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# Travel Photography

An Essential Guide for Photographers



ROAD RUNNER  
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# 1

## Travel Photography

“My favorite thing is to go where I’ve never been.”

– Diane Arbus



With travel photography comes many emotions:

- Anticipation as the trip approaches
- Excitement at the prospects of seeing and experiencing new places
- Frustration at not experiencing what we expected



- Anxiety as the bills from the trip pile up



There are ways to enhance the good emotions, while minimizing the more stressful ones. In this guide, we will look at the challenges of traveling and discuss some of the choices that get made, including the ones we make before the adventure starts.

We will also look at managing reality versus expectation. I will also share some of the ways I have managed the disconnect between the reality I experienced and expectation of what I had hoped for, as well as the tricks I use to enhance my photography.



# Dream Big!



Dream Big! means to set destination goals, big and small, local and far away. It really doesn't matter where you want to go, just that you choose a place and make it a goal to get there.

I have met so many people who talk about traveling and yet never make a plan to travel. They are indecisive and refuse to pick a destination, commit to a date, or even accept ideas from others, and as a result, they never go anywhere. At the

same time, they express regret for "having not pulled it together" in time to go.

Dreaming big and having a plan can be a great way to get over this hurdle. Your dreams may be big, such as going to all seven continents, or smaller, such as seeing all the national and state parks in your state. It really doesn't matter, as long as you create a list that you know is reasonable to achieve. I say "reasonable to achieve" because you don't want to create



a list that is so big or so aggressive it causes you stress. Start small and as you check items off, add new items on!



My inspiration comes from looking at two maps, one of the United States and one of the world. I put thumbtacks on each location visited, which helps highlight all the places I haven't seen. Those "blank spots" form the foundation of my Dream Big list.

Often when we think about travel and travel photography, we visualize traveling to another country, something far away and exotic. But honestly, destinations can

be as close as your own town. We camp within 35 miles of our home, three or four times throughout the year. These mini-destinations get us out of the house and into nature where we can recharge. I just can't stress enough, dreaming big is really easy.

All trips, large and small, have a cost. Sometimes the biggest challenge to overcome is simply being able to afford a trip. The best way to achieve your travel goals is to put money aside regularly. That way, you don't have to come up with large sums all at once.

	Week	Amount	Cumulative Total		Week	Amount	Cumulative Total
6-Jan	52	<del>125</del>	125	7-Jul	26	125	3375
13-Jan	51	<del>125</del>	250	14-Jul	25	125	3500
20-Jan	50	<del>425</del>	375	21-Jul	24	125	3625
27-Jan	49	<del>125</del>	500	28-Jul	23	125	3750
3-Feb	48	125	625	4-Aug	22	125	3875
10-Feb	47	125	750	11-Aug	21	125	4000
17-Feb	46	125	875	18-Aug	20	125	4125
24-Feb	45	125	1000	25-Aug	19	125	4250
3-Mar	44	125	1125	1-Sep	18	125	4375
10-Mar	43	125	1250	8-Sep	17	125	4500
17-Mar	42	125	1375	15-Sep	16	125	4625
24-Mar	41	125	1500	22-Sep	15	125	4750
31-Mar	40	125	1625	29-Sep	14	125	4875
7-Apr	39	125	1750	6-Oct	13	125	5000
14-Apr	38	125	1875	13-Oct	12	125	5125
21-Apr	37	125	2000	20-Oct	11	125	5250
28-Apr	36	125	2125	27-Oct	10	125	5375
5-May	35	125	2250	3-Nov	9	125	5500
12-May	34	125	2375	10-Nov	8	125	5625
19-May	33	125	2500	17-Nov	7	125	5750
26-May	32	125	2625	24-Nov	6	125	5875
2-Jun	31	125	2750	1-Dec	5	125	6000
9-Jun	30	125	2875	8-Dec	4	125	6125
16-Jun	29	125	3000	15-Dec	3	125	6250
23-Jun	28	125	3125	22-Dec	2	125	6375
30-Jun	27	125	3250	29-Dec	1	125	6500
							13000

The easiest way to save money is to make it a habit. For myself, I have created a simple spreadsheet that layouts out the weeks of the year, the amount to put



aside, and a cumulative total so that I can see my balance grow as the year progresses.

When we started this, Geff and I each put aside \$25/week, which amounts to \$2,600/year. Pretty quickly we realized that \$25 was an easy weekly target for us, so we increased it to \$50/week. A year later, as shown in the image above, we were up to \$125/week. This year, because our goal is to pay off our new travel trailer when it is delivered this fall, we are putting away \$200/week! This is proving a bit more difficult, because it's such a large amount, but because it's a goal, we recognize that for some weeks we may have to modify the plan and that is OK. What this savings plan does is help us focus on what we want and what we don't need. We have found that we spend less money on stuff we don't need, so that we can do the things we want to do. The spreadsheet simply helps build discipline.

Remember, you are writing yourself a check (which is how we do it) or transferring money into your own account designated for travel. This is not the same as spending it. You are simply getting it out of your checkbook, where you are likely to buy "stuff" with it and moving into your Dream Big fund. It's still in the bank!

You can use it for your travels or for emergencies should something come up. It just removes it from an "easy spend account" to an account from which you have to consciously withdraw. Having money put aside helps manage costs and therefore, stress. When it is time to pay for a campsite or flight, the money is there. When the bills come in at the end of the trip, the money is there. Putting money aside makes big dreams achievable!



# Planning, Planning, and More Planning



With our Dream Big list created and money accumulating, it is time to pick a destination and start planning a trip! For this section of the guide, we are going to look at international travel, because planning local trips tends to be much easier.

Choosing a place to go is personal and unique to each of us, so let's talk about the some of the things that are common to most if not all big trips.

It is important to plan, plan, and then plan some more. Do your research before your trip, so that once you arrive at your destination, you will be better prepared to handle any situation that may occur.

To know as much about your destination as you can, you should obtain an understanding of these types of things:

- Cultural norms
- Climate



- Holidays
- Security and safety concerns
- Availability of medical services
- Trip Insurance
- Passport, Visas, and Currency

*Cultural norms.* This is a broad category but generally encompasses the acceptable behavior in your destination country.

Cultural differences extend to all sorts of little things and while allowances will usually be made for foreigners, visitors unacquainted with customs may inadvertently cause offense and themselves embarrassment.



For example, in India, everyone eats with only their right hand. This is because in India, the left hand is used for wiping after using the toilet, cleaning feet, and other

less savory functions. Therefore, the right hand is for eating, shaking hands and so on. Another example is that to this day chewing gum in Singapore is illegal, unless it is for medicinal purposes and prescribed by a doctor. Who knew! A little research can go a long way to avoid causing offense or embarrassment. When in doubt, watch what the local people are doing around you and follow their lead.

*Climate.* Although this seems straightforward, it isn't as simple as looking up the predicted weather for the 10 days you will be traveling. As we all know, forecasts are less than reliable. Investigate historical weather patterns, including rain totals and temperature, including the high and low temperature extremes. This is definitely more important when traveling to remote locations where finding a place to buy suitable gear and clothing is not possible.

For example, when traveling above the Arctic Circle to capture aurora images, if you don't have the right clothing or are not staying somewhere with clothing available for guests, it is very easy to find yourself unprepared. Each year when I visit the Aurora Lodge in Bettles, Alaska, I see folks arrive in lightweight winter boots and ski



jackets. Generally, this type of clothing is rated to 25-30°F.

