



# Finding Its Feet

Brian Thacker finds the booming popularity of north-west Vietnam reaping economic rewards

**B**y the fifth shot of rice wine I'm ready for deep-fried chicken feet. Our lunch is served on the floor of a simple stilted house in Na Bai, north-west Vietnam. The floor later serves as the bedroom for our homestay with a local family. Although just three hours from Hanoi, tourists are only beginning to discover this traditional community surrounded by steep-terraced rice fields.

There are many similar villages in the surrounding provinces. With their mountain landscapes and colourful ethnic cultures, they're ideal for programmes based on sustainable tourism – enabling travellers to experience the world through ordinary citizens' eyes while contributing directly to the community.

The north-west has only recently experienced the kind of tourism growth other parts of Vietnam have seen for a decade. Organisations such as Dutch-based SNV facilitate tourism education by organising homestays and offering training in food preparation, tour guiding, first aid and garbage collection.

Development of these areas as trekking and homestay destinations has had indirect benefits, such as improved roads and better access to clean water, sanitation and electricity.

On the wall of our residence is a photo of a large tour group. "They stayed here," our host says. He can't stop smiling: he can now send his children to school, buy them clothes and toys, and afford what seems an endless supply of rice wine and chicken feet. 🍷

**Our host can't stop smiling: he can now send his children to school**

## DO YOUR PART FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

- LEARN about the culture and people of the country and region you plan to visit
- RESPECT the local customs and traditions
- CONTRIBUTE to tolerance and understanding between cultures
- SUPPORT local economies by purchasing locally made products and using local services
- CONSERVE natural resources by actively seeking out environmentally conscious businesses