

A
PASSION
FOR
TRAVEL

photos that tell the story

from NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

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WELCOME

We're glad you're here. And we're pleased to know how much you care about travel and photography. We'll do everything we can today to share what we know about the techniques and business of travel photography.

To help you keep track of all the information we're going to go over we have prepared this brief outline. In places we have included brief notes of information we'll present. Finally you'll find suggested websites and a FAQ section in the back. But please understand that keeping up in the fast-changing world of photography means understanding that information can become dated quite quickly.

So... we want to share the freshest information we have, some of which might be different than what we would have told you only a year ago. Flexibility is an important tool for travel photographers. We'll give you all the information we can. What you do with it is up to you!

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ITEMS OF THE DAY

The Photos We Love (and Why)

What's In the Bag? (Gear and Techniques)

**Making Great Pictures: Methods, Tips
(and Tricks)**

Lunch

**Our Passion for Places: Telling
the Tale in Pictures**

Immersion Photography

Photographing People

Capturing the Spirit of Places We Love

Great Travel Photography Destinations

Sharing Your Pictures: The Digital Way

KEY FEATURES OF THIS SEMINAR

Our Passion for Travel

This seminar is about passion. Passion for travel, passion for photography, and how they go together. Successful pictures bring home a wealth of experience that travel gives us. And great travel takes us to places of the heart as well as destinations on the map.

We'll share everything we can about how National Geographic Traveler gets pictures that capture our passion for travel.

We all want simple answers, that's human nature. Unfortunately there are no simple, one-size-fits-all solutions in travel photography. The true "secrets" are to be found in how you think about your photography rather than in the what you do with your camera. We're glad to share all the little tricks with you, but successful pictures come from more than employing the tricks of the trade.

What do we mean by "successful?" In short, pictures that work for you. Pictures that succeed in sharing your vision, that succeed in getting the viewer's attention, that succeed at changing your life. We can't define that for you. This might mean better pictures for your family album, or it might mean pictures that are going to get you an assignment at National Geographic TRAVELER.

Successful pictures break through the barriers and really communicate. The secrets are in how you look at the world, not in how you turn the dials on the camera.

Description not Prescription

We believe in providing descriptions of how successful photographers work, not prescriptions for picture taking. Why? Because what works for us may not work for you. Because the world of photography keeps changing and what we prescribe today may be out of date tomorrow. Mostly because it is essential for you to find your way, rather than us telling you where to go.

Storytelling: What We Mean and Why It Matters

Over and over in this seminar we will refer to "picture stories" or "the story." That's photo business shorthand for "the theme," "the narrative," or "the message."

But storytelling is almost universal in good pictures. It means producing pictures that communicate, that convey information, that connect us to universal values. Often groups of pictures communicate better than individual pictures. And very often the thought process used to produce groups of pictures that relate to each other results in better individual pictures, too.

Most important, knowing what you are looking for (knowing what your "story" is) is much better than wandering around till you see something interesting. You'll take better pictures.

Judging Pictures: What Makes a Picture “Good”

We think “interesting” pictures are better than “good” pictures. Trying to define what makes a “good” picture is rather fruitless. Furthermore, just producing good pictures (by whatever definition) is no guarantee that your viewer will care about them. So during this seminar we’re going to focus on understanding what makes pictures interesting and why people care about them. Many times great travel photos are a bit “messy” rather than “perfect.” Whether it is a grandmother showing off pictures of the grandkids or a picture editor at National Geographic TRAVELER choosing pictures for publication, the universal question is: “Is it interesting?”

WHAT'S IN THE BAG

Wide-Angle Zoom (12-24mm)

Amateurs spend most of their time with a telephoto zoom. Pros spend most of their time with a wide angle. Why? Because the wide angle gets you into the middle of the action and makes pictures with a sense of "being there."

Telephoto Zoom (70-200 mm)

Besides the obvious things that telephotos do, like compressing things (telephone poles) and make pleasing portraits (no big noses), they also tend to isolate objects, useful when you want to switch gears and make simple, direct pictures.

