

ETHOS - Spirit of the Community



Your travel experience will allow for a unique opportunity to support the local ethnic cultures while enjoying the diversity and beauty of the land, with a true respect for all. In enjoying an experience in Sapa, you can contribute to conservation efforts to protect the region's biodiversity and provide a sustainable alternative income source for these isolated and fascinating local communities.

Our Vision

To be a responsible and creative leader in the Sapa tourism industry; designing and operating innovative, sustainable treks and tours that resoundingly demonstrate the positive impacts of ethical best practice.

Our Mission Statement

ETHOS Adventure Travel Specialists provides well-designed tours that connect travellers to Sapa and its people, creating authentic, unforgettable travel experiences. We provide tours for people of varying ages and fitness levels that want to experience Sapa within a range comfort zones. We practice sustainable and responsible tourism, and therefore ETHOS Adventures appeals to the ethically conscious traveller.

ETHOS Adventures cares for the environment, its workers, and the local people, and we constantly strive to improve our operations and services through self evaluation, innovation and creativity. We create and nurture a healthy and enjoyable working environment, in which our employees are fairly compensated and encouraged to respect the customer and the quality of the service we provide. We seek fair and responsible profit, and fairly remunerate employees for their work and effort.

According to the "World Commission on Environment and Development a sustainable development implies **"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"**

Ideally, ecotourism satisfies several general criteria, including the conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection, promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, share of socio-economic benefits with local communities through informed consent and participation, increase in environmental and cultural knowledge, affordability and reduced waste, and minimization of its own environmental impact. In such ways, it contributes to the long term benefits to both the environment and local communities."

Ideally, ecotourism should satisfy several criteria:

Ecotourism's criteria	ETHOS's action
"Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity, through ecosystem protection"	Small groups in order to minimise footpath erosion and disturbance to nature. Trekking is the primary means for visiting local villages. Decisions are made by local guides to educate visitors and inform about traditions and culture.
"Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local people"	ETHOS employs local guides. All market stalls where goods are purchased and homes we visit are owned by local people, most often Hmong or other ethnic minorities.
"Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises."	The majority of tour revenues are given the local community. We support individuals, small groups and families in creating sustainable micro enterprises in a number of surrounding villages.
"Tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern."	All of our guides are aware of current environmental issues.
"Minimisation of tourism's own environmental impact"	When eating with local families, all food is locally grown. Our guides and tourists leave no rubbish and pick up litter as they hike.
Local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions	Hoang Lien Son is a National Park. We work in partnership with The National Park in order to effectively promote the area's biodiversity.

Today I will commit to the notion that when travelling I will see myself as the privileged guest and ambassador of my own country. I will take responsibility for my actions and accept that every choice I make has both its adverse consequences and positive outcomes. Thus, with integrity, humility and genuine desire, I will foster and promote a cultural etiquettes and a more ethical style of travel by:

- Using my camera in a way that is sensitive to the peoples and cultures around me. Further I promise to never take a picture of someone without politely asking first;
- Being aware that in my pursuit to find something 'untouched by tourism' I may be the one stretching the boundaries of tourism's negative impacts and harmful effects.
- Avoiding wearing white clothes whilst in the village because white is often worn at funerals and is associated with death and mourning.
- Avoiding public displays of affection in the village as this is not culturally accepted by most traditional villagers.
- Please do not enter a home that has leaves or feathers hanging from the entrance. This symbolises a shamanic ritual and your entering is a bad omen for the family who live there.
- If cooking and eating with a minority family, be sure to specifically invite your hosts to sit and eat with you. If they refuse, invite again. Avoid starting to eat until all the food is ready and everyone is seated.
- Please when entering a home take your back pack off of your shoulders and carry it with your hands.
- If you are staying overnight, please be respectful of the villagers as they go to bed early.
- Please avoid touching the heads of the infants.
- Giving money or sweets to children only encourages begging. Also consider that most minority people do not have access to a dentist and have no means to dispose of plastics and litter.
- Visitors who value local traditions encourage the local pride and maintain local cultures, so please show an interest in local culture and an interest in understanding local traditions.
- Supporting only local initiatives, and participating in those tourism products that are local and / or aim to support the local community economically and through social programs (this includes tour companies, hotels, and restaurants);
- Purchasing goods that are produced and sold locally at a fair price and assuring that those goods are not products of illegal activities and / or important symbols of the host's culture;
- Reducing my environmental footprint through maintaining a conscious awareness of how my actions will affect the host's valuable resources.
- Advocating those companies and organisations who support and provide ethical and community based tourism products and services;
- Making a stand against sex tourism, through reporting any illegal activities to local authorities and supporting those projects that have put forth the effort to fight against it.
- The emergence of plastics are a real issue in the region. If you see rubbish, why not lead by example and pick some up. The best way of educating is to explain why you find it offensive to look at and why pristine environment is more attractive to visitors.
- If you promise to do something, please keep your promise.

The hard sell

- Vietnam is developing country, and one that has experienced a long period of war so poverty is obvious and unavoidable. Consider that many in Sapa are selling as a means of survival.
- Be aware that handmade goods from hemp and indigo may have taken many months or even years to make, so don't expect these to come cheap. (For further details see our information guide on hemp in Hmong culture).
- Look out for Chinese imitations. Whilst beautiful in their own right, many goods are machine made replicas and purchasing such items may lead to the loss of traditional skill and customs.
- If a street seller approaches you, be firm but polite and calm in turning them away, even if you are irritated by a day filled with similar approaches.
- Negotiate prices in advance before accepting either goods from street sellers, or getting on a xe om (motorbike taxi) or into a cyclo.

