



## What About Vietnam - 2-14

# Gain a deeper love of travel through North Vietnam through Social Enterprises

Emily Lush Podcast - Talking about North Vietnam and Social Enterprise

**Kerry Newsome:** So today I'm lucky enough to be talking to [Emily Lush](#). Now, where is Emily going to take us? She's going to take us on a different kind of adventure. We will get to go to some beautiful places, meet and hear about some very interesting people, communities, and minority groups. And she's going to take us into an area that they call Social Enterprise. And what does that mean? What does that bring to an experience in Vietnam? Please say hello to Emily Lush.

**Emily Lush:** Thank you, Kerry. I'm very happy to be here.

**Kerry Newsome:** I'm delighted to have you on the program now. For the uninitiated, Tell us what Social Enterprise is all about and what it means to you?

**Emily Lush:** Right? So Social Enterprise. It's sometimes easier to start by saying what it's not. So a Social Enterprise is not a charity. It's not volunteering. It's a business much like any other business. It differs in the way that it's more holistic model, so it's often underpinned by a strong social cause or message. There's often an environmental aspect to the business, so sustainability is really important. But most importantly, it's about community and society and driving change on a specific issue or empowering a specific group of people through business activities or services or products.

It could be led by an individual or by a non government organization. They often set up Social Enterprises to help people. and yeah, it's really about bringing the whole community, to share in the success of a business. So sometimes you'll see profits reinvested back into a community fund or something like that. Everyone can benefit from this. It is really, really important in Vietnam, a country where, you know, they've made absolutely monumental progress on a whole lot of issues in the last couple of decades. But there's still some things below the surface. , women's rights, ethnic minority rights. Human trafficking is still a big problem in Vietnam, so you'll often see Social Enterprises that target these issues in really innovative ways. , this is gonna be really important. It has been really important. It's gonna be even more important in a post covid world, especially when travelers they're looking for deeper ways. Thus a chance to give back and engage with communities when we do get to travel again.

So Vietnam has been really progressive in terms of Social Enterprise. It's been written into their laws. Since 2014, things have been created, like a really good environment for Social Enterprise to flourish. It's given birth to a whole range of different Social Enterprises. So in tourism you'll see restaurants, cafe souvenir shops, homestays, tour companies, and a

whole range of projects that are working under this Social Enterprise model. , and I want to give you a few examples because I think it's easier sometimes to sort of understand how it works when you have something concrete to look at.

So a couple of my favorites and I know you're familiar with a couple of these..

So [KOTO](#), which is a training restaurant, , in Hanoi and Saigon. They have a couple of different branches across the country, and they are a restaurant and a cooking school, but they work with disadvantaged youth. , people who have come from, you know, terrible circumstances often, and they train them. They give them the tools that they need to work in the restaurant and to go on and start their own projects later in life.

Another one I really like. is called [Zo Paper](#). So as you say, your paper. So it's run by, ah, young woman in Hanoi, and her mission is to revitalize this'll dying art of handmade paper on bits only done in specific villages in the north. So she set up this beautiful little shop. , I hope it's still operating. , but her project is ongoing, and she does workshops and tours and has a beautiful website as well, where you can buy gift cards, earrings, all kinds of things made from this paper. And because she sources the paper from these sort of small villages, she's helping keep that industry alive and also give economic opportunities to these artisans who otherwise, , don't really have a place to sell to sell their stuff. So there's a couple of examples from Hanoi. But you can find Social Enterprises all over Vietnam in Hoi An and Danang there's a lot of cafes.

So you have, like [Reaching Out Teahouse](#) life, and [9Grains Bakery](#), those kind of operations and then in the north outside of Hanoi, you have, like SAPA and those beautiful areas where Social Enterprises are really, you know, working with that environment and taking people to remote areas, um, as part of their as part of the operation. So there's so much to find in Vietnam.

**Kerry Newsome:** And this subject is obviously something close to your heart, which you kind of can hear in your voice. I mean, what is it about Social Enterprise that drives you?

Emily Lush: Maybe I'm so interested in culture, in material culture especially so, like costume and textiles and all these beautiful things that you find in, , in communities. And I think Social Enterprise is a really nice gateway to experience those things on a deeper level. I always, you know, love the experience of going into a small community, um, in a respectful way and being able to encounter those things sort of at the source. And I think Social Enterprise, because of the way it's structured, it gives travelers a lot of opportunities. to have those kind of deep experiences and to speak and learn from people firsthand, it's just amazing. It's so enriching for a travel experience.

