

Photography: Hobby for Life

Paul Beiboer has travelled around Asia for over a decade, residing in Jakarta, Bangkok and Hong Kong. He is a bank manager, whose passion in photography has driven him to carve out a distinctive style in his portraits of Asians and the lush landscapes they live in. Born in Wamena, West Papua, Indonesia, Paul developed an affinity with the cultures and peoples in the region; and has today amassed a vast collection of photographs - he has taken - which evoke the beauty and exquisiteness of Southeast Asia. Many of these photographs have been exhibited in Jakarta, Singapore, Bangkok and Hong Kong, and published in books, travel and other commercial publications as well. Paul's photographs are also posted on his website www.paulbeiboer.com

How much time have you spent in your country of birth?

I was born in Indonesia, and feel a bond to the country and people, but I've only lived there for four years between 1996 and 2000. It was the period of the end of President Suharto's reign. Indonesia was booming initially during that period, and then went through undergone a very difficult time following the collapse of the local currency, the Rupiah, and the social unrest. It was a time of immense contrast.

*Timt for a ehfrmt,
Mandulay. Ilurma*



*Rtrlining Huddha.
Aynddhaya. Thailand*

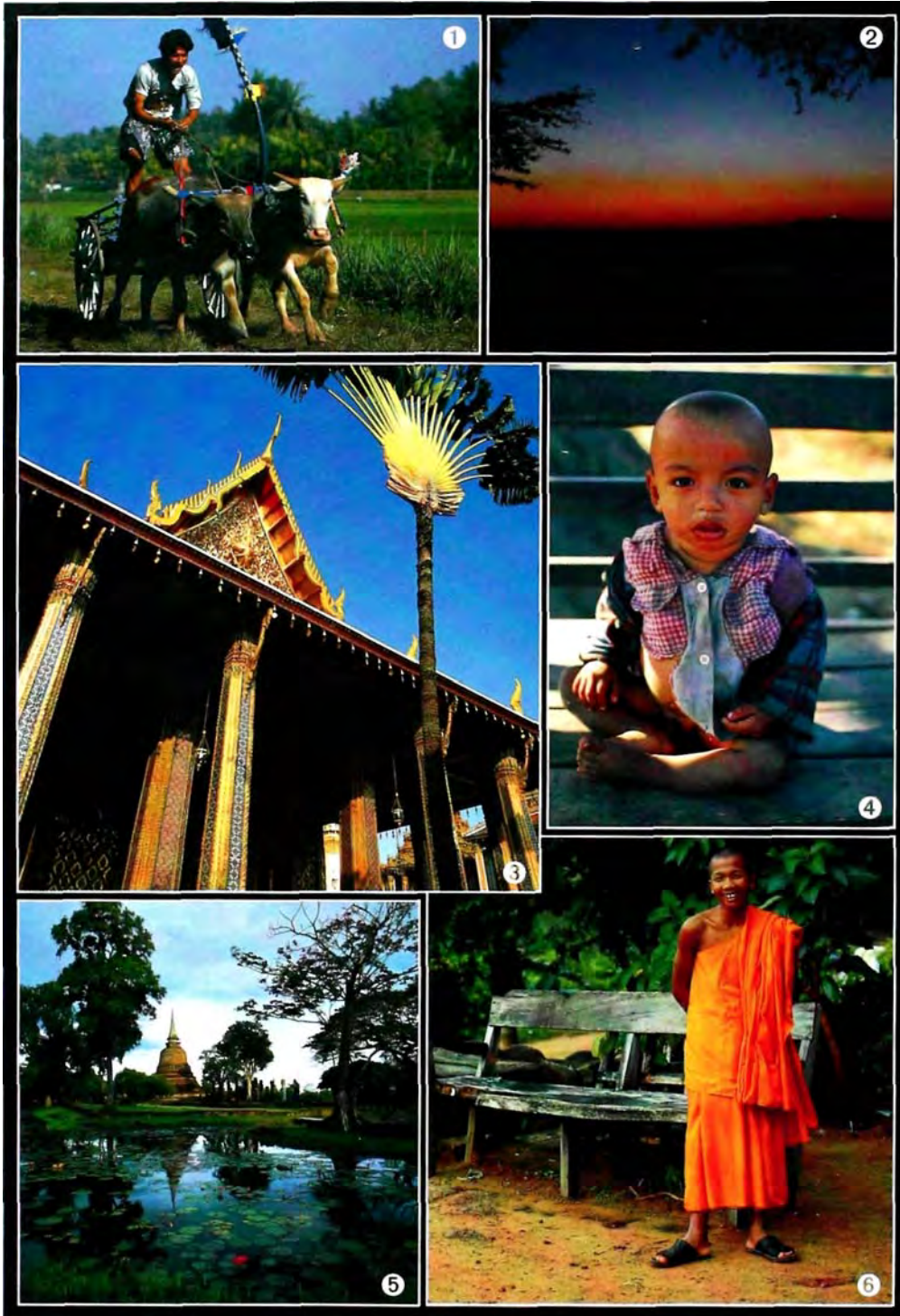


Sukhnlhai trmplr. Thailand



*Monks in classroom.
Sirm Heap. Cambodia*





*O Buffalo races, Bali
 O Pagan sunset, Burma
 & Royal Palace, Bangkok
 O Burmese boy, Pagan, Burma
 O Sukhothai reflection, Thailand
 © Happy monk, Luang
 Prabang, Laos*



Angkor Wat, Cambodia

What are your experiences there?

It was both an interesting and challenging time, with the political changes occurring. I became more familiar with the culture and people, and found Indonesia a fascinating place. During this period, my interest in photography - which has been my hobby for more than 25 years - became more serious and intense. I had mainly taken photos and slides, which were great for travel photography, when I concentrated on landscape, architecture and people. Six years ago, however, I began to explore the black and white medium.

Why the change?

I joined the Leica Club, a photography society in Jakarta, and the photographs taken by members there showed how powerful black and white photographs could be in comparison with colour ones. It opened my eyes to black and white. People responded well to my black and white photographs when I held exhibitions of my work. It was a rewarding period for me. Lots of positive feedback.

Is it presumptuous to say that if you did not become a banker, you would now be a professional photographer?

I am currently working in a Dutch bank, Rabobank. Photography spurs my travels in Asia, which I have been doing for about ten years now. On weekends and vacations, I always bring my camera out in search of interesting subjects. It is quite a serious hobby to me. I hold a solo exhibition every year, pretty much wherever I live. It is certainly true that I would be a professional photographer today had I not been involved in the bank business. My head may be in banking, but my heart is in photography.



Reflecting, Luang Prabang, Laos

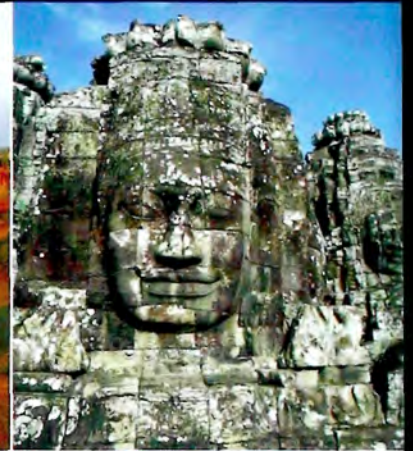
*Monks in prayer,
Sukhothai, Thailand*



Early morning in Pagan, Burma



*Bayon heads, Angkor,
Cambodia*



*Ayudhaya temples,
Thailand*



Monks at Golden Mount, Burma



*Sukhothai Buddha,
Thailand*

Obviously, you must be very committed to the hobby because you have a family and children, and you're not making a living out of photography, so how do you manage your time?

I receive some income out of the hobby, when magazines, books and other commercial publications use my photographs, but I think of it as my hobby basically. It's nice to see people appreciate what I produce with the camera, and the small income I make helps me with the expenditure, which can be costly. Even though I do not develop the photos myself, and do not have the facilities to, the films and travel expenses can add up to much. And we're talking only about expenses in taking photographs. If you're also organizing exhibitions, they involve a great deal of finances and time. It's my hobby, so I enjoy it tremendously.



Having traveled in Asia for more than 15 years, which place held the fondest memories for you?

My top destinations were Tibet, Burma and Irian Jaya. All very different, but very pure.



Sitklwtwi. Thailand

How has Asia been a place of inspiration where you could fulfill your life's passion?

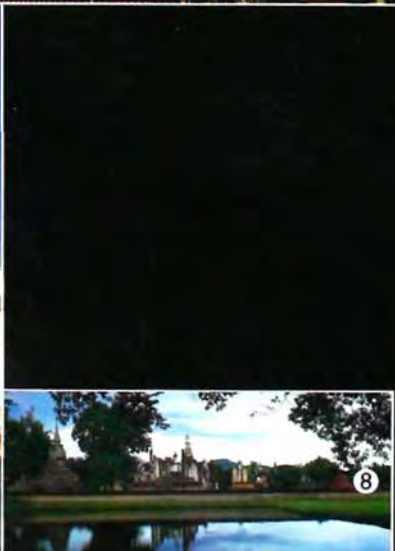
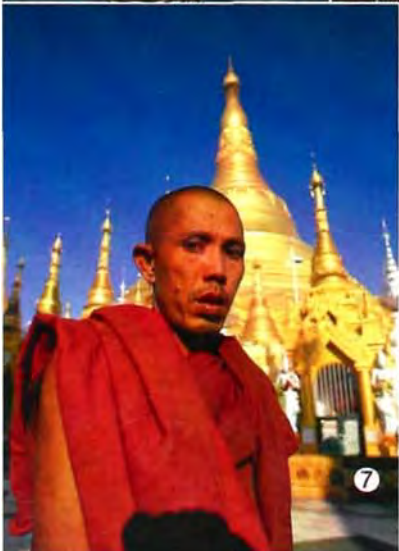
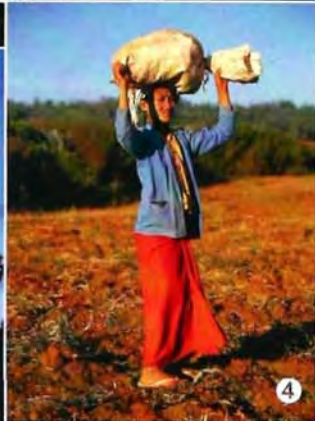
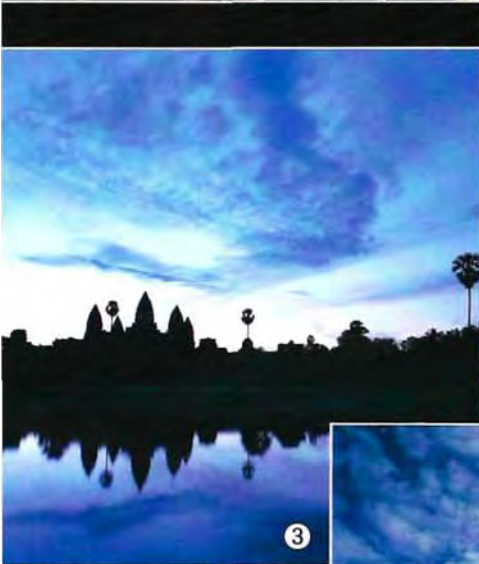
Pretty much everywhere you go, there are fascinating people and cultures to explore. Going around Asia, you are never short of interesting subjects. I thoroughly love documenting all of these places. In so many of the locations, time stood still and it was a joy to spend time there.

As you have lived in Hong Kong, Jakarta and Bangkok, which city impressed you the most, and why?

I have to say that Bangkok is my favorite although all three of them have a lot of character. Bangkok has great food, nice temples - it's a bustling city. It really has a lot to offer. Life by the river is also very interesting.

How have you participated in the attractions of the local life in Asia that fascinated you?

I always try to avoid the touristy sites and find the most unspoiled places.



*Sukhothai Buddha, Thailand
Buddha head in the roots off'ee,
Ayuddhaya, Thailand
Angkor sunrise, Cambodia
Harvest at lake bile, Burma
Praying, Royal Palace, Bangkok
DoiSuthep, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Burmese monk, Yangon, Burma
Early morning at Sukhothai, Thailand*

After years of photographing people and their culture, do you feel that you have a more intimate knowledge about them, or have you remained detached (as a photographer tends to be distant from its subject)?

I try to read up on all the places I visit, its people, history, culture, etc.. I try to spend time in each location to soak up the atmosphere rather than rushing through.

Those who were photographed by you in portraits tended to look directly at the camera as if charmed; how do you manage this, and does it entail rolls of film before you achieve the ideal shot?

Almost all people I photographed were very willing subjects. They felt at ease. That was probably because I tried to spend time with them and make them comfortable.

From the angles and lighting you use, a viewer of the portraits you made may think that you were not too distant from the subject. How do you approach the people? How do you get them to agree to pose for you?

Again, I try to spend some time in each place where I take photos. As soon as you do that, they warm up to you, and I only start shooting once they have gotten used to my presence. Quite a few of them like looking through my camera, from my perspective, and once they have seen that, they are more willing to have their photo taken.

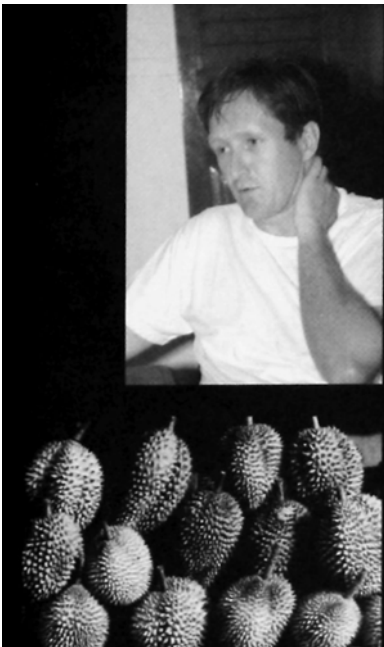
How do you make a landscape photo interesting?

Composition is really the main element for making a landscape look good on photograph. Obviously if you get the right light, that helps a lot. But composition is key.

It's been said that your work has given you the opportunity to express your unique point of view. Are you able to sum up that point of view briefly?

I am always trying to bring out the best in the people that I photograph. I try to get them to relax, make them look good.

Paul Beiboer



Durions

Regarding the portraits of Asians whom observers may consider "ordinary people", did you gravitate gradually toward your subject matter, or did it choose you?

I guess it's a bit of both, really.

What do you reckon is the historical significance to your photographs? And what's the secret to taking good photos?

A lot of places, lifestyles and cultures are changing and westernizing rapidly. I try to capture the traditional lifestyles before they disappear. To make good photos, interesting composition is the most important factor, I find. You really need to have an eye for it.

Can you describe how you create your images? What do you look for?

I look for interesting facial expressions, interesting compositions and/or interesting light. In landscape photography, I look for great colours and interesting shapes. Again, composition is key.

What ideas did you wish to convey in your photographs?

I like to show unique places and cultures. Document them before they change for good.

Which photographer do you most admire for her/his work?

Ansel Adams is obviously a great master and I love his work.

Which is the most interesting place you have visited to photograph?

Burma is a great place to visit and take photos. It's like stepping back in time.



Sadhu, an ascetic holy man, Nepal

What's your favorite way to waste time?

Walking around little villages in remote areas.

These days just about anyone can afford a camera, and is a photographer. In regarding yourself as a photographer, I'm sure you sought to explore undiscovered ground that distinguish your approach. What is your "undiscovered" ground?

It's really about looking for subjects that appear ordinary but are actually very interesting. Making ordinary people and subjects look special. It's about catching them at the right time and getting the perfect composition.

Are there any special considerations/equipment needed to take photograph in the tropics?

You have to protect your camera from dust and moisture. Most of the time, you are shooting in humid and dusty conditions so you need to keep your camera clean. Also, avoid shooting during the middle of the day as the shadows are harsh. Go for the golden hours when the sun is lower or catch people in the shade.

What can you share with photographers who hope to make Asia the 'playground' of their photographic aspirations?

I would say you will be rewarded if you stayed off the beaten track. Avoid the crowded touristy places. You will obtain great benefits if you spend time with your subjects. They will warm up to you and you will achieve better results. II

