

CAPTURING MEMORIES OF THAILAND



The Post snaps up some time of Swiss photographer Andy Helbling to talk about some of the incredible photos he has managed to capture while holidaying in Phuket and around Thailand

My name is Andy Helbling and I live in Lucerne, Switzerland. One of my oldest friends is the son of the famous landscape photographer Willi P. Burkhardt.

Ever since we were young, my friend and I spent the majority of our free time playing in his father's studio. Maybe it was then that I was infected by the photography virus.

At 15-years-old I bought my first camera: a Minolta 5000, but didn't start getting paid for my work until 1994.

I like to think I get better with every photo I take. I must have spent over 10,000 Euros on cameras and equipment since I started!

Every time the goal is the same: to make photos that people like, so that they and I may remember the beautiful world in which we live, and to conserve all those special moments that may never come back.

What is your favourite subject matter?

I am not a classical photo artist. I am more of a reporter for special situations, events or landscapes.

My favorites are planes, landscapes, street photography, events and of course travel photography.

Why do you like taking photos of Thailand?

My older brother took me to Thailand for the first time in 2002. I was fascinated by the beautiful and exotic world he showed me. To see the people and their happiness was like falling in love with this wonderful country.

For me as a photographer, Thailand is a never-ending place of colorful and fascinating areas with numberless facets of life to catch with the camera. It starts with the beauty of the people, the spectacular land, the sea areas and the mystical magic of the temples.

Has there ever been one moment where you wished you'd had your camera with you, but you didn't?

Oh, there are many... The last one was in Phuket in Patong this summer. This year I had decided to focus on capturing sunsets. On the one day I had left the camera at home - because I thought it was too late - I saw an incredibly romantic sunset; with the clouds on the horizon, the sea coloured from gold to red.

There was also a great bright golden light over the sea in the middle of a passing fisher boat.

I missed this very special moment, which was incredibly frustrating, but on my way home I managed to shoot this spectacular sunset at Bangkok Airport (above right).

For further information and to see more of Andy's wonderful photos, go to www.andyhelbling.ch



Chiang Mai, Royal Park Rajapruek, Royal Pavillon:
Inside the pavillon is the painted life of the King. This is another example of a Thai building not just being functional, but for looking good too.



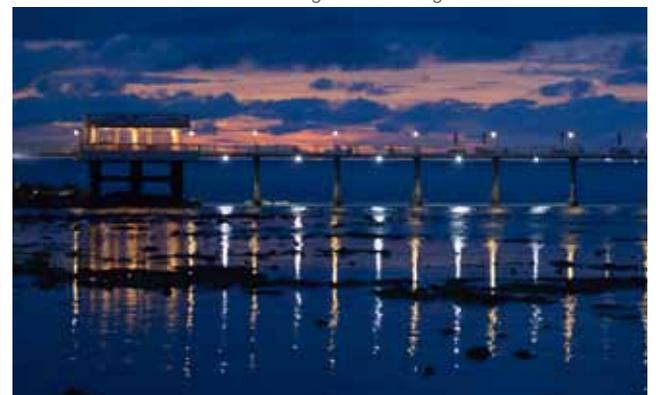
Chiang Mai, Royal Park Rajapruek, Royal Pavillon:
This building contains many details in wood work and shows a lot of love for the king.



Bangkok Airport Terminal F: Sunset made it resemble a futuristic station. I shot this on my way back to Switzerland. I felt like Thailand was thanking me for visiting.



Phuket, Patong, Sunset:
Another day, another light, another colour and an endless pool for romantic photos.



Phuket, Patong, Hotel Amari Coral Beach, Jetty-pier at sunset:
A romantic sunset that I did manage to take.



Phuket, Patong, Bangla, Street magician:
Tiger: Another reason that keeps Soi Bangla interesting.



Chiang Mai, Lighted Tuk Tuk on a red light in Chang Klan Rd:
Hated and Loved: In Thailand, everything is so full of colour and the people are creative.

INVESTIGATING THE TRUST IN LUST

By Jody Houton

Phuket, Thailand: a place where dreams, along with thousands of dalliances and relationships are made every single night.

But what happens when those walks on the beach, afternoon cocktails and delicious lie-ins give way to that drive to the airport, that last cup of coffee and hurried exchange of email addresses?

What happens when you have to wake up from your Phuket dream? At what point did the longing for something intangible turn from something that seemed so real in that first moment you caught her eye?

Work undertaken by 'Mark', the owner of Thailand Private Investigations (TPI), hinges on the fear, confusion and pain of

and 'befriending', while foreign staff will sometimes be deployed, depending on the scenario.

"A foreign guy for example can blend much less conspicuously in the bar environment, I often handle a lot of these cases myself," Mark explains.

