

# Chapter 6:

## *Van Community and Intrepid Travel.*

### Contents.

6.1	<i>Background to the Research Setting.</i>	2
6.1.1	<i>Van community .</i>	2
6.1.2	<i>Livelihoods of village households.</i>	3
6.1.3	<i>Changes in the community.</i>	4
6.1.4.	<i>Intrepid Travellers.</i>	5
6.1.5	<i>The Local Operator- Buffalo Tours.</i>	5
6.2	<i>Tourism in Van.</i>	6
6.2.1	<i>History of tourism in Van.</i>	6
6.2.2	<i>A description of an Intrepid trip to Van. .</i>	7
6.3	<i>Economic Outcomes for Van.</i>	9
6.3.1	<i>Intrepid trips and household income.</i>	10
6.3.2	<i>Effect on household of income obtained from Intrepid trips.</i>	10
6.4	<i>Socio-Cultural Outcomes for Van.</i>	11
6.4.1	<i>Perceptions of village leaders.</i>	12
6.4.2	<i>Perceptions of households not involved in Intrepid trips.</i>	13
6.4.3	<i>Perception of the hosting household towards Intrepid trips.</i>	13
6.5	<i>Physical Outcomes for Van.</i>	14
6.6	<i>Outcomes for Travellers.</i>	15
6.1.1	<i>Travellers expectations.</i>	15
6.1.2	<i>Factors that determined travellers village experience.</i>	16
6.7	<i>Causal factors that determined the outcomes obtained by Van.</i>	17
6.7.1	<i>Factors determined by Intrepid Travel and Buffalo Tours..</i>	17
6.7.2	<i>Factors determined by Van. .</i>	18
6.8	<i>Impacts Matrix.</i>	22
6.9	<i>Recommendations.</i>	23

**A note on exchange rates:**

The following currencies are referred to in this report. Their approximate exchange rate to the Australian dollar (AUD) as of January, 2002, are shown below:

Malaysian Ringgit (MYR)    AUD\$1 = 1.97

Vietnamese Dong (VND)    AUD\$1 = 8,182.50

Thai Baht (THB)            AUD\$1 = 22.80

## ***6. Van Community and Intrepid Travel.***

### **6.1 Background to the Research Setting.**

#### **6.1.1 The Van community.**

Van is a large White Thai village that Intrepid visits as part of its adventure trip, “Vietnam Adventure”. Buffalo Tours, a local tourism operator based in Hanoi (Northern Vietnam), operates the trekking trip for Intrepid Travel. Travellers stay at Van village on the first night of a three day trek completed near the end of their trip.

The village is located in the far North Western corner of Vietnam, approximately twenty-four kilometers from the town of Mai Chau. Mai Chau is a four hour drive from Hanoi. Access to the village is via a rough dirt track which travellers walk up as part of their trek into the village.

The White Thai of the Mai Chau area are one of the small Thai ethnic groups in Vietnam. They are thought to have migrated to Vietnam in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, settling in fertile valleys, river basins and beside streams. The Thai in Vietnam number over one million people and are officially listed as one of the fifty-four ethnic groups by the General Department of Statistics. They are well known for their expert rice farming techniques, distinctive dress standards, unique arts and crafts and for their striking wooden houses built on stilts. Many of these material elements of Thai culture are features of life in Van, although few are overtly displayed as part of the programme completed by Intrepid groups.

The village of Van is situated in a broad valley surrounded by the mountains of Pu Hooc and Prong Son. Both of these mountains rise steeply from the valley floor providing a spectacular backdrop to the village. The one hundred and twenty households that make up the community are geographically dispersed over a large area and surround the extensive rice fields that sustain the livelihoods of the majority of people in the community. About six hundred people live in the community.

Van village is made up of three clans, including the Ha Clan, Dinh Cong Clan and the Ngan Van Clan. The Ha Clan, the largest in the village also has two sub groups which are the Ha Van and the Ha Cong. Mrs Oong, the matriarch of the household where Intrepid groups stay, belongs to the Ha Clan. The majority of people in leadership positions within the village belong to either the Ha Clan or the Dinh Cong Clan.

Administratively the village of Van is controlled by the Pieng Ve Commune peoples committee, Mai Chau District peoples committee, Hoa Binh provincial peoples committee and the national government of Vietnam.

