

Spectacular glass-bottomed bridge opens in Vietnam

Don't look down! Vietnam launched a new attraction for tourists with a head for heights on Friday, with the opening of a glass-bottomed bridge suspended 150 meters above a lush jungle. The Bach Long pedestrian bridge - whose name translates to "white dragon" - in northwest Son La province snakes around dizzying cliff faces before spanning a dramatic valley between two peaks, hitting a total length of 632 meters. The floor of the bridge is made from French-produced tempered glass, making it strong enough to support up to 450 people at a time, while giving them a

spectacular view of the greenery in the gorge far below.

"When standing on the bridge, travelers will be able to admire the beauty of nature," Hoang Manh Duy, a representative of the bridge's operator said. The company says it is the world's longest glass-bottomed bridge, surpassing a 526-metre structure in Guangdong, China. Officials from Guinness World Records are expected to verify the claim next month. Vietnamese tourism chiefs are seeking to lure visitors back after two years of COVID-19 shutdowns that kept out virtually all foreign travelers.

In mid-March, the country ended quarantine for international visitors and resumed 15 days of visa-free travel for citizens from 13 countries. Vietnam is set to host the Southeast Asian Games in two weeks - with more than 10,000 athletes and sports staff from countries in the region en route. Bach Long is Vietnam's third glass bridge. "I hope the bridge will lure more domestic and international tourists to our area," local resident Bui Van Thach said after walking across it. — AFP



Visitors walk on the Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province on April 29, 2022.



This aerial photo taken shows the newly constructed Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province.

Health woes force Celine Dion to postpone tour

Canadian superstar Celine Dion announced Friday the postponement until 2023 of European concert dates for her "Courage World Tour," citing a persistent health issue. "I feel a little better... but I still have spasms," Dion explained in a news release, updating fans on severe involuntary muscle contractions that she began experiencing late last year. "I'm so sorry to have to change the dates of the European tour again; the first time it was because of the pandemic, now it's because of my health," said the 54-year-old singer. "To be on stage, I have to

be on top of my game. To be honest, I can't wait, but I'm not quite ready yet... I'm trying my best to come back at 100 percent to get on stage, because that's what you deserve." The Grammy Award-winner's tour is her first without her husband-manager Rene Angelil, who died from cancer in 2016.

Dion had given the first 52 shows of the global itinerary before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, at the beginning of 2020. She announced in January that she was cancelling the North American leg because of health problems. Speaking directly to fans in an online video, she thanked them for their understanding and support, her voice trembling with emotion. "The good news is that I am doing a little bit better, but it (her recovery) is going very slow and it is very frustrating for me," she said with a sigh, her eyes tearing up. "I appreciate your loyalty," she added. — AFP



In this file photo, Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the stage of the AccorHotels Arena in Paris. Celine Dion announced on April 29, 2022 that she postponed to 2023 all the concerts of her 'Courage World Tour' scheduled in Europe this year, due to a health problem. — AFP

Fear on the dance floor: Disco needle attacks baffle France

Alarm is spreading on dance floors in France following needle attacks on dozens of young people in nightclubs, with police in the dark as to the assailants' identity or motives. The victims, who are mostly women, report the sudden onset of identical symptoms - nausea, dizziness and sharp pain - while out partying, and only later detect a needle prick on their skin, a red dot surrounded by a blue circular bruise. Returning home from a night of dancing in April in Nantes, western France, 21-year-old Eloise Cornut had a sudden onset of "cold sweat, nausea, shivering and dizziness".

The beauty parlor apprentice felt better the next day, but a colleague noticed a needle prick in the back of her arm. "It was a red dot with half an inch of blue bruising around," she told AFP. Cornut, who doesn't drink or take drugs and only goes out at weekends, said she quickly realized that needle attack must have happened during her Saturday dance outing. Her colleagues urged her to file a police report and get a blood test.

'Totally stresses me out'

"I now have to wait five weeks before I can get an HIV test," she said. "That totally stresses me out." Since early April, police have been dealing with around 60 such cases reported in nightclubs, a police source said, with the true number likely much higher. The gendarmerie, France's

paramilitary police force mostly active outside of large cities, said it was not able to give any nationwide figures yet, as the data had not been sufficiently evaluated.

Some 45 cases have been reported in Nantes since mid-February, according to prosecutors. Complaints were also filed in the western city of Rennes and in areas of France's south, the southwest, the French Alps and the Atlantic coast. Blood tests have not revealed the presence of GHB, known as "liquid ecstasy" or "date rape drug", a substance that potential sex assailants sometimes mix into the drink of their victims, prosecutor Renaud Gaudeul said.

Lab tests had also failed to establish the presence of any other toxic substance, and nobody had been arrested, he told AFP. Experts caution, however, that GHB disappears from the bloodstream without trace within hours after being administered. One police source said the needle attacks were sometimes followed by a sexual assault, and sometimes not.

'Big bruise, red dot'

In Roanne, a picturesque town in the Loire valley, an 18-year-old woman who asked not to be named was celebrating a friend's birthday in a disco. When she accompanied a friend to the toilet, a man groped her bottom. "When I got home I checked in the mirror and there was a big bruise with a red dot on my right buttock," she told AFP. Her friends later told her that they had noticed a man staring at her in the disco "as if he was waiting for something to happen to me".

Doctors immediately gave her preventative treatment for HIV and hepatitis. Roanne police are investigating the incident for "pre-meditated violence and the pre-meditated administration of a harmful substance". A similar probe was launched following a complaint by a young man in his 20s, who reported a needle stab in his

shoulder in the same disco on the same night.

The phenomenon has been spreading to music festivals, such as the Printemps de Bourges in central France, one of the country's biggest music gatherings. After nine complaints from festival goers, police there also launched an investigation into "administration of harmful substances", without having been able so far to find any culprits or determine exactly what devices were being used.

"We don't know whether we're looking for syringes or whether they're using simple pins," said Agnes Bonjean, chief of staff to the prefect of the Cher region where Bourges is located. "It really hurt," said Noemie, 23, who was stabbed "in the thigh, right up to the sciatic nerve" during a night out in Beziers, southwestern France, and immediately rushed to hospital by friends after nearly losing consciousness.

'Sick and perverse'

The public prosecutor in Beziers, Raphael Baland, told AFP that 15 complaints had been filed there, of which 14 followed attacks that happened over a single night, from April 17 to 18. Contacted by AFP, prosecutors in Paris said that six investigations had been launched since last week in the capital.

Meanwhile nightclub owners are beginning to feel the impact of the attacks on their earnings. Saying the "sick and perverse" attacks were sparking "hysteria" among young people, Thierry Fontaine, at the UMIH hospitality association, said they were also creating a fresh problem for nightclub owners who were still reeling from the impact of COVID restrictions. One nightclub owner in southwestern France reported a revenue drop of 50 percent last weekend as people stayed away following two needle attack cases, Fontaine said. — AFP