

# WOMAN

An all girl trek guide group, updates from the Women's Museum, and a review of Emily Maguire's *Fishing for Tigers*



## The Sapa Sisters

"When a woman has a safe, well-paid job it is easier to become independent if she needs to leave her husband. Or maybe the husband values her more as the main source of income in the family. It's power." Empowerment, according to Ylva Landoff Lindberg, drives the homegrown trek guiding company, Sapa Sisters. The organisation, founded in 2009, was initially an effort to level out the unequal pay for Hmong guides in northern Vietnam's mountainous region. It's here that a constant influx of travellers are interested in trekking, but tour companies are almost exclusively run by agencies capitalising on the poor education of native guides.

When Ylva and the late Radek Stypczynski started talking business with the four young Hmong women who would become co-founders of Sapa Sisters — Chi, Lang Yang, Lan Do and Zao — the women were working

for various Vietnamese run hotels and tour companies, getting paid a pathetically small percentage of the profits.

"It was a problem," Ylva says, for the women she first met in 2005 and with whom she had gradually built close friendships over the years. "We had to go with them to different hotels and advocate... Sapa Sisters started so they could cut out the middle man and take all the money from tours for themselves."

Though in some cases in the world, the more money you come across the more problems you see, in Sapa for the 17 Hmong women employed to guide private treks through the misty valleys of their home, the income saves their lives. Because of the ongoing, increasing rate of female trafficking to China, Hmong women in Sapa are at risk. The finances from Sapa Sisters allow

the women to not only put money in a bank account, buy their own computers, or renovate their homes, it also gives them good reason not to be lured over the border. The work provides a shield of self-confidence.

"The bigger change is in their pride," Ylva says. "Before they were so shy in contacting the authorities. They still are, but now they know they have something good going on."

Sapa Sisters' treks consist of one guide per group and are customised to the interests and requirements of each group. Over the course of the last year, the organisation that started as a small group of friends has built itself up to become a professional business. Yet the final step of official accreditation demands a deposit of money, the sum of which is outside the means of the group. To help the sisters out in their fundraising efforts, visit [indiegogo.com/sapa-sisters](http://indiegogo.com/sapa-sisters).