The village cooperative is the dominant political organisation within the community. The cooperative is very much like the village council and is responsible for the running of the village. It is made up of the chairman, vice chairman, village chief, accountant, supervisor and five production managers. Decisions made by the cooperative are reported to the Pieng Ve Commune peoples committee by the village chief. The five production managers are each responsible for particular sections of the village's rice fields, providing fertilizers and seeds for people to plant. Other organizations in the village include the elderly union, youth union and the women's union.

### **6.1.2 Livelihoods of village households.**

Like the majority of White Thai villages the people of Van are predominantly rice farmers and have been since the start of their village approximately 150 years ago. Rice planting occurs in February and June and is harvested twice a year in May and September. Rice is harvested for subsistence purposes only and is not sold in markets or used to earn a cash income.

The allocation of village rice fields is determined by the village cooperative, who allocate approximately three hundred square metres to every member of each household. Those household members who earn a living from other means such as teaching or other professions do not receive their allocated quota of rice, although others in the house still do.

The forest that surrounds the village is also allocated to village members. Each obtains approximately 14,000 square metres to do with as they please, although permission is needed from the commune if large trees are to be cleared for house building. Those households who still rely on

subsistence agriculture use this land to grow crops such as maize, manioc and ground nuts, which they sell to wholesale collectors from Hoa Binh, or at local markets.

According to the village chief, an overwhelming number of households in the village still rely on subsistence agriculture, especially the rice harvest. Only a very small percentage of households rely on wage labor to support their families. The house where Intrepid groups stay is one of these households.

### **6.1.3 Changes in the community.**

While Van still resembles a classic peasant rural community reliant on subsistence agriculture, it would be naive to suggest it is a remote village cut off from mainstream Vietnam society. The changes that have occurred in the community over the past thirty years have ensured that the people of Van now have physical access to surrounding towns, such as Mai Chau, and electronic access through television and radio to mainstream Vietnamese society.

The road into Van was built in 1968, as part of military operations during the Vietnam War. People from Van village fought along side the Vietnamese. The road provides a transport link between Van village and Mai Chau, the largest town in the surrounding district. This road link has opened up trade and educational opportunities for the people of the village. One of the children in the household where Intrepid groups stay lives in Mai Chau during the week to attend high school. Building materials such as roof tiles, which are now commonly used on new households in the community, all come from Mai Chau. A daily bus service now operates between the neighbouring village of Boa La and Mai Chau.

The other pervasive influence of change that has effected the village. is the introduction of television into the community. Many houses visited as part of this research had television. The majority of programmes were in Vietnamese while some were in French.

Main electricity was connected to the village in the year 2000 and provides the village with power 24 hours a day. Before this time, generators provided energy although they were only used at night, and according to Mrs Oong, notoriously unreliable.

The dress and interests of young people in the community reflect the influence of television

and other media within the community. Programmes such as the Premier League Football are very popular among young people and most have attached posters of famous football stars on the walls of their homes. Vietnamese rock stars are also popular amongst young people.

The integration of the village into the dominant Viet Kinh culture is reflected in the fact that nobody in the village can write in Thai script any longer. This script is based on Sanskrit and has now been lost to the village community. Everyone in the community can speak Vietnamese.

The other major influence of change is the administrative system of the village. This involves many layers, and largely controls the roles and movements of people within the community, including visiting tourists. While the people of Van are proud of their White Thai heritage, they are also happy to enjoy the advantages of being part of the dominant Vietnamese society, into which they have been integrated.

Any assessment of Intrepid's impact within the community needs to consider that tourism is only one of the myriad forces of social change transforming life within Van.

#### **6.1.4 Intrepid travellers.**

One hundred and ninety-one travellers visited Van on Intrepid trips between 1/1/2001 and 1/7/2001. The majority of these (63%) were female and under the age of forty (67%). Nearly 60% were from Australia with the second largest grouping of travellers coming from Great Britain (15%). Small numbers came from the U.S.A, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden and South Africa. Almost all of the travellers were professionally employed in occupations such as healthcare, hospitality and tourism, education, sales and marketing and management. Nearly 10% of travellers who attended Intrepid trips were university students.

Passenger's motivations for doing the 'Vietnam Adventure' trip varied. Of the two groups surveyed, half (n=9) identified the opportunity to participate in a rural village stay as one of their motivations for choosing the trip. Others were attracted by the prospect of doing a trek while the majority identified Intrepid's style of travel as a key factor in their decision to choose the trip.

#### **6.1.5 The Local Operator – Buffalo Tours.**

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Buffalo Tours are the local tour operator that runs the Mai Chau trek for Intrepid. They are

responsible for organizing all aspects of the trip including the itinerary. Buffalo Tours also provide a guide who accompanies the group during the trek.

