



◀ ▲ Bau Truong

Bac Cang Nghieu (above) has enjoyed tremendous success with her restaurant for the past 16 years. A favourite among her customers is the *bo nuong vi* (left) – sliced beef in lemongrass oil that customers can cook themselves on a sizzling plate at their table with a variety of condiments, before creating a rice paper roll to enjoy it. 42 John St, (02) 9727 4492.

In the neighbourhood

CABRAMATTA, SYDNEY

When Thi Nhu Pham arrived in Australia in December 1978, her first home, like many Vietnamese refugees who came to Sydney at that time, was Westbridge Migrant Hostel (now Villawood Immigration Detention Centre) in the city's south-west. Cabramatta, just two stops away on the train, had affordable high-density housing, so many who came through Westbridge ended up settling in the nearby suburb.

Despite being home to many European migrants, it's the Vietnamese who arrived in large numbers from the 80s who dominate Cabramatta today. So much so, it is now home to Australia's largest Vietnamese community, with one in three who live in the suburb born in Vietnam.

Thi, aged 63, opened Cabramatta's first *pho* restaurant, called Pho Tau Bay (12/117 John St). Her story is one that echoes many of Vietnam's refugees. Thi was two months pregnant when she fled by boat, in 1978, with one of her daughters and nine of her husband's family members. Her husband and other daughter stayed behind. "We split up because if something happened, our whole family would not perish," explains Thi.

With a young family to look after and no English under her belt, Thi's work options in Australia were limited. There were no *pho* restaurants in Cabramatta at that time, so Thi's family suggested she open her home on Sundays to sell the beef noodle soup. Back then, a bowl of her *pho* cost \$1.50 (today it goes for \$10). "On the first day, I had just two customers," she says with a laugh.

Word soon spread and within six weeks, Thi was serving *pho* on Saturdays to meet the demand. Two years later, in 1982, Pho Tau Bay opened. Running the business was hard work, but Thi now had a financial base to sponsor her husband, daughter and parents to join her in Australia, which she did in 1984 under the Family Reunion scheme.

It's a story many in the area can relate to. Bac Cang Nghieu, 67, of the famed Bau Truong restaurant, also immigrated through the scheme, in 1990. While she had a catering business in Vietnam, she spoke little English. Bac staked everything on Bau Truong; she mortgaged the family's home and borrowed from relatives in America to buy the business in 1995. Located back then in Belvedere Arcade, the restaurant's staff, most of whom were women, were terrified of the drug dealers and addicts in the area at the time. Despite this, the restaurant continued to trade and, when Cabramatta's drug problem improved, so too did Bau Truong's business.

In 2007, Bac moved Bau Truong to the main street. It was an instant success. Over the years, Bau Truong has expanded with two other outlets in Canley Heights and Marrickville.

Thanks to stories like Thi and Bac's – ones of hardship that were overcome through a tenacious drive to survive and succeed – Cabramatta has become one of the most popular places in Australia for fresh, delicious and traditional Vietnamese food.

Don't miss the SBS documentary series *Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta* on January 8, 15 and 22 at 8.30pm or at sbs.com.au/ondemand



◀ **Duy Linh Vegetarian**

Some may find it odd that many menu items here replicate meat dishes. You'll find things like spring rolls with vermicelli noodles, roast duck and even pho, but Duy Linh succeeds and pulls in the crowds because its tofu-based mock meat tastes and looks amazingly like the real thing. 10/117 John St, (02) 9727 9800, duylinh-vegan-restaurant.com.



▼ **Dong Ba**
Bun bo hue (spicy beef noodle soup) is the restaurant's specialty and it's a fierce progression from pho. The spaghetti-like vermicelli noodles come in a soup that's bright red from chilli and laced with lemongrass and prawn paste. There are several versions of the dish, including options with pork, devon, congealed blood and pig trotters. 6/40 Park Rd, (02) 9755 0727.



◀ ◀ **Ngoc Duc Takeaway**
 For 15 years, this has been a local institution. In one tiny shop, you can grab more than 100 sweet and savoury Vietnamese dishes. Think spring rolls, fresh rolls, *bánh xèo* (savoury pancakes), *goi du du* (green papaya salad) and freshly crushed sugar cane juice (pictured above). It's fast and cheap, but with friendly service from employee Huong Thi Le (pictured left). 19/105 John St, (02) 9755 0844.



▶ ▶ **Café Nho**
 Owner Eddie Nguyen (pictured above) keeps the crowds' thirst quenched with his popular iced coffee: it's served in a tall glass that's filled three-quarters with ice and topped with a thick base of condensed milk and a shot of strong Vietnamese coffee. The cafe's smoothies (mango, avocado, strawberry, and sour apple, pictured right with the iced coffee) are also standouts. 8/66-68 John St, (02) 9755 9299.

