

The Business



Photos by Francois Deslauriers

Trainspotting

The Dalat Train Villa is 100m from Dalat Station at Villa 3, 1 Quang Trung, Dalat. Both the carriage and the villa are presently being renovated and the site is due to open for business in June. For more information email dalattrainvilla@gmail.com or click on dalattrainvilla.com. The photos and the whole move were documented by Dalat-based photographer Francois Deslauriers

Imagine moving a train. No, we're not just talking about plonking it on its rails, firing up the engine and heaving on the accelerator lever. We're talking about transferring a 1910, French-built carriage from the Di An Train Company 'graveyard' in Binh Duong to its destination in Dalat, a 250km journey along narrow winding roads up the hills to this 1,600m altitude city.

It may sound crazy to some. What would anyone want with an old train carriage? Especially in modern-day Vietnam, when it's all about destroying the past and living for the future. But to the couple behind this project, it all makes perfect sense.

Having rented a villa close to Dalat Train Station, the owners of **V Café** (1/1 Bui Thi Xuan) in Dalat, Curtis and Thuy, are expanding their business interests by converting both the villa and carriage into a café and a bar. There will also be a mini-hotel and apartment thrown into the mix. The villa itself was a former railway hotel, and together with the carriage, which has been assigned to its gardens, Curtis is

hoping that the carriage-cum-café-cum-watering hole will not just provide a unique new dimension to the food and beverage scene in the city, but will also become a tourist attraction.

"The views from the carriage are spectacular," he explains. "You can see Lang Biang Mountain, the Lycee Yersin, and the surrounding old colonial buildings."

But while the Ho Chi Minh City leg of the move was fairly straightforward — the carriage was put on a massive truck without a hitch — parking it in its final resting place was a tense affair.

"The truck arrived late at night in Dalat," explains Curtis. "It was too late to install it at the villa, so they parked it at the Dalat Train Station. The actual movement from the train station to the villa, and the actual installation of the carriage at the **Dalat Train Villa**, was extremely tricky.

"I've never seen cranes, trucks, pulleys and people working so creatively. Fortunately, the train carriage was properly installed. But there were definitely some tense moments." — *Nick Ross*