

Where Butterflies live

*Budding flower, which slowly opens its leaves to the unknown.
Something, just a little one, quiet, hidden inside for a long time is impatiently
waiting, when it will be able to fly out and spread its wings.*

*Standing in the RAMM. Second floor. Green room opposite the stairs.
Beautiful collection of insects. Behind the window screen.
Nailed. Trapped. Shown.
(for educational purposes)*

Not alive anymore.

But.

*Inside of us, there is a little miracle, alive, waiting for a moment of freedom.
Inside of us, there is a little butterfly, alive, **Soft as Life**, Pure as a Deep Tear,
Light as Wind, Noble as Truth.*

My name is Alexandra and in my project I have chosen to research an item, which is maybe far away from my native culture.

Many people asked me, “Why, you... non-religious, want to write about the Monastery? And why, you... non-religious eastern European, want to write about the Buddhist Monastery? What do you know about it?”

Yes, on the one hand, they are right. If I chose a topic, which would be closer to my culture, it might have been easier, perhaps better... maybe next time.

But on the other hand, different kitchens, different tastes. And we will never find out unless we try. **The knowledge about other cultures opens doors to another level and widens our insights into other people.** To learn about other cultures teaches us to respect diversity of people and their thinking. The fight against discrimination starts with education and understanding others and their culture.

On the question of my religion, Burmese monks chuckled and added:
"So, you are free then, you can pick which way you want to go..."

The pot with a Buddhist scent seemed too far away for us, people who did not grow up in such an environment, too difficult to reach...In the country I am originally from, almost untouchable...But, lucky me, I touched, I tried, I tasted and I would like to know the recipe...



Burma – Golden Land,
where the gold adorns the
country, whereas its heart
stays pure and human

I don't know why, a picture of this little boy evokes thoughts about a butterfly which woke up only few months ago in my heart.

Is it possible, I did not know that it could exist for 30 years? A typical tourist holidays in Myanmar (Burma) rapidly changed from the first day of my trip in this amazing country by an unbelievable time, full of experiences spreading further every day. I was introduced to Buddhism in practice. I was introduced to **Goodness, Purity and Love**, which I would never have expected to get. Imagine, where ever you go, you are never alone, you are never lost, who ever you ask for help, they will help without expectation to receive anything back in return. They will feed you, offer you a bed, they will show you the way, they will give you their smile. And when you leave, a little present is a certainty. You are safe, you can trust...Yes, surprisingly, in spite of the difficult situation they are living in for many years, Burmese people are like this, they are just happy, friendly, affectionate and generous...

And suddenly I ask myself: where is this huge amount of Goodness is coming from?

Today is a new day...a moment, which will never come back. And you have an opportunity to live this happy moment...

**2013, BEGINNING OF JANUARY:
SIDMOUTH, DEVON, UNITED KINGDOM**

Cold. Sitting on the tiny bench at the bus stop. 4 other ladies happily jabber about their grandchildren. A curious man secretly glances at my exercise book with the intention to find out what I am writing so anxiously...Plough the sand...I just started to write my travel diary, but using Slovakian, my natural language, so he gives up soon...

Full of expectations, dreams and desires spiced with a bit of scary feelings and travel problems such as questioning myself for a million time again: Do I have my passport? Did I take spare batteries for my camera? Will I have enough money? I might have checked my flight schedule one more time...And....where is my flight ticket...? Oh no...its not here...Where is it???...sweat all the body in one second.....Oh, you silly.....your ticket is in the right place...just concentrate....concentrate.... According to other visitors: Burma will be difficult to travel through – or just different?

