

Phototravel

The Good, the Bad & the Beautiful

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The Good

Phototravel is many people's favorite thing to do photographically

The Bad

- But there are often challenges of all kinds when you travel with a major focus on taking photos
- Sometimes there is a BIG difference between what we saw when we were there and what we see on computer screen back home
- Sometimes even frustration or disappointment!

The Beautiful

Producing the kind of images you are excited about and want to share.

What is Phototravel anyway?

My definition

- Intend to take a lot of great images to share with others (usually beyond your immediate friends/family) (*Photo*) by
- Traveling somewhere interesting for at least a few nights (*travel*)
- That really "captures" the area
- Can focus on a geographic area (e.g. Italy, Vermont)
- But also may focus on particular subject matter (e.g. Colorado aspens, Alaskan eagles, Bhutan dance festivals)

What is Phototravel anyway?

For me phototravel covers a wide gamut

It be quite near like a...

- Long weekend in New England
- A few days focused on wildlife in Maine

Phototravel

Could require traveling farther away...

- One week in Florida focused on bird photography
- Five day fall or winter trip to Colorado
- Two weeks in Utah & Arizona

Phototravel

Could require travel really far away

- Two weeks in New Zealand's South Island
- Ten day scuba diving trip to Malaysian Borneo or Indonesia

Phototravel

Could be to really exotic places like

- Eleven days in Bhutan focused on Buddha dance festivals
- Twelve days to Galapagos (wildlife) & Ecuador (people)

My Job

- ✓ Share with you what I do to focus on the Good & Beautiful
- ✓ Help you keep the Bad to a minimum – tricks & traps

Agenda

With a tour or on my own - pluses & minuses?

- General tour companies
- Photo tours & workshops
- DIY (Do It Yourself)

Getting the best possible photos while traveling?

- General photography
- People & street photography

With a tour or on my own - pluses & minuses?

The most critical travel question

A. Is my highest priority photography or

B. Is my highest priority enjoying the place &
taking photos along the way

Pick one

Your answer will determine many things...

Planning my trip around photography

With a tour or on my own?

Pluses & minuses

- General tour companies
- Photo tours & workshops
- DIY (Do It Yourself)

General tour companies

Advantages

- Efficient (especially if outside USA)
- Usually cost effective
- Worry-less (everything is arranged for you)
- Safe
- Great when traveling with spouses, etc who are not so focused on picture taking (lots of things to do/see)

General tour companies

Disadvantages (for serious photography)

- Not particularly focused on or catering to photographers
- Can be limiting for more serious photography – e.g. tend to move quickly, driven by tight schedules
- But some do offer free or open time slots as well as options (e.g. side trips) where you can really concentrate on getting good pictures (beyond record shots) but not designed for photography

Sometimes spend more time in gift shops than at the sights!

Photo tours & workshops

Advantages

- Organized, inclusive ... worry-less
- Led by world-class instructors
- On site, in the field (real time) instruction
- Critiquing & feedback of your work
- Usually small, intense
- Traveling with people serious about learning
- Access to outstanding (often difficult to get to) locations usually at the best time of year & best time of day
- **Pretty much guaranteed to come home with amazing images**
- **Raises your photographic skills**

Photo tours & workshops

Disadvantages

- Not so good/fun for non-photographer spouses, etc
- Typically more expensive
- Watch out- some are better than others

Photo tours & workshops

How to find them?

- Talk to people who have been on these (best)
- Google
- Check back pages of “Outdoor Photographer” & “Shutterbug”
- See Hitchman’s Newsletter (www.photographamerica.com)

DIY - Do It Yourself tours

Advantages

- You are in charge
- Maximum freedom/flexibility
- Focused on subjects & locations you are most interested in (customized)
- Usually less expensive
- Highly rewarding
- Very fun especially if you can do it with a few other photographers

DIY - Do It Yourself tours

Disadvantages

- Not for everyone – requires some level of “adventuresomeness”
- You are on your own (or with a photo buddy or two) so some risks
- Requires a great deal more time/effort on your part to plan & execute
- May not be a viable option in some parts of the world (e.g. Antarctica, Galapagos, Bhutan)
- Harder in non-English speaking parts of the world but still quite possible
- No guarantees you'll find what your looking for or be there at the perfect time (unlike a photo tour)

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Preparation & planning is key:

- Study, study, study - Do lots of research about the locations – web, travel books, fellow photographers (best)
- Look at published/posted photographs of the area – web, coffee table books, post cards - to see where are the locations you want to visit

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Preparation & planning is key:

- *Trick:*

Travel brochures from general or especially photographic workshops can provide you with lots of good info (like when is the best time of year to go, highlights of the area, possible itineraries, festivals, etc)

- Subscribe to the phototravel guides and newsletters such as Hitchman's Photograph America Newsletter
- Build in “cushion” days to account for poor weather, travel issues or to give you extra time on location

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Trick/option

Consider hiring a local guide for a few days during your trip (especially overseas or even in USA)

Advantages

- Reduces time trying finding (scouting) places
- Gets you off the beaten path safely
- May be the only practical way to get to some places
- Opens up possibilities to photograph less known areas or access different vantage points even with well known locations
- Great way to learn about the area & maybe find new spots