Mid-Range Zoom (17-55mm)

If you get just one lens, this is it. Unlike extreme wide angle or extreme telephoto lenses, pictures taken with moderate focal length lenses tend to look, well, classic. Subjects have a natural feel. Less exotic looking, but images you can live with, images that endure. Also, these lenses force you to move around and look harder, always a good thing for better pictures.

Fixed 85mm or 135mm Portrait Lens

Portrait lenses are always a solid bet, since every place has the opportunity for great portraits. Shoot your subject with a tight frame on cloudy days or on the shady side of a building (for a giant softbox effect). A sharper image, and a better blur for your background, make the eyes and features of your subject pop.

Fast Lenses

For rare golden opportunities in low light, nothing beats a really fast prime (non-zoom) lens like a 50mm f1.4. Many of these situations will look unnatural if you add flash. And really fast lenses (f2 or faster) produce really pleasing out-of-focus backgrounds. The downside? They are generally expensive and you end up carrying more gear. Digital SLR's that can use higher ISO ratings reduce the need for these lenses somewhat, but not entirely. Fast lenses make sharper images when blown up to larger scale prints, yet have the ability to shoot in incredibly low light. They are perfect for candlelight, shooting both before sunrise and after sunset, and star shots at night. Such images are simply not possible with a zoom lens.

Flash (Just One)

Every camera bag probably needs a flash, for a little more light, fill flash and assorted emergencies. Fill flash does wonders for pictures in broad daylight. And bounce light indoors can do wonders for dark situations. But, doing flash well takes work. Many flashes are automatic. But really good flash pictures are anything but automatic.

Right Angle Finder

This attachment goes on the camera eyepiece so that you can view at a right angle. Used when you want to get down low or on the ground, down amid the wildflowers, for example.

Polarizer Filter

Besides making blue skies darker these filters also add saturation to foliage and flowers and are useful in nature scenes, even on overcast days.

Half-Gray Filters

Landscape photographers swear by the square half-gray filters they can move up or down to darken just the sky in a picture. Often essential to control bright areas within a scene, such as skies with bright clouds. By the way, yes, you can replicate some of this effect in Photoshop. But not always, especially if you are faced with real extremes of contrast range.

Trlpod

They are awkward to work with and heavy to carry. Buy the legs and the head separately. Carbon fiber is great but expensive. If pressed buy cheaper (but sturdy) legs and spend more on the ball head. (Think over \$200.)

Flexfilll

This collapsible disk can add light to any situation by "catching" the light or any light source and bouncing it onto your subject. Great for adding fill light to a window portrait, or for close-ups of food. The soft gold/white is especially appealing.

Magnifying Glass

If you have trouble seeing the screen, for those over a certain age, this works wonders!

Ewa Marine Bag

This piece of equipment is an affordable way to shoot photos underwater and makes shots that capture a place in a truly unique way. One interesting approach is to shoot half in and half out of the water with a wide angle lens. In the same frame, you can get a shark underwater and the huts and palms on the shore. Or, you can photograph a boat above water and swimmers under water.

CAMERAS: WHY CHOOSE A D-SLR

You can use a lot of different cameras for travel photography. But there are good, fundamental reasons to move up to a D-SLR. To be clear, we are talking about interchangeable lens, full size cameras. Any of the top brands will produce perfectly publishable pictures and the quality differences between them are not huge. Bottom line: the least expensive D-SLR will outperform the most expensive point-and-shoot.

Here are some of the key reasons to choose a D-SLR

D-SLR's have bigger sensors

D-SLR's have bigger sensors than point-and-shoot cameras. Bigger sensors mean each individual pixel in the sensor is bigger, resulting in more "signal" and less "noise." Digital noise in an image looks something like grain in film, and is especially troublesome in the shadow areas.

D-SLR's make better Images at high ISO ratings

Once again, the D-SLR's bigger sensor wins out big time, producing much less noise at higher ISO ratings (which let you shoot in darker situations.) How much better? Well, a lot. By way of comparison, most point-and-shoot cameras produce beautiful images at ISO 400 (good only in daylight) and are producing visible noise at ISO 800. At ISO 800 most are unusable for publication. Most D-SLR's produce almost no noise at ISO 800 and very good, publishable images at ISO 2000. Some can now produce beautiful images at ISO 6400!

When you push the button on a D-SLR the shutter goes off. Instantly!

