



# Monthly Newsletter

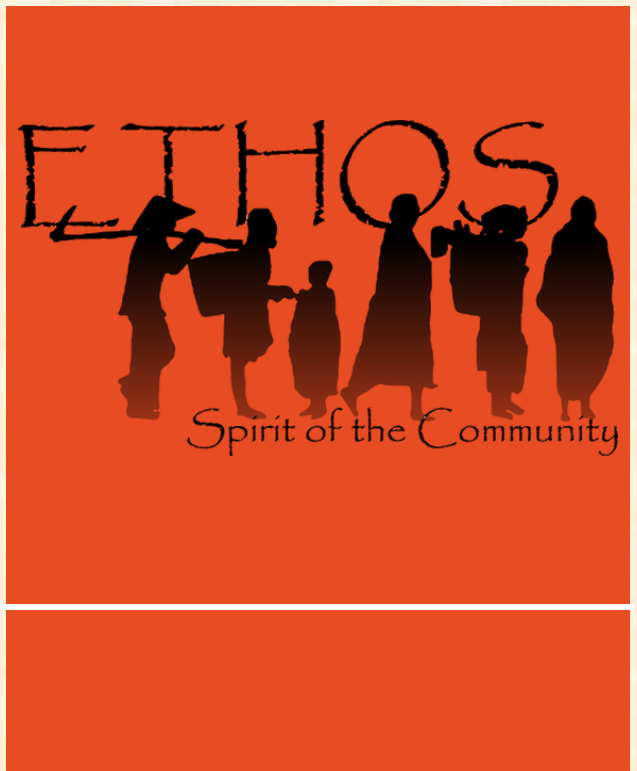
Volume 1 | Issue 5 | ETHOS – Spirit of the Community

## *Announcement*

From all of us at ETHOS, we wish you a wonderful 2020. What is done is done, and as you look back to the year, learn from the past and wish for a brighter future in light of lessons learned. May your heart be full of cheer, your brain is full of pleasure, and your days full of happiness.

## *Inside This Issue*

In this special issue, we take a look at 2019 in numbers.



## *3984 water bottles refilled and saved from landfill*

ETHOS are part of a community of responsible travellers and mindful business owners who take action. We offer a simple alternative to buying bottled water and our goal is to reduce the number of single-use plastic bottles being disposed as unnecessary landfill.

ETHOS are a registered water refill station with Refill My Bottle Vietnam. We offer free filtered water for travellers who want a sustainable solution to creating less plastic. This project runs along side our growing network of village based water tanks and our commitment to being a plastic free organisation. This means that each day, our trekkers are not creating new plastic waste, but instead reusing with massive positives.



"Every moment is a  
fresh beginning."

"Life's not about  
expecting, hoping and  
wishing, it's about  
doing, being and  
becoming."

## *128 medical patients supported.*

Nobody plans to get sick or hurt, but most people will need medical care at some point in their lives. Ensuring our wider community have access to appropriate medical care is a priority and the ETHOS team have many ongoing medical cases requiring our assistance. On a day to day basis, we never quite know who's going to walk through our doors. Our role takes the form of support with paperwork and accessing the most appropriate healthcare, be it in Sapa or Hanoi.



## *4800 used bars of soap upcycled*

2019 has seen us partner with Hôtel de la Coupole - MGallery who have kindly provided us with used soap bars that would typically end us as landfill. We use an innovative but simple cold-press designed and supplied by Soap for Hope by Diversey. The result is new soap bars that can then be distributed as part of our community led health and sanitation village workshops.







## **600** Hmong and Dao children taught about personal hygiene and disease prevention.

Effective rural hygiene and sanitation is a huge challenge facing many people in our region. This contributes to high infant mortality and low life expectancy. We have trained Cha and Khu as youth leaders who now promote healthcare as a human right. Our aim is that every child, no matter where they are born, should have access to knowledge to help stay strong and healthy. We distribute soap and oral hygiene kits as well as play games and activities that teach about how diseases are transmitted and prevented.

