

# RICE-ROOTS

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- "Clean up the World" 2
- MTV EXIT's Simple Plan
- New School Appeal

## Also in this issue:

- Volunteer story
- 1st Sapa Half Marathon

## With assistance from:

### Linda Silmalis

Chief Reporter of the  
Sunday Telegraph  
(Australia's best selling  
newspaper)

### Andrew Kelly

Director of Wild Dog Books  
(An Australian children's  
book publisher)



## Sapa O'Chau Takes On The World!!

It's been a huge last few months for Sapa O'Chau founder, Shu Tan, who travelled overseas for the first time with invitations to two significant international forums. The first stop was South Korea where she represented Vietnam at the Asian Social Entrepreneurs Summit (ASES2012), held biennially to help young social entrepreneurs to expand their network and create a co-operative ecosystem for governments, private companies, NGOs and social enterprises across Asia. Shu described the weeklong trip as a fantastic opportunity. "It was very exciting for me," she said. "Not only could I share Sapa O'Chau's work, I learnt a lot about other organisations and

what they are doing. I also learnt a bit about South Korea and its culture. It's a great place. Lots of trees!"

Shu returned to Sapa only to be flying out again, this time to the United Kingdom for a three-day workshop hosted by the Overseas Development Institute in London and led by its Research Fellow, Dr. Caroline Harper. The workshop focused on finalising the research instruments to be used in their 'Transforming the Lives of Adolescent Girls' programme, a four-year UKaid funded project putting the spotlight on adolescence as a pivotal life phase. Some of the themes being explored include laws, policies and cultural practices preventing young girls

from reaching their full potential. The goal of the work is to improve development outcomes for girls, breaking inter-generational poverty and providing a catalyst for change. Harper invited Shu to attend in order to share her ideas and experience of working with disadvantaged minority youths, paying all costs. With the workshop over, Shu flew back to Vietnam and headed out to remote Ha Giang province where she worked as a translator for the ODI research team. "They need somebody who can speak to local people," she said. "It has been a super busy time, but a good experience for me to learn about what is going on abroad and how I can better help Sapa's next generation."



Shu in London



# Rice-Roots Environmental Activism



H'mong basket full of litter



Let's keep it this beautiful!



"Climb every mountain higher!"



Mr. Do finishing!

Following the success of our 'Clean Up the World' event in 2011, Sapa O'Chau lead a massive community effort on the 22nd & 23rd of September as part of the 'Clean Up the World Weekend' campaign which each year mobilises over 30 million volunteers from all around the globe to improve their local environment.

On the Saturday, our students and volunteers cleared the valley of rubbish as they trekked through Lao Chai and Ta Van villages. Then on Sunday they tackled Cat Cat and Xin Chai.

It was no easy task. Saturday's sun shone hot in the sky, while Sunday

brought torrential rains, but the young participants demonstrated impressive resolve, filling enough H'mong baskets with candy wrappers, plastic bags, empty bottles and other roadside refuse to fill an entire pick-up truck each day.

Once all hands were thoroughly scrubbed there was a 'Thank You Party' for the participants and all the event sponsors; [Victoria Hotel](#), [Topas Ecolodge](#), [Delta Group](#), [My Way Travel](#), [Hmong Sisters](#) and [Eddiez](#).

'Clean Up the World' founder [Ian Kiernan](#) sent a personal message to Sapa O'Chau. Kiernan, speaking from Australia,

said he admired the initiative shown. "We greatly appreciate the commitment of the kids," he said. "It is apparent that they really 'get it' in relation to the importance of the environment while becoming more connected to Western influences and products. I have had connection with the H'mong people and am aware of their high standards of behaviour as world citizens. They have just hooked on to the 'Clean Up the World' concept and by organising theirs, are taking a significant step in adjusting to the changes taking place in their world. Congratulations. You have our fullest support."

## Running for Sapa O'Chau

This September tourists may have seen a young H'mong boy running laps around the Sapa lake. Sapa O'Chau can reveal that this was 21-year-old 'Mr. Do', our Café manager! The running sessions were part of Do's training regime ahead of taking part in the inaugural '[Sapa 21 KM Challenge](#)'. Organised by the Hanoi Red River Runners, the September 9th event was the brainchild of '[Topas Travel](#)' general director Peter Jensen, who himself is an avid runner. The first of its kind to be held in Sapa, Jensen said he wanted to keep it small before looking to launch a larger one next year. Do was among 50 people to take part, including fellow staff member 'Mr. Pay'.

Runners paid an entry fee, with [Topas Ecolodge](#) providing subsidised accommodation and Ratraco Train helping out with transportation. Runners were treated to an energizing song and dance session by Sapa O'Chau students before racing off from Sapa's sports stadium towards the finishing line at the Ecolodge. Jensen said many of the runners had described the route as among the most spectacular they had ever raced. "It was just before harvest time, so the fields were all green," he said. "Some had to run around water buffalo and all had the local H'mong and Dao people cheering them on as they ran through the villages." Jensen said Do

and Pay were ahead of the pack at the start until he passed them half way through the race. "They raced out as fast as they could, but I later passed them," he said. Do said he had stopped to buy some food! "I was running really fast but then I got hungry, so I bought some noodles to eat," he said. "Otherwise maybe I could have come first." Do clocked a respectable 2:22:33, coming 22<sup>nd</sup> while Pay came in at 2:16:02. Winner, Luke Kenny crossed the line at 1:21:58 while Jensen was not far behind at 1:42:01. Despite being a trial run, the event raised an impressive \$750 for Sapa O'Chau.