Want to photograph action or people? Then shutter delay is a big deal. D-SLR's fire almost instantaneously, whereas a point-and-shoot can make you wait for almost a second to fire. OK for a mountain that isn't going anywhere, but pretty worthless for the fleeting expressions of people (or animals.)

Interchangeable lenses to fit any need

When you need them, the D-SLR will accept no-holds-barred great lenses. Or specialty lenses. Or very fast lenses with really great imaging characteristics.

Real buttons for real control

D-SLR's give you real control over all the camera settings. A point-and-shoot hides too much down in the menus, making it slow and cumbersome to respond to changing situations quickly.

A real viewfinder and fast autofocus

A precise viewfinder is invaluable and the fast autofocus of a D-SLR can keep up with real action.

RAW FORMAT (and why it is a good idea)

RAW format seems to be one of the most confusing things many digital photographers face. When you choose which format you want your camera to record your pictures in, you come down to two basic choices: JPG and RAW. If you want maximum flexibility and best options for top quality, RAW is generally the better choice. Here's why.

Digital cameras use two sets of information to make a picture: the information from the light-sensitive sensor and your instructions to the camera (ISO settings, white balance choices, etc.) The data from the sensor is huge while the data from the instructions is miniscule. When your camera makes a digital file (a picture) it takes the data from the sensor, modifies it according to your instructions (i.e. daylight white balance) and the internal computer processes the whole thing into a JPG file (generally.)

RAW works differently. Instead of processing all that data at the time you take the picture, the camera takes the sensor data and puts it in a file and adds a small file with your instructions. The processing to turn all that data into a picture is delayed until you get the picture to your computer where a "RAW Converter" does the computing.

What's the advantage? You can change your instructions later! If you made a mistake and were shooting indoors under fluorescent light instead of outdoors in daylight (like you told the camera) you can change it at the time of processing. You get to correct your mistakes! And, you have much greater flexibility of exposure. Most RAW converters will let you correct your exposure after you shoot the picture, usually by about two stops of underexposure and a little over one stop of overexposure.

What's more, RAW converters are getting better all the time. In the future, if you have a RAW file you can look forward to making a better picture from it when a better RAW converter comes down the pike.

The bottom line is this: shooting in RAW makes better pictures.

Disadvantages: it takes additional time and effort to work with RAW files. Software makers are working on solutions but already programs like Apple's Aperture and Adobe's Lightroom (among others) can streamline the process.

RULES OF THE PHOTO ROAD 101

(Simple tips for better pictures)

I can't begin to lay out all the rules of photography that have been pitched and promoted over the years. And I wouldn't want to. Rules can often help make pictures better. But on their own, the rules won't make a bad picture good. I offer these ideas as starting points, ways to depart from the normal and move toward something more original (and more interesting).

Don't constantly put subjects in the middle of the picture

Whether it is the horizon in a landscape or a person in a portrait, dead center is rarely the best place to put them in a picture. Usually it is static. We fall in this rut because our cameras tend to have their focus aids in the middle. Learn to focus and then reframe.

Make spaces where things can happen

Compositions are built out of two things: subjects and spaces. Simple to say, but how you arrange them inside the frame is what makes compositions interesting. Try to make the spaces just as interesting as the subjects. That's where elegance comes from.

Get the moment

Almost every good shot captures a unique moment in time. Sometimes the moment happens right away, and sometimes you have to wait a while. It can be as simple as a woman glancing up; or as complex as when many elements align into a perfect composition.

Get out early, stay late

Light makes pictures and the best light is often found right at sunrise and sunset.

Watch the weather

It's a cliché, but it's true: bad weather makes good pictures. Rain, snow, and fog transform the world and make pictures of unique mood and beauty. Go prepared. (A simple baggie works wonders for keeping a camera dry.)

Framing directs the viewer

Framing scenes is a tried-and-true way of adding depth and focusing attention. But try to go beyond the obvious doorway or window frame. Framing looks contrived when done too simply or too often.

BUILDING BETTER PICTURES

There are many ways to think about making better pictures, expanding the pictures to tell a story, and organizing them to do so effectively. Here are just a few thoughts you might find useful.

