

In Vietnam's capital, old town braces for makeover

By Mike Ives
The Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam — Tourists, hawkers, and motorcyclists rub shoulders every morning in the congested alleyways of Hanoi's low-rise Old Quarter, which seems generations away from the office towers and electronics megastores springing up in other parts of the capital. The quarter's street grid, laid out in the 15th century, is still dominated by dilapidated shops selling everything from brass gongs to bamboo scaffolding.

It is now among Asia's best-preserved urban hubs of traditional commerce — thanks largely to decades of inattention. The 82-hectare (203-acre) downtown area is crammed with Buddhist temples, pagodas, and French colonial shophouses, whose original tiles and peeling yellow paint have become a draw for foreign visitors.

But with property values high, the neighborhood could change dramatically in the coming years as similar ones already have in Singapore, Shanghai, and many other cities. Authorities want to begin gentrifying the Old Quarter by relocating 6,200 households between this year and 2020. New construction is likely a few years away, but some residents already have been relocated.

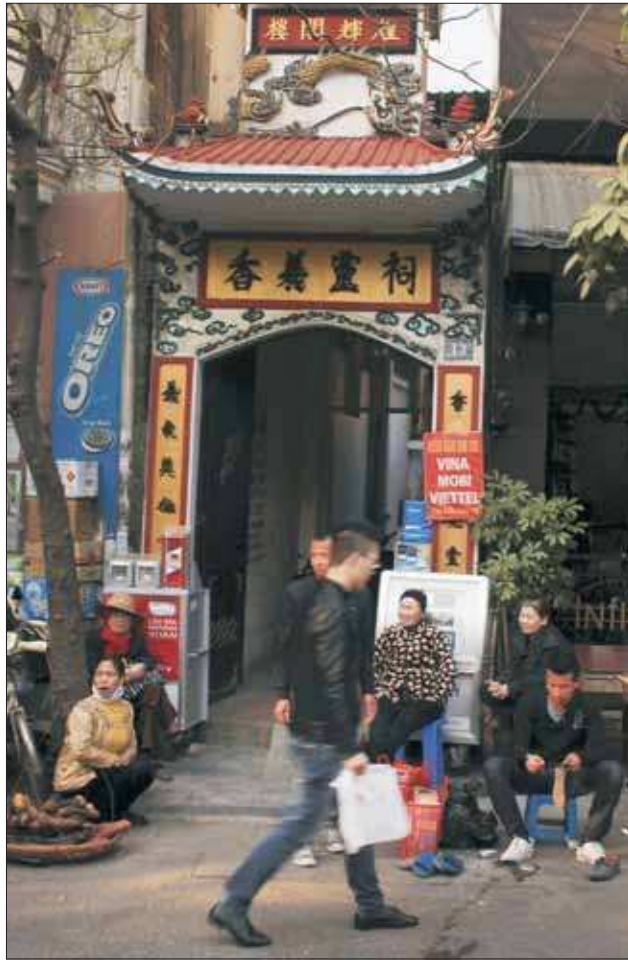
Some of them are nervous, though not necessarily over lost history. They worry about being exiled to the city's dusty margins, and of being forced to accept a bad deal from a Communist government that has generated public discontent across Vietnam by forcing people off their land with compensation far below market rates.

Pham Dinh Tranh, a retired jeweler in the Old Quarter, has watched many of the traditional jewelry workshops of Silver Street slowly morph into cafés and souvenir shops. The 82-year-old wouldn't mind a change of scene: The Silver Street home he shares with his extended family is cramped and the roof leaks. But he said Hanoi officials will need to make a convincing case for relocation.

"We're willing to go, but not if they take this property and resell it for profit," Tranh said.

Vu Thi Hong, an official with the Hanoi government's Old Quarter Housing Relocation Project, said the main goal of the planned relocations is to reduce population density while preserving cultural heritage. With about 66,000 people, the quarter has a population density of 823 people per hectare (2.5 acres) — nearly eight times that of New York City.

One Silver Street temple — formerly occupied by long-term squatters — has been refurbished and opened



DENIZENS DISPLACED. A man walks by Huong Nghia Temple in the heart of the Old Quarter of Hanoi, Vietnam. With property values high, the neighborhood could change dramatically in the coming years as similar ones already have in Singapore, Shanghai, and many other cities. Authorities want to begin gentrifying the Old Quarter by relocating 6,200 households between 2014 and 2020. New construction is likely a few years away, but a few hundred residents already have been relocated. (AP Photo/Mike Ives)

price at Old Quarter properties is currently between \$12,500 and \$15,000 per square meter, according to Nguyen Son, a property agent in Hanoi. That exceeds the average price of \$9,337 per square meter paid at luxury residential properties across Shanghai, as calculated last year by the London-based consultancy Knight Frank.