Tran Trong Kien founded Buffalo Tours in 1994 after requests from Intrepid to develop a trek in Northern Vietnam. This association grew to include the Mai Chau trek, which was originally designed by a government organisation called the Hanoi Youth Tourism Company.

Buffalo Tours have also been involved in various projects in the rural communities they visit, including Van village. These projects have involved the donation of a water buffalo to poor families and the running of health clinics in ethnic minority communities such as Van.

Since its humble beginnings in 1994, Buffalo Tours has expanded substantially to offer tours throughout Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and China, and now has offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Siem Reap. Besides the Mai Chau trek the company operates other Intrepid products including Roam Asia (trips catering for 18-35 year olds) and Alternative Adventures (organized itineraries for independent travellers).

## **6.2 Tourism in Van.**

### **6.2.1 History of tourism in Van.**

The programme that Intrepid groups complete in Van village was organized by Tran Trong Kien. The first Intrepid trips that ran to the village began in 1996 but only occurred every couple of months. When Kien first designed the trips he did not envisage that they would run more frequently than once a month. However, by 1998 Intrepid groups were visiting the village every week.

As part of developing the trip, Kien visited the village on several occasions and talked to different households within the community. In an attempt to lesson any disruption that may occur to the community, he decided on a geographical section of the village which was slightly removed from the main body of houses that form the nucleus of the community. After choosing this section of the village, which is one of the most aesthetically pleasing in the village, he approached houses within this section to see if they were interested in having tourists stay at their households.

According to Kien, most showed some interest but were generally ambivalent about taking

tourists. Mrs Oong's, was one of the few households who were particularly enthusiastic. This suited Kien as Mrs Oong was a retired primary school teacher and her husband a well-known musician. As a highly educated household, they were more aware of the needs of Western travellers and their large clean household would accommodate Intrepid groups of up to twelve people.

On agreeing to take travellers the household then went through the exhaustive process of applying for a business license from the provincial government of Hoa Binh. This process involved visits from officials from the provincial government (Hoa Binh), district committee (Mai Chau) the local commune (Pieng Ve) and the village cooperative. Police also visited the household as part of a security assessment.

The programme in Van has changed only slightly since trips first came to the village. This change has seen a small reduction in local involvement. According to Kien the original trips to the village did involve some traditional Thai dancing but these stopped when Thai dancing was offered at Lac Village, the final village where travellers stay on their three day trek.

Intrepid groups continue to stay at the same household although the interaction between the hosting family and Intrepid leaders and groups appears to have suffered as leaders no longer visit the community on a consistent basis . Travellers continue to do a village walk on the second morning of their stay in the community.

Since Intrepid groups began visiting the village there has been another household who has obtained a license to house tourists, however the number of tourists who stay at this household are very low. Estimates given by the head of this household suggest that generally between three and five tourists stay in their household once a month.

### **6.2.2 A description of an Intrepid trip to Van.**

After a four-hour bus drive from Hanoi the Intrepid group reaches the district town of Mai Chau where permits are obtained to complete the trek in the Mai Chau district. Arrangements are made for a local man to transport the food and water requirements for the trek, by motorbike to the villages where the group will stay.



From Mai Chau the bus follows a sealed road which becomes a bumpy dirt road for sixteen kilometers. Once the road becomes too rough, travellers disembark and begin an eight kilometre trek into Van, which takes about two hours. During the trek travellers pass through the villages of Xom Pet, Xom Peo, Ban Buac, and Xom Ve. All are White Thai villages.

Trip travellers enter the village from the southern section and pass through several clusters of houses, circulating around a section of rice fields before meandering into another collection of houses. A few people in the village wave and say hello to the travellers as they walk by, although most just continue with their activities.

On arriving at Mrs Oong's house the Buffalo guide normally introduces the group to Mrs Oong, the matriarch of the house. She is incredibly welcoming and cheerful to everyone. The Buffalo guide indicates where the toilet and washing facilities are and explains that travellers are not to wear shoes in the house nor should they point their feet at the ancestral shrine.

According to my observations, travellers washed, slept or played cards, before dinner which is served around 7pm. Mrs Oong and a few others in the family join the group for a shot of rice wine to welcome them to the household. All trip travellers and the Intrepid leader sit together on the floor, while the family, the cook and the local Buffalo guide have their meals separately. Dinner includes servings of home made spring rolls, vegetable soup, meat dishes, omelets and large bowls of rice.