“Making” pictures instead of “taking” pictures

Start with an idea or observation and go after the picture. Don't be satisfied until you find it and nail it. Just waiting until you see something interesting is often the least effective way of making good pictures

Build from the foundation up

Try starting with a scene or location and building from there, patiently waiting for more interesting elements to come along and add interest and character. That might mean waiting minutes or hours for someone to come into the frame or for the clouds to part and the sun to come through.

Include elements that inform, exclude everything else

Pictures get stronger when everything inside the frame contributes to the whole. Leave out everything else! There are no neutral elements in a picture. Either they contribute or they are distracting. (P.S. No fair cleaning up your pictures in Photoshop. Learn to use the photographic frame to pick just the right elements out of a scene. It will make you a better photographer.)

Find more than one way to shoot the picture

Shoot one good picture. Then find another way to shoot the same scene. Then find yet another way. Dan Westergren, our senior photo editor, claims three times is a charm. When I follow his advice I get better pictures.

Work your subject: long shots, close-ups, action, angles

Seasoned photographers sometimes call this “dancing around the teacup.” Some photographers do this instinctively, some work from an actual checklist. It's very effective.

Build a set of pictures around just one subject

Stick with one subject until you have a thorough coverage. Many photographers move on too soon, resulting in superficial pictures and incomplete coverage.

TIPS ABOUT LEARNING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Photographic techniques range from the simple (using a wide f-stop to make the background out of focus) to the complex (convoluted lighting schemes combined with arduous Photoshop layering techniques.)

OK, so these aren't really rules. They are just ways of moving your photography ahead. Too often it seems that our favorite photographer knows everything about every last photographic technique (and we know next to nothing).

That is almost never the case. Photographers tend to concentrate their work around a few techniques that they really perfect. This often leads them to a recognizable style. In other, less fortunate cases, photographers forget to keep growing, to keep trying new methods and hence, they become stale.

One thing is certain. No technique is so sure-fire that selecting it from the menu on your camera will automatically make a good picture. (Ditto for Photoshop tricks.)

Conquer skills one at a time

Skills take practice. Conquer one before moving on to the next. Learn how to make backgrounds out of focus before trying your hand at panning action at a slow shutter speed.

Use techniques in combination

Things get interesting when you use techniques in combination. Like combining fill flash with slow shutter panning.

Don't rely on one technique too much A little bit too much is actually way too much. Any technique that is repeated over and over becomes boring. And relying on one way of doing things restricts your photographic growth.

Techniques are window dressing

Content makes pictures. Fancy techniques are nice ways of adding interest. But technique by itself is hollow.

Content Makes Pictures

I know, I said that already. But interesting content trumps interesting technique every time. Content makes pictures.

The Most Important Rule: Thou shalt not be boring!

MAKING YOURSELF WELCOME (with your camera)

Tips from Catherine Karnow

Photographers I know use a wide range of methods to make their subjects comfortable. No one trick works in all situations. Invariably the photographer's personality is as important as anything and treating people with consideration is almost universally successful.

Be comfortable with your camera and yourself

Don't broadcast self-doubt. Learn your camera. If you are comfortable with your equipment you can focus on relating to your subjects. Your confidence in yourself will instill confidence in them.

Tune into the local frequency

Get a feel for accepted local norms and expectations. Conform your manners to local custom. Find the local bulletin boards or chat up the grocery store owner.

Dress appropriately

Fit in with the social scene. For some events (Mardi Gras) consider a costume. Dress for church if you are going to church. It is one of the most visible ways to show respect for local sensibilities.

Move in close and make friends

Don't act like a spy: put away the telephoto and become part of the moment. Successful people pictures almost never happen from across the street.

Try the local food

Share a snack or a meal, but also share the customs. Seasoned National Geographic photographers have one rule: take at least one bite.

Understand the social contract

Your subjects are giving of themselves and you're getting. Don't abuse their gift of sharing their lives. Don't treat them like models.

Give yourself an assignment

If you have a reason for taking the pictures you'll feel more comfortable and your subjects may enjoy contributing to something worthwhile.

Get business cards printed

Many cultures value business cards when making introductions. If you are working in a foreign country it is wise to have yours translated into the destination language on the reverse side.

