



What About Vietnam - Series 2-15

[Find out more about Sapa as we go beyond the tourist tracks](#)

Kerry: To set the scene for my next guest, Phil Hoolihan.

Phil lives in the Sapa region, I've said region as Phil will explain a bit more about that later. Phil came to Vietnam from the UK about 20 years ago on a science project, studying biodiversity, he went back to the UK after that, but only to return after he completed his degree.

I find out a bit further that he had many trips in that time back and forth and probably chewed up most of that three-year degree time in Vietnam, as it says, Phil is going to give us a very grassroots take on the Sapa that features regularly in most extended tours to Vietnam. And he's going to do that versus what I keep calling and referring to the extended region, because usually the snapshot view or the snapshot tour, two to three days tour set that you will get on an extended tour, doesn't take into consideration the region that Phil's going to talk about.

He's also going to talk to us more about the ethos of the region and what compelled him to stay on and add to that. The social enterprise he is involved with means we're going to soon find out that there's more to Sapa than you think. So, Phil if I could say.."great to have you on the show let's just say I'm in Hanoi and I've just bought a three-day, two-night trip to Sapa, just from a local at a desk, as you know, there's many of them in Hanoi, talk us through what that will look like. So, I'm going to get the train up, coach back as I understand from the ticket and I'm staying in a hotel in Sapa. So, talk to us a little bit about what that would look like for your average, Joe.

Phil: Well, I think it's a great start to the area. I think the train itself is a big part of the experiential travel, although it's longer and more expensive than alternative forms of transport as it happens. It's a big part of this area's history. I mean, it was originally built by the French in the early 19th century. It's something that I feel brings you into an area in a unique way to sleep on a train overnight, but a lot of people come up here because of the diverse landscape, and rich culture.

And I think generally it's these two elements that make North Vietnam so fascinating for many travelers, that combination of incredible scenery, potentially it often rains, it's frequently foggy and the culture, which of course is there regardless of the weather, fortunately!

Kerry: But what am I going to be doing on that three days and two nights? Because the train is usually an overnight train, the time I did it, as you rightfully say, it's a cute trip. As long as you don't get a snorer to share with in your 4 berth cabin. And so, if you get a

snorer in there, it's a little bit harrowing, but yeah, you're right, it's neat. The train is a really good entry point, so what happens from there?

Phil: Well, generally, I mean, a lot of people think when you're arriving on the train, you're actually in Sapa, the train arrives about one hour away from Sapa in a city called Lao Chai and then it's a minibus or a pickup from there up to your hotel or accommodation in Sapa. And it's a real mix, I mean, the town has grown, I mean, I think there's many positives to the growth for certainty, one of them is the range of accommodation available now from budgets three, \$4 a night, backpacker, hostel kind of establishments, right the way through to the high-end four- and five-star rooms. So, generally there's something for everyone in terms of accommodation and food as well. But frequently you'll be picked up by your guide and then most people when they're up in Sapa they are doing some form of Trek and typically those treks follow a certain pattern.

If it's a half day event, it will be a village called, Cat Cat which is actually owned by a tour company or alternatively for those doing a day trip or a two-day trip it's to villages called Lai Chau and Ta Van and some people will also visit Ta Phin. So, there's four villages that are very much on the tourist trail and they're comfortable, they've been adapted for us, most of the accommodation has, and again I think most people would welcome this, they have got Western style toilets & hot shower and they offer Wi-Fi.

And even the food is perhaps not as traditionally Vietnamese as you might get elsewhere, it's a fusion of Vietnamese or Western dishes. So, all in all its kind of packaged experience that fits your typical traveler in the sense that it aims for that kind of mass tourist, that mid centric person who wants to experience, but wants something comfortable and that's what most people end up doing.

Kerry: Yeah, and I mean, if I draw on my own experience you know I felt like it was a well-trodden trail, like including every single stop, every single person as in a local person from a minority group, etc. They kind of were dressed and acting according to the tourists that they were going to be meeting that day, which was us.

So, I felt it was a little bit orchestrated and a little bit too finely tuned. And for that I Kind of walked away with Hmm...., is that Sapa? I expected probably a more immersive, more authentic, maybe a bit more raw than I got and that kind of threw me a bit.

So, since then, of course I've learned a lot and I've met people like you, etc. But certainly, I think it's good to talk through for the average person who's trying to fit a lot in, on a trip. You know, they think, they bought 14 days, but they're going to do an extra three days on a trip like this to Sapa. I think sometimes they want to just get in and get out and that's Kind of, to me, I don't know what your thoughts are, but that's Kind of doing Sapa and the region a disservice because the snapshot you're getting is Kind of what I'm just talking about. Superficial...Would you agree?