After dinner the local guide provides a little background on the White Thai people and the family, although it is very general and not particularly informative. After this, most of the group drift off to their beds to read or sleep. At 9pm the family begin erecting the mosquito nets around each bed and by 10pm most people are sleeping soundly, tired from the day's activities.

The next morning the group wakes by 7am. Breakfast is served around 8am. At 9.30 the Buffalo guide takes the travellers for a walk around the village, although both walks I attended did not really go through the main part of the village and ventured off into several other villages. The guide I observed, stopped at several points to discuss a few things about the village and Thai people. It was very general and not really specific about the village except for its size and

population. There is very little interaction with local people on this walk except for the occasional wave from a local person working out in the fields. The walk normally takes about one and half-hours.

On the return to the household, travellers have free time until lunch is served at 12.30pm, some sleep, others play cards or sit around and chat. Due to the extreme heat of the day, it is normally decided by the Intrepid leader and Buffalo Guide to leave the homestay at about three in the afternoon. Until that time most, including Mrs Oong and her family, stop for a sleep.

At 3pm the group is packed and ready, Mrs Oong and her family farewell them and then they head off to the next homestay in Xo village which is a further two hour walk along the dirt road that brought the group into Van.

## **6.3 Economic Outcomes for Van**

The economic outcomes for the village community were determined by identifying:

- 6 The income obtained by the household from Intrepid visits.
- 7 Effect on the household of income obtained from Intrepid trips.

The economic benefits of Intrepid trips to Van only accrue to one household and do not provide any direct benefit to the community. The economic benefits to this household are substantial and have contributed greatly to the opportunities available to its members.

### **6.3.1 Intrepid trips and household income.**

The household involved in Intrepid trips receives a payment of 40,000VND per trip participant for providing the homestay accommodation. During the first six months of 2001 the household accommodating tourists received payments totalling 7,640,000VND for 191 travellers. The significance of this payment is highlighted by the wage paid to the village chief Ding Cong Hahn who receives 40, 000VND per month.

Costs incurred for the household when hosting Intrepid groups includes:

- 6 Business license- 550,000VND per year.
- 7 Revenue Tax- 100,000VND per month irrespective of whether tourists visit or not. Between

1994-98 this tax had been set at 50% of total income earned from tourism.

Even taking these costs into account the economic benefits to the household are still very substantial at 6, 815,000VND for the first six months of 2001.

The household does not incur any costs relating to the food and water consumed by travellers during their time in the homestay as they are supplied by Buffalo Tours. Buffalo Tours also supply a cook who accompanies the group for two nights.

The economic benefits from tourism supplement the income obtained by the household from other sources, including the wages paid to Mr Oong, her daughter Ha Thi Hong Ky (who teaches in the local school and continues to live with her parents) and Mrs Oong's pension. Several of the other daughters who also teach but live away from the village occasionally send a small amount of money occasionally back to the family. According to Mrs Oong, the income earned from tourism accounts for over 80% of the aggregate weekly income earned by the family.

### **6.3.2 Effect on household of income obtained from Intrepid trips.**

The economic benefits from tourism have been spent on schooling for the household's children, household goods and the employment of labor during rice harvesting and planting. According to Mrs Oong the most important benefit is the schooling provided to her children. This includes the university education of her daughters, Ha Thi Hong Ky and Ha Thi Hong Phu, and the payment of school fees for her son, Ha Duc Inh, who is completing high school studies in Mai Chau. In fact it is most unlikely that Ha Thi Hong Ky or Ha Thi Hong Phu would have attended university if not for Intrepid trips, as the family simply could not have afforded it.

Money obtained from Intrepid's trips is also spent on buying household goods such as fans and mattresses. Some is spent on fertilizers for their rice fields and allows the family to hire labour from the village during rice harvesting in September and rice planting in February. Declining harvests have seen the introduction of fertilizers, which help maintain yields. Without the income from tourism, Mrs Oong would not be able to maintain a rice crop as the members of her household are either too old, working, or still completing schooling. No productive use is made of the forest area that is allocated to the family.

The impact of Intrepid trips on this household is substantial, particularly the educational opportunities that have become available to some of its members. The consistent income obtained from tourism has reinforced the family's position within the wealthier sections of the community, a position that should be maintained into the future given the investment the family has made towards educating its younger members.

Interviews conducted with village leaders highlight that all believe that the village community should receive some economic benefit from Intrepid's visits to the village. This was the case between 1994 and 1998 when the cooperative received 15% of the taxes Mrs Oong (hosting household for Intrepid groups) paid to the Pieng Ve commune. However since the changes in the tax structure in 1998 the cooperative has not received any benefit from visiting tourists to the community.

