

## Shopping For A Good Cause

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Photos: John Lim  
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Just Next Door to the Old House of Tan Ky and a stone's throw away from the popular Tam Tam restaurant, along Nguyen Thai Hoc Street in Hoi An town centre, is a quaint handicraft shop with a difference.

Once inside, you'll be attracted to the wide array of colorful handicrafts. And if you look beyond the door at the back of the shop and into the courtyard, you'll catch a glimpse of disabled crafts people working hard at their creations

Reaching Out Hoa-Nhap Handicrafts is a gift shop run by disabled people for the benefit of disabled people. The shop is the first of its kind in Vietnam.

It sells beautiful traditional craft items which are handmade by disabled crafts people from all over Vietnam, and profits are used to help the disabled community.

Tourists shopping for Vietnamese creations will be spoiled for choice – from hand-embroidered handbags and cushion covers to ceramics with beautifully-tooled metal filigré to paper-quilled photo albums.

Founded in spring 2000 by a group of disabled people, Reaching Out was started to help the disabled gain some form of independence through skills training that would provide a livelihood.

Many people with disabilities also have difficulty in getting access to education and feel excluded from society. By enabling the potential of these people, this self-help group trains them with marketable skills to make for the ones they lack.

In doing so, Reaching Out hopes to help them integrate into mainstream society and be considered as people with different abilities, rather than being disabled.

Wheelchair-bound Mr Le Nguyen Binh, founder of Reaching Out, is one good example of an individual who has risen above his situation. Mr Binh runs a computer training centre with three co-workers with similar problems. And their lack of ability in certain areas does not impede the work that they do.

It was through this realisation that Mr Binh was driven to help others with disabilities. He started by recruiting 10 disabled people and training them for four months at his center. He then sourced for companies who were willing to employ them. Of the 10 persons he trained, four were employed. And of the four employed, one now owns an internet café with support from a foreign visitor.

However, Mr Binh also realises that there are others who can be helped if they are trained. With the help of friends and others in similar situations, Reaching Out was born.

Reaching out operates on the principles of fair trade taking into account the creation of opportunities for and payment of a fair price to their disadvantaged producers; which in turn, allows them to do what they do best - to continue producing their creations.

Young disabled people are recruited and trained in embroidery, sewing, weaving, metalwork and papercraft, in a friendly supportive environment.

Although training lasts at most five months, the end result of their work is as good as those found in other shops.

Reaching Out now employs 18 local disabled crafts people, as well as a number of others who are unable to travel to their workshop and so work from home.

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This self-help group aims to be a centralized marketing service for disabled crafts people.

The shop has a fixed-price policy. "While our prices may not be as cheap as other shops in town, this is because we refuse to cut corners for the sake of a few cents – our customers can be assured that they are purchasing crafts made from high-quality materials by workers who receive training, a fair market wage plus bonuses, a daily lunch allowance and ongoing support and advice," said Mr Binh.

All profits are used to further develop their business and support community programmes for the disabled community in Vietnam.

Reaching Out welcomes visits from tour groups to view their workshop. As a self-group group, they welcome help in other ways like sponsoring a trainee, introducing them to handicraft distributors outside their country as well as help in their health support programme.

So when you are in Hoi An, pay a visit to Reaching Out, your purchase will make a difference.

### **Suffering From Haggling Fatigue?**

Visit **Reaching Out Hoa-Nhap Handicrafts Shop**, a fixed price, fair trade gift shop with a difference. You'll be pleasantly surprised at the high-quality and fine workmanship of products made by a group of disabled craftsmen. Your support is important to us. Help us reach out and assist more disabled individuals discover their hidden potential and capabilities.

At Reaching Out, all products on sale are made by disabled craftsmen.