Phil: It's too well oiled, I mean, the very fact that you mentioned there a tour, it feels like a package. It feels like the places you're walking to and the conversations you're having and the food you're eating has been pre-organized, it feels very much like that. And you know what, there are certain people who appreciate that, I'm not one of them actually. But it's simply down to a little bit of background, I mean, the larger group of visitors to Sapa are actually the Vietnamese Kinh you know, migrant Kinh workers dominate the paid employment. They run the tour companies fundamentally, and they like that Kind of tourism. They want to know where they are going to be, everything's itinerized to a point

with which prior to your trip, you could even be given a menu, this is what you'll be eating on day three or day two, for instance.

Well, you know, to contextualize what you've just said, those three villages, I mentioned earlier, Cat Cat, Lao Chai and Tavan, I haven't visited either of those places for years.

Kerry: In 20 years.

Phil: I have, I've been to all of them, but I very, very infrequently visit. I've not been to Cat Cat since I worked there 20 years ago, I haven't been there. It's not somewhere, I think it fits with myself or the audience that I prefer to talk to in Sapa, which is a little bit more sustainably orientated, a little bit more free in terms of what they want to do and the keyword is more authentic.

Kerry: Yes, and with that authenticity as I want to remind people, is that they can't expect all the comforts of home with that. And I think that's where the cross section of people comes to, as in there's some people that go, oh, you know, for a couple of nights, that's fine, I can hack that. But then there's the others that go, oh, no, that's not what I bargained for and, you know, struggle. You know, they're tired, they've done a trek in the respect of, you know, some hours walking up those Hills, etc. And they're exhausted and they want all those comforts of home to come back to. And I think that's definitely on offer in Sapa as we've agreed. But I think what I'd like to take time with you today is to talk about beyond that region, you know, that more immersive aspect to the region.

Because it's not as well-known and it's not as well publicised, because it is that social enterprise community kind of type sharing. And as you said, you know, the tours that you offer aren't for everybody, you know, it's not for everybody, but I want you to talk about it. So, people are at least aware of it so that they can say, hey I think that's more me rather than the more structured, more tailor-made more westernized tour. So, talk to us a little bit about beyond Sapa, talk to us about homestays that are real homestays and your interacting with the real locals.

Phil: Well, I think if you look across the country nationally, you've got 13 national parks. I think there's eight UNESCO world heritage sites, and there's more in the pipeline. But one thing that stands out to me is these 53 ethnic minority groups. I believe there are more, there's also the Kinh the main ethnic group. And interestingly, we work with a lot of those ethnic minorities. And if you talk to them, they typically value nature, they enjoy being outdoors and they value that post-contact with the land and resources they grow and forage. Now, I think this is something that can be reflected very, very effectively in tourism, if you're with them and experiencing their life, inevitably, you are in nature and you're living this kind of simple hand to mouth existence with you. Now, I hope that a lot of visitors to Sapa can find and the wider region, of course, but can find this immersive, sustainable travel, this experiential style of travel far more rewarding.

I mean, to a point with which many people have told me that being here is life-changing which I think is a fantastic compliment to this area.

But you know, what you've got in Sapa I believe is a mountainous area, one and a half thousand meters above sea level, about six hours from Hanoi by bus. And you've got a temperate climate and that is appealing because it's better to walk in a tropical jungle. You've also got an incredible history, you've got charming little villages and beautiful scenery, but I think the key thing is how will that reflect in people's interpretation of this area? We chose Sapa primarily because the ease of access to 16 ethnic minorities in

the region. And I don't mean within walking distance, some of those are three or four hours away by motorbike, but that is the heritage that this area offers.

And I think that's something that often goes undervalued. If, for example, you get a Kinh Vietnamese guide who was raised in Hanoi, went to a university in Hanoi, learnt their history and culture from a book, as opposed to someone who was born here lives here can understand how to forage and collect.

So, you mentioned earlier about the homestays and I mean, I've got a strange story that happened probably about two, three years ago now. And it was actually an older couple from Wales, they wrote to us in advance and said, you know, we'd like to do a challenging trek. We have three days, one day, we'd like to go on a motorbike trip and the other two were looking for something really authentic, really traditional they said a hard trek. So, we offered them a few different choices, but left it open in the sense that when they arrived, your walk distance, your level of challenge, what you eat, where you stay is all open.