In other P.I companies, often the extent of the investigation merely involves a P.I going to a bar and paying money to see if the girl will sleep with him.

This Mark believes is unfair and not particularly useful, "Often the girls are in a very desperate and poverty-stricken situation and which of them is not going to sleep with someone who offers her a few thousand baht?"

appears a man is neglecting his family and children, he takes the case with gusto.

"It's bad for everyone, so we go and take plenty of photos to force him to face up to the matter. Sometimes this is the only way to get him to stop or think about his actions," explained Mark.

He also revealed that quite often he will even talk to the philanderer to try to make him realise the error of his ways, "Many men will continue to do it unless they meet somebody who can make them see sense. They're often looking at things through rose-tinted glasses. I just make him realise that it's basically the mating instinct that they are experiencing; it's lust that they are experiencing, it's not love."

addictive personality and that I do not deal with. Only systematic professional help can deal with addictions."

TPI also doesn't provide specific information that could theoretically inflame an already volatile situation.

"Often clients ask for names of who he/she has been cheating with and places where they meet, so that they may go and confront them themselves. We never give out such information. It's too dangerous."

Evidence is presented only after a particular dalliance, to avoid such crimes of passion, but also to prepare the video footage and photos and write up the log, report and analysis.

What happens next is down to the



Pic: Andy Helbling

Soi Bangla where you're never quite sure of who is watching who

that exact moment.

TPI is the second oldest P.I agency in Thailand and has been operational since 1997. They undertake cases throughout Thailand, with the majority based in the Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket areas.

As with other aspects of fraudulent conduct, the private investigations into relationships and affairs of the hearts and groins has had to evolve since its inception, "The business is now much more into internet dating and abusive uses of social media. These sites are the modern day equivalent of a bar. Bar girls now don't even necessarily work in bars anymore, they can do it all on the Internet," revealed Mark.

Other than the nuances of technological advancement, however, Mark believes that little has changed in the types of requests he gets:

"We have two kinds of cases: The most common is following a girl that a guy has met whilst on holiday. When he goes back home to his own country, he wants to find out what she's doing and if she is who she says she is."

Services provided in such a case involve 'tailing' her from her residence to her workplace. 'Ordinary looking' Thai people are often used for surveillance

A large part of the service TPI offers is an actual written assessment and entrapment, Mark argues, is not an accurate way to observe the Thai girl in her natural state.

"We prefer to go into their environment, to see whether she is the predator or not."

Interestingly, although Mark vehemently disproves of entrapping by offering 'larger' sums of money, he does regularly perform 'short-time' (employing the services of a prostitute for a short time) entrapment.

"I do a lot of that," said Mark, "I go and meet said girl and start negotiations low. If she agrees then we go to wherever the short time location is and we have people with cameras nearby. After a few minutes I receive an emergency 'get-away' phone call."

The second most common request that Mark receives is from foreign women, who are curious about their husband's movements or constant trips to Thailand.

He explained that although he prefers not to get people in 'trouble', often if it

Foreign men who are investigated tend to fall into two categories: Firstly there's the man who starts an affair with a Thai girl and then there's the man who is addicted to having multiple sexual partners.

In the former Mark believes there is still hope for a possible reconciliation - if the wife so wished - as he believes falling for another lady shows that the man is at least relationship-orientated.

In these cases, he sometimes acts as a mediator/counsellor for the families, often to positive effect, "I have talked many wives back from the brink of dumping their husband, and saved some families in the long run. The wife can usually handle the husband with my suggestions," Mark said.

Mark does not see as much potential for reform or reconciliation in the latter cases however, and as such prefers not to get involved, "This kind of man is just addicted to having multiple ladies and often drinks alcohol every night. He tends to have an

people involved, "Either the customer gets peace of mind, or else the customer confronts their partner, or they just walk away. Occasionally the customer asks us to continue on an extended mission after they confront their partner. Often the investigated then asks us to investigate the girlfriend/wife in return."

Mark's world is often a dark and disturbing one; he sees drug use and 'questionably under-aged girls' regularly, and receives often hostile and derogatory comments, but although he admits he is not out to save the world, he does believe that he and other private investigation companies in Thailand are doing a valuable and necessary job:

"Relationships are very important for people. Families with children are on the line. Some men are investing a whole lot of their time, emotion, and hard-earned savings into a lady, and often considering making major changes in their lives, sometimes even affecting their job or career.

"These men need to know the ground truth when they are away. We are trying to help guys from being scammed. Scamming men by relationships is a big business here, and many of the ladies are very professional about it."

Mark is happily married...

*"We prefer to go into their environment, to see whether she is the predator or not.":
Owner of Thailand Private Investigations, 'Mark'*