

## The Good Life in Viet Nam

By Dave Wondra

Sa Pa is a small hill station in the Northwest Highlands of Viet Nam. It is nestled high in the Tonkin Alps, near the Chinese border. It is the place where people go to begin treks to visit the local hill tribe villages. Viet Nam has over 50 ethnic minorities, some of whom live in remote parts of the country. Eight of these ethnic groups live in the remote area outside of Sa Pa.

I was in Sa Pa with my family during the summer of 2006. We were headed for a small village inhabited by the Tay people. We put a few essentials into our backpacks, and then departed for a ten mile trek into the mountains. We followed a well-worn path that serves as the main artery that connects the villages to each other. As we walked, we occasionally met up with locals who were traveling the path, going about their day.

Eventually we arrived at the home of our hosts. During the few days we stayed with this family, I spent a good deal of time observing village life, and what our hosts did all day. Since I did not notice any stores, malls, factories, office buildings, cell towers, phone lines, high-speed internet connections or mail service, I will say that I was curious.

I was struck by what I learned. A typical day consisted of growing and preparing food, caring for the house, raising the children, visiting with and helping extended family members and other villagers, resting, and laughing. That's it. What I realized is that they were simply going about the business of living; engaging with whatever presented itself. They were doing this without the aid of schedules, day planners, PDAs, or virtual assistants.

And they were happy.

Since returning home, I have been reflecting on this experience and noting that many Americans would say that their ultimate goal is to find happiness through an American version of living. Many of us consume much of our lives getting ready to live, because we hold a strong belief that we first need to accumulate enough money, property, achievements, status, success, time...before we can get to living the simpler life we yearn for. This is a real version of The Fisherman's Parable (if you aren't familiar with it, Google it).

Coaches offer hope. Helping people sort through important questions like this is at the heart of the work that coaches do. Coaching professionals help people envision the sort of life they want to live, and then move to the hard work of helping them do something about it. Ends up that many of the restrictions that keep people from their ideal way of living are often self-imposed, or self-created.

As Americans, we tend to see ourselves as the experts in living the good life. For me, it took a visit to the other side of the world to discover that through having very little, one can have a lot.