Each year, I see people suffer. It is not unusual for the temperature to be -40°F at night and -20°F during the day. It has taken me multiple trips to figure out what I need to buy to be even close to comfortable. Over the years, I have collected a variety of boots because each year I find the gear I take isn't sufficient. I now have 6 pairs of winter boots! I have chosen to buy gear only because I know I will go back nearly every year. But for most people, buying clothing for these extreme temperatures that makes no sense.

Thankfully, the lodge we visit provides boots, parkas, and other gear for guests. But not all locations will have these amenities. The only way you will know whether they do is if you do your research.

*Holidays.* Many European countries are known for the long summer vacations. There is nothing worse than showing up in an amazing city like Rome to find locations closed or on reduced hours. Local holidays can also result in huge crowds; think Mardi Gras in New Orleans or Carnival in Venice, Italy. Not only are the crowds huge, but generally the costs go up and finding hotel rooms can be nearly impossible. It may not change your

planned travel date, but knowing local holidays will at least prepare you for what to expect.

*Security and Safety Concerns.* These days it's hard to keep track of where it is safe to travel. Sadly, for Americans this can be more challenging than for people from other parts of the world. The U.S. State Department has a great website for checking on travel warnings and restrictions ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)). It's important to consider safety concerns even when you are traveling locally. For example, if you are planning to visit any of the national or state parks, you can check their websites for what to expect and how to make sure you stay safe when visiting. Additionally, you might want to also check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) for information regarding suggested vaccinations for your destination. There's a ton of information at there, so use it.

*Availability of Medical Services.* When traveling in the U.S., you can probably find a hospital, clinic, or pharmacy regardless of which state or city you are visiting. This isn't necessarily true when you travel abroad. For example, Cuba is only 90 miles away and even though it is known to have great doctors available to foreign



visitors, it is not known for having medical equipment, supplies, and drugs on hand. In other words, if you need a prescription, make sure you take enough with you for the duration of your tour, because you will not be able to get a refill. In other areas of the world, you may only be able to find a hospital in a large city. So when planning your trip, consider whether you need additional medical insurance (does your health plan cover you on international or even domestic travel?) or evacuation insurance to make sure you can get to treatment should an emergency arise. There are a number of websites that can help you compare and buy medical and evacuation insurance, including trip insurance (discussed in a minute). I use [TravelInsurance.com](http://TravelInsurance.com) ([www.travelinsurance.com](http://www.travelinsurance.com)), but there are other resources.



Something else to consider related to safety and medical services is whether you know how to contact emergency services in your destination cities, should you need them. Here in the U.S. we would dial 911. What if you were in Iceland, what number would you dial there? The answer is 112. What about England? Well, there it may be 999 or 112. Why do Iceland and the United Kingdom both have 112 for emergency services? Well, this is because 112 is the emergency number for the European Union. The local emergency number for the United Kingdom (England) is 999.

*Trip Insurance.* In addition to rental car insurance, and medical and evacuation insurance, you should consider whether to buy trip insurance, which may provide reimbursement for things such as trip cancellation, lost baggage, and whatever other options you choose. Choosing to buy trip insurance is a personal decision. I insure my larger, more expensive excursions (for obvious reasons, as these have the potential for the greatest loss).

*Passport, Visas, and Currency.* If you are traveling out of the country, make sure your passport has at least 6 months left on it before it expires. Additionally, find out if the country to which you are traveling requires a visa. Visas can take weeks to



get and often require visiting the country's embassy, which may be located far away from where you live.

My only experience with obtaining a visa occurred when traveling to China for work. This was a last-minute work related trip, so I ended up needing to expedite the visa (which costs extra money). When possible, plan ahead and avoid the extra cost.

The Chinese embassy, located in Washington, D.C., has very limited hours for visa application, so to ensure that I could get in and get the application complete, I had to arrive early and wait in line for an hour before the embassy even opened. I was second in line after arriving before 7 AM and by 8 AM the line was down the block. I was prepared for this because I had done a lot of online research into the visa process before I went. I also made sure I had all the documents I needed, including a letter of request from my Chinese host. Without this, my application would not even be processed. My host had requested a multi-visit, multi-year visa, which was granted. A few days later, I had to return to the embassy to pick up my passport (which I had to leave behind) and my visa. This required another morning in line. All in all, the experience wasn't too bad.

At the time, I had about 7 months left before my passport expired. I wasn't worried about this because my online research (on the Chinese embassy website) had suggested that if your Visa was inactive and in an expired passport, you could travel with two passports, the expired one with the active visa, and the new passport. So on my second trip to China, about 8 months after the first trip, I was shocked when I went to check in for my flight and I was told my visa was expired! It turned out, that instead of following their own guidance and giving me a multi-year visa, the Chinese embassy set my visa to expire when my passport expired. I didn't realize this and it didn't even occur to me that this would happen. I found out the hard way, when I couldn't get on the plane. I had to call my boss to let him know I wouldn't be making the trip, which in turn cancelled all the scheduled meetings. Ugh! Thankfully, everyone needed more time to prepare, so we scheduled the trip for a few months later. Believe me, I went and got a new visa the next week so as not to have that experience again.

When traveling abroad, you will likely need to exchange money. In some countries, for example Iceland, you can use a credit card for everything. When I go to Iceland, I



exchange about \$40 into Icelandic krona, just to have pocket change. I also wait until I get to Iceland to change my money, as there are no fees charged when I do it there. If I did it in the U.S., I would pay a 3% fee for the service. Remember though, each country is unique. For example, Cuba has a different system. If you are changing U.S. dollars to Cuban pesos, known as CUPs, you will be charged an additional 10% fee (tax) on the conversion. This is above and beyond the normal 3% fee. To avoid this, we converted our U.S. dollars to euros (3% fee) and then converted the euros to Cuban pesos (3% fee), to avoid the surcharge on U.S. money. This essentially saved us 7% in fees. Additionally you need to convert the Cuban pesos back to U.S. dollars before you leave Cuba, or you will be stuck with them.

If you do intend to rely on credit cards when traveling abroad, be sure the contact your bank to let them know of your upcoming travel plans and to find out if there are foreign transaction fees. It is not uncommon for credit card companies to cut off card usage when the bank identifies foreign transactions. In fact, I have a friend who traveled from Oregon to Pennsylvania and had his card frozen more than once during the trip. It is better to let them know

in advance of travel, then to struggle to make contact during your trip. Many credit card companies charge 3% of the transaction cost as a fee for translating the foreign currency into U.S. dollars. This can definitely add up if you are paying for big items such as hotel bills, gasoline, and restaurants. I carry the United Explorer Visa card. At the time of this writing, this credit card has no foreign transaction fees, and good insurance coverage for car rentals and other losses incurred (e.g., baggage), when the trip is paid for using the card. I use it to pay for everything when I travel.

Where can we find this information?