Pham Ba Bao, who was relocated from Silver Street in 2010, is not entirely satisfied with his new situation.

The retired bicycle maker used to live in the temple that has since been refurbished. He said he received 900 million dong (\$42,300) and later purchased an apartment about seven miles away for 474 million dong (\$22,278).

"We're happy with this apartment, but we can't make a living," Bao said recently at his new place, down the street from some gasoline storage tanks.

He said he used to earn 200,000 (\$9.50) to 300,000 (\$14) per day selling tea outside the temple, but foot traffic in his new location is minimal. He now survives mainly on the 3 million dong (\$141) per month his daughter-in-law earns as a hairdresser.

Scholars say vendors and artisans were among the first residents of the Old Quarter's 36 streets. When some traders fled to the former U.S.-backed South Vietnam in the 1950s, the north's Communist government seized their shophouses and divided them into apartments.

Romain Orfeuvre, an architect from Toulouse who works in Hanoi, said the Old Quarter resisted change decades ago because of stunted economic development during Vietnam's wars against France and the United States, and more recently because authorities have been reluctant to evict squatters.

Hoang Thi Tao, who runs a newspaper stand near the Old Quarter, is cautiously optimistic about the impending changes.

"The project will help to make the Old Quarter prettier, improve its residents' living standards, and lure more foreign tourists," Tao said. "But it'll also require a lot of resources and determination on the government's part. They'll need to give big compensation offers to persuade those people to leave."

to the public, with assistance from architectural consultants from the French city of Toulouse.

During an interview at the temple, Hong said compensation for relocations is paid at market rates determined by the government. City planners have not yet decided what will be constructed once current residents are relocated, she added, but new buildings won't exceed three stories.

She said a few hundred Old Quarter residents have been moved in the last decade from weathered temples and pagodas, and authorities plan to build an apartment complex on Hanoi's outskirts to house thousands of others.

"Most of those who have already been moved say they have a better life now," Hong said, adding that the government pays up to 81 million dong (\$4,000) per square meter at streetfront properties.

In Hanoi's real-estate market, the average transaction

Indonesia hopes to cash in on manta ray tourism

Continued from page 2

for medicinal concoctions, mainly in China. Mantas are also frequently caught accidentally by fishermen, but they are not part of a major targeted industry in Indonesia as in other countries, such as Sri Lanka, Gunawan said.

Increased demand has led to a sharp drop in manta numbers in recent years, raising international concern. Multibillionaire Virgin Group boss Richard Branson has sounded alarms though the "Manta Ray of Hope" conservation project. And last year the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora imposed new trade regulations for the species.

"Enforcement and community education are always necessary in order for this or any law to have a real impact, but passage of the law is a critical step," Mary O'Malley, lead author of the study from the San Francisco-based nonprofit WildAid, said in an e-mail.

She said her organization also plans to launch a campaign in China to address demand there.

Mantas are among the world's largest fish and can reach up to 26 feet from wingtip to wingtip. Found in the tropics, they can live up to 50 years, but do not mature until age eight to 10, and typically give birth to a single pup only every two to five years. This slow reproduction rate means fishing cannot be sustained over the long haul, and mantas are classified as vulnerable to extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

Mantas are smart and capable of migrating more than 621 miles, and each has a unique pattern of spots on its belly. Unlike stingrays, they have no barbs and are harmless to humans.

Even though they are beloved by divers and snorkellers, due to their size, friendliness, and graceful beauty in the water, much remains unknown about their population

numbers worldwide.

Early last year, Indonesia's Institute of Science estimated that the country has 17,000 mantra rays, though it said that approximation did not account for regional migrations and may be overly optimistic.

In addition to Indonesia, manta fishing is banned in Australia, Ecuador, the European Union, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Guam, the Micronesian island of Yap, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. states of Hawaii and Florida.

ADRC

Aging and Disability
Resource Connection
— of OREGON —

Support and services relating to:

• Aging • Disabilities • Veterans

- Abuse reporting
- Housing resources
- Transportation
- Meals
- In-home support
- Legal resources
- Public benefits
- Medicare help
- Other related issues
- Caregiver support

Toll Free 1-855-673-2372

TTY 711

www.ADRCoforegon.org

Building for Lease

Or/Potential Build to Suite Opportunity

5050 SE 82ND AVE., PORTLAND

22,374 SFT. Retail Building on 89,862 SFT. of land

Located directly across the street from Fred Meyer

425-450-2300

LEGACY
COMPANIES