

The Criteria

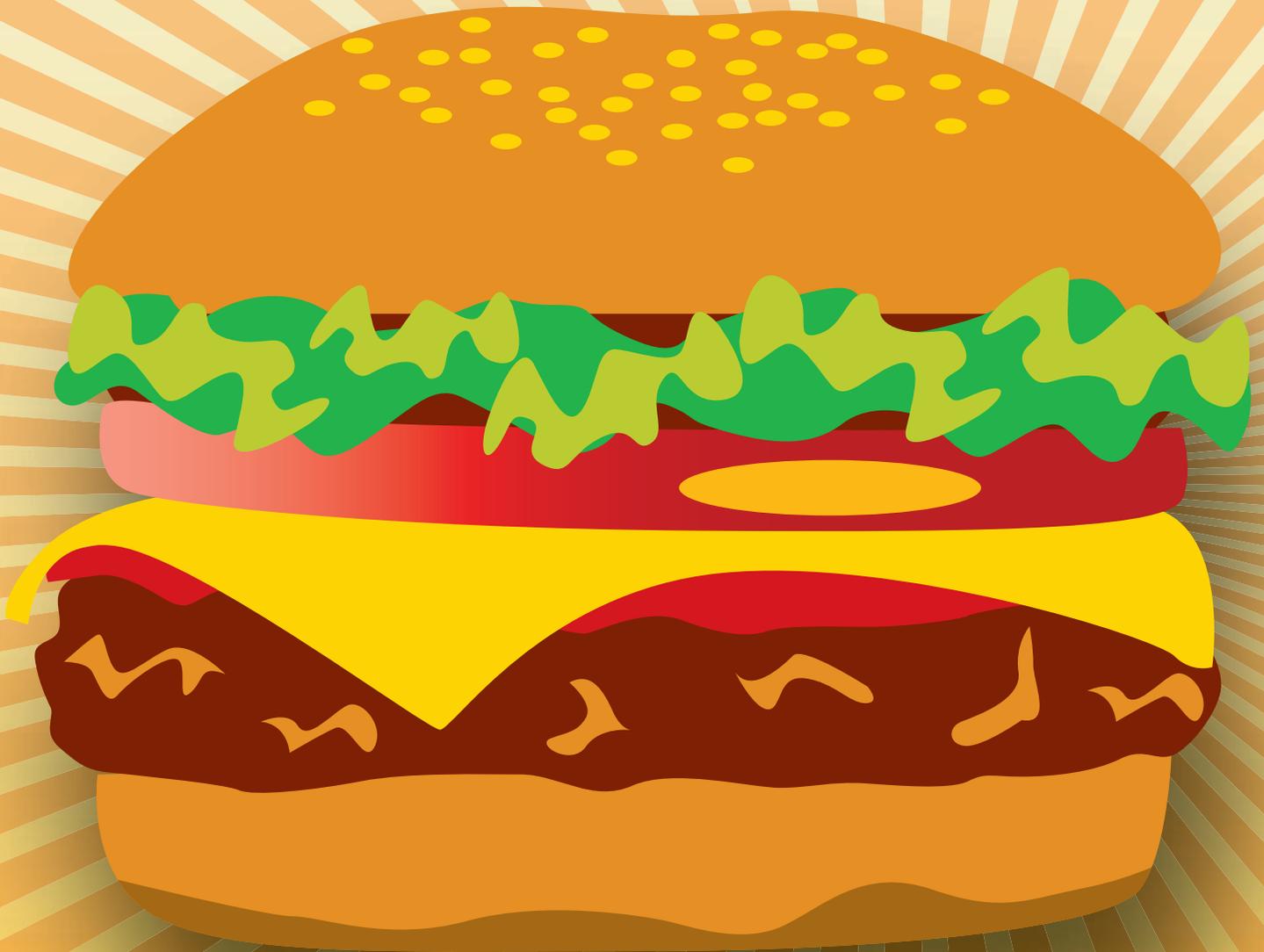
We used the following criteria to assess the burgers. Each category was marked out of 10.

- *The bun*
- *The patty*
- *The sauce*
- *Presentation*
- *Overall taste*
- *Price*

EAT & DRINK

HANOI

Burger Wars



Four expert judges battled lunchtime traffic, salad cravings and meat sweats to taste 10 burgers in two days. **David Mann** delivers the verdicts on who's dishing up the best beef burgers in Hanoi.

Photos by **Julie Vola**

There has been much talk recently about which joint serves up the best burger in Hanoi. So, we decided to find out for ourselves and hit 10 restaurants known for the quality of their

patties-inside-a-bun.

A quick disclaimer. Each restaurant agreed to join the tasting — this certainly wasn't done blind. And each restaurant was allowed to choose the burger they would

make for the challenge.

Our instruction was simple and clear: give us your best burger. Even better, give us two of them, exactly the same.

Our entrants duly complied.



The Judges



PETER 'THE FOODIE' NACKEN
Tall, German, and armed with razor sharp taste buds, Nacken helps run the *Foodies in Hanoi* Facebook group which has accumulated more than 3,600 members since its inception. Peter has dined in restaurants from New York to Fiji but maintains that "at heart, I'm still a Hamburg-er."