## **11** village clean ups organised.

Armed with bags, gloves, litter pickers and a strong sense of purpose, over 350 volunteers have cleaned up eleven villages and collected over 4 tonnes of plastic waste from the natural environment during the past 12 months. Sustainable development is the pathway to the future for all. It offers a framework to generate growth, achieve social justice, and exercise environmental stewardship. That is why we chose to establish “Clean up Sapa” aiming to:

- Minimise waste and support local conservation and environmental protection efforts.
- Develop concern and awareness among the Sapa population via education initiatives within local schools. This will in turn engage and inspire youth in protecting the natural environment.
- Implement projects to create a greener Sapa.
- Organise regular community clean ups

Some activists argue that such volunteer clean-ups are not the best way to tackle the plastic pollution. What we need to do, they say, is reduce unnecessary plastic at source, design less harmful products and develop better recycling processes.

We agree. But we also know that children are great imitators and our current approach is to give them something great to imitate.

The solution is companies and individuals taking responsibility. Until they do, we will lead by example, working with local communities to assure a greener, more sustainable Sapa.



## *4349 guests welcomed from 83 countries.*

From Argentina, Malta, Lichtenstein and Morocco to more popular visitors from countries such as France, USA and Australia, 2019 has seen us welcome guests from a wider range of countries than ever before. Representation in guides books and blogs and of course your opinions spread by word of mouth and in reviews are all really important ways in which others heard of our experiences. As a small organisation with goals to help and support a wider community, we are very aware of the power of online media and wish to thank everyone who has written reviews or published photographs in 2019. It means a lot.

## *41 cancellations and no shows.*

It's not all good news. All too often, guests simply don't turn up on their scheduled date of travel. Once every nine days, almost always when the weather is wet and foggy, we have a no show. This is always disappointing because so much hard work goes into making every tour happen. We have to arrange paperwork, buy village entrance tickets and arrange drivers. We communicate extensively via email to assure all guests have the right information to be best prepared for their ETHOS experience. We send maps, kit lists, a code of conduct, videos and much more. Perhaps most significantly is the guides who make their way from their villages come rain or shine to be ready for your tour. Any no show or cancellation hits them the hardest. For that reason, we took the decision some time ago to pay the guides in full for any no show. Our commitment to fairness means that ETHOS has lost \$2066 in 2019 because of no shows. This is money that would have otherwise been invested in community development work.

## *207 reviews*

## *4 new tour guides trained and integrated into our team.*

With a waiting list of guides wanting to work with ETHOS, one of our big challenges is finding enough guests to assure a regular income for our growing team. This year saw us welcome three new Hmong guides - Thao, Chu and Chinh and one new Red Dao guide - May Lai. Having all passed their training in first aid, health and hygiene and risk assessment, we are happy to report that they have really enjoyed being involved and becoming an integral part of our community.



## *2 new babies*

2019 saw two of our guides, Sung and May Kim give birth to a baby boy and girl respectively. Both babies are strong, healthy and growing up fast. May Kim and Sung have just returned to guiding after four months of paid maternity leave. Both wish to pass on their thanks for all those well-wishers and kind messages they received while at home.





Across Facebook, Tripadvisor and Google, 2019 saw us receive 207 reviews. It is testament to the hard work of our team that 98% were five stars. Our only one star review was a fake, and our single two star review was left by a disgruntled customer who was angry when we were fully booked!

One thing that stands out is how many of our guests find us on these three platforms, yet how few people actually contribute to supporting others in providing honest opinions. For small social impact business like ETHOS, reviews matter.

### *3285 plastic bags saved from landfill*

ETHOS guides use traditional bamboo baskets when buying food at the local market. We supply each guide with refillable plastic boxes that eliminate the need for single use plastic bags. This simple system is making a huge difference and offering a viable alternative and contributing to our commitment to zero waste on our treks and experiences.

### *28 homestay families worked with.*

Many travellers opt for overnight stays, and there is nothing more authentic and immersive than an ETHOS homestay. Typically quite basic, there is no better way to get up close and personal to the domestic animals and learn more about local culture. Homestays form such an integral part of many ETHOS experiences and our host families wished to pass on their thanks to all of those who stayed with them this past year.

### *4 Hmong people taught how to batik.*

Hmong artisan Sung was first introduced to us with a very nasty looking foot infection. She stayed with us for six weeks as we treated the infection and during her stay, we discovered her reputation as one of the most respected batik producers in the area. Not only do we now stock her wonderful pillowcases for sale in our community centre, but Sung has kindly committed to training a new generation of teachers this incredible skill.