Guidebooks, friends, and the Internet are

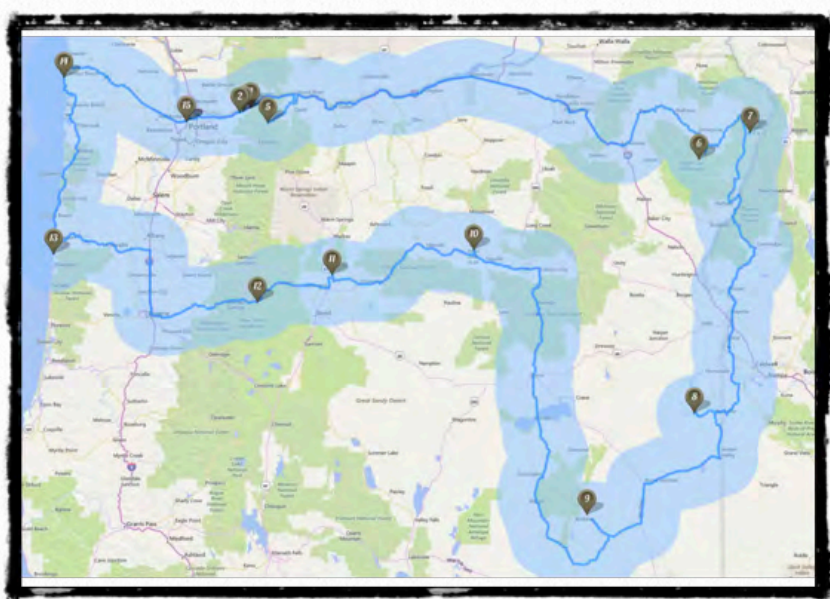


great resources.

With some basic information under your belt, you are ready to plan your trip; picking dates, finding flights, figuring out locations and travel path. Generally, when



traveling in the U.S., you can find great interactive mapping programs on the Internet. These websites will really help you plan your trip out. But remember, these are best used as a basic route guide, not as a rigid plan. For example, maps may identify routes that don't really exist. This is what happened to us in Oregon. We mapped out a route to Alvord Desert, looked to be a short drive in from the main road, so we planned our day accordingly and figured we would arrive and set up camp early in the day. It didn't work out that way. The road identified on the map wasn't really available for use (private road) and that meant we had to drive hours to get to the public entrance. Since we had all day, this wasn't the end of world, but we also didn't get the rest day we had planned for either.



Another location (I am sure there are many) where Internet mapping creates false

expectations is Iceland. On a map, Iceland looks small and the Ring Road (Route 1) looks like the D.C. Beltway. In reality, Iceland is an extremely large country and the Ring Road takes days to get around, not hours. Google will tell you that from Reykjavik to Jökulsárlón (the Iceberg Lagoon) it will take about 4.5 hours drive. The drive can easily take 6+ hours, if not more. The map doesn't account for all the amazing sights you will see along the way. It doesn't account for the fact that many of the bridges are single-lane that only allow every other car to pass. It doesn't account for the traffic (easily an hour's worth) you will hit just trying to get out of Reykjavik. It will show you the road to take to get there, but it cannot provide you the real experience. I can't tell you how often people have said to me that they plan to drive the entire Ring Road in a weeklong trip. It's not that you can't do it, but to do it you will not be able to stop and enjoy the epic scenery you will come across.

Remember, planning and research. When you think you are done, research and plan some more.



# 2

## How to Travel

“Travel ... the best way to be lost and found at the same time.”

– Brenna Smith



Once your destination is chosen, there are a few more key decisions that need to be made, such as:

- How to get around:
  - Public transportation
  - Group tour (large or small)



- Travel alone
- Where to stay
- Dietary considerations
- Clothing
- Communication
- Power Conversion
- Language Barriers

*How to get around:* This may just be one of the biggest decisions you make when planning a trip. Determining whether you want the sole responsibility for your transport or whether you want to be in the presence of others can have a huge impact on how much you enjoy the trip.

Taking public transportation, such as a train or local bus, can be a lot of fun. The responsibility for travel days is definitely left to someone else, which means you get to kick back and enjoy the ride. However, in some countries, breakdowns or last-minute strikes involving public transportation can put a real crimp in your plans, particularly if you have hotel reservations in the next stop. Also, most forms of public transportation have set stops and schedules, with no real room for variation, other than choosing which stops

to get off and get on. You really have little to no control over your destiny once you board a train or local bus.

Large group tours are another option. Generally, you will be traveling by large coach with lots of people. Large group tours are often less expensive because you are sharing the cost of transportation with many people. But this affordability comes at a price: crowded and often loud buses, time waiting for all those people to pile on and off the bus, multiple personalities and person relationships to manage. Even if you are not personally involved, having people seated two rows back on the bus fighting with each other can be stressful to witness. Also, large groups, particularly those on coach buses, have very little flexibility. The bus routes are scheduled and tightly timed and the buses cannot stop just anywhere.





Often, there are time limits set for each stop, which can be frustrating if you are on a trip to make pictures. Also, in most countries, the drivers have highly regulated driving limits with establish the maximum amount of time they are allowed to drive. When they reach their maximum hours, they are required to stop and rest. It doesn't matter that the best sunset of the trip is happening and the bus got stuck in local traffic, you will find yourself on the way to the hotel.

Small group tours, like the ones we run, might cost a bit more, but have much more flexibility. For many of our international destinations, we are the drivers. Even when we hire drivers, they are private drivers who do not fall under the same rigid rules as coach bus drivers. This allows us more flexibility. The small group size also allows us to rent vehicles that will be able to access more remote destinations and follow the "light" and weather conditions.

We too will have a set destination in mind, but we have much more control over the schedule and therefore, we do our very best to stop when guests see something they are interested in.



Traveling alone is probably the most flexible way to travel, just you and your friends or family in a car or van. But this type of travel comes with its own drawbacks, such as having to plan all the details of the trip, having to know where all the coolest places are to visit, and having energy to do all the driving while also trying to enjoy the trip – basically, having total responsibility.

I think that small group tours, like ours, allow for the most enjoyable experience for the traveller; they has the most flexibility while still letting you, the guest, rest and relax (or shoot out the window).

*Where to stay.* This decision can often be a difficult one, because trying to choose between amenities and local flavor can be difficult. Do you want to stay in a well-known chain of hotels or do you want to stay at a local inn? Each has its benefits and drawbacks.





Here is another quick story to demonstrate what I mean. Years ago, I went to Italy. We deliberately found pensiones, essentially bed and breakfasts, in each of our destination cities. In Rome, our pensione was near the Spanish Steps. Each day we would start our day with a light European breakfast, before heading out for a day of exploration. Our days were long and included lunch and dinner in a neighborhood café or restaurant. We never went back to our lodgings for food because we wanted to experience Italian food in Italy and frankly, it wasn't even an option, because they only offered breakfast.

We experienced Italy the way locals do and it was AMAZING! A few years later, a co-worker of mine went to Rome. When she returned I was excited to hear about her trip and to share "war stories" about the amazing sights, food, and culture of Italy. I asked her, "So what did you think, wasn't the food amazing!?!". She said she wasn't impressed at all with the food and that the trip was okay. I was floored! What

on earth was she talking about... not impressed... it's Italy! After some further questioning, it became clear. I asked her where she stayed... she said, "Near the Spanish Steps." Well, I know for a fact that there were many options for amazing eats right there. I asked if she stayed in a pensione. She did not, she had stayed at the Ritz. I asked her if she had tried any of the restaurants in the neighborhood. She had not, they ate all their meals at the Ritz. My jaw dropped. She had traveled to one of the most amazing places in Europe, known for its food, its culture, its wine, and she had eaten all of her meals at the Ritz. She was right, her trip to Italy was only okay... she had completely missed Italy and I told her just that. I told her she needed to go back, sleep where she may, but she needed to eat everywhere else.

There is nothing wrong with wanting the benefits of a big chain for lodging. Big chain hotels can provide luxury, security, and great location, but they simply cannot provide cultural experiences. Eating all your meals in chain restaurants, whether they are hotel-based or McDonald's limits the uniqueness of your journey. You might as well go one big city over from where you currently live, as the experience will be just about the same. At the end of the day,



she could have just gone to New York and watched Italian movies.