Give something back

Send back some prints, cherish the moment, and treat them well.

8 GREAT TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

Four from Catherine Karnow

1. Vietnam

Huge variety of landscapes: mountains, beautiful coast, rich culture and history. Special place for Americans because of our involvement there, and the Vietnamese love Americans. Seductive: the people and the culture will draw you in. Beautiful old French architecture in Saigon, Hanoi, and various hill towns. Very beautiful people. Vibrant street life. Everything happens right on the street! Temples. Festivals. Inexpensive place to travel, also easy and inexpensive to find translators. Even a non-professional photographer can hire a student or inexpensive guide, and get right into the culture.

2. Amsterdam

My favorite city in Europe! So beautiful with its canals, old canal houses, and graceful boats gliding down the waterways; handsome people, charming shops and ancient "brown" cafes, organic farmers' markets and the signs of artists and their creativity at every turn.

3. Transylvania

In the countryside, it is as if time stopped in the middle ages. Farmers going down the road in horse carts piled high with hay; painted churches that will take your breath away; and a people so wildly photogenic and kind you could shoot for a week in one village.

4. Paris

As always, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Magnificent architecture; café life; manicured gardens; over the top style; bohemian and ethnic neighborhoods and great food!

DESTINATIONS

Four from Aaron Huey

5. The Black Hills region of South Dakota

The stark beauty of the Badlands National Monument and the rolling prairies covered with buffalo are a photographer's dream. Head onto any number of Indian reservations in the summer to see the tribal Pow Wows. You can't go wrong photographing these colorful displays of culture. The light, the color, and especially the people are always engaging.

6. Republic of Georgia

I don't really "do" Europe, so this is as close as it gets for me. Georgia is diverse and exotic with a wide range of backdrops from 17,000 foot peaks to the palm-treed coast of the Black Sea. It is also the birthplace of wine! Festivals include incredible amounts of the red nectar sipped Ibex horns and come with giant frisbees of bread filled with meat and cheese. Dancing and singing will follow you wherever you go if you are in the countryside in the wedding season (Autumn).

7. Burma

Burma is Thailand 100 years ago. You can still see temples covered with real gold instead of gold paint. You will also find saffron-robed monks in numbers that will fill your viewfinder from edge to edge. Be sure to check out the national sport of Chinlone, six man hacky sack with a wicker ball to the beat of a live band!

8. Mali

Once you have seen the Dogon country or danced through the night to a 14-piece band in the capital of Bamako, you too will be convinced that Mali is not to be missed. The Bandiagara cliffs of Mali still contain the burial caves of people stretching back over a thousand years. Boabab trees and desert sunsets will never disappoint. And today villagers still live in mud structures under those cliffs. You can hike the area in the day and sleep in open-air huts at night. Everywhere you go you will see ancient totems and rituals still alive and in use today. The mosque at Djene is an architectural marvel not to be missed, but be sure to be there to photograph the market early in the morning.

PHOTO RESEARCH: HOW & WHY

I'm a better photographer when I point my camera at interesting stuff. Find more interesting stuff to stand in front of and you'll be a better photographer. It's that simple. Good research is, perhaps, the single most important factor in producing really good travel pictures. I like to have 30 or 40 solid picture ideas before I ever walk out the door on assignment. Where do all these ideas come from?

Start a file folder for each location

Whether a computer folder or an old manila folder, start collecting. I look for travel stories, good web sites, food recommendations. These folders gather material for years at a time. Some lead directly to trips, others remain on the wish list. What fun!

Ransack the guide books, photo books and brochures

Look for anything that has pictures that will show what the place looks like. I always stop at the bargain shelves in the bookstores and buy cheap books of travel destinations, like "Scottish Castles from the Air." My office shelves are full of them.

Look for places, events, seasons and the timeless

Start cataloging the can't-miss situations you know will make pictures. I try to stack the deck in my favor by winnowing out the "great" events from the merely "good."

Google your destination to death

Try multiple searches for different kinds of subjects. Go outside the usual tourist web sites. Look for sites by niche experts, such as birders, hikers, or history buffs. I once found the best list of pubs in Cornwall on the church bell ringer's website. Go figure!