DAVID 'THE FOOD WRITER' MANN
Seasoned food writer, *Word* staff editor and self-declared burger lover.



SOREN 'THE BUTCHER' NIELSEN
This is one man who knows his meat. A butcher turned food production manager turned hotdog-maker; Soren is the man with the hottest wieners in town. Pioneering Hanoi's first authentic Danish hotdog stand, he's also launching a range of authentic German bratwursts and Italian sausages.



CYPRIEN 'THE FOOD AND WINE GUY' PIERLOVISI
Few people love food as much as Frenchman Cyp, co-founder of the new hit gastro pub, Cousins, and the regional manager for gourmet food importer, Classic Fine Foods.

The Burgers



Shay's Famous Burger

Daluva
VND180,000

Our first stop on the Burger Wars trail and Daluva came out swinging. It's renowned for its inventive and well-executed fare and **Shay's Famous Burger** is no exception. It offers a generous 200g patty of locally sourced beef, ground to the restaurant's 80:20 meat-to-fat ratio, designed to make it sizzle when it's thrown into the pan. Topped with a slice of cheddar cheese, smoked bacon and pickles, it's served in a custom-made brioche bun sourced daily from S. Honore, alongside a helping of fries and green salad.

Overall Verdict
The seaweed salt on the French fries, caper aioli and bell pepper ketchup certainly made this a compelling and affordable choice, particularly for those with the taste for the exotic. The bun does err on the sweet side, but overall a good performer.



Tay Tap Burger

Tay Tap Bar and Grill
VND180,000

One of Tay Ho's favourite new evening venues, Tay Tap has caused a stir with its hearty pub favourites and lakeside location. The **Tay Tap Burger** comes with 180g of Australian chuck beef, grilled and stacked with cheddar cheese, cos lettuce, tomato and balsamic onions. The burger also comes neatly presented on a rustic butcher's block and with a side of French fries.

Overall Verdict
This burger definitely has the makings of a top contender. The nice juicy patty and neat presentation caught our judges' attention but unfortunately some of the highly anticipated trimmings, like balsamic onions and the cheddar, didn't make it onto the burger. In previous encounters, however, the judges said that this burger was "fantastic" and on a good day is one of Hanoi's best.



Tracy's Damn Good Burger

Tracy's Bar
VND165,000

A treasured community bar perched on the entrance to Xuan Dieu, this cosy local favourite churns out an impressive selection of goods despite a very tightly squeezed kitchen. The 200g Australian beef patty is cooked on a small grill and also comes with the works: caramelised onions, a fried egg, lettuce, bacon and cheese. Sides include a serving of pre-made coleslaw and barbeque flavoured potato crisps.

Overall Verdict
It's incredible that Tracy's is able to serve up such a cheerful and well-stacked option from its tiny kitchen. It's the kind of big, tasty burger that you would expect from your favourite neighbourhood pub.



Wagyu Beef and Blue Cheese Burger

The Republic
VND240,000

Packing 180g of Wagyu beef, fresh rocket and blue cheese sauce, the **Wagyu Beef and Blue Cheese Burger** is big on flavour. The sizable patty is classic grilled and served with a nice helping of blue cheese that melts its way into a soft sourdough bun. Dipping bowls of tomato chutney and aioli give an extra kick of flavour to a generous side of fat chips.

Overall Verdict
At VND240,000 this option isn't cheap, but the ingredients make the pricing hard to argue with. Combining high hitting toppings and top-notch beef into a burger big enough to give you lock jaw, this option delivered strongly on value. The judges also agreed that the sourdough bun was the best of the bunch. If you're not big on blue cheese, the generous dollop may overpower the taste of that fine Wagyu patty, but overall, you won't be disappointed.



St. Helen's Washington State Prime Beef Berger

Don's Bistro
VND199,000++

As you would expect from Don's, this burger is delivered with style. The Washington chuck beef is fed through a grinder three times to ensure consistency before being cooked over a wood-fire grill, infusing the 120g patty with a rich (and sometimes elusive) smoky flavour. Topped with a medium-aged cheddar cheese from Vermont, dill pickles, grilled onions, lettuce and tomato, it also comes with a serving of golden fat chips.

Overall Verdict

In a near unanimous vote, this delicious burger was deemed the best of the entire challenge. The reasons were simple: an unrivalled smoky tasting beef patty, a bity cheddar cheese and a top-class bun to bring it together. Presentation was also a winner, with the burger arriving as a carefully stacked tower with the cheese oozing down the sides — an instant mouth waterer. Although a teensy bit on the messy side to eat, the world-class flavours, presentation and the reasonable price tag had the judges weak at the knees.

Other Burger Joints

We tried to get in the best of the best when it came to this challenge, but there are three other restaurants which are known for their burgers. Their non-inclusion is, well, not deliberate. But we thought we should give them a mention anyway.