Mr. Do's tasty noodles!



# A Simple Plan

This summer something remarkable happened. [MTV EXIT](#) came to Sapa scouting for locations to make a documentary about human trafficking with the multi-platinum selling Canadian rock band [Simple Plan](#) and we offered to help them find the best locations.

MTV EXIT (End Exploitation and Trafficking) is an awareness campaign targeting human trafficking and modern day slavery. It uses MTV's globally recognised brand to highlight these issues. Human trafficking is a major problem in communities like ours that are close to international borders.

When they heard about our work with at-risk children, they invited us to participate.

As part of their campaign, they were also organising a massive charity concert, MTV EXIT LIVE, at the National Stadium in Hanoi, to be held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May.

Our volunteers thought it would be a fantastic idea to take our students to the show, and Sapa O'Chau took up the challenge.

## School's Out For Summer

Taking 30 kids to Hanoi wasn't going to be free, or easy, especially at short notice, so we started a fundraising campaign to raise \$500 dollars in 20 days (just enough for an old bus and food for the kids). Amazingly, within a week we had raised over \$1000 and the trip was given the green light. Thanks to [TNH Vietnam](#) and [Hanoi Grapevine](#) for online promotion and the kind donations of many special people.

Teaming up with [Topas Travel](#) we chartered a comfy sleeper coach, our hotel on wheels, and left late Friday evening.

Arriving early Saturday morning in the capitol, the first treat of the day was a hot bowl of Pho Bo, Hanoi's traditional beef noodle soup.

We visited the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum to pay our respects, and then to the Workers Theatre on Trang Tien Street for an MTV EXIT multi-media art exhibition where our students watched 'Enslaved', an awareness documentary presented by Vietnamese pop star [My Tam](#), and took part in an interactive theatre workshop.

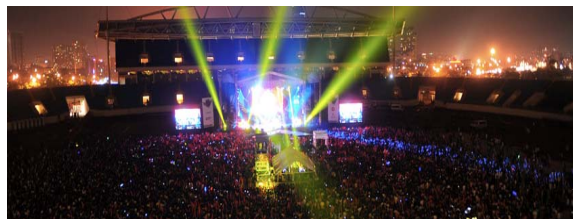
After sandwiches and Trang Tien's famous ice-cream we headed to the Museum of Ethnology where our students learnt about the 54 ethnic groups that make up Vietnam's rich culture. The highlight was a replica H'mong house!

## Imagine the population of Sapa in one place

That night the National Stadium held over 40,000 people and our students had VIP tickets! The international line-up included South Korean popstars [Brown Eyed Girls](#) and Australia's [Kate Miller-Heidke](#). The atmosphere was electric!

Five lucky students were invited back-stage, accompanied by Peter and Shu. In the VIP lounge they met with US Ambassador to ASEAN, [David L. Carden](#), and told off Peter for nibbling at the buffet! They also met AusAID Minister-Counsellor [Michael Wilson](#) (who later sang a song with Kate on stage). While chatting to members of Kate's band, we invited them to Sapa - and the band accepted! ([Watch the Video here](#)).

The night ended with Simple Plan's headline performance. What a show! All the students were blown away. Having never left Sapa before, it had been quite a day. They were ecstatic, exhausted and slept soundly on the drive home.



Sapa O'Chau at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum



Time for reflection at the MTV EXIT exhibition



Students with the US ambassador to ASEAN



Backstage during Kate's set



The kids rocking out!



Simple Plan at the Sapa O'Chau Café.



Students of Sapa O'Chau singing along with Simple Plan

## Saparadise

Two days later the action started again. It was now time for Simple Plan to visit us! The band volunteered at the Centre with a lesson entitled 'The 3 Rules of Safe Migration'. (1. Don't Rush 2. Don't be afraid to ask questions. 3. Don't give away your possessions.)

After lunch at the Sapa O'Chau Café our trainees took the band trekking, each member accompanied by their own guide, and we walked to the Sapa O'Chau Homestay in Lao Chai village. "That's where I walk," joked frontman, [Pierre Bouvier](#), "I walk with the buffalo!"

Finally, there was a Simple Plan acoustic set at [Topas Ecolodge](#). Our students were the stars as they joined the band for a beautiful rendition of the hit single, 'Summer Paradise'.

"It was an extremely special experience for the Simple Plan boys and the crew," said [Matt Love](#), MTV EXIT Campaign Director. "Sapa O'Chau is doing extraordinary work which will hopefully prevent human trafficking. And on top of it all, Sapa was beautiful – what an incredible, stunning place to visit!"