## **6.4 Socio-cultural Outcomes for Van.**

The socio-cultural outcomes for the village community from Intrepid's trips were assessed according to:

- Perceptions of village leaders.
- Perceptions of households not involved in Intrepid trips.
- Perceptions of the hosting household towards Intrepid trips.

The limited programme completed by Intrepid groups while in the village and the lack of local involvement limits the socio-cultural outcomes and impact of Intrepid trips on the community. During the interviews with village leaders and households most were ambivalent about having Intrepid groups stay in the community and were not concerned that the benefits of Intrepid trips flowed to only one household. These interviews revealed that Intrepid's visits to the community were having very little effect on any of the following:

- daily lifestyles of people.
- Arts and crafts practiced.
- Intra -village relationships.

- Political or management structures.
- Women.
- Young people.

#### **6.4.1 Perceptions of village leaders.**

Village leaders interviewed as part of this research included: Mr Dinh Cong Hahn (Village Chief), Mr Ha Cong Dung (Chairman of the Village Cooperative), Mr Ha Van Sam (Vice-Chairman of the village Cooperative), Mr Ha Cong Thoan (head of the Elderly Union), Ha Cong Thu (Head of the Youth Union) and Dinh Hu Wen (Vice-Chairman of the Women's Union).

All of these leaders believed that tourism visits involving Intrepid groups had little impact on the village. None were aware of any complaints or negative comments from people in the village about tourists staying at Mrs Oong's house although all identified activities that could make Intrepid visits more positive for local people.

Those leaders involved in the village cooperative, believed that the village as a whole could benefit more from having Intrepid groups in the community. All mentioned the fact that the cooperative no longer gets a percentage of the money from the taxes paid by the household to the local commune. All would like to see the village cooperative get some financial benefit from Intrepid visits and several leaders even nominated projects, which could be developed if these funds were available.

Mr Ha Cong Thoan mentioned that when tourists first came some of the older members of the community thought that they were all French or American and did not want them to come. However once they realized that not all tourists who came to the village were French or American, they were happy for them to be in the village. Thoan believes that tourism could contribute to the Union's activities, particularly in the form of donations of medicines or the sponsoring of activities such as a trip to visit the Elderly Union in a nearby commune.

Ha Cong Thu believed that most young people in the village were hardly even aware of the presence of tourists within the community. He said this was because at the time that tourists walk

around the village most young people are at school. He mentioned that tourists who come to the village are very polite and friendly.

Dinh Hu Wen could not identify any benefit to members of her Union from tourist visits, but was happy for tourists to come to the community and for the benefits of tourism to go to one household. She believed that women could be more involved with groups who come to the village through dance demonstrations and possibly through the development of a craft market. She explained that dancing for tourist groups would allow the women to practice their dances in readiness for village festivals and district competitions.

#### **6.4.2 Perception of households not involved in Intrepid trips.**

Interviews conducted with the seven households, highlighted that all had little or no opinion of Intrepid trips. None of these households could identify any benefits that tourist visits had made to their households. However, three were aware that a water buffalo had been donated to a household within the community and one other household mentioned that one Intrepid group had donated books to the village kindergarten.

Each household was happy for tourists to visit their village even though they did not receive any benefit and all were unconcerned that the economic benefits flowed directly to one household. They could not identify any problems caused by tourists who visited their community. Household members who had some minor interaction with tourists said that they were friendly and had not caused any trouble.

All households thought that there were not enough tourists visiting to the village to warrant them getting a business license. They explained that they were too busy with their fields and did not have time to look after tourists.

#### **6.4.3 Perception of the hosting household toward Intrepid trips.**

Interviews with Mrs Oong revealed that she was very positive about having Intrepid groups stay in her home. The main benefit she identified of hosting tourists, was the education she could provide her children. She also enjoys meeting the Intrepid leaders who come to the village, but would prefer that the same ones come regularly so that she could get to know them. She does not

talk very much to Intrepid travellers, because she cannot speak English but she is happy for them to come once a week.

She does not think that hosting tourists disrupts her house much, because tourists only visit once a week and Buffalo Tours supplies all of the food and water. She also likes the cook who comes with them and is happy to help prepare the meals. Now that she is retired, she has the time to look after the tourists who come to her house.