French Grill

The Hanoi Social Club

Tet Décor Café

The Press Club

The Burgers



Kafe Style Beef Burger

The Kafe
VND100,000

Priced at a compelling VND100,000, the Kafe's entrant was the cheapest of the range. Keeping with the eatery's quirky and inventive theme, the **Kafe Burger** offers up a 150g pork and beef patty served on a brioche bun with cheddar cheese, mayonnaise, romaine lettuce, tomato and onions. The burger also comes with a side of chunky English potato chips seasoned with tarragon and salt, all neatly organised on a trendy (obviously) butcher's block.

Overall Verdict
The brioche bun and the tarragon chips were the highlights of this meal, as was the quirky presentation. While the addition of pork seemed to keep the patty moist, some judges weren't completely sold on the flavour. At VND100,000, however, this option presents a cheap feed in a hip location.



Beef and Bone Marrow Burger

Moose & Roo Smokehouse
VND210,000++

This ambitious newcomer has attracted a loyal following with its **Beef and Bone Marrow Burger**, crowned by regulars as one of the best burgers in the city. The 180g Australian top ground beef patty is prepared fresh every morning before being grilled and finished in the oven. Housed in a custom-made sesame seed bun, the patty is topped with a helping of juicy onions — caramelised in-house for 10 hours — pickles, stringy bacon, cheddar cheese and a secret sauce. The burger also comes with house made slaw and French fries.

Overall Verdict
Talk about wow factor. This burger was an instant favourite for its overall taste and the high quality ingredients. Personal touches such as the secret sauce, air-dried stringy bacon and caramelised onions — all prepared in house — added flair and a unique finger licking taste that had the judges fighting over the leftovers. The deconstructed presentation also won votes for originality, as did the reasonable price. Some judges did question the addition of bone marrow but this was put down to personal taste.



Homemade Cheese and Bacon Burger

El Gaucho Argentinian Steakhouse
VND390,000++

The Argentinian Steakhouse, which opened its second branch on Trang Tien last year, is now a favourite among Hanoi's resident carnivores who like their meat imported and their bill with a shot of caramel vodka. It's easy to see why. The 220g patty blends four cuts of prime beef into one exquisite and juicy patty, is flame-grilled and topped with lettuce, tomato, ketchup and mayonnaise. The burger is also accompanied by a generous serving of fat chips and salad splashed with delicious vinaigrette dressing.

Overall Verdict
We won't lie. Our expectations were high for El Gaucho. And with the poise and flair of an Argentinian tango, it delivered. The four-cut patty was an instant winner with the judges. So if you're picky about your meat, and splurging US\$20 doesn't matter to you, then this is probably the place for you. The panel was also impressed with the presentation and the tasty sides, which also included a welcome basket of wood-fired bread, garlic confit, salsa ciolla and garlic butter.



Ultimate Wagyu Beef Burger

Jackson's Steakhouse
VND355,000++

An Aussie touch shines through in the **Ultimate Wagyu Beef Burger** — the only burger in the challenge to come with a thick slice of beetroot. The sesame seed bun is baked fresh daily at the in-house bakery, before being buttered and tossed on the grill to make it nice and toasty. The beef is 180g of Australian Wagyu and New Zealand sirloin ground into a juicy patty that is grilled and stacked with Swiss Emmental cheese (or blue cheese, if you so desire), crispy bacon and a runny fried egg. It's served with a side of fat

chips sprinkled with salt, pepper and a pinch of chilli flakes.

Overall Verdict
This burger was an all-round performer, but didn't quite hit the same notes as others in its price range. The meat patty rated highly with the judges as did the refreshingly light taste. A buttered and well-toasted bun and the offerings of four different kinds of mustard were also winners.



Ete Burger

Ete Bar
 VND145,000

Ete’s tasty food, quirky cocktails and no-frills approach to dining make it one of the most popular spots south of West Lake. We sampled the medium-sized **Ete Burger**, which was furnished with a 180g pan-fried patty layered with wholegrain mustard, onions, garlic, cheddar cheese, pickles, tomato and cos lettuce. Sides include garden salad and chunky potato chips tossed with an aromatic blend of garlic, thyme and rosemary.

Overall Verdict
 Hands down the best chips of the challenge and the patty, cooked in a flaming hot pan, came with a nice darkened crust. The addition of a runny fried egg that soaked the patty with a delicious warm yolk when you bit into it was also well received by the judges. With that price tag, this burger presented the best value option overall.

The Final Verdict

The Top 3

The best burger is awarded to **DON’S BISTRO** for their **ST. HELEN’S WASHINGTON STATE PRIME BEEF BERGER**.

Also in the top 3 are:

— **EL GAUCHO** for their **HOMEMADE CHEESE AND BACON BURGER**

— **MOOSE & ROO SMOKEHOUSE** for their **BEEF AND BONE MARROW BURGER**

Category Awards

BEST BUN
 The Republic

BEST FRIES
 Ete

BEST PATTY
 El Gaucho

BEST PRESENTATION
 Don’s Bistro

BEST SAUCE
 Moose & Roo
 Smokehouse

BEST TRIMMINGS
 Moose & Roo
 Smokehouse

BEST VALUE
 Ete