I mean, it's certainly not fixed beforehand because of the fluidity of the trip. And they ended up doing a lot less than they anticipated. If I'm overly harsh, I'd describe them as morbidly obese, they certainly weren't the kind of people to do a long, hard trek. We've got a fairly interesting call probably around an hour into the walk from the guide, these people aren't going to make it to lunch she said, they're just not going to get there, you know, she was panicking a little bit. So, we interjected, we spoke to the couple who were very open, they were lovely, and they said they were finding it hard and we talked to the guy and she said, oh, I'll find somewhere near here where we can have lunch, which was great. So, they went in the house, they cook their traditional food together, which they thoroughly enjoyed.

And what they realized is the destination, the homestay they had in mind was just not achievable. We said, maybe you could come back into town and get a hotel, but they were determined, they wanted to stay overnight. And we said, right, two choices, it will be where you are now or you can continue to walk a little bit and find somewhere in that area to stay, which they opted for. So, they did their trip, we called them in the evening, everything's fine. They've got a homestay; they were staying in a local home and of course they are extremely traditional. It's a working farm, your cockerels and pigs wandering around; the bed is a sprung bamboo homemade bed, you do get a blanket, but there's no hot shower, there is no bathroom. In fact, many homestays don't even have toilets. That's how authentic they are, but they assured us everything was great.

And they came back the next day and they raved about the experience. They said the food was delicious, the guide was knowledgeable. They thoroughly enjoyed it, but and this is the key here, when they wrote their review, it wasn't quite the same.

And this to me is fascinating it was a four-star review, they thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a good review and they listed everything they thoroughly enjoyed, but they did describe the homestay is extremely challenging, I appreciate that. What they anticipated is that I think in their phraseology, they simply imagined it to be like a little boutique hotel. We normally stay in four- and five-star establishments, we thought a home stay would be a room or a hot shower, private suite. Now, to be honest, I had sent them videos, we had emailed them, and we even sent them photographs quite how they'd missed all of that, I don't know. But what they described the homestay, perhaps a little bit harshly was medieval. They said it was like staying in a cow shed. Now to some degree, I can

understand that I've stayed in these homestays. I know you have; they are extremely basic.

Kerry: Raw, that's what I was saying before, very raw.

Phil: And that's for many people, you know, sat by the fire with a local family who speak very little English, communicating through the guide, eating local food, helping prepare, talking to the kids drinking rice wine. That experience is absolutely what they want. Well, that's something Sapa can offer, but what this couple did I believe is make a small mistake in not quite understanding the variety of homestays, whether that was their problem, I'm not quite sure because elsewhere in Vietnam, as I'm sure you're aware a homestay, something totally different, it is a boutique hotel go and stay in a homestay in Hoi An. It's absolutely not a home, it's a functional little boutique hotel. Well, these homestays are homes, they are homes you stay in. It's what I believe a homestay to be. And they can be challenging, they can be wonderful. But it's something that I think is important to discuss with whoever you arrange your Sapa trip with. Of course, you can do the authentic option, but there are other options that are more comfortable.

Kerry: And I think, you know, this is what it means about meeting expectations and understanding, you know, when you buy that ticket that train trip, that coach back that two nights stay, you know, if it says a homestay, the traveler is possibly best to ask some more questions about that homestay, because if they've just come from Hoi An and they've stayed in a homestay, their expectation could be immediately that it's going to be replicated in Sapa. And we've had many a traveler that has been in shock that they would be expected to stay in accommodation of that kind. So, whilst you're talking about the authenticity side of it and the immersive side of it and being able to be part of a family, they're not there for show, they actually live there, they function there every single day and that they've invited you into their home. That is not for everyone, that is just definitely not for everyone.

Phil: Well, I've also heard it the other way round. I mean, I've also heard it where people have arrived expecting authenticity, and they've actually ended up in quite a large group in a purpose-built hostel in the middle of a touristy village and they too are disappointed.

Kerry: Disappointed, yes.

Phil: It all depends, it's absolutely due diligence. It's preparation it's asking the right questions and finding the right answers. And I think that's absolutely critical to enjoying your experience in this region.

Kerry: Absolutely, talk to us a little bit more Phil, about the social enterprise side of what you do. I really got a lot out of our previous discussion when you were talking about just how, some of the things that you do give back to the community, and I'm really keen for you to talk and expand a bit more on that.

Phil: It's a challenging area. I mean, again, I'm talking beyond Sapa now, but you've got a number of ethnic minorities that actually number millions.