According to Mrs Oong, the money that she makes from tourism has also allowed her to keep producing a rice crop, as she is able to pay other people in the community to help during rice planting and harvesting.

## **6.5 Physical Outcomes for Van.**

The physical outcomes for Van village were assessed according to:

- 8 Waste and pollution related to visitation from Intrepid groups.
- 9 Local resources use related to visitation from Intrepid groups.

The physical effects of Intrepid visits are negligible, as the household hosting Intrepid groups consume few local resources while Intrepid groups are staying with them. Excluding the small amount of firewood used to cook meals and the water used for washing there are few resources consumed by the groups.

The arrangements made to transport 20 litre water drums into the community by motorbike, has greatly reduced the number of plastic water bottles used by travellers on the trek. In this system travellers refill their water bottles at each homestay from one of these drums.

There is little doubt that activities completed by Intrepid groups, including the walk around the village, would create some environmental consequences, however they would be minor and were not directly measured.

The toilet facilities used by travellers at the homestay do need to be improved as they are unhygienic. At present travellers have to squat on logs above an open pit, which is unsatisfactory and particularly impractical for the number of travellers who stay at the household. The level of

privacy afforded travellers is also unsatisfactory.

The urinary arrangements are also most unsatisfactory. Essentially the urinary is an open area where urine runs directly into the soil and is not stored in any capacity. It creates unnecessary physical and health risks. Given the number of people now visiting the site, a more permanent arrangement should be developed. Intrepid in conjunction with Buffalo Tours should instigate an appropriate system to handle the waste created by the number of visiting travellers. This would involve the building of a squat toilet that could handle all solid and urinary waste, including a building to offer travellers some privacy.

## **6.6 Outcomes for travellers.**

### **6.6.1 Travellers' expectations.**

The reaction of travellers to their Van experience was mixed. Thirteen of the eighteen travellers who completed a questionnaire on their expectations and experiences, believed that their experience met their expectations. Four however felt that their experience in Van did not meet their pre-trip expectations. Only one said that their time in Van exceeded their expectations. The following comments highlight travellers' perception of their time in Van:

“Didn't interact a lot with villagers or learn much about their lifestyle and traditions.”

(Katherine)

“The programme had many gaps and there was very little interaction with the villagers. A better background on the villages, the agriculture and the lifestyles would have been useful.”

(Bob)

“ I did not have any preconceived ideas about what it would be like. The scenery certainly surpassed anything I had imagined.”

(Chris)

“Got to experience the life of people living in the village as well as walking through the environment/ landscape.”



### 6.6.2 Factors that determined travellers' village experience.

As part of the questionnaire, travellers were asked to rank in order of importance the factors that they considered significant in determining their Van village experience. These factors were developed after discussions with travellers, Intrepid leaders, local operators, local people, and other Intrepid staff. Three responses were not fully completed and therefore not included.

**Table 6.6.2 Factors that travellers considered important in determining their Van village experience (n = 15).**

Factors.	Average Ranking	
	Most important 1	Least important 9
Role of Buffalo Tours' guides.	4.69	
Role of Intrepid leader.	7.06	
The trekking activities.	<b>3.56</b>	
Interaction with local village people.	<b>3.94</b>	
Activities conducted in the village.	4.81	
Interaction with other travellers.	5.69	
Weather.	4.69	
Trip organisation.	4.25	
Ability to cope with the physical and mental challenges posed by the trek/village stay.	6.31	

The results highlight that travellers consider their interaction with local people and the activities they completed within the village as the most important factors that determined the experience they had during their Van village stay.

## 6.7 Causal Factors that Determine the Outcomes Obtained

**by Van.**

Causal factors that determine the outcomes obtained by the community appear to be related to the political and socio-cultural structure of the community, external government policies, Buffalo Tours and Intrepid Travel. However it should be noted (as discussed in chapter 2- Research Design and Methods) that the causal statements and inferences made below are drawn from the researchers intimate knowledge of the data collected. Nevertheless it should be remembered that the statements are data based speculation and conjecture.

### 6.7.1 Factors determined by Intrepid Travel and Buffalo Tours.

- The lack of interaction.

The activities undertaken by the groups I observed were very much based at the homestay. There are no activities that develop interaction between local people and Intrepid travellers. This limits the impact, positive or negative, that Intrepid trips have on the community.

- The local operator.

The role of Buffalo Tours is one of the most decisive factors in determining what outcomes local people achieve from Intrepid visits. They are responsible for all facets of the programme. Intrepid Travel provides the clientele.

- The Intrepid Leaders.

