

# Readers' galleria

A chance for you to show off your talent

## The landscape of a country should always include the people

Images and words by Deanna Ng



"Early one morning, I wandered down to the Golden Shoe Hawker Centre that is in my neighbourhood, and even though I've lived in the same flat for all my life, I barely knew the local market. The only hawkers I was familiar with were the Wonton Mee auntie, Soya Bean Milk uncle, the fried Bee Hoon couple, a couple of vegetables sellers, and the egg seller. Conversations then had been limited to requests for items on my mum's shopping list. How in the world was I going to ask them to let me shoot their portraits? So, I walked up and down the market that morning with my big fat camera hanging around my neck, smiling at everyone I met like an idiot. After 10 minutes or so, I started asking stall owners if I could take their portraits. As expected, I was dealt with a flat NO. But by the time I had reached the end of the market, the whole place was gossiping about a crazy lady going around trying to take their portraits.

"Suddenly, the preserved vegetable auntie tapped me on the shoulder and asked, 'Why do you want to take our pictures?' Ideas of self-glorification and affirmation that I'm a good photographer swept my immediate thoughts, or was I doing it to highlight the state of Singapore hawker centres to the world? No, my sole goal was to view Singapore as an accidental tourist. Travel to me meant getting to know the people in the country. Nothing shows the cultural landscape of a country better than a walk through its local markets. A walk through the Vietnamese market will show you that there's more than one type of 'pho', and just how much the Vietnamese love their dog meat as it hangs off the racks like roasted ducks in our markets. Buying soya bean milk in rural China is another experience as you have to bring your own bottle and the locals will suck the beverage out of the cans with a tube. Note to all, charcoal pills are always a good idea to bring along when eating in China.

"With this new-found conviction as to why markets are important to me (the accidental tourist), and explaining it all to the hawkers in a mix of broken Hokkien, Mandarin, and English, they seemed to like the idea. Suddenly, they were telling me their life stories. The coffee miller's son happens to be a famous Xinyao singer. The chicken seller's daughter is facing a lot of pressure in school. The provision shop auntie, who did not want me to take her picture, was prepared to tell me her woes as a mother as I sat in her stall for 2 hours. The spanking new biscuit shop auntie whose stall looks a bit too 'atas' (high class) for the market, has a son who's a designer. Uncle Jimmy, the fruit seller was selling fruits to pass time since he's retired.

"When I returned the next day, I was hoping to get some laughs out from the hawkers, so I wore a pair of striped drawstring pants that I had bought. This was the type of pyjama pants that you might have seen on

your grandfathers. The fishmonger decided to have a bit of fun and stuck a cigarette in the fish head he was holding up. I spotted a shy vegetable seller who looks exactly like Bruce Lee! And I was lucky enough to find a fish ball seller who could juggle and was willing to juggle fish balls for me. The truth was that I had fun for the two days I hung out in the market, and I think that because of my silliness, the hawkers had fun too. They were teasing each other and calling each other names "Yan Dao eh!" (handsome in Hokkien). I'm eternally in their debt for putting up with my antics and requests.

Deanna is a travel photographer and writer. Her latest muse is the yong tau foo auntie in Tekka market who watches Korean dramas at her stall. Deanna has been studying various types of photography at Objectifs for the past two years and her portfolio can be found online at [www.intraphoto.com.sg](http://www.intraphoto.com.sg).



PICTURE INFO

Camera type NIKON D70  
Exposure program Manual  
Aperture F3.5  
Focal length 18mm



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