**Kerry Newsome:** And I think for a traveler who wants, kind of a more authentic experience. Ah, little bit more immersive, not so rehearsed. And for want of a better description "tourism curated". I think you're right. I think it does offer that opportunity. But out of all the places in the world that you could pursue this passion, What was it about Vietnam that inspired you to visit.

**Emily Lush:** I love Southeast Asia. I I traveled there a couple of years ago, and I absolutely fell in love with the textiles, especially. I think, you know, I had spent time in the region previously, and I was really drawn to Vietnam just because of the sort of contrast. It's, you know, it's part of the region, but it's a little bit different. , especially in the North. I was really interested in learning more about the remote communities, which, you know Vietnam is kind of the place to do that. So that's what attracted me to find Vietnam. I just feel very comfortable there. I find it an easy place, to travel and to live, which is what I ultimately ended up doing. So those things combined with a beautiful heritage, but also that

very forward thinking approach to tourism, which I really found, you know, perfect. To stay there long term and to really, you know, go deeper into some of these places and Social Enterprises was very personally rewarding.

**Kerry Newsome:** And we're probably going to talk on another session about the difference between actually visiting a place. And as you said, um, you were able to visit there for a month or so, but then decided to come back and live there for a year, which I guess offered you the opportunity to do smaller trips and things basing yourself in Hanoi.

So you have to tell us now some of the places in Vietnam that Social Enterprise took you too. I'm sure there's some stories to tell, , in those regions, whenever I do talk to people that venture out, you know, when they get off the tourist laid down track, when they venture into, as you say, those those those very local communities and minority groups, I just love to hear some of the places that you've been to, and I'm sure my audience would as well.

**Emily Lush:** Yeah, I was very lucky getting to travel so much around the North, especially so. But I'll start by saying that I think giving or pursuing Social Enterprise. Uh, you know, it gave me a different perspective on Hanoi as well. So Hanoi is a very big, sometimes an anonymous city and seeking out these places, I made some incredible relationships and got to experience um, really, really fantastic social projects that are happening in Hanoi. So I think it could be enriching even if you're just in the city as well.

But outside of the city, I had some incredible travel experiences. So there are two places in particular that stand out, and I visited both these places with Social Enterprise groups. So the first one is HaGingi, that's spelt H a G i N G. So it's the area in Vietnam east of Sapa. But it's still along the border with China, and this is sometimes called a Sapa alternative or the new South because it's, , it's fairly remote.

It's not very touristy at the moment. It was the last part of Vietnam to sort of open up to tourists. It takes a long time to get there, which is one of the things one of the trade offs and

**Kerry Newsome:** it's got. I think it features in a lot in photos. You know when when they show northern Vietnam, all those windy, bendy roads and switchbacks, etcetera, that's the region you are talking about, right?

**Emily Lush:** Yes, that's that region. Exactly. So one thing to do in HaGing, is jump on a motorbike and go hustling around those roads very slowly, and with great caution. But look, I've lived in Southeast Asia for a long time and never driven a motorbike. So it's not my thing, and I was traveling with my dad, so we had a different experience and this is part of the reason we went with the Social Enterprise because they do tours by car. So we were able to go up there, with a private driver and a guide who is very embedded in the community and works with a lot of people up there. And it was just a terrific experience and we had that adventure, but, you know, from the safety of our comfort zone. so it was kind of ah, blend of off those two things.

**Kerry Newsome:** I think you're right. I think it's up to the individual how they want to experience that region in particular. There's certainly the people who do it on bikes and just rave about it.

I'd probably be a little bit more like you, Emily. I'd probably be doing it from the comfort of a car. Those windy roads and bends. However, I could tell you on a on a bus, etcetera, you know, can be, um, quite difficult for people who suffer with car sickness, because it is out there!!! isn't it?

It's quite untouched, which is a marvel in itself, I think. And that's what Vietnam offers that people don't know. I think in the first sense people think trillions and trillions of motorbikes. But it does have a lot of wide open, beautiful spaces, and I think post Covid it's going to draw those travelers, and I'm hoping that they will follow your lead a little bit in the Social Enterprise space because I think from a recovery perspective, that's what Vietnam is going to need.

And I think they do it better than, a lot of countries. For some reason, they just have a great community spirit, which is why they dealt with Covid better than many other countries because they were concerned about their own community. So anyway, that's one of your favorites, or that's a standout. Tell us, tell us more.

**Emily Lush:** Another one I wanted to mention is a place called Da Bac, Đà Bắc is a rural district of Hòa Bình Province in the Northwest region of Vietnam and it kind of borders on Hanoi.. So it's just about three hours west of the capital via, another very bumpy sort of treacherous road.