The leaders I joined on trips, through no fault of their own, had little knowledge of the village community. Consistent and knowledgeable Intrepid leaders would dramatically alter the outcomes for travellers. Given the generalist nature of Intrepid and Buffalo trips and leaders, efforts should be made to find a local person to lead the walk around the village. During the walk they could provide a history of the village and explain the livelihoods, and political and social structure of the village.

- External supply of goods and services.

The food and water consumed by Intrepid travellers during their stay in Van is supplied by Buffalo Tours. A motorbike transports the food and water to the homestay. A cook also accompanies the group and cooks their meals for them. Although family members assist in the cooking and serving of meals, the provision of these goods by Buffalo Tours, means they are required to do very little preparation prior to the arrival of the Intrepid group.

- Level of visitation.

A maximum of one group visits the village every week. At present levels the amount of interruption and the physical presence of tourists is still so low that local people do not really consider the impacts of tourism. The relatively low level of visitation is also a factor in the lack of interest of local people in earning secondary economic benefits through activities such as the making of handicrafts including bags and baskets. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that such benefits could be substantial if properly organized.

- Arrival time and activities conducted.

Intrepid groups tend to arrive in mid to late afternoon when most people are still out in the fields or are busy doing their daily activities. A similar scenario occurs in the morning when the group participates in a walk around the village. Again this walk normally occurs around nine in the morning, when everyone is already busy doing their daily chores or activities. The group normally leaves the village in the middle of the afternoon when most people are resting or out working again.

## **6.7.2 Factors determined by the community.**

- The dispersed physical structure of the village.

Unlike other rural communities, the village of Van is very dispersed. Only a very small section of the community physically receives visitation from Intrepid travellers. If local people do see travellers it is only very briefly as they walk past them in their homes or in the fields.

The fact that Mrs Oong's house is separated from other houses means, that the group activities are confined to a small part of the village.

- The political and administrative structure that controls tourism in the village.

Obtaining a license to house tourists is a time consuming process, which requires formal approval from several People Committees at various administrative levels. Police approval is also required. Unless there is high demand for accommodation, most in the village do not believe it is worth undertaking such a procedure. With Intrepid only visiting once a week and staying at one household the impact on the general village community is very low. The state controls to a large extent how tourism will be developed.

- Family Characteristics.

The fact that the Mrs Oong is now retired, means that she has the time to cater for passenger's needs. As groups visit once a week the family has the opportunity to continue their normal subsistence activities of planting and harvesting rice. The income from tourism allows them to pay others to work their rice fields if they are too busy with tourists.

- The relatively prosperous nature of the community.

Because of the political and social structure evident in the village, there is not a great disparity of wealth amongst the majority of households. While those who work do have more disposable income and therefore more material goods, this does not affect the amount of land and agricultural harvest they can produce.

In essence, the distribution of farming lands within the community ensures that every household in the village can maintain a reasonable standard of living from their allocation of rice fields and forest. Therefore, there is not a great deal of drive amongst local people to become involved in the cash economy to help supplement their subsistence activities. People in the village do not need the extra income from hosting tourists, particularly given the low numbers who come to the village.

- Lack of business drive and cooperative nature of the community.

In many ways this is a reflection of the very structured lives that people in the community have lead. An entrepreneurial spirit is not part of the history of the community or the lifestyle of the people of Van. The attitude of households to Intrepid trips reflects the cooperative and

tolerant nature of the community. No households interviewed resented the benefits of Intrepid trips flowing to one household.

## **6.8 Impacts Matrix.**

Table 6.8 highlights the relationship between causal factors, outcomes and impacts identified in sections 6.3- 6.7. The table shows that the outcomes and impacts of Intrepid trips for local people are a result of a combination of factors. Some of these are determined by the community themselves while others are directly related to how Intrepid practically implements its trips.

The table also highlights the relationship between outcomes and impacts. In particular it demonstrates that the impacts of Intrepid trips flow directly from the outcomes obtained by local people.



## 6.9 Recommendations.

The challenge for Intrepid in Van is not necessarily to reduce its negative impacts, but to make its impact more positive. This would ensure that the community as a whole would benefit to a greater degree from having a group of twelve travellers pass through their community each week.

- Developing a code of practice.

A code of practice or a set of principles for operating overnight trips to ethnic minority communities such as Van, needs to be developed. This would ensure that the basic principles of community based tourism would be followed by all local operators who run Intrepid s trips to ethnic minority communities.

- Development of a community support fund.

