

● Emirates, migrants and money

People of an economic exodus Report

As the cranes and scaffolding of Dubai stood silent in the wake of the worldwide recession, it's not just the noise of continuous building work that was absent for the Emirate. Hundreds of thousands of Indian nationals sought employment and a better way of life in the UAE but many have been left with just a plane ticket home – others have been left with less than that. Following their story back to their towns and villages was journalist Nick Hunt – recipient of the Society's Journey of a Lifetime award for 2010.

With a taste for exploration and an eye for a good story, Nick used the support he received from the Society and BBC Radio 4 to focus on Dubai's workforce of Indian migrants whom he considers the unseen, unheard victims of the recession. By day they were responsible for constructing the glittering, glass-fronted iconic buildings of Dubai's once constantly evolving skyline; by night he found they were a population on the periphery, living in often difficult conditions, far from home and from any sense of equality.

Nick met Ramu from Andhra Pradesh who had left his village because his ethnic group, Telangana, has limited access to water for irrigation. "One man in every family in this region migrates, mostly to the Gulf, because of the lack of equality between ethnic groups with relation to agriculture," Nick said. However, with poor education and a desperate desire to find a better life, touts often step in to take advantage of the situation. "When people like Ramu finally get to Dubai, they are already in debt and can end up working the most menial jobs at the mercy of unscrupulous companies."

Ramu made it home after four years away from his family, meeting his daughter for the first time on his return. Nick explained: "It was a journey through the economic fallout of the current economic crisis. The workers have few rights, but what amazed me was

just how dignified they are; full of humour, humanity and warmth."

For Nick, originally from Bristol but now living in London, the journey was far removed from the glossy travel brochures with which tourists from the UK may be familiar. "The most important thing was seeing that these people are not just statistics, but individuals with diverse and varied lives and histories, thrown together in difficult conditions by the boom and bust of the world's economy," he said. "These are the people who keep the cogs of the world turning and they are rarely noticed or rewarded for their efforts."

[Nick's story](#), broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 10 September 2010, is just one of three independent [travel grants](#), open to everyone to apply, and which form just part of the Society's wider [programme of grants](#). Whether you are a teacher who wants to innovate in the classroom, a senior researcher looking to kick-start a research project, or a young team planning their first scientific expedition, get online and find out how the Society can support your project.



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