But this part of Vietnam is pretty, you know, it's not known among tourists at all. It's pretty remote again, while still being, you know Ah, a lot closer to Hanoi. So here in Da Bac there is a project run by the NGO called [Action on Poverty](#), who has a strong presence in Australia as well.

I went over there to check out their homestays. They work with a network of villages, around a reservoir. Really beautiful environment, and they've worked with a range of families to set up homestays in these beautiful Traditional wooden homes. They do meals, you know, they've had, really practical training and catering to tourist's needs so they can do anything you need. Vegetarian, vegan, whatever. Beautiful homestays, really comfortable places.

And then just this pristine environment. Rice fields for days. You know, the classic Vietnam that you sort of conjure up when you think about traveling in the north Just a really beautiful part of the country. And one thing that I did there that is very memorable and sort of sticks out with a traditional red dao herbal bath. So you can do this in other places but well, but they offer them in in Da Bac, and you basically sit in a wooden like barrel that is a traditional bath, and they fill it up with water and these medicinal herbs that they've collected from around the village on the water gets heated up with this special wood, um and you sit in the bath and soak. And in this particular room at a homestay where I was. It was just offered a window overlooking the rice fields, and you just sit there and kind of relax. It was it was beautiful.

**Kerry Newsome:** Hmm. I did something a little bit similar in Mau Chau. And you're right. It's the richness of that wooden bath. And then just the simplicity of the view, you know, it's just pure nature. Yeah, it is quite a memorable, beautiful healing experience.

Definitely. Okay. So if you're going to talk to people about this and I know you, you've done a great job with your blog,, and I do love your blog by the way. Uh, tell us. You know, what would you advise? Did you learn any kind of tips along the way that you'd say, Hey, make sure you do this or whatever, Maybe maybe share some of those? I'm sure there are some ones that could save people, some issues. Let's say!!

**Emily Lush:** I think it's important to mention, you know, we've talked about a few times that this is a great way to sort of get off the beaten track. And I think it's important to know that with that there is, ah, more raw element to some of these experiences. So there is a language barrier, that you have to work a little bit harder to overcome. It's nothing that you can't overcome. Like I. I did this for a year, basically traveling all around and, you know, I did

learn a bit of Vietnamese, but you know, I have no problem at the end of the day, but they're all those things that you have to keep in mind and just, you know, be realistic about what you're going into.

Like you know, it is going to be a long time in the car if you're going to a more remote place. and stay in a homestay might not be. You know, it's not gonna be a boutique hotel standard, so as long as you're prepared for that, you can enjoy it for what it is. I think that's important to keep in mind. , but otherwise, you know you'll find especially in Vietnam one thing that struck me was how professional these Social Enterprises are.

They really do their research. They really do their, you know, European class training, European standard training, um, to get people up to a good level off service, which is really, really important for a sustainable project. So while you do have to temper your expectations a little bit during its not, I think a lot of people get intimidated, especially at the idea of a home stay. But you'll find the standards are pretty good, especially in the North.

**Kerry Newsome:** And, you know, we talk about homestays and it's a good subject to bring up because, they are a real wild card now, the homestay because in some places they're like an Airbnb, or you know, they're like in Australia what we know as a Bed and breakfast place. They're really quite modern. And they have kind of come up a few levels, but in the areas that you're talking about, you use the word "raw" I think raw is a very good word for it. They don't always include a hot shower or a comfortable bed, and sometimes that shower is outside and the meals definitely would not be catering to all tastes, etc. You're not going to get a menu choice, etcetera. You're going to get what the family's eating that day or that night. So you're right, setting people up so that they understand what to expect, I think, can I avoid disappointment for the people who go there that go or you know, that that's to rule for May on, then for other people who have gone to other places and not had that experience on are disappointed and going away with the thought that are, you know, to get unauthentic experience. That's all rubbish. so yeah just trying to find and navigate that that path I think is important. And I'm glad you mentioned it because I get a lot of people who say You know what's a homestay? And you know it's not an easy question to answer in one sentence because of that diversification of homestays we are just taking about. I think in in Hoi An alone they stopped giving out licenses because there was like 340 homestays in addition to hotels. So yeah, it's a bit crazy. Anything else?

**Emily Lush:** It is becoming quite trendy. There will be places that sort of use that title that might not give that sort of experience. So again a Social Enterprise that is like underpinned by a group code of ethics and you know they're vetted their reviewed, they have a name for themselves that could be a good way to find those more quote-unquote authentic places. And you know, often they are the more remote rural places where you're gonna find things a bit more "out there". So that's another way that Social Enterprise could be really helpful to to seek those out specifically because they do the research, they do the legwork. They are very, good about offering high quality and meeting your expectations.