I personally prefer quaint inns for my lodging. They can provide ample security for you and your property, while providing you with unique experiences. Often the operator is the owner and can provide invaluable information about their neighborhood, village, or city. Because these types of lodgings are small, they are often located very close to main points of interest. One drawback to this type of lodging may be the availability of parking. In a city like Rome, we used public transportation to get from the airport to the center of town and then walked everywhere. We didn't rent a car until the morning we left Rome to head to Tuscany.

You may prefer more rural digs and want to stay in a small cabin or even tent in the woods.



These options are also available (albeit maybe not in Rome) and come with their own amazing experiences.

No matter where you choose to stay and choose to eat, you must choose. So lodging and eating are on the list of “must make” decisions.



*Dietary considerations.* Depending on your personal preferences and needs, food may present a challenge in some locations. I have yet to find an intolerable experience, but I have been challenged. For example, I eat a lot of salad (trying to be healthy). I found this habit impossible to maintain in Cuba. The Cuban diet consists of protein (chicken, pork, and fish) and starch (rice, yucca, bread, and other carbohydrates and root vegetables). All food I love, but also all food I have been avoiding. I had to compromise. I ate more meat than normal and did my best to avoid as many carbs as possible. The food was amazing, so my compromise was a tasty one. But for some, say vegetarians or vegans, this might be more difficult. Other considerations include traveling to a destination, say China, knowing you aren't a fan of Chinese food. I will say, food in China is amazing and nothing like Chinese



food in the U.S., so don't be deterred, it's just something to think about. Remember, you can always bring snacks (nuts, protein bars, etc.) to fill in any dietary gaps you might experience. Also, if you do have dietary needs, make sure to let your lodging know in advance, so that they can prepare accordingly. This will help them ensure you have the trip of a lifetime.

*Clothing.* Preparing for your trip includes packing properly. There is nothing worse than landing at your destination to find that you have to find a shop to get a coat before you even see your first sight. As noted early in this guide, don't just look at the projected forecast but look at the historical norms. That will definitely help.

Each time we lead a tour to Iceland, at least half of the group buys gloves.



The saying "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco," (it is believed that Mark Twain did not actually say this) is accurate for a reason. It's cold in San Francisco in June and July.

Frankly, those are the coldest months, even colder than winter. As a Californian who worked in San Francisco for 10 or so years, I say this from firsthand experience. Even though it is summer everywhere else in the U.S., the north coast of California and in particular, San Francisco, can be bone-chilling in June and July.

Are there warm days? Sure, but few and far between. People show up at the airport





in short-sleeve shirts and cargo shorts and immediately buy an “I Love SF” sweatshirt. They did not do their research. As a side note, the reason San Francisco is so cold in June and July is that during those months, the temperatures about 40 miles east of the city get well into the high 90s and low 100s daily. This heat draws the coastal fog into the bay, shrouding San Francisco in a solid blanket of cold wet fog, hence all of those amazing Golden Gate Bridge shots and chilly temperatures.



Not packing correctly happens to the best of us. Most recently on a weekend trip to Death Valley, everyone expected hot temperatures... it is Death Valley. Shorts and light jackets had been packed. One last check of the weather the night before the trip made it clear winter gear was needed. The highs were expected to be in the 40s. Everyone had to scramble to repack.

*Communication.* This can still be one of the most challenging hurdles to overcome, which is amazing with all the technology out there. We are spoiled in (most of) the U.S. because for the most part, we have good access to WIFI and cellular services. We have come to expect that these services exist everywhere a plane can land. But this is simply not the case. Even here in the U.S., finding cellular service is a challenge once you leave the more populated areas, and in some cases even finding WIFI connection can be nearly impossible. For example, in Bettles, Alaska, there is no cellular service and WIFI is satellite-based, which is slow as molasses when it is working. The Aurora Lodge does have a satellite-based landline for basic communication and emergencies. They will let guests use it if necessary, but otherwise, once you are there, you will be out of touch until you return to Fairbanks. On my most recent stay in Bettles (not a tour), I saw more than a few people constantly trying to get online to check in with family and friends. Instead of enjoying their trip, they sat in the lodge frustrated. If you are traveling to a remote location, let your friends and family know that you will touch base when and if you can and not to worry about you. This will take significant burden off of you, allowing you to relax and enjoy the experience of



such a remote location. The silence and beauty of the Alaskan arctic is simply amazing and when the aurora borealis comes out, you will forget your desire for Facebook.

You will find that each destination you choose will have different solutions to



communication challenges. In Iceland we buy Icelandic SIM cards and then buy time on Icelandic cellular carriers. Since we are doing the driving, we need to be able to communicate between the cars, as well as readily accessed weather reports and mapping programs. Also, in Iceland, WIFI is available in every lodging (those we use) and just about every restaurant. This allows us to communicate more readily with friends and family in the evenings.

In Cuba, cellular service to the mainland is impossible to find. You can buy a SIM (although we didn't try this) and use their cellular service provider, but my

understanding is that the service is not reliable and it won't help you communicate outside of Cuba. This is why we chose not to purchase SIM cards. You can buy login WIFI access, but to use it you have to hang out at specific city parks to get service.

In other words, do your research and know what you are going to need before you go. It is generally not a one-size-fits-all solution for any of these topics.

*Power Conversion.* When traveling to a foreign country, it is important to make sure that you will be able to charge your camera batteries and run other electronic gear (e.g., computers, tablets, etc.). These days, the easiest solution to power conversion concerns is to buy a universal adapter. This one-stop device will provide you with the most flexibility for all your travels.





*Language Barriers.* For many of us, travel to foreign countries will come with a language barrier. Crash courses in a new language and phrase books can help. However, if you are like me, the minute I need to speak my brain goes blank and I forget everything I have learned.

If you carry a smart phone, you might have the best solution right in your hand. There are many different types of translation applications that will translate what you type or speak into the foreign language of your choice. Some of these applications even have downloadable dictionaries, so that active cellular or internet access is not needed to use. I used the Google Translate application.

I suggest that if you are traveling to a country in which language will be an issue, definitely download the offline dictionary content. It may take up space on your phone, but you will be happy you have it.





# 3

## Gear, Gear, and More Gear

“You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.”

– Mae West



How much gear is too much?

As photographers, we need gear. How much gear is up to debate, but no matter what... we need gear.

My gear necessities list looks like this:

- Camera body(ies) - I always carry two bodies
- Lenses (wide-angle, telephoto, and sometimes prime lens)
- Tripod (light-weight or sturdy depending on destination and planned subjects)
- Extra batteries (camera and AA/AAA), SD/CF cards, chargers, remote trigger
- ND or other filters
- Cleaning supplies



Over the years, I pack fewer and fewer items, because I don't enjoy lugging a heavy camera bag around with me. When the trip will be mostly car-based, then you might be able to take more gear, because you will have access to a car to store the bulk of the gear during the day.

But remember, the more gear you take, the more gear you will need to schlep from the car to your lodgings nightly and each morning. If you need your bag with you all day, you will carry all that weight on your back for the duration.

Do I need this lens? I always carry two camera bodies. I don't want to go on the trip of a lifetime to have my camera fritz out and stop working. Lenses though are another matter. After years of practice, I have learned not to pack a lens that may give me that one shot, because I almost never use it. If the lens isn't going to be of primary use, it stays home. At my age, my back means more to me than that one shot I may take. Here is an image of a typical travel camera bag.



Obviously these choices are personal. We each know what we are looking to capture, so there are no rights or wrongs, just decisions to be made.



