



Coming Together for Nepal

A collaboration between the owner of Ambiance, Malaysian photographer Mazlim Husin, and Nepal-based charity WONDERWorks has led to the Photography Exhibition and Sale for Nepal, to be held in mid-January in order to raise funds and awareness for the needy in Nepal. **Sharuna Segaren** talks to the people behind this charitable venture.



I sat down to chat with Jim Moore, owner of Ambiance, in his newest stunning showroom in G Village, as well as the committee members of WONDERWorks, co-founders Chulie Davey and Maxine Savidge, and Health Advisor Darina Walsh. All four of them are expats in Malaysia, although as Moore said laughingly, “We’ve been here for so long, it’s weird to think of ourselves as ‘expats’. We’re Malaysians!”

They were preparing for the photography exhibition at the time, which was held back in November and served to raise awareness for the upcoming sale. Davey and the others, having found time on their hands after their grown-up children left home, have been spending the past few years going back and forth to Nepal to help exploited women and children working in the entertainment sector.

Finding that there are few resources for such people, they intend to provide a safe house and centre which will provide temporary shelter for emergency and abused cases, as well as support for entertainment workers. The centre will include activities to address mental health and safety issues and also provide skills training. They have also raised funds for resources for women to start small home businesses so they can provide for themselves, such as cart businesses, beauty parlours, restaurants, shoe shops, tailor shops, cosmetic stalls, clothing stalls, and grocery shops.

Davey said, “The proceeds for the photography sale will mainly go towards our new Support Centre/Safe House/ Training Centre that we’re opening in January. We want to be able to run the project for at least two years, so need to know we’ll have sufficient funds to cover rent and utilities for that time as well as buy basic furniture and necessities such as mattresses, cushions, a white board, a large plastic water storage bucket, and solar lights, and be able to pay for resources like stationery, sewing machines, small salaries for tailoring tutors, and a doctor for baby clinic. With the money raised at the photographic exhibition and sale, it will help ensure that we will be able to run the project for at least two years. Profits from the next photography sale in January will be divided between the different projects we run.”





The photography exhibition consists of a collection of spectacular photographs shot in Nepal by local photographer Mazlim Husin. For the sale, 28 limited edition signed copies of each photo will be available. WONDERWorks will also be selling a selection of items from Nepal, including Indian cotton dressing gowns which are made by tailoring graduates they've sponsored into home businesses, colourful 'Yak' shawls and blankets, shawls, cashmere ponchos, silk scarves, and handmade felt items.

Davey said that they are also hoping to be able to create awareness about trafficking in Nepal and have the opportunity to talk to people about their work through this venture. "We've found people are surprised to find that just RM500 will cover the monthly salary of a full-time qualified health nurse or outreach worker or the cost of running our Safe House per month. We're in the fortunate position to be able to put ALL our profits and donations into the charity as the Management Committee are unpaid and any costs involved to visit Nepal, including hotels and accommodation, are personally covered by the individuals going over to implement the projects and directly oversee how the funds are spent. If

someone donates RM100, for example, they know that exactly RM100 will go directly towards our work. People like to be able to give in a 'tangible' way. Much of what we do allows people to donate in exactly this way, either through funds for something specific such as an entire small business or a piece of equipment such as a sewing machine, a cart, or anatomy model for health classes."

She continued, "We hope that in future we'll get more long term donors who might be interested in setting up a monthly standing order to pay for, perhaps, the doctor's fee for his monthly visit to our baby clinic, the monthly or individual lesson cost of our self-defence teacher, monthly laundry costs for the towels, even the monthly cost of our utility bills, or simply the plain hot tea we'll provide the ladies. The list is endless and can suit any budget and area of interest! On our part we would then provide ongoing information, updates, and photos to the sponsor on how the small business is going, how an item is being used, student progress, and so on. Alternatively, if somebody has a particular skill that would help our ladies, we'd love to hear from them. We'll soon be announcing our new centre on our

social media, with suggestions on how people might help in this way."

In a separate interview, Husin spoke of his contribution to this venture. He said, "All these photos were shot during four visits to Nepal. I hiked up to Everest Base Camp twice, and rode a classic Royal Enfield classic bike from Kathmandu to Muktinath. Nepal is a beautiful country with wonderful people. I am grateful they share the beauty of their country with the world through tourism. They are very poor, and even worse now after the earthquake. Just RM1,000 can go a long way there. I have enjoyed their country several times and now I feel it is time for me to give back. It's like my own personal CSR project."

It was no easy feat getting these stunning photographs. Husin said, "My inspiration behind these photos was to capture the beauty of nature and share it with the world. My experience taking them was physically and mentally challenging. I was at over 5,000 meters of elevation, in sub-zero temperatures, at risk for Acute Mountain Sickness, and there were low oxygen levels and only minimal heating. I had to use all of my willpower. Despite the exhaustion from days of hiking or motorcycling, my passion woke me up



way before sunrise, got me dressed in full winter hiking gear, and allowed me to wait patiently in the cold with my camera gear and tripod, often in the darkness. The adrenaline kept me going."

He continued, "We have a significant number of Nepalese foreign workers here in Malaysia. Even though they are labourers, they have a very rich cultural heritage and religious background. We have to treat them with respect. I do make a point to acknowledge them here by telling them that I have visited their beautiful country and that brings smiles to their faces, as probably they are homesick, too. ■"

The Photography Sale for Nepal will be held on 15th and 16th of January at the Ambiance showroom in G Village, Ampang Hilir. For more information, please contact Jim Moore at 603. 9226 7280. To find out more about WONDERWorks, please visit www.wonderworksasia.org