

## Trekking in Vietnam



arrived but today they are happy and their lives run with ease. Education is basic but good and this tiny village even has its own school. The children have no toys and games but it doesn't seem to faze them. I tried to teach a Hmong girl cats cradle with some string from my rucksack but she put me to shame by knowing even more moves than I did.

Dinner was cooked by the lady of the house over a fire. This was no poor mans dinner but a feast of the very best of Vietnamese cooking, spring rolls, rice, chicken dishes and soups. At the end of the meal, our hosts insisted on pouring us all a glass of rice wine. Don't be fooled by its gentle name, as the drink is lethal. As soon as our glasses were empty they were topped up again for it is a matter of pride to the host that he drink the foreigners under the table!

With our fill of food and drink and all the fresh mountain air, we slept like babies. The next morning we thanked our hosts and were tempted with souvenirs by the girls. The Hmong people are largely self sufficient, but as more tourists descend on their communities, it is clear that they have learned the value of mass craftsmanship and strong arm sales tactics! After buying more than we could carry, we set off on our journey once again. Our guide led us to some local highlights including Fansipan, highest peak in Vietnam and from here we were able to survey the magnificent scenery of the whole region.



I was nursing a little sunburn, unused to a whole day in the oppressive heat and as we trekked on, climbing over walls and wading through mud I began to tire. I was grateful when we made it back to the town and I enjoyed a long shower, my first in 3 days. From the village, I surveyed the wonderful view once again, but this time in a different light. Just a few hours ago, I'd been welcomed into a tribal community and been allowed to learn about their very special way of life.

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