When making these decisions, remember to take into consideration all airline baggage allowances, not just the flight out of the U.S. If you have any in-country or puddle-jump flights scheduled on smaller carriers, you need to make sure you meet their baggage allowances as well, or at least be prepared to pay for overages. Even if you are on a tour, the tour operator will not cover baggage overages, so know what is allowed and plan accordingly.

Many airlines have different allowances based on fare class. Sometimes just buying a better seat can expand your weight limit dramatically. So definitely look into this. However, remember it doesn't tend to be the bigger airlines that are the issue. The problem of baggage weight is most often an issue on the smaller flights that get you out to more remote locations. For example, when flying from Fairbanks to Bettles, Alaska, there is a 50-pound limit on the flight. If you are carrying a camera bag, computer, tripod, and other accessories for capturing and archiving aurora images, you will hit 50 pounds before you even get to clothing; which by the way, will be heavy winter clothes and boots. On my last trip, my camera bag and laptop case took up my 50-pound allotment. My suitcase for clothes, boots, and tripod was an additional 52 pounds.

At \$1.80/pound surcharge, that added up fast. I needed all that I packed, so I just paid it. This will often be the case, so just make sure you are prepared.

Also, remember that these days, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is more rigid during their inspections of carry-on bags and the more gear you bring, the more likely you are to receive a higher level of scrutiny. TSA is always stressful (for me) but I do recognize its purpose, so I try to get through with the least hassle possible. On a recent trip, the TSA agent pulled my camera bag aside for inspection. I identified myself as the owner and he asked whether anything in the bag was breakable. ? I couldn't restrain myself from saying, no, as long as you don't drop it. He laughed and minutes later I was on my way.

When determining what to carry on the plane and what to check, I consider value. I never check my camera gear or my computer, as there is no way I am willing to lose these items. I will, however, sometimes check my tripod, though I will keep my ball-head with my camera gear. There have been times that I have carried my tripod onto the plane as part of my carry-on baggage. To this day, I have not had any trouble doing this, but it is



important to review the airline's website to see if they have specific restrictions.

When the primary purpose for my trip is landscape photography, I take my large full-size Induro tripod, as it is sturdier and more likely to handle any inclement weather I may experience. If the purpose of the trip is to make street photography images, then I tend to carry a lighter-weight tripod, such as a MeFOTO RoadTrip Travel Tripod. These tripods collapse and easily fit in a carry-on bag or small suitcase.



Lastly, lens. I generally shoot with telephoto lenses (18-55mm, 10-24mm, 55-200mm), because they provide the most flexibility. I recognize that prime lens may be sharper, but it is a trade off I am willing to make to minimize items and weight.



I generally carry my heavy glass (e.g., 100-400mm or 50-140mm) when I know I will be photographing subjects, such as wildlife, for example, bears in Katmai National Park.





# 4

## Expectation Versus Reality

**“It is better to see something once than to hear about it a thousand times.”**  
– Asian Proverb



We have done our research, mapped our trip, packed, arrived, and are anticipating a wonderful trip full of sights and photography! Just as we should be!!

Inevitably and according to Murphy's Law, the reality we experience will not meet the expectations we have.



For example:

- It will rain, if we don't have an umbrella or have planned days out hiking.
- It will snow, if we don't have gloves.
- There will be no clouds, and as photographers we aren't fans (generally) of blue skies.
- There will be wind and we have our lightweight tripod.
- There will be no epic sunrise or sunset, enough said.

How we handle these adversities is important for many reasons. Primarily, we don't want to bring other folks down (friends and family on the trip) because we are unhappy with our circumstances.

Another reason though, is more particular to us, as photographers. We bring ourselves to every image we create. If we are in a bad mood or disenchanted by the conditions in which we find ourselves, this negativity will reflect itself in our work. Maybe we chose to stay in and not even go out to shoot or if we do get out, we might miss amazing scenes and opportunities because we are not feeling inspired.

If you don't believe me try this experiment. Process an image after you've had a long day at work or after an argument with someone. Then later, when you have calmed down and are in a better mood, process the same image again. I promise you, the images will be dramatically different.

On my first trip to China, part of my research included finding images of subjects, like the Great Wall, that I planned to visit. Here is a stock image (artist unknown) that I found. Seeing this, I was so excited to make my own images of this amazing structure.



Well upon landing in China, it was pretty clear I wasn't going to see sky. The week I was there, China was experiencing its well-known smog. Even the news reports were covering air quality and health impact. Here is what I saw, when I got to the Great Wall.





You can't control Mother Nature; do your best to not let her control you. Remember, you will not always have the conditions you wanted, but the best light is the light you have. My theory is "all light is great light," you just need to know how to handle it.

Roll with the punches and make memories!

Here is the image I made from my reality.



This image tells the story of my reality and incredible smog I experienced. Other people will have a different story to tell and to me, that's the beauty of sharing images.

We get to experience other people's stories and they get to experience ours.

Although I had awful weather, China had a ton to offer and believe me, was beautiful all the same.





# Rolling with the Punches



Let's look at some common conditions we will experience during our travels and how to handle making pictures:

- Bright sunny days with few or no clouds and less than amazing sunrises and sunsets
- Bad weather
- Expected events don't happen (e.g., no auroras)

I will share with you some of the ways I handle these conditions. Hopefully, my tips and tricks will help you roll with the punches on your next trip.

*Bright sunny days with few or no clouds and less than amazing sunrises and sunsets.* Bright sunny days mean high contrast scenes. Most photographers try to avoid bright sunny days and prefer to shoot early morning and late evening. But I think high contrast can make amazing



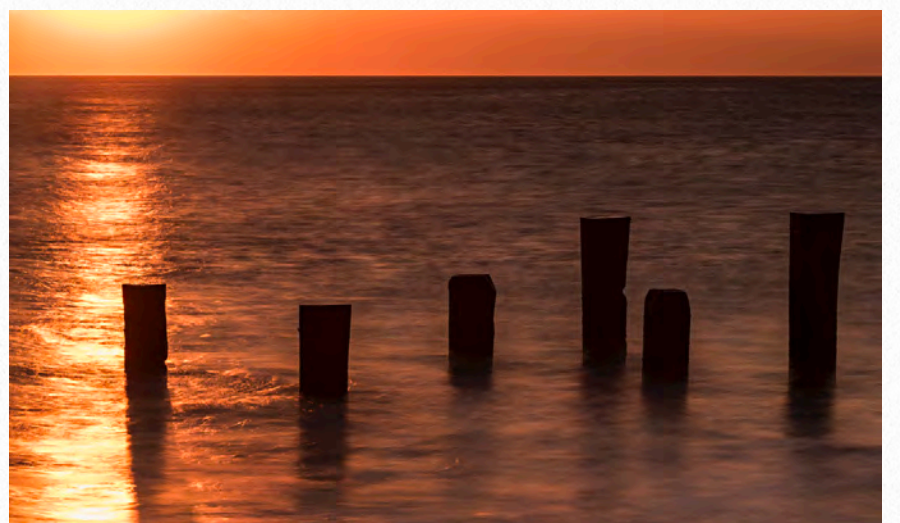
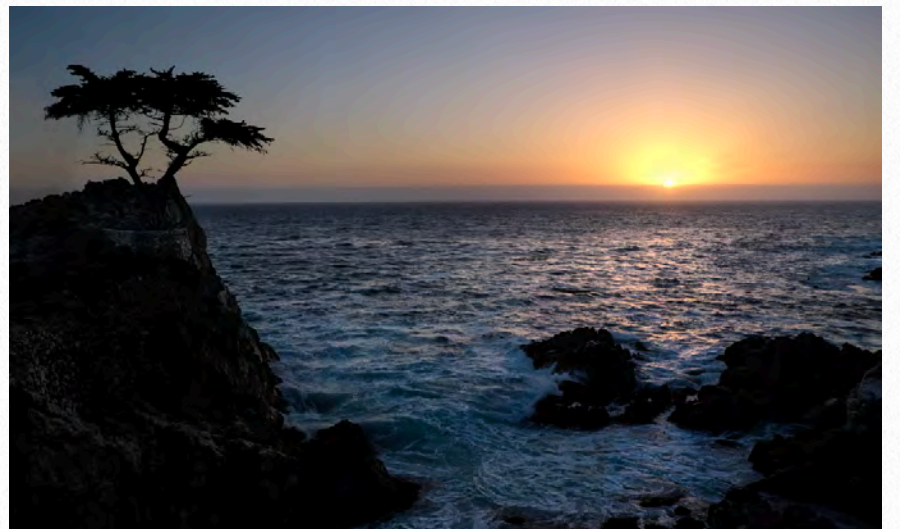
images. My go-to solution is to process the images in black and white, as deep dark shades and bright highlights are key to strong black and white imagery. I also consider looking for compositions that have texture and detail, such as the images below.



Sometimes even with clouds in the sky, our primary subject is in full sun and then infrared black and white imagery might be best.



Another approach is to minimize the sky as best you can. Focus the viewer's attention away from the sky by cutting it out as much as possible.





Or by bringing the subject to the foreground.



You can also simply cut the sky out of the image altogether. Not all landscape images require skies. Sometimes the landscape alone tells the whole story.



Lastly, change it up during post processing. Consider enhancing the sky with clouds or stars or replacing the sky (and other distracting backgrounds) with a texture.



You might even consider running the image through a creative software application, such as TopazLabs Impression, to give it an entirely new look. Doing this ensures no one will be

evaluating the “light” with which you were working.



*Bad weather.* Weather comes in all shapes and sizes, but generally, as luck would have it, it comes in exactly the form you don’t want. Again, we can thank Murphy.

Quick story. I lived on the West Coast for 37 years, and 21 of them with a driver’s license. Yet in all that time, I had not driven from the San Francisco Bay Area to Washington State. I certainly explored the coastline, but just never hit the road for the epic road trip. A few years back, Geff and I decided to do the drive. We flew to San Francisco, rented a car, and headed north. The West Coast in the early fall is beautiful, known for its incredible Indian Summer weather. The California portion of the trip was all that we expected, with beautiful warm days, cool evenings, and stunning



sunsets. So far, all was good. But then we got to Oregon and the weather turned. In fact, it was shockingly bad. We found ourselves in the waning days of a typhoon. 37 years on the West Coast and I had never experienced such weather, but here I am on a two-week trip, with 4 days in Oregon, and I am in torrential rain and hurricane winds. There was no danger, but still it was not what we had hoped for. But it was what we got, so what did we do... of course we took pictures of it!



The weather was so bad, that the pelicans were huddled together to wait out the storm.



The weather finally cleared, but left behind a creepy black layer of who knows what hovering above the ocean.



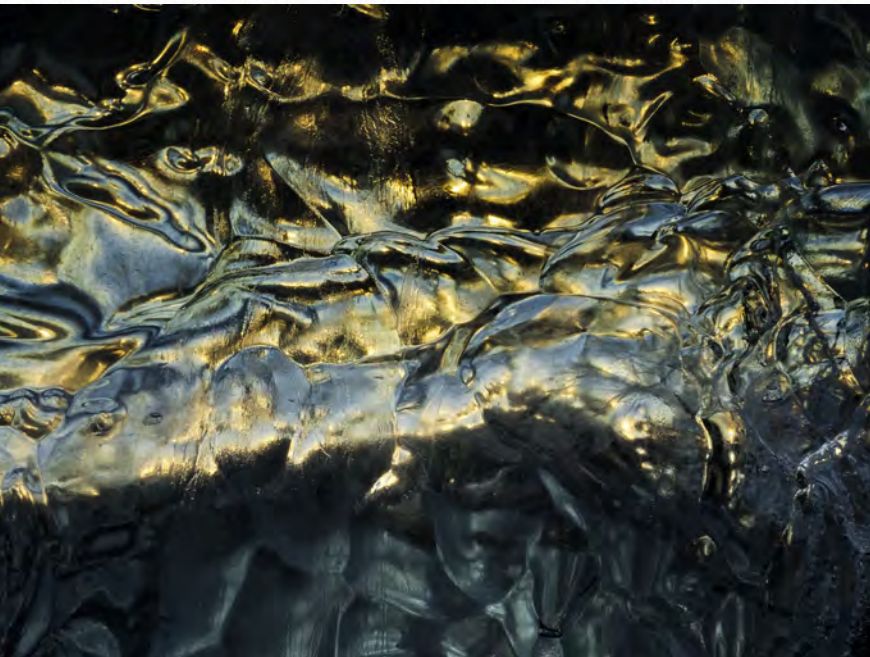
We documented it all and our images provide clear examples of our experience.

If only this trip was an isolated experience. We have experienced crazy weather everywhere. On a recent trip to Iceland, we got gale-force winds. In fact, our saying is, "If it's not windy, then you're not in Iceland." Iceland is known for its unpredictable weather, but the weather is also known for its changeability. In other words, wait 10 minutes, because the weather will change. It may actually take more than 10 minutes, but you get the point.

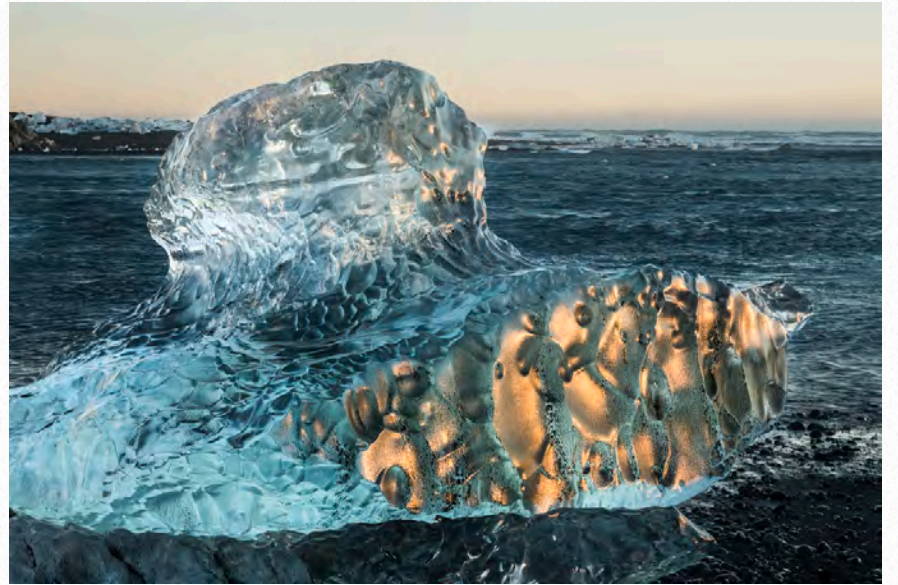


One morning we got up and headed to the iceberg beach, hoping for some amazing Icelandic winter light. When we arrived and the sun started to rise, it was pretty clear, pretty quickly that the sunrise was going to be a colorless bust. In addition to that, the winds were whipping along the beach, carrying stingy black sand with it.

Our group stuck it out and got creative. Here is an image of sunrise with the sky omitted. You still get the feel of sunrise, just in an abstract way.



Also, the black sand, although totally unpleasant stinging our face and hands, made for some interesting features. In this image, the sun reflects in the black sand stuck to the flat surface of the ice, creating a golden reflection and a very cool added feature on my ice spaceship!



We have also experienced seemingly endless clouds and fog. But even those days can result in unique images.

One morning in West Virginia, we woke up to fog. Since we were headed up into the Dolly Sods Wilderness area, it was impossible to know whether we would end up above the fog. We had to take our chances.





It turned out to be so dark and foggy, it was hard to tell what image would be captured, but I was there so, I decided to shoot anyway. I ended up with one of my favorite images of this area: a couple enjoying a hike with their best friend.

After a day of clouds and weather in Iceland, I decided to get up late and test the skies for auroras. That night I was gifted with not only auroras, but also, the top of the glacier, which is rarely visible.



On a camping trip to Assateague State Park in Maryland, we checked the weather and knew rain was coming. We had no idea how it was going to be delivered by an epic wall cloud. Sometimes you will have the opportunity to get most amazing images when weather is incoming.



Word of caution, big storms can be dangerous. Don't stay out so long that you put yourself and others in danger. We were inside before this storm hit.

Lastly, expected events don't always happen. Beyond sunrises and sunsets that are duds, you may have planned a trip for a particular event, for example to see auroras, an eclipse, or wildlife. Trips like these carry added pressure, because the purpose of the trip is one over which we have zero control – nature. By far, this is more frustrating than a lousy sunrise or sunset. These trips tend to be big destinations that require long-range planning and considerable expense. So when we arrive and our expected event doesn't occur, it can be a real downer.

Here's my approach: Get out and shoot anyway. You never know what you will find until you look. Here are some examples of



images that in my mind's eye would have included auroras given the amazing clear dark skies. Although the aurora never showed up, the full moon provided ample light on the ice sculptures on the beach and in the lagoon.



Had I stayed at the hotel and waited for the sky to light up with aurora, I would have missed this opportunity. Remember, all light is good light. You just have to be willing to see it and be open to the possibilities.



# 5

## When It All Comes Together

“Like all great travelers, I have seen more than I remember and remember more than I have seen.”

– Benjamin Disraeli



As Mick Jagger sings, “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometime, well you might find you get what you need.” This can’t be truer than in nature photography.

Every now and then, the planets and your planning align to provide you everything you had hoped for. In my experience, this happens on every trip. You just have to be open to seeing it.



We had driven for hours to get to Dynjandi, a waterfall in the Westfjords of Iceland. When we arrived, the sky was blue, the light was harsh, and the scene, even in black and white, was ordinary. Outside of some detail shots (zooming into the falls), there weren't very many images to be made. I was less than inspired. We all struggle with this.

I was ready to head back to the vehicle when I turned around and found that the light behind me was much, much better than the light on the falls! Clearly, I was one of the last to notice. Lesson learned... look around!!



Another technique for creating interesting images is to challenge yourself to shoot at different times of day and night. This

image was created at 1 am, in the Palouse region of Washington. We went out to shoot star trails and found a bright full moon. At first disappointed because our planned shoot wasn't going to work, we started to take notice that the moon was lighting up the clouds and fields, resulting in dramatic and different landscapes. We shot for a few hours and have scenes of the Palouse that are totally unique.



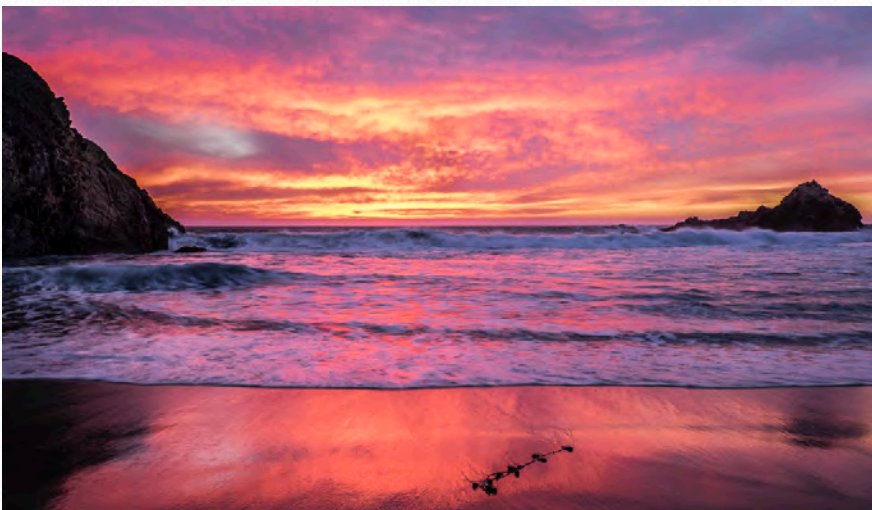
This next story still stings a bit. I had traveled to Big Sur, California, to capture the famous light beam that shoots through the keyhole in the rock at Pfeiffer Beach. This event happens twice a year in the month of the solstices. Everything was planned out. We scouted the beach early in the day to make sure we knew exactly where to be that evening. I captured this shot, still one of my favorite images of the trip.





Once we were set on where to be for sunset, we headed out for lunch and a stroll through Carmel. On around 4 pm, long before sunset, we headed back to the beach to find about 20 people hunkered down and waiting for the sunset on the same 10-square-foot patch of sand we wanted.

Those few hours ensured that we were not getting “the shot” because other angles simply would not reveal the beauty of the beam. To make matters worse, this next image shows you just how magical the sunset turned out to be.



This was my experience and I have an

amazing image to show for it. It’s just not the image I had planned to capture. I went back the next solstice to try again and couldn’t get anywhere near the beach due to landslides. Go figure. Another lesson learned. The next time I go, I will be the first person on the spot. Promise.

For all the weather you will experience during an Icelandic winter, you will also be gifted with some of the most amazing winter light. Dress warm and be prepared to shoot, shoot, shoot.







The typhoon in Oregon also left behind some amazing scenes.



Lastly get up and enjoy sunrise and be out for sunset, because they do pop!

This image was also captured on the West Coast trip was taken from Alki Beach in Seattle. We were waiting for the Seattle skyline to light up, when I turned around and found the most beautiful sunset happening right behind us!





This sunset image was taken at the top of Spruce Knob Mountain, in West Virginia. The cloud layer made for a beautiful reflective surface just as the set on the horizon.



After a rainy night camping, we hustled down to Spruce Knob Lake, in West Virginia, to be gifted with a lovely sunrise on a foggy lake. This made a wet night and sloshy campsite more than worth it.



Remember, every trip will have low points where our expectations will not be met. That is simply the way it works, but with the right mindset and a few simple tricks, even those moments will make for great imagery. Patience (and a sense of humor) will pay off with amazing scenes that result from the less than perfect conditions.

It's all in how you wish to experience it. My motto: Embrace every moment.



# 6

## Street Photography

““I'm in love with cities I've never been to and people I've never met.”

– Melody Truong



I decided to make street photography its own topic because street photography doesn't usually come with particular expectations around weather or time of day. We can capture images of cityscapes

(people and scenes) in just about every location to which we travel.

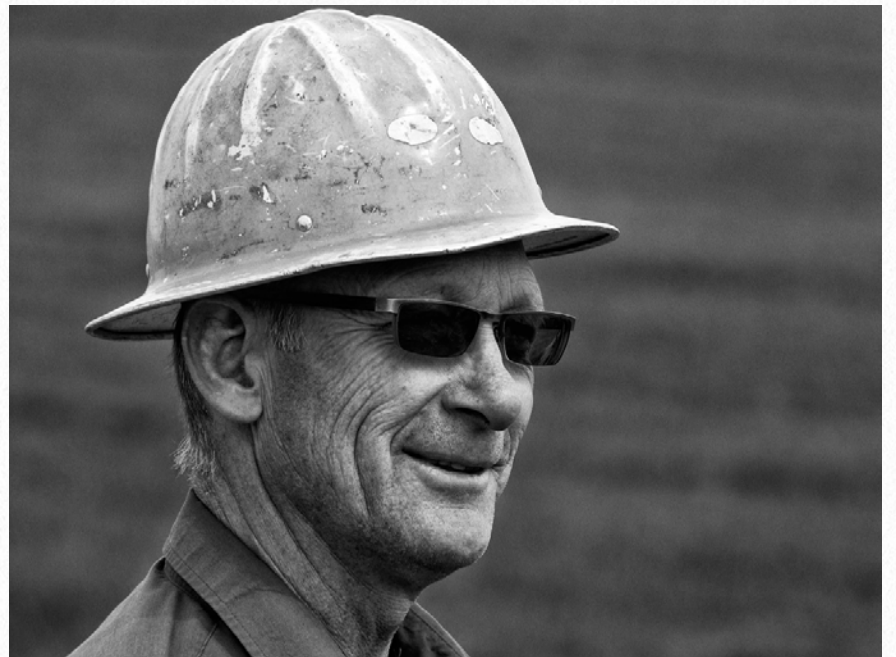


Some basic suggestions:

- Be respectful of others
- Ask permission - not everyone wants to be photographed
- Be careful about photographing children without parental consent

First and foremost: Be respectful of others. Street photography can be intimidating for the photographer (and the subject). Personally, I find it very difficult to approach people I don't know, so for the longest time I preferred to use my long lenses for street photography. However, to overcome this shyness, I have set a goal for myself this year to engage with more people when out shooting street scenes.

It's not that I have never asked permission, I just don't enjoy doing it. Another way to obtain permission, particularly if there is a language barrier, is simply to indicate with the camera that you would like to take a picture. This works great, by the way. The only downside is that seeking permission tends to get you portraits.



Portraits can be wonderful, I just prefer more candid imagery.







There are work-arounds if you want more candid, less posed shots.

- Shoot in very public places
- Use a telephoto (long) lens
- Shoot from the car
- Focus on something other than people

*Public Places:* Both of these images were taken in or near Pike's Market in Seattle.



This image was taken near the visitor's entrance to the Great Wall of China.





This image was taken in a cemetery in Cuba. This groundskeeper was enjoying a break with his coworkers.



*Long Lens:* Using a telephoto lens can get images that capture a moment in time when people are focused on something besides their photo being taken.



This image was taken in a public park in Beijing. People were so generous of spirit that the next thing I knew I was playing hacky sack with the locals enjoying the park.



*Shoot from the car:* If you aren't the driver, then you should have your camera in hand, particularly if you are in a town or village. I can't tell you how many times I have regretted putting my camera in the trunk!



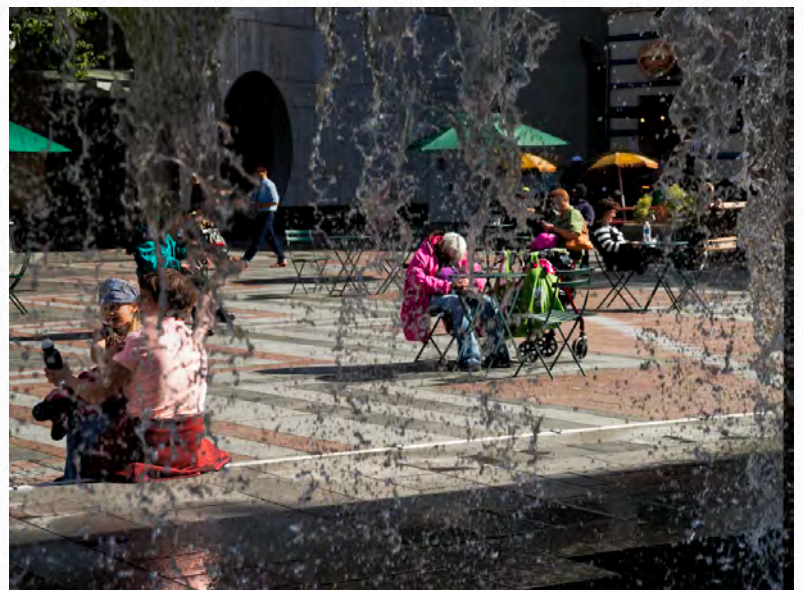




*Focus on something other than people:* In this image, I was in a park in Cuba and focused on this very cool storefront. Because I was there for some time, I blended in and that allowed people to go about their business and me to go about capturing their images.



Again, hanging out in a park in Seattle, capturing images of a fountain, as well as the people enjoying the sunny day. Notice that in this shot, I managed to avoid the bright blue sky.





Street photography can be about much more than people photography. Cuba is known for its amazing old American cars. Remember to look around and experience the uniqueness of each city you visit.



Over time I have learned to find middle ground, seek permission and shoot long enough for people to go back to what they were doing, so I can get a more natural image.

### *How to Handle Getting Caught:*

Sometimes people will indicate that they do not want their image taken. When this happens, put the camera down and walk away. There are thousands, millions of other people who won't notice or won't care. There is no need to capture an image of someone who doesn't want to be captured. If someone becomes confrontational (thankfully not with me, but I have seen it), if you have an image of them, just offer to delete it and show them

that it is gone. This is really rare, but it can happen. Just take the path of least resistance, be friendly, apologize, thank them, and move on. This usually works fine.

Here are a couple of images that show the look you may receive. ;) I always smile and say thank you.







# 7

## Epilogue

**“It feels good to be lost in the right direction.”**

– Unknown



With research and planning, your trip should be everything you hoped it would be. Planning allows you to handle just about any situation that may arise and be more ready to deal with the unexpected.

With less stress weighing you down, your images should be able to tell your story, no matter the conditions under which they were taken. Most importantly, have fun and make great memories!



For more information on our amazing photography tours, check out:



# ROAD RUNNER

## Photography Tours

[www.roadrunnerphotographytours.com](http://www.roadrunnerphotographytours.com)

Road Runner Photography Tours offers guided photography tours and adventures for beginner to advanced level photographers who are passionate about photography, enjoy travel, and prefer learning new techniques in the field and not in the classroom.

Most photography tours include a significant amount of classroom instructional time. However, we believe that when you travel, it's important to spend time in the field learning how to use gear and maximizing photography opportunities. We are always there to help folks get comfortable with their camera equipment and if needed with image processing, but the photography tour itself will be focused on capturing images!

We created Road Runner Photography Tours to provide an alternative for photographers who prefer to focus on fieldwork. We believe that learning through

practice, with camera in hand is the best way to develop skills.

What differentiates us?

- We keep our photography tours small, with generally 3 participants to each leader, providing a great opportunity for learning.
- Our smaller group sizes allow for more flexibility, which allows us to take our folks off the beaten track to explore the sites other tours can't get to.
- We pre-scout our destinations and when needed have local guides with local knowledge of all the greatest locations!
- We do our best to accommodate our participants' "I must have this image" moments, while other tours won't even consider modifying the "tour" timing.

Our tours are for photographers who are looking to experience new places, build friendships, find photo-companions, and develop technique.

Let us show you all the great spots we have found so you can enjoy your photography tour vacation!

Welcome to the Road Runner  
Photography Tours family!