**2013, MIDDLE OF JANUARY:
MANDALAY, BURMA**

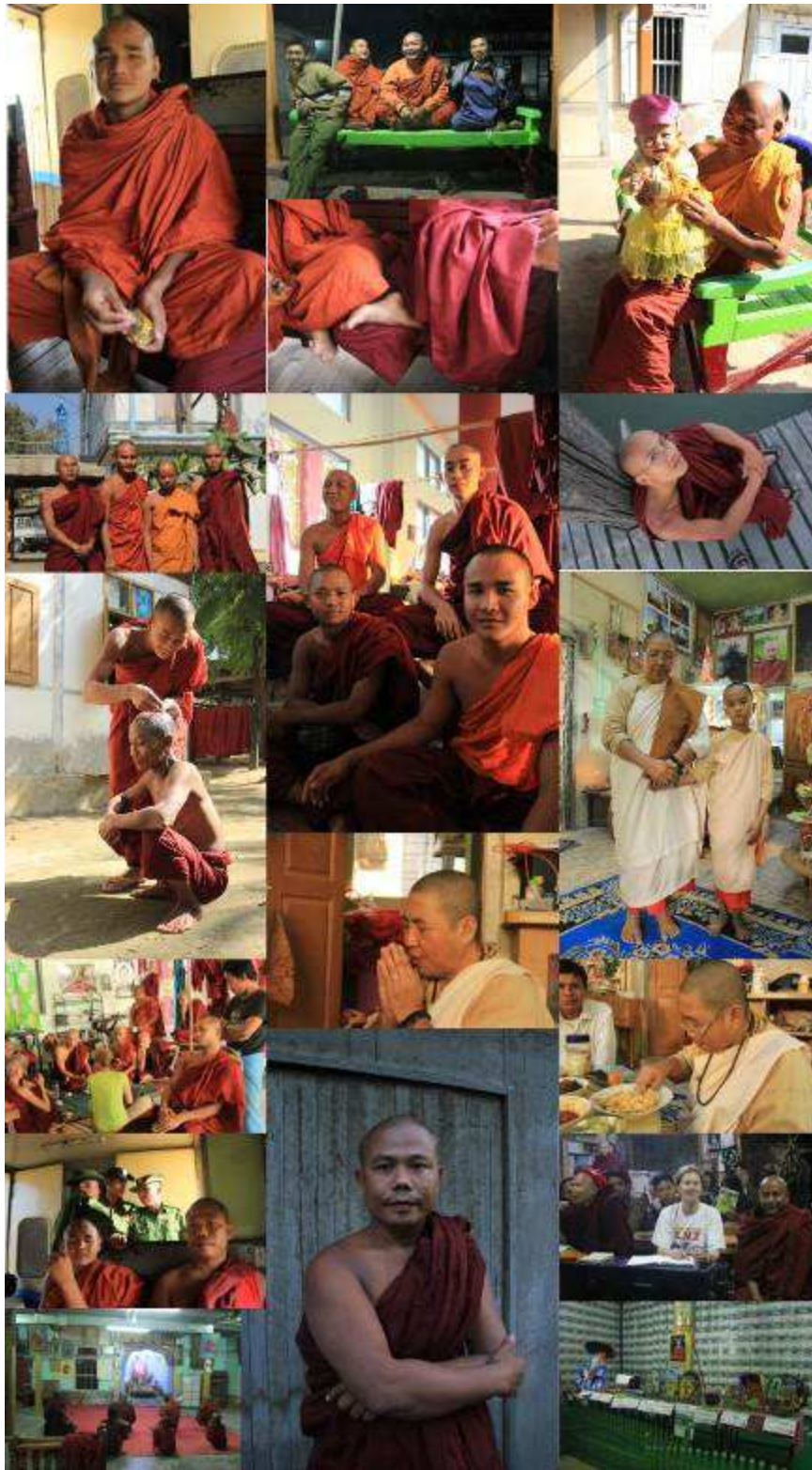
Hot. Sitting on the tiny bench under the tree in one of the meditation centres somewhere in Mandalay. One man is sitting next to me. His head is completely shaved. The speech of his body wrapped in a red ruby robe invokes respect. But the look on his face reveals goodness and trust.

Concentrate, concentrate...Breath In, Breath Out...don't run far away...stay in present and feel this moment...practice...practice...

...different travelling through the Golden land, difficult only...travelling back to the core of my being...



1, 2: Entrance to my first Meditation Center, Mandalay, Burma (2013)



These pictures were taken in **Burma in January 2013**. I picked those that reminded me of my meditation experiences the most. All monks and many lay people had a big influence on me to think and start with meditation. Actually, they never said "You should try it" ...They didnt say anything about meditation. Only when I asked, why are Burmese people so happy and calm, the answer was, because there is a friendly attitude to life through the religion and meditation. I saw how they practice and I had got the idea to try it. When I mentioned to them my interest to monks, who decided to take care of me, they suddenly started a serious disscussion in Burmese language and then one quick phone call to somebody. After while, they probably found the solution. One of them: "Excuse me, tomorrow we will take you to meditation center where is a monk, who will explain you more about meditation in English if you wish. Our English is not good enough to explain you how to do it. One o'clock. Can be?" **And here my journey starts**, and does not finish in the Yangon airport on my way back to England. Even after half year, it is very difficult to describe experiences and feelings I brought from Myanmar. Rubies? Gems? Gold? No. The best present that I could bring from "home" to home is a diamond in my heart more precious than the huge one located at the top of famous Schwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.



3. Panjota: Monk who gave me first meditation lessons (2013)



4: My first meditation class, Mandalay, Burma (2013)

2013, FEBRUARY:

SIDMOUTH, DEVON, UNITED KINGDOM

*Warm. Sitting in my tiny room in front of my good friend, my computer. Trying to concentrate and dig out something about Buddhism in Exeter on Google...
....long concentration... **patience brings roses...***

2013, BEGINNING OF APRIL:

VILLAGE RAWRIDGE, DEVON, UNITED KINGDOM

Very cold. Asking for directions to start my journey... local people in the village are very nice and everyone gladly help....and then up there...

*Moving up there, on the hill where I am expected to come. They are waiting for me. They know about Alexandra. Beautiful countryside – I stop for a while and turn around ...close my eyes, Deep Breath...mix of thoughts in my head. **Mix of glamorous memories of my home country evoke endless green valleys, the smell of the spring makes me so alive and I realise the journey of my life is so colourful and full of various scents like the world...** I am so excited to meet them and curious to know what this place will be like. Will it be something similar as I have seen in Burma? I really believe that I will not be disappointed by this place I have decided to write about in my project "Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots".*

Half an hour up the Hill, few turns left-right, a little simple sign reassures me that I am at the right place. Garden path welcomes me. It's so quiet here. Few minutes of walking through and I finally I see the building. White, tiny farmhouse with a red roof and a big window. Actually, nothing stunning, nothing luxurious, just a modest cottage. Building built for a purpose but doesn't destroy the charm of the nature around, a building that doesn't want to be admired at all. And suddenly, someone in the saffron robe approaches to me.

A man in this warm and simple robe immediately greeted me with a sincere smile. He came out from the path which leads somewhere behind trees, somewhere, where it must be even quieter and calmer. Yet, around the main house of Hartridge Buddhist Monastery there will gather more people during the lunch time of offering.

*"Suvaco, and you have to be Alexandra certainly. Welcome to the Hartridge". The expression on his face cleared all my doubts and worries. **Warmly welcomed to this special place followed by an introduction to the other residents assured me this would be a good place to research and write.***