[Watch out for the 'MTV EXIT Special: Simple Plan in Vietnam'](#)

## Sapa O'Chau Cafe going from Strength to Strength!

"Arriving at Sapa O'Chau early on the first day of our one month volunteer placement, we were unsure of what to expect. We needn't have worried! Greeted by Shu Tan and the H'mong staff, we quickly felt among friends.

Our mission? To teach kitchen hygiene and cooking skills to the staff, as well as general 'Cafe and Trekking conversation skills'.

Happy, smiling faces greeted us each morning as we began our day. Impromptu English lessons on

the 'Rice-Terrace' drew in many young Hmong children, all eager to learn new phrases and vocabulary.

Highlights for us were many. Teaching basic cooking techniques and preparing meals with the students for our daily lunches was a joy as they were very enthusiastic! Sometimes elaborate, sometimes simple, our Family Meals were always delicious!

The students' hunger for language acquisition is even greater than their hunger for a good meal. These appreciative children realize how



Family Meal at the Sapa O'Chau Café for volunteers and staff

lucky they are to be a part of Sapa O'Chau, just as we do.

Leaving, we hope we are 'leaving more than just footprints!' Certainly the children of Sapa left a big impression on our hearts."

**Chris & Becky Steere, Aspen, CO, USA**  
18<sup>th</sup> Oct 2012

### Sapa O'Chau Cafe: Restaurant Reviews

08 Thac Bac Street, Sapa, Vietnam  
+84 203 771 166 Website E-mail Add



Ranked #1 of 51 restaurants in Sapa

25 Reviews

Price range: 3 AUD - 5 AUD

Cuisines: Tea Room

Good for: Child-friendly, Outdoor seating

[Update restaurant details](#)



Thanks to the support of volunteers like Becky & Chris, the great work of our staff and the appreciation of our guests, the Sapa O'Chau Café is currently ranked number one on TripAdvisor!

[Your review could help us too :\)](#)



### Do you want to support us?



Pledge a Donation to Sapa O'Chau!  
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## Sapa O'Chau Needs Your Help! We Need A New School

For the past two and half years, a team of passionate volunteers and locals operating out of the Sapa O'Chau Centre have been providing some of the region's most disadvantaged minority children the chance for a better life.

Teaching under the guidance of Shu & Peter, the volunteers cover English, Vietnamese and H'mong literacy, mathematics, vocational training, art, self-confidence, human trafficking awareness, domestic violence and personal health.

Opened in June 2010 with just 15 students, the word soon got around town and numbers exploded. At one stage, volunteers were trying to teach over 100 students, many of whom were living on site. To ensure the most needy did not miss out, the Centre was closed to the public and a class of 35 was selected. The youngest student is 12 years old but some are young adults. Some were found by Shu selling in the streets, while others were brought to us by concerned tourists.

The classes have been held in an old, dilapidated building rented in Hoang Lien Street. In the time the

Centre has been open, the building has been rapidly deteriorating (while the rent has been going up!) The ceilings have become so rotten that they sag, while the walls are in desperate need of a paint-job. The student dorms are dark and cramped and let's not even mention the condition of the communal kitchen and washing facilities. The students never complain, but we at Sapa O'Chau think they deserve better.

As a result, we have secured a new 30+ room premises (a former hotel and brothel!) Despite its questionable past, it has huge potential. There are separate areas to house the boys and girls and a detached building for volunteers. A separate building, previously used as a meeting/conference room, will be converted into 3 classrooms.

We urgently need to raise \$20,000 to complete the first stage of the renovations to make it livable and the dreams of our students alive. The funds will pay for painting the interior and exterior of the buildings and an urgent upgrade of the kitchen. We also want to create a library room for the students to study and read. The funds will be used to pay for books and 10 computers. While the school

currently relies heavily on short-term volunteers to teach its students, we wish to pay for a full-time Vietnamese teacher. While the school helps keep children safe and off the streets, its long-term goal is to re-integrate the students into local High Schools to be able to gain their Vietnamese educational diplomas.

"Any donation is welcomed," says Shu. "By donating to this appeal, you will be helping keep children off the streets where they are at risk of being trafficked and abused. We want to be able to show them that it is possible to realise their dreams. That they don't have to wander the streets selling. We are the bridge between the life they have now, and the fulfilling one they can have."

If you would like to help us, please make a donation to the [Sapa O'Chau New School Appeal](#) via our PayPal. Also, become our friend on Facebook or follow us on Twitter to keep updated on our progress! And don't forget to tell your friends to come visit us when in town.

In the H'mong language, O'Chau means thank you! Thank you for reading.

### Contact Us!



[www.sapaochau.org](http://www.sapaochau.org)

General enquiries:  
[info@sapaochau.org](mailto:info@sapaochau.org)

Email: [info@sapaochau.org](mailto:info@sapaochau.org) Telephone: +84 203 771  
166 Mobile: +84 915 351 479

Add: 08 Thac Bac Street, Sapa Town, Lao Cai, Vietnam