**Kerry Newsome:** The other thing I want to touch on, which comes up around Social Enterprise in my experience is price or cost.

There's still that elusion that everything in Vietnam is cheap, cheap. You know it, Copy, Copy, Copy and cheap, Cheap. And like we both know that yes, sure, that exists. But when

you go to Social Enterprises and you're buying something that's handmade or whatever, you are often going to be paying quite a high price.

And, you know, I've seen some tourists really push back on that.. They go, you know, I wouldn't be expecting to pay that. And yet, if anything was handmade in their own country, they definitely would be paying that. So that's kind of a new and interesting dynamic, too, don't you think in this in this space?

**Emily Lush:** Absolutely. I think a lot of travelers get into the mindset like you say that everything will be cheap as chips. And you can find that. But if you're wanting to give back, I suppose, or support a business that kind of goes a bit further. You often times do need to pay more, and I think there's a responsibility on the brand or the company to justify that, to tell the story behind the product to explain where that money is going, and I think that makes the decision for travel easier if you can see or, you know, that 10% of what I'm paying. You know, it might be 20% more than this other shop, but 10% is gonna go into the community fund. And maybe it's aiming to build a library for this small village so that Children can learn there own language.

I think that makes the decision a bit easier. And I think most travelers who go to Vietnam, or Southeast Asia, are interested in leaving something good and meaningful behind when they leave. A lot of people, you know, have a great experience in Vietnam and they feel very connected to the people. To the culture there. And it's a really nice opportunity to be able to give something back. Often times, yeah, you will be paying a bit more, but I mean, obviously I think it's more than worth it. And these are the experiences that you know after a year in Vietnam, these are the things I remember most vividly and really look back on most fondly, and also the items that I've purchased that I hold on to, and you know, there they because I maybe because I paid a bit more it made it even more precious to me, because I know the story of who made it, where it came from, what it's made from, all those layers. I think just to contribute to something worthwhile is good. It's a personal decision at the end of the day, but I think it's more than worth it.

**Kerry Newsome:** And, you know, I can relate to that very well because let's face it you know, one 5 star hotel looks pretty much the same as another. But if you are going to a country like Vietnam and you do want to feel like, you've actually been to Vietnam, like you've experienced something off the culture, the history. I mean, it's got such a huge history.

You know, some people still think of Vietnam as the Vietnam War. I can remember very early on on one of my visits, one of the tour guides said, You know, Vietnam is a country not a war.

I went, Whoa, I'm going to take that away with me.

So I mean, Social Enterprise in Vietnam is something that is hard to explain and get on people's radar. As a collective from my experience, you really have to kind of, dig away to find, as you say, brands, etcetera. So I'm delighted that you can talk about it on your [Wander Lush Blog](#)

I'm gonna make sure I put that link in the episode notes so people can find out about that. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this episode that we can share and to give travelers in the future coming to Vietnam some further guidance.

**Emily Lush:** So, yeah, there are a couple of resources on my website. There's another website called [grassroots volunteering](#), which has a bit of a directory, as well and then one more is called [CBT Vietnam](#). They work in SAPA and they're sort of like a directory of homestays that you can, look up, sort of find better term stays in that part of Vietnam, but yeah, I just want to end by saying that I liked Vietnam. You know, it has so much to offer as a country, but the greatest asset is the people. Absolutely. Especially the ethnic diversity. In some of these areas we've spoken about, I think Social Enterprise is just the perfect way to travel and is a gateway into deeper experiences in those areas. And to make sure that in these places tourism develops is done in a sustainable way and that people benefit, and they share in the benefits of tourism as it as it continues to develop at a roaring pace in some parts of Vietnam.

So, yeah, I just I strongly recommend seeking out these places. You know, it is getting easier. Like you say, it's an ecosystem. Once you sort of find one, you can ask, the owner. Everyone is working together. which is another really nice thing about it. It's a very supportive environment for business owners. So, yeah, once you get in there, you can find pretty much anything from motor bikes, to haircuts and massages that have, ah, social edge to their business and just a nice alternative. If that's something that you want to pursue.

**Kerry Newsome:** it's definitely the good feel way, isn't it to travel through Vietnam. Thank you so much, Emily. I'm going to leave you now because that to me just sums it up. And I just thank you for your time and for your information, and I hope to talk to you soon.

Emily Lush: Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure.