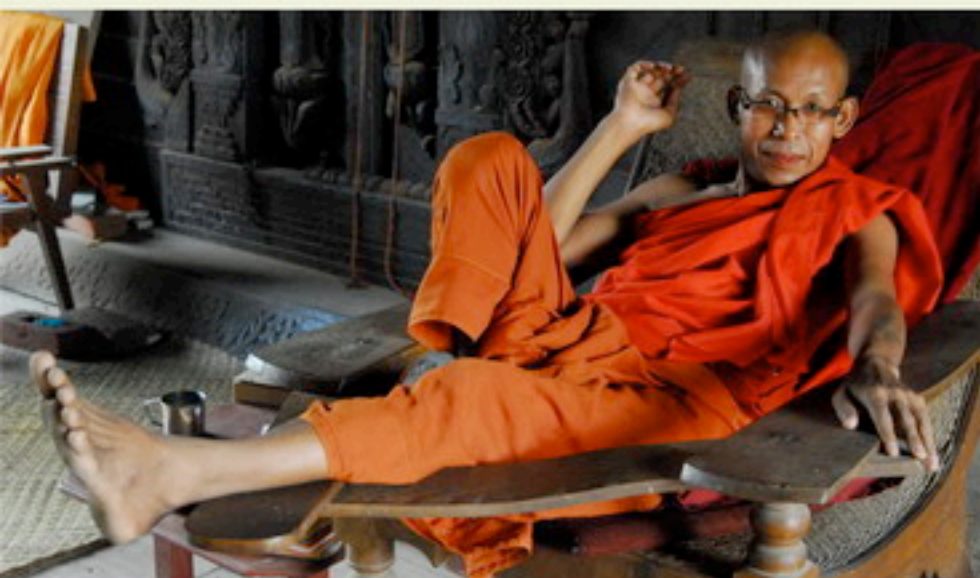


GESINE UNVERZAGT

FACES OF ASIA - TRACES OF LIFE

BY DIMITRI WARING



Few people in this life have the chance to travel every month, meet people from all over the world, experience many different cultures - and call it their job. Gesine Unverzagt is one of that select few. She has had an amazing career in photography, starting out with the Hamburger Fotoschule followed by working in Hamburg and then in Paris for two years. She became an assistant to the famous photographer Frank Horvath and then went independent. At first she photographed just about everyone in the international music scene for various magazines including Melody Maker and Stern. Since then she has spent the last 15 years criss-crossing the globe and visiting over 60 countries, photographing people, places and cultures. She's been published in over 40 magazines and newspapers and has also produced two books of photographs. She is not just a photographer but writer as well, and is skillful in both media.

Last March she had come to Koh Samui to oversee an exhibition of her photographs. Despite so much travel - from her bio it would appear to be almost ceaseless - she is a relaxed person. The very opposite, in other words, of the traditionally frazzled photographer with too many cameras and equipment.

Gesine Unverzagt is definitely an international figure. She grew up in Sweden, and then moved to Germany along with her parents while she was still young. She is bilingual and learned to speak English and French as well. She seems equally at home wherever she travels, whether it be on a cruise along the coast of Madagascar, or ice-skating in Norway, or exploring the dizzy heights of Bhutan's mountains. That's the way a good travel writer/photographer should be, but what's it like working in so many different countries and how does she go about her work? - it's not your average job, after all. She explained that she travels usually just once per month, sometimes more, and spends the rest of her time in Hamburg, where she lives with her husband.



Some of Gesine's photos were exhibited and for sale at the Renaissance Resort and Spa in Lamai. The exhibition was entitled *Faces of Asia- Traces of Life*. All of the proceeds were donated to a leading organization which addresses the issue of housing for the needy, the Habitat for Humanity Thailand and Marriot Hotels Thailand.



She's annoyed, she says, when people wish her happy holidays when she's going off on a trip. She says that once she's out in the place she is going to write about and photograph, she doesn't relax. There's a lot of running about to do. When she first arrives she checks out with the local people what's really interesting about the area. She follows their recommendations and goes to the places that will make the trip special. In the evenings she writes up her impressions - they go into her diary and later, when she's back in Hamburg, she begins to work on them and shape them into the stories that grace the pages of the travel sections in newspapers and magazines.

When she's at home, it's a time to put together everything that's happened on her trip; this is the writing stage, where she types up the drafts of the stories she will submit. She also goes through the photos she has taken, sorts them and captions them all. When she's away on a trip, she takes copious notes, but it's not till she gets home to Germany that they come together in any form.

She enjoys the writing part - it's all too common for travel writers to be holed up in their rooms once the day is over, rather than going out and partying - but best of all she loves meeting people, experiencing different cultures and learning from everyone. For her, travel is a formative experience and one that she's never tired of. It's still, however, work, and work of a seriously competitive kind. She says of photo-journalism that it's a very hard field to break into. It's also difficult to survive thanks to the internet, as many magazines are closing down.