Develop a network of friends to swap information

Make a point of befriending other photographers and sources. Nothing is quite as valuable as another photographer who has actually been there. Travel photography workshops are great for building these networks.

Contact the destination tourist office

Tourist offices love photographers who will make them look good. Try to find the really knowledgeable person there who favors photographers. Be enthusiastic about their place. Send them pictures when you get back. Build the relationship.

Read the novels (and the murder mysteries)

This is fun as well as informative. These are often the best places to discover the heart and soul of a place. Make notes on signature themes and locations.

Once there, make friends with the locals

Digging up local gems is half the fun. Guide books can't get down to this level of detail. These are the pictures that will really set you apart.

Find the local bulletin board

Every place has to have a local clearinghouse for activities and events. Find it and you'll be on the inside track to local events. When the youth pipe band practices on the green, for instance. Priceless.

Remain flexible

Don't let your research lock out serendipity. (But luck favors the prepared.) If you think the children's pet parade is blocking your view of the cathedral, then you are looking at the wrong thing.

Set reasonable goals

Don't let the photography run your life. If you are on vacation decide just how much you want to devote to the pictures. Pictures are great to reflect and remember great experiences, but they are often hollow reminders that you didn't take time to have the experience in the first place. Last but not least, remember that a pint of Guinness in an Irish pub is always a better thing to have than a PICTURE of the pint of Guinness.

SOURCES for travel photographers

Publishing law and Copyright

In-depth information

www.publaw.com/

Model releases

Good practical overview

www.danheller.com/model-release.html

Latest digital photography news and equipment reviews

Latest digital industry news

www.robgalbraith.com/bins/index.asp

Camera reviews and news

www.dpreview.com/

Objective lens tests for SLR cameras

www.slrgear.com/reviews/index.php

Compare digital cameras side-by-side

www.imaging-resource.com/

Software Solutions

PhotoMechanic, quick and nimble

www.camerabits.com/

Apple Aperture, robust RAW workflow

www.apple.com/aperture/

Adobe LightRoom, robust RAW workflow

www.adobe.com/

Nikon Capture NX 2, great RAW control

www.capturenx.com/

FotoQuote, photography pricing software

www.fotoquote.com/

Book Printing

Scribble Press Gallery Books

www.spgallerybooks.com/

AsukaBook

<http://asukabook.com/>

Blurb

www.blurb.com

Lulu

www.lulu.com

MyPublisher

www.mypublisher.com/

iPhoto or Aperture

via .mac account

Sharedink

<http://www.sharedink.com/>

StarPrintBroker for printing in Asia

<http://www.starprintbrokers.com>

Half Grey Neutral Density Filters

Inexpensive filters to start out

Cokin filter system

Mid-Price

HiTech

High-quality but expensive

Singh-Ray's Galen Rowell filters

Tips and Resources

A Photo Editor	http://www.aphotoeditor.com/
Worthy photo opinions	http://theonlinephotographer.com
Photo tips, reviews	www.photo.net/
Tutorials, general information	www.luminous-landscape.com/
Resources for the Photography Workflow	www.outbackphoto.com/
Photography Blogs	www.photoblogs.org/
Photoshop	www.photoshop.com/
Photoshop tutorials	www.photoshopsupport.com/tutorials/jennifer.html
History and culture of photography	www.stilljournal.com/
Photoshop tips	www.russellbrown.com/tips_tech.html
News photos online	www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/photo/
Offbeat tourist attractions	www.roadsideamerica.com/

Photographic Lighting

Small flash photography techniques	http://strobist.blogspot.com/
Lightpainting, flash and sports methods	www.daveblackphotography.com

Photography Workshops

Santa Fe Workshops	www.santfeworkshops.com
National Geographic Expeditions	www.nationalgeographicexpeditions.com

Photo Sharing

Popular photo sharing site	www.flickr.com/
Photoshelter	http://www.photoshelter.com/
SmugMug	http://www.smugmug.com/

Travel Events and Locations

Events and festivals worldwide	www.whatsonwhen.com
Travel photography books	www.photosecrets.com/books.html

Travel Books

Travel books with good country lists	http://www.longitudebooks.com/
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Blogs

The Online Photographer	http://theonlinephotographer.blogspot.com/
Bob Krist blog	http://www.pixiq.com/contributors/21
Jim Richardson blog	http://jimrichardson.typepad.com/
Aaron Huey blog	http://aaronhuey.com/blog/

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need a model release? Do you get model releases?