The development of a community support fund has widespread approval amongst the village leadership group. Everyone in the village believes that the impact of tourism is negligible or non-existent. All of the people in leadership positions within the village believe that the broader village community should receive some benefit from tourists who come to the village, not just the house where Intrepid groups stay.

There is little doubt that the very structured leadership organizations that exist in the community such as the village cooperative, elderly union, youth union and women's union make the implementation of this a possibility. At present the benefits that come from tourism go to one household or flow out of the village to the Pieng Ve Commune via the collection of taxes. This could easily become a priority for the Intrepid Responsible Travel Coordinator within Vietnam.

- Supporting aspects of material culture such as music, dance and handicrafts.

In Van there is still a rich heritage of material culture that is practiced by local people. Opportunities exist for groups to learn more about this rich handicraft heritage. Women still make intricate weavings with the use of large looms. In several of the houses I visited, women

were making cushion covers, blankets, scarves and wall hangings. All were enthusiastic about having visitors come into their house for tea to look at the variety of goods that they made. A market could be arranged to display these goods.

Music and dance continues to be a part of village life. Two music and dance groups exist in the village. Local people I spoke to were enthusiastic about performing to tour groups, not only for the small amount of money they would receive but also for the practice in readiness for competitions.

- Monitoring of trips.

Monitoring of trips from a responsible travel perspective and a qualitative viewpoint, is important, particularly where there does not appear to be a consistent group of leaders doing the treks on a regular basis. More specific questions directly related to the period spent in Van, should be included in the leaders trip report form. This would elicit a more direct response from leaders.

- Detailed trip notes on Van for Intrepid Leaders and Travellers.

These notes could be prepared from information contained in this report and other information currently used by leaders. Such information could also be provided for travellers, similar to the trip notes that are provided to travellers before their village visits in Borneo. The irregular visits to the village from Intrepid leaders, makes this information even more relevant, particularly if the Buffalo guide provided is not familiar with the community.

- Use of a local person from the village to act as a guide during the village walk.

A local member of the community could be used to guide travellers around their community. The Buffalo guide could be used as a translator. Given the right person, it would not only add to the travellers' experience but would spread the benefits of Intrepid visits. It would also give local people the opportunity to have some direct involvement in how their village is represented.

- Regular Intrepid leaders.

The Intrepid leaders I observed had either not been to the village or had only visited the



village on one occasion. Leaders general knowledge of the village was poor, which develops an over reliance on the Buffalo guide. This is not a problem if the Buffalo guide is motivated, inspiring and has a detailed knowledge of the areas visited. However this was not evident in the Buffalo guides that lead the trips I attended. The present programme puts an unhealthy reliance on the local guide.

If Intrepid leaders are not doing the trips regularly then it is unreasonable to expect them to develop an understanding of the long term impacts of Intrepid trips. It is most unlikely that local people directly involved with Intrepid trips would be prepared to talk openly with Intrepid leaders on problems they could be experiencing.

- Shorten the trek.

The clientele participating in treks do not want long trekking trips unless the days are varied. This is certainly not the case with the Mai Chau trek. I believe the trek could easily be reduced to three days / two nights. This would require a greater focus on activities within Van and would open up the possibility of developing a far more interactive programme within the community. The second day could still involve a walk and homestay in Xo village. The third day would involve a walk back to Pom Cong, a stroll around Ban Lac, lunch at a house in Pom Cong and then travel back to Hanoi.

- The upgrading of toilet facilities.

As Intrepid groups now visit Van on a regular basis, a more permanent arrangement to handle the waste produced by a group of up to twelve people needs to be established. Funds should be provided by Intrepid in conjunction with Buffalo Tours to develop a proper pit system with a squat toilet and adequate privacy at the homestay.

- Walking on Roads.

All of the walking during the trek is on roads. This makes for a less interesting walk and inevitably spreads the group over a large distance. This was not a problem on the treks I observed as the Intrepid leader and the Buffalo guide rotated between the front and back of the group. Walking on tracks would certainly make for a far more interesting walk for travellers.

- Passenger Feedback.

I believe that feedbacks could be made into a far more effective monitoring tool. This would involve developing trip specific feedbacks and questions that addressed particular parts of trips, for example the trekking section of the 'Vietnam Adventure' trip. Such a format would provide a more sophisticated evaluation of trips by directing passenger responses to different parts of their trip.

- Water distribution system.

Assess the possibility of replicating the system of water bottle usage used on the Mai Chau trek to other treks completed by Intrepid in remote village communities.