I mean, you know, they stretch over five Northern provinces and actually there's a lot of historical issues beginning during the French colonial period where they were kind of supporting the French in growing and trading opium. Obviously that trade has disappeared now in order to monitor and to control that trade these tribes that were historically nomadic were forced to fix and live-in permanent settlements. And that's not how they've traditionally lived, and they found that adaptation really challenging. They went from being semi-nomadic, shifting cultivators, self-sustainable to being in their way trapped and poor, to be honest, they've never recovered. And during the Vietnam, American war, because of perceived persecution by the Vietnamese prior, they were actually recruited by the CIA and ended up siding with the Americans during the war, which had a large impact post-war.

You know, if you imagine it from a Vietnamese, these people were seen as rebels and outlaws. So, what you have is what I would phrase as marginalization that can perpetuate in racism. You get people who are treated differently and do act differently, they value different things in society. So, what you tend to find is most people over the age of, let's say 27, 28 years old, never went to school because there were no schools. That means if they are in Europe, they're illiterate. And that's challenging, very challenging when you try and find employment, be in tourism or otherwise, if you walk into any job being illiterate, you find yourself often deemed unemployable.

So, what you find is in this area, even though the ethnic minorities are the majority, you know, it's a strange way of terming things, but there are more of them than there are Vietnamese Kinh. The Kinh own the businesses, they own everything, all the homestays, all the restaurants, all the tour companies.

Kerry: When you talk about Vietnamese Kinh, tell me what does that mean, is that a rural person, but not a minority group?

Phil: They are the majority, so they are the biggest ethnic group in Vietnam, I think they make up about 90% of the population. So, if you're traveling through Vietnam, if you're in Hanoi or Saigon, if you're in Hue or Hoi An, most of the people who live in those urban metropolises are actually Kinh Vietnamese, so they make up big majority. So, the language, the Viet language is actually spoken as their primary language, the Kinh. Whereas these ethnic minorities, they have a different culture, they have different food, different clothing, and their own languages. And this historical marginalization has created poverty, extreme poverty in some cases. And I think that's something that tourism can be a big part of in terms of a solution. If it's done right, our presence can end up providing not only income for otherwise marginalized people, but also acceptance the fact that we are on a trek and staying in a homestay with an ethnic minority person means that we're not judging them on their poverty.

We're seeing them as it is, and we're involved with them. And they take real pride in the fact that certainly as travelers, we are choosing those experiences and we're valuing what they offer, there's a great sense of pride. Which in turn helps to support their traditional ways because they understand the value, for instance their language or their clothing, because they know that we enjoy, and we like to learn about that. So, a long time ago, I spoke to a lot of our team who were all from two of the tribes, Muong, and Dao. And we spoke to them about what they thought were the biggest challenges here. They described health, access to employment and we set about trying to find solutions to these. Of course, if you're illiterate, the easiest solution is developed literacy easier said than done.

But likewise access to hospital care, you know, I know we had a conversation, a side of our conversation today last week, talking about a young boy who was quite badly burned. Well, the problem his family had is once they arrived in the hospital, they couldn't understand the doctors nor could they fill in the basic forms to allow them to access the hospital, which is where our organization we're able to support, just simple access, access like that. So, I think in terms of tourism, it's great to know that we can come here and enjoy it, whatever type of tourist you are, but at the same time, really support locally.

Kerry: Yes.

Phil: I don't know if you recall. I mean, did you find that when you were doing your trekking, were you followed by local sellers?

Kerry: Yes.

Phil: I find that quite challenging because when I'm doing a walk, I don't want to be troubled by having, do we, do we not? Is it right to buy from a child? Should I not? There's too many thoughts when I'm trying to enjoy an experience. The simple reality is those people are selling because it's their only access point to tourism, if they can't get jobs in hotels and restaurants and they're not guides, well where do they earn money?

Because they can't grow enough food to eat, so they have to earn an income. The simple solution to me is find and work with them on meaningful employment. They are the guides, they are the homestay owners, they do prepare and grow the food. And as soon as they become integral, then it works. And those sellers begin to dissipate because why would anyone want to follow you for 12 kilometers on a day long trek to maybe sell something, if they could be your guide, do the same walk anyway, and be guaranteed a wage at the end of the day.

Kerry: Yeah, exactly.

Phil: To me, it's simple. So, you know, my advice here is, when you come to Sapa if you've not booked something in advance, find someone local, find someone is Dao or Muong, someone who's got a good command of the language that you want to communicate in when you trek and make sure that the money is going into the right areas.