First, let us say this is not legal advice. There is no simple answer to this question. Now, having said that, for editorial use in the United States in many (if not most) cases you probably don't need a model release for editorial photography. Catherine really works at it. (She's smart.) This is a tricky area. Educate yourself well.

Do you ask permission to photograph people?

In many cases I do. But that is because we are trying to create very personal pictures of people in their environment. Furthermore, I usually feel better about what I do when my subjects feel comfortable. So, yes, I usually talk to them. But not always. And there are many other fine photographers who work very differently without intruding or invading their subjects' lives.

What should my portfolio include?

The basic rule for a portfolio is simple: a portfolio should show that you can do what the client needs to have done. It needs to be tailored to each prospective client. A travel magazine portfolio is very different from a hard news portfolio for a news magazine. If you send a portfolio to TRAVELER you should include somewhere between 40 and 60 pictures, with strong single images that include landscapes, people, food, festivals, etc.

Furthermore, it would include three or four "stories," groups of pictures focused on a theme. The portfolio is your introduction. You'll need to follow up over time to make an impression.

Do you pay people to take their picture?

Hardly ever, but not never. Generally, for editorial use paying people smacks of "checkbook" journalism. But there are certainly cultures where you simply will not get any pictures without paying them.

How much should I charge for my pictures?

Pricing of pictures varies over a vast range depending on a myriad of considerations. The best advice is to go out and buy a copy of FotoQuote software. It is the industry standard for pricing pictures and it will not only help you reach the best price, it will coach you on how to negotiate the deal.

Do you own your pictures?

Yes! Yes, yes, yes! Well...almost every last picture and almost all rights. Ownership conditions of assignment photography can vary widely depending on the details of the contract. (Read the contracts!) In general, you want to own as much of your work as you possibly can. Rights equal money. Avoid, if at all possible, work-for-hire contracts. But, working with a reliable client for the mutual benefit of everyone is good.

Should I consider a career as a travel photographer?

If you need encouragement to become a travel photographer then the answer is no, don't do it. It's a tough business. If nothing we say can stop you, then why not? (But it will still be tough.)

How much can I use Photoshop In my travel pictures?

The answer to this question might vary some depending on what the picture is going to be used for. Most publications and web sites that use travel photographs are in the "non-fiction" photography business. Certainly that applies to publications like National Geographic TRAVELER and National Geographic Magazine, as well as the other major travel magazines.

Generally, you can use Photoshop to do the kinds of things that would have been done in a darkroom before. Therefore, you CAN lighten, darken, burn, dodge, crop, color correct, tweak contrast and saturation and the like. You CANNOT put things into pictures or take them out. You can't take telephone wires out, add dramatic clouds, or clone in a few extra zebras. But, that will vary with the publication to some degree, so be sure to ask them and see what they say.

And if you are talking about entering a contest, read the rules carefully to see what is allowed.

Now, if you go on Flickr and look around you are going to see tons and tons of pictures being heavily Photoshopped. There's nothing wrong with that as long as everyone understands what is happening. But these pictures are what I would call "fiction" photography. Many of them are beautiful and powerful images and deserve all the accolades they get on Flickr. But they are fiction just like a novel is fiction. It's not fair to blur the lines, using the power of photography to impress people with things that are not true without telling them what you are doing. Novels get labeled as fiction. Fictional pictures should, too.

Professionals working for major publications do not create pictures in this way, generally. It happens, and it happens more all the time. But it will get you fired from your job if you are a photojournalist, and rightly so. News is real. And the pictures have to be real. At National Geographic I have to send all of my RAW files to the editors so they can see every last thing I did in the field.

The point here is to reaffirm that working photographers put a lot of effort into finding great images out in the field and doing every last thing they have to do to capture the images in camera. They don't rely on Photoshop to do their creative work. It's hard but it is rewarding. It is better to spend more time out relishing our great, wonderful world and less time in front of a computer screen. Ultimately, your photos will mean more to you and to everyone with whom you share them.