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WINTER 2017



TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

CAPTURE BOTH THE JOURNEY AND THE DESTINATION
WITH THESE PRO TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN MATIASH

When traveling, I'm always looking to capture moments that normally get overlooked, like an elderly man taking in the setting sun in Essaouria, Morocco

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

I've long battled with myself over how to accurately define the genre of travel photography. Is it about taking photos of the vehicle you're using to get from where you currently are to where you're going? Is it about the views you see along the way, be it a beautiful bank of clouds or some gigantic mountain looming on the horizon? Or could it be about the people you encounter and what they're doing as they live out their own lives? Truthfully, travel photography can be whatever you want it to be, and if I had to give some sort of constraint or criteria on top of that, it would be that you have to be involved in the act of travel, exploring or visiting. What you make of that is completely up to you and, honestly, that should excite you. Because travel photography can be

so loosely and individually defined, it can comprise a wide variety of techniques. Travel photography can require you to exercise landscape, portrait, architecture and/or photojournalistic practices. It all depends on you and how you choose to define it for yourself. And while the saying goes that it should be about the journey and not about the destination, I argue that with travel photography, it's very much about both.

Whenever I travel to a remote place with my camera gear—where remote equates to me not being in the general vicinity of my home—my goal is to document three primary elements: what I see, who I see and how I see life playing out in front of me. If the natural life cycle of a photo ends with you sharing it with

the world, then I want my travel photos to give viewers a sense of what it was like being where I was at the time I first took them. So let's break down some key concepts that will help you get the most out of your travel photography endeavors.

WHAT I SEE

Not to put too fine a point on it, but I define "What I See" with regards to travel photography as the landscape and architecture of wherever I am. Oftentimes, before I leave for a destination, I'll research the location to get a better idea of the geography, architectural styles, etc. I'm almost always more interested in what the area looks like during the early and late hours of the day, because that's when the light is most pleasant. Another component in my research is figuring out how to get to a particular area or landmark. If your plan is to capture the early-morning light of a sunrise, then knowing how to get to your location will save you precious time instead of fumbling around—although fumbling around can also yield some fantastic results.

Another reason why getting to a location as early as possible is important is because it will increase your chances of staking claim to prime real estate. I can think of no better example of this than when I first visited the beautiful Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia. To ensure a prime spot near the reflecting pool in front of the temple, we had to leave with our guide at 3 a.m., and waited several hours for the sun to rise. Fortunately, the effort paid off big time.

WHO I SEE

Arguably, one of the most rewarding aspects of travel photography—and traveling, in general—is getting to know the locals and immersing yourself in their culture. With that said, there are many ways to approach photographing locals who, in most cases, may simply be going about their day. I've always been of the mindset that when I photograph people during my travels, I want to be as inconspicuous as possible. It's not because I'm self-conscious, although that's a very real issue many photographers deal with, so much as I'm more interested in capturing

GEAR

CAMERAS

When I'm traveling, my goal is to be nimble and inconspicuous. My camera gear needs to suit those purposes, as well. That's why I often go for "smaller and lighter" when I'm roaming around a new city or village.



FUJIFILM X-T2

If you're looking for an alternative to a full-frame mirrorless camera with a blistering price tag, the Fujifilm X-T2 should be closely looked at. Its classic and functional ergonomics have won over many photographers. With all key exposure controls bound to physical dials and knobs, you can quickly and intuitively change settings without taking the camera away from your face. The X-T2 also boasts superfast autofocus and provides serious peace of mind, with dual SD card slots that support the same UHS-II standard as the Sony a9.

Price: \$1,599. **Website:** fujifilmusa.com



SONY A9

When I see a particular moment about to unfold, I'll rifle off a bunch of frames in the hope of nailing one perfect shot in the sequence. That's why it's important that my camera has a high frame rate and deep buffer. The last thing I want is to max out my camera's buffer and be forced to wait for it to write image data to my storage card. This is where the Sony a9 absolutely shines. It has blazing-fast autofocus and can handle just about any burst of photos that I throw at it. And, because it supports the faster UHS-II standard, it can write photos faster than ever.

Price: \$4,499. **Website:** sony.com

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Note: The structure of the actual lens may be different.
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the way their lives unfold as naturally as possible. In other words, once my presence as a photographer is established, that moment of unadulterated activity evaporates.

That's why I typically avoid using neck or shoulder straps with my camera. I'm a big fan of using a wrist strap to hold my camera rather than allow it to dangle. If I'm in an urban environment, I'll find a

I never would have found this photo had I not allowed myself to meander along the vast canals and alleyways of Venice, Italy. It's okay to get lost—just make sure that the light is good when it happens.

corner to hang out at without raising my camera. I take anywhere from five to 10 minutes to simply observe and to hopefully blend in as just another guy. When I see something of interest, I get into position and do what I need to in order to get the shot. Once that moment passes, I return to being just another guy blending in. I've found that this process really helps me fall into the background, as it were, and let the people around me feel comfortable to go about their routines without paying much attention to me.