Kerry: And how do you do that, how do you make sure? I mean, when you've traveled a lot as I know you and I have, you've been to places like India and been haggled and things like that. I found the haggling in Sapa very invasive, I've found it uncomfortable and I felt on the spot. And when you're roaming through that trek, and you've just got this family where children on their back and walking behind you and trying to sell, textiles and things like that. I Kind of felt like it was staged, and I'd rather get the money and go and give it to somewhere where I truly felt it was going to go to the right people. But even though they looked like the right people, they look like the wrong people to give the money to, if there's a way of saying that.

And that's a shame because as you say, it is possibly their only way of connecting with a tourist and having the opportunity to earn some money that way. But I think from a tourist perspective, they are more accepting of giving back to the community in ways of buying some of the textiles like, beautiful bedspreads and pillowcases. And I've bought some beautiful pieces, etc. And I bring them home and I love them more than anything because I know the story behind them, I know where I bought it, the woman I bought it from, the village she came from. So, you know, it has much more meaning, but once again I was talking to someone else today and I think there is a perception that everything you do in Vietnam is cheap.

So, you know, it's cheap, cheap copy, copy. And everybody expects that they should be getting everything for nickel and dime cheapest chips kind of thing. So, that concept fights hard with the social enterprise who is offering handmade items that are sometimes expensive. They're not out of a little factory somewhere churning out stuff, they are actually handmade. And sometimes, you know, some of the local art that I bought takes months to make one piece and I can feel the shell in the surface, I can feel every inch of that painting, etc. But I had to pay some serious Us dollars for that. And I think that concept is hard for the average tourist to bend their brain around as well. What are your thoughts on that?

Phil: Well, I mean, there's two sides to the same story, really. I mean, one is if you were a local seller and you knew that on a given day, there may be four or 500 people arriving and trekking, and they all do the same trek, the same route, where would you go to sell? Of course, they gravitate towards those villages. So, if you end up going to those villages, you will have sellers. And actually, what the sellers have realized is that most of those people are on a fairly tight budget. They've realized that most of them don't really want to buy anything, I mean, why would you want to buy a big blanket and then do a trek carrying this with you. So, they've ended up kind of investing their own time in doing little bit new experiments. There's a lady, Vietnamese lady in town buys huge quantities from China of machine-made textiles.

A lot of the Muong and the Dao will wander into town. They'll borrow trinkets from her, borrow them, not buy them. And then what they'll do is loiter around either in the town or in those three villages, I mentioned, and as groups of tourists come, they latch on they'll follow you in the hopes that they can sell, if they do, they'll pay the lady in Sapa and if they don't, they return the objects. Now that's a way of earning a very, very meager income, but I believe it to be negative on every front because you're promoting the purchasing of machine-made fabrics that veer away from tradition, the younger generations are therefore not learning their traditions, which is a major issue. You've also got a poor in my mind, experiential tourism, because we see them as a photo opportunity. They see us as a sales opportunity that isn't rewarding for either party.

On the opposite side of that Sapa has, I believe 96 villages and hamlets, go to other areas of the country. Then, instead of seeing, as you as a sales opportunity, if you end up staying with people and eating with people, why do they need to sell to you? Their

business is accommodating you; their business is guiding you, that becomes the transaction. And to me, that's more meaningful and it's absolutely available here everywhere you go to anywhere but those three, I'll say four, if you include Ta Phin, villages, that's the experience you'll get.

So, we've told all the people we work with at the villages that we work with, this is your tourism industry, not mine. Foreigners who come here have certain expectations, it's important that we make sure that they feel satisfied and comfortable, but at the same time, nobody wants to be followed and harassed.

So, we've worked out a simple model, and this is out there publicly. I don't mind if anyone copies it, but in the morning, we buy food from the market, but all the food is bought from locals, local guide, local drivers. We do a walk, or we stop in a local home for lunch. We cook and eat as they do, we share the food together, you continue on your stay in a local home. The following day, you eat lunch in a local home, you come back with a local driver. So, over the course of a typical trip, it could be that six, seven, eight families benefit from you coming well, if they benefit, they don't need to sell you anything. If you ask and you want it's there it's readily available top-quality things, items that they've made cherished with love hand spawn, handle woven, hemp dyed with Indigo, and then embroidered over the course of a year, it's outstanding stuff. You're not going to find that down in the touristy villages.

Kerry: No, well, you'll find it, but you'll find it's made in China.

Phil: There you go, yeah completely, you're absolutely right. Or printed versions of the same.