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Trick/option

Consider hiring a local guide for a few days during your trip (overseas or USA)

Disadvantages

- Adds to cost (but if you can travel with 1-2 other people the cost per person becomes more reasonable)
- But next time you go to the area however you may know better where to go & not have to depend on a guide (Take good notes if you can)

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Trick/option

Consider hiring a local guide for a few days

Challenges:

- Not easy finding good ones (talk with photographers who have been to the destination, Google tours) but they are out there. Use phone interviews.
- Best ones are local photographers or people who understand the “special” needs of serious photographers
- Be sure and tell them exactly what you are looking for

DIY - Do it yourself tours

The following images were made possible by a local guide

DIY - Do it yourself tours

Trick/option

Use & bring with you a variety of the commonly available guidebooks such as Frommers, Fodor's, Lonely Planet, Michelin Guides

- What they do provide very well:
 - ❖ Valuable info on hotels, restaurants, car rentals, etc
 - ❖ Historical, architectural & cultural points of interest
- What they don't provide very well:
 - ❖ The kind of info photographers like to have - where are the best locations for landscapes, what time of day to be at a spot, etc

Time for Another Short Photo Travel Essay

Getting the Best Possible Photos While Traveling

- General travel photography
- People & street photography

General travel photography

Less is more – minimize what equipment you bring



General travel photography

Less is more – minimize what equipment you bring
Here's my typical gear list:

- Camera body + backup body
- 16-35 mm wide angle lens
- 24-120 mm zoom
- 70-200 mm
- Polarizer
- Tripod
- X-tra batteries, chargers (proper plugs if international)
- Memory cards (16, 32 & 64 GB) (Lots & lots)
- Flash
- Small lightweight laptop (optional)

General travel photography

Some of my approaches to phototravel:

Early light is the best time to photograph

- ✓ The quality of light is better
- ✓ Less human activity & distractions as well especially around the popular spots (e.g. national parks or urban areas)

General travel photography

Use the middle of the day to mostly scout or sightsee (or sleep & eat)

- I actively scout for rural areas, quaint village, outdoor markets & natural settings for landscapes, best time for lighting, etc
- This is where all the preparation & planning pays off

General travel photography

You can of course also get great shots during mid-day as well

- Mid-day can allow you to grab street scenes, photograph people, do close up or macro work, wildlife, capture details etc
- Good time to shoot material that you might want to use in a show or book you are planning to put together about your trip.

General travel photography

Late afternoon light (like morning light) is also the best time to photograph

- Remember some places are better in the morning & some in the afternoon
- It is not very common to have great spots that are equally good in the AM & the PM - why having flexibility & doing your planning matters

“Great photographs are not just taken... they are made”

General photography

Early evening (up until about 30 min after sunset) consider night photography on your trip

- City lights
- Lighted monuments
- Fireworks if your timing is right
- Milky Way

Tripod required!

People & street photography

**People can be the most compelling & interesting part of the trip
especially when traveling internationally**

People & street photography

Head to the outdoor markets & remote villages to photograph the land
and its people

People & street photography

There are great stories to be told photographically

People & street photography

BUT there is a challenge here –

Many of us are quite reluctant to photograph strangers or people on the street

People & street photography

I highly recommend mastering candid and street photography
before heading off on your next trip

You can practice right here at home

People & street photography

Tips & recommendations

Use a 70-200 mm zoom lens with a wide aperture (e.g. f/2.8 or f/4)

- ☐ Allows you to better control background
- ☐ Fills the frame
- ☐ Enables you stay a comfortable distance from your subject

People & street photography

The Biggest Challenge – controlling your background

- ☐ Use aperture priority
- ☐ Shoot fairly wide open like f/4
- ☐ Watch out for depth of field

Avoid including different people at different distances from your camera

Try to have everyone in same plane if shooting a family or group

- ☐ Don't bother with a tripod

People & street photography

Controlling your backgrounds – the biggest challenge

- ☐ Move yourself around to try to minimize distracting backgrounds
- ☐ Consider having your subject face you at a “better” angle
- ☐ Work with them if possible

People & street photography

Keep your people compositions simple

- ❑ Isolate a single person for a candid portrait (shoot tight)

People & street photography

- ❑ Sometimes a wider shot works quite well since it tells a fuller story
- ❑ Also, a wide angle lens an easier way to do street photography & candids

People & street photography

Consider using fill flash to add sparkle to your candids

- Built in flashes are fine for this – just watch out for red-eye
- Best - off camera external fill flash
- Set your flash so that you are -1 to -1 $\frac{3}{4}$ stops underexposing

People & street photography

Challenges to candid photography anywhere

- Be friendly and appropriate – avoid invading personal space
- Be patient - wait for the right moment, shoot a lot
- Be prepared to offer some sort of “compensation” as is culturally appropriate for the area you traveling in
- If necessary ask permission

People & street photography

Combining landscapes with people is one of my most favorite phototravel techniques

Consider putting people in the picture (e.g. as foreground)

vs.

making them the focus of the picture

A Final Short Photo Travel Essay