Despite your best efforts, it's almost inevitable that you'll make eye contact



NIKKOR

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—Joe McNally

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AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8 ED VR



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Joe McNally captures top speed with NIKKOR lenses — the only lenses in the world engineered to perfectly communicate and integrate with Nikon cameras. That's something no other lens manufacturer can deliver. The result is an instrument, unrivaled in performance and dependability, that doesn't just work, but works together at an even higher level.

Capture every detail this holiday — upgrade with a new NIKKOR lens. nikonusa.com/NIKKORholiday



TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY



GEAR

LENSES

There are several reasons why a travel photographer would consider a fast lens important. Aside from the need to get as fast as a shutter speed as possible to capture all those fleeting moments, it's often very desirable to separate your primary focal point from the background, and having a fast lens makes that easier to achieve. The question, for me, usually boils down to whether I want to use a zoom or prime lens. Fortunately, there are fantastic options for both.

SIGMA 24-70MM F2.8 DG OS HSM ART

The 24-70mm focal range is popular with standard zoom lenses, for a good reason. You get the best of both worlds, with opportunities to capture both wide and narrow situations. Sigma's entry into the standard zoom lens lineup doubles down on that by offering a fast $f/2.8$ aperture along with solid construction, and is part of its flagship ART line.

Price: \$1,299. **Website:** sigmaphoto.com



ZEISS MILVUS 1.4/35

The 35mm focal length has long been regarded as one of the classics. It strikes a perfect balance of a wide angle without introducing much distortion. The Zeiss Milvus 1.4/35 (for both Canon EF and Nikon F mounts) gives you those benefits along with a wide $f/1.4$ aperture, allowing you to smoothly separate your subject from its background. It's one of the best lenses I've ever used.

Price: \$1,999

Website: zeiss.com/camera-lenses/us/



Travel photography isn't always about finding the most exciting moment happening in front of you. A large component is conveying what normal life looks like. This mechanic in Havana, Cuba, bending over to fix a car, is a perfect example of that (left), as is this Moroccan woman tending her sheep (right) in the local mountains.

with others. In those cases, it's so important to be courteous and respectful. Whenever I visit a country where English isn't the primary language, I make sure to teach myself some basic phrases, including how to ask, "Can I take your picture?" If you aren't able to communicate verbally, you can almost always rely on good ol' finger pointing at your camera and then at the person while flashing a warm smile. That's usually an effective method in establishing whether permission is granted. Most importantly, if the person on the business end of your lens indicates verbally or through a gesture that they don't want you to take their photo, be respectful and honor their wish. When this happens to me, I usually nod, smile wide and wave my hand goodbye. No harm, no foul.


HOW I SEE LIFE PLAYING OUT


I love seeing travel photos that depict life happening naturally. People exhibit certain characteristics when they're left to their own devices that otherwise aren't visible when they sense that they're being watched. That's why I take the act of blending in so seriously when I'm traveling. Recently, when I visited Morocco, I was dazzled by the way people lived out their lives. However, there was a layer of complexity added because the local culture is especially wary of photographers. It's one thing if you're in a dense market, where vendors are going out of their way to be spectacles. It's quite another thing if you're roaming around a random street and everyone around you is simply living out their lives. This is where blending in is very important.

Remember, one of the main goals of travel photography is to share what life looks like in other areas. That's why I treat it like a spectator sport. When I'm on a journey with my camera, I'm in the business of observing and anticipating. The camera comes into play for only a fraction




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Photo by Philip Thurston

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Admittedly, photographing Moroccans in their home villages proved to be especially difficult. However, that difficulty created a challenge to capture people living their lives in a way that was respectful and nonintrusive.

of a second to crystalize a moment. My job is to find the moments that will give my viewers a greater sense of what it must feel like to be standing exactly where I was standing at the time of exposure. What's also important to remember is that life often isn't very exciting, but it's the reality for everyone in your vicinity, and it's your responsibility to tease out the moments worth capturing.

DP

BRIAN MATIASH is a photographer, author and educator, and an ambassador for a number of companies including Sony and Zeiss. You can find more of his work at matias.com and on Instagram @brianmatiash.

GEAR

CAMERA BAGS

With all this talk about camera bodies and lenses, it would be reckless not to talk about what you'd use to carry all of it in. While camera bags can be a very personal thing for photographers, my approach