Kerry: It is, yes and if there's nothing more than I get across with this podcast is trying to give the travelers some insights and educate the future traveler about what to look for.

So, that as you say, they can get the experience that they want. So, if it does mean doing a bit of research, listening to this podcast, heaven forbid you know, reaching out to yourself directly, I'm going to be putting all your links in the episode notes, then, you know my job is done because I blindly walked into Sapa and walked away and it took me a couple more goes to see more, to get the benefit of more knowledge and more education. Possibly I was lazy, and I didn't do enough research, but as you say, if you do, it's there, it's available.

And as extensive as the area is, I mean, you've mentioned some names of other areas in Northern Vietnam. I mean, I just adore Northern Vietnam, I just think it's that memorable, that every trip I make a point of going to somewhere new in the North. And every time I've never been disappointed.

I think if we have done something well today its show them the many sides of Sapa.

Phil: And we've won all sorts of awards and I don't say that lightly. I don't necessarily think we've ever tried to get those awards. We've simply had open dialogue with people I respect as friends, constantly.

So, my advice generally is to kind of do your own research, find an experience that suits your needs because everybody goes to those three locations. You've got to work out

whether those locations are for you. All treks and experiences can be tailored. So, ask your tour company what you would like to do in terms of distance and accommodation. We've talked about even down to food, you know, if you don't eat meat, you're a vegetarian or vegan, of course it's something that we can accommodate as a destination.

I'm not talking about our organization. I think it's super important to ask your guide or your company where the money goes, because in an area where 50% of the population are registered as poor, I think it's essential. The income from tourism spreads to more than one individual, more than one company. So, have a look at the literature, have a look at their newsfeed on social media; gauge what they're like as individuals, or as an organization. Are they in tourism purely for profit, or are they involved in community development, village cleanups, education, etc. So, I think that's there if you want it.

You mentioned before, it's easy in Sapa to fall into that trap of thinking, oh, well, everyone seems to be offering the same. And I come full circle a little earlier, I mentioned that the Kinh Vietnamese owned most of the tour companies. We did a social experiment some months ago, it was fascinating, we targeted a number of people throughout the town, and they ended up being categorized into three groups, Vietnamese, tribal people, as in the and the Muong and general foreigners, it doesn't matter which country you are from.

And what we asked them to do while they were in this region is to come up with the first five words that they thought of while in the area. And I found it fascinating because when we asked foreigners, they came up with the words, culture, forest mountains, heritage, homestay, treks. When we asked the locals, they said, rice, Indigo, forest, Buffalo, friends, farming. There is an overlap, it's a tenuous one, but there is an overlap then the Vietnamese and it was stark. They said, Fanispan, the name of the biggest mountain in Vietnam, Sun World the name of the tour company who owned the cable car up the biggest mountain in Vietnam, Sapa Swing a destination where you can take selfies. Selfie was one of their words when they think of Sapa and the last one, I couldn't believe it, but it's true karaoke.

So, what you find with that and the reason I... it's astonishing, isn't it? The reason I raised that point is because culturally you've got a group of people who were organizing tours and, in their mind,, this is a destination for cable cars, selfies, and karaoke. That's not what I want when I come to Sapa. If that's what you want, go to a generic Vietnamese agency and that's what they'll provide. If it's not what you want, you will have to dig a little deeper.

Kerry: Yeah, I think Phil that digging a little bit deeper I think we should finish on that.

Phil: Yeah.

Kerry: That I think is the guts of it, if I can say that.

Phil: Yeah, absolutely.

Kerry: I think taking it on a superficial level is not the way to go, there is more to Sapa and you just have to dig a bit deeper. Phil, thank you so much for your time. Great to talk to you as always and love what you're doing and look forward to talking to you again soon.

Phil: You're welcome, pleasure, thanks for your time today.

Kerry: I hope you enjoy this episode, talking about Sapa and the extended region that it is. It offers just such a wide range of experiences, possibly more immersive and authentic than you may have originally thought. I'm truly grateful for Phil's time and the knowledge he shared with us today. I really had no concept of the marginalization in the area and the challenges that brings to local operators trying to make a living from tourism. Hopefully when you start planning a trip to Vietnam, you know, maybe take a bit more time to maybe dig a bit deeper in the areas Phil mentioned just to get that local experience with minority groups in their real habitat. I'll put all the appropriate links in the episode notes, please share, and let us know what you think of the program and how we can improve drop us an email or give us a shout out on our Facebook page until next time.