

LIFE & STYLE

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Gaze of hope

A photographer documents the lives of Phuket's migrant workers > p2

Photo: Adriano Trapani



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Local photographer Adriano Trapani began a six-week project over the summer, the 'Gaze of Hope', to document the lives of Burmese migrants in the island's many camps.

Hope and a prayer

Uncovering the hidden world of poverty in Phuket

“A world where women suffer the indignities of not being able to support their families or being granted basic health care; where men often resort to gambling and drugs as ways to escape their pitiful lives; and where, for children, even basic education is a luxury commodity

Behind Phuket's palm trees, white beaches and smiles, is another world, unseen by most eyes. A world where mothers give birth on shack floors, where fathers are rarely able to see their families, and where children have nothing to play with but a stick or a piece of metal they find in the ground.

A world where women suffer the indignities of not being able to support their families or being granted basic health care; where men often resort to gambling and drugs as ways to escape their pitiful lives; and where, for children, even basic education is a luxury commodity.

Welcome to 'paradise'.

It is estimated that 2 million Burmese migrants live in Thailand, with a high percentage of that figure found in Phuket. Many are trafficked here illegally without proper documentation, with a promise of a better life, only to find themselves locked in a vicious circle of poverty and debt.

The majority of migrants are forced into menial labour work on construction sites, or are sent out to sea on rickety fishing boats. They earn very little, having to give a portion of their salaries to the traffickers who brought them into Thailand.

Adriano Trapani a locally-based professional photographer, began a six-week project over the summer to document the lives of these migrants in the hidden camps of Phuket.

The Good Shepherd charity organisation needed new images to help bring awareness of the migrant plight in Phuket, but what began as a simple marketing exercise soon became much, much more.

Walking through the small walkways of the migrant camps, lined with drying clothes, water barrels, cats, chickens and wood for cooking, there is a realisation that life here is basic and hard.

Each 'home', being only a few metres across, is usually furnished by a small storage cupboard at best. People sit, eat and sleep on the floor. Pillows, bedding and basic comforts do not exist here.

Despite their simple surroundings, many of the Burmese were happy to spend time and have their picture taken with Adriano, including a man with HIV. The photographer and the migrant talked, sat on the floor with the man's six-month-old baby, his wife out at work, earning money for the family.

As the man is terminally ill, he is unable to work. He has spent a hard life working on the fishing boats, spending months



Basic education is often a luxury.

at sea at a time, with little sleep and the desperate struggle to provide for the family.

He had turned to drugs to bring some relief to his life, but now here he sits, frail, waiting for an end to come.

This man had been found previously by The Good Shepherd's Migrant Worker Outreach Project, which provided him with the medical check ups and prescriptions he needed.

However, this dying man's wish was to go back to Myanmar, and spend his remaining days with his family, in his home country. Sitting in his Phuket shack, Adriano was generously offered water, and the man recounted his life story. He is a young man, with the soul and body of a much older person.

A meagre B12,000 was all that is required to grant the wish of this man and send him back to his home with proper

medicine. Reaching out to its network, The Good Shepherd was able to find a sponsor.

The project continued in this way. All across the island, Adriano was welcomed into the homes of the migrant workers, always being offered water and food and listening to the Burmese stories, of imagined dreams, and broken promises.

Through his lens, he began to capture 'the gaze of hope', in each of the eyes of the migrants he was photographing, and 'The Gaze of Hope' project was born.

The Indigo Pearl resort in Nai Yang will host the 'Gaze of Hope' exhibition from December 1, a limited collection of portraits to be sold in a silent auction.

The gallery will be open in the lobby of Indigo Pearl two weeks prior to the event with all details also on Facebook. All proceeds from the event go to The Good Shepherd charity project, working for the Migrant Worker Outreach Project in Phuket.

This is your paradise. Make it theirs too.

For more information, call 084 842 8869, email gsp Phuket info@gmail.com, or visit thegood shepherd.info or [facebook.com/GoodShepherdPhuket](https://www.facebook.com/GoodShepherdPhuket)