，优质鱼子酱应该有充满海风气息的嫩滑口感。要达到如此美妙口味，让鲑鱼在水质清冽的环境里生长非常重要。因此，Le 的渔场设在氧气丰富的水力库旁。稳定的气候让鲑鱼常年产卵，鱼卵可在市场有需求时才收成。这意味着越南鲑鱼集团出产的鱼子酱无需添加防腐剂延长有效期。

虽然 Caviar de Duc 鱼子酱目前只在越南售卖，Le 对他的鱼子酱国际市场潜力却是信心满满的。en.caviardeduc.net

中国全天然用品

农场 (Shangri-la Farms)。

Malik 和兄妹在云南结识了精通国际种植法和博咖啡豆的当地农民。农民运用工匠式农耕法种植出品质很高的咖啡豆，不过却难以顺口。香格里拉农场以公平贸易为理念，用高于市价的价格向农民购买咖啡豆，让他们得以维持生计继续耕作。

香格里拉农场也和三百多名蜜蜂养殖户合作售卖单源花种蜂蜜如圣诺菊、金银花口味等。与参杂不同种类蜂蜜达统一口味的商业生产蜜糖不同，单源蜂蜜反映了其植物的独特风味，品质和营养价值也跟优质蜂蜜如麦卢卡蜂蜜 (Manuka) 不相上下。

AD

农场的产品也包括无防腐剂和无化学成分肥皂和护肤产品系列、全天然香膏和泡澡盐等。产品可在中国大陆80多个地点买到，但Malik一伙人胸怀更大的愿景：把香格里拉农场的产品推广至成为中国优质品牌。shangrilafarms.com

果酱先生

水果在东南亚垂手可得，不过，用当地水果制作的果酱就比较少见。31岁的Joey Gan看准商机，创立GSH(他译名的缩写)果酱工厂。

“我的目的是将GSH打造成用可持续方式栽种或取得实材的食品公司。”努力不懈的他爱创新，果酱食谱通常是反复试验的结果，爱好烹饪和烘焙的太太也不时提供新口味点子。勇于尝试的成果是新加坡传统果酱史上从未出现过的崭新口味，如百香果(Gan的各人最爱)、独特组合像龙珠果配荔枝或番薯配姜。香辣南瓜酱和甜辣椒沾酱还可作为菜肴和沙拉增添滋味呢！

Gan也热衷环保。“一部有关家禽和



肉食品工厂式的生产影片震撼了我，引发了许多疑问——身为新加坡人的我们是促使这种现代化培植和生产方式的帮凶吗？我们又做些什么改善这种情况？”gshconserves.com

与众不同

一直到Ashok Thakuri尝试用羊奶做乳酪，羊奶乳酪对尼泊尔人来说是一种怪东西。Thakuri住在离加德满都两小时车程的Chitlang村，在一次机缘巧合下，到法国参加由非政府组织赞助的乳酪制作课程。学成归来，他在2011年创办了尼泊尔羊乳品农场(Nepal Dairy Goat Farm)。

上：GSH果酱多元化口味全是品牌创办人Joey Gan研发出来的；下：离加德满都两小时车程的Chitlang村以羊奶乳酪闻名；第40页：上等黑鱼子酱是高级料理界的极品

万事起头难，当同乡对自己的羊奶乳酪不看好时，Thakuri转而进攻加德满都的高档旅店和餐馆。反应最佳，独创的乳酪成了Chitlang村的代名词。

Thakuri制造法式硬和软乳酪，后者用自家后院栽种的香草和香料调味。他自豪地透露，全部食材都是有机或自由放养的。由于自己的羊产奶量有限，Thakuri也向其他村子购买羊奶，Chitlang Chandragiri乳酪制作协会因此成立，制造了就业机会。Thakuri计划扩充运作，进军城市如博克拉。虽然面对羊奶产量和人力不足，当地村民也不热衷于羊奶乳酪各方面挑战，Thakuri乐观地说：“无论如何，我还是会继续制造羊奶乳酪！”



胜安航空飞往越南、中国和尼泊尔。
预知航班详情，请查阅第58页