### *5 ethnic groups filmed and documented.*

This is a project that ‘gives voice’ or an opportunity for ethnic minorities, craftspeople and artisans in the Northern provinces to share skills and knowledge. We are releasing a series of short films in association with Open Cinematic. Each film aims to introduce a different ethnic group and share their understanding of the forest, agriculture and textiles as well as demonstrate different traditional crafts.

You can now watch the first of this series on our Facebook page in HD.





### *5 team building trips*

Travelling to new areas provides time to think, ideate, observe and learn new things - culture, food, history. It also gives a lot of time to introspect and understand how certain things are done around the world. We have observed over many years that poverty almost always makes people focus on the short term. When resources are scarce and the future is uncertain, focusing on present needs is the smart thing to do. However, when chronic poverty leads to a daily focus on the present, it undermines long term goals like education, savings, and investment, making poverty worse.

While it may be tempting to think that underachievement is due poor socioeconomic status, poor literacy levels or a lack of self-belief, we have known for some time that it's more complicated than that. We therefore resist the urge to confuse a lack progress as failure.

Over the past year, the ETHOS team have travelled to, Ha Giang, Mu Cang Chai, Tuyen Quang, Y Ty, Mu Cang Chai and many more locations on team building trips. A personal highlight was a visit to Hoi An in central Vietnam. Watching reactions on the first flight or first time seeing the ocean was magical. These trips help create a sense of place. They help to incentivise learning and have had a profoundly positive impact on how our team value their own culture.

### *8 girls attending weekly English and empowerment classes*

ETHOS' girls empowerment program equips ethnic minority girls with tools, support, and provides education that

encourages critical thinking. The program supports girls in growing into becoming role models and future community leaders who can promote positive development in their local communities.

We now have eight Hmong girls aged between 12 and 15 attending weekly. They thoroughly enjoy their classes and are beginning to understand the long term thinking that helps plan a more wholesome future for themselves and their families.



### *54 lunch host families supported.*

Aside of our guide team, our primary method of providing a regular income for families is via our network of lunch stops. Not only do all host families receive frequent, good quality and nutritious local food, but they also receive a payment to host. Needless to say, they love welcoming guests and feel privileged that people from around the world choose to share some of their holiday time together with them. Host families record better levels of health because of a more balanced diet. They are also able to use their regular income to buy essentials and improve standard of living.



## 16 water tanks

Properly maintained rainwater tanks provide good quality drinking water for our guides, their families and for travellers who use our homestays and eat with host families.

Sapa Mountain rainwater is clear, has little taste or smell and is sourced from a well maintained water catchment system. For extra safety, we bring our water to a rolling boil for six to eight minutes and then allow it to cool before drinking. The ETHOS water tanks therefore contain non-fluoridated and unadulterated crisp clean rainwater. Drinking clean water is known to be the best form of hydration. It helps cleanse toxins from your body, balances blood sugar and helps relieve headaches.

Instruction as to how to perform periodic cleaning of rainwater tanks is also included as part of this programme.

## 20 ethnic minority groups and subgroups.

Working in a country as rich and diverse in culture as Vietnam is a genuine privilege. ETHOS are also proud to work directly with many ethnic groups across four northern provinces. With each group having a unique language, costume, architectural style and cuisine, we find everywhere we visit offers so much to learn and so many unique opportunities to share. This year saw us develop links with the Phu La, La Chi and Dao Tien ethnic minority groups.



## 4 bathrooms built

In developing countries, universal access to water and sanitation is seen as an essential step in reducing the preventable infectious diseases burden. This is best achieved by programs that integrate hygiene promotion with improvements in water quality and availability, and sanitation.

Home hygiene pertains to hygiene practices that prevent or minimize the spread of disease at home other everyday settings such as social settings.

About 2 million people die every year due to diarrheal diseases, most of them are children less than 5 years of age.

Access to hot water and personal space for bathing therefore plays a vital role in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. ETHOS are supporting our community in the building of wet-rooms, complete with sink and mixer tap, water heater and shower head. These facilities take on a particular level of importance in winter, where Sapa temperatures can dip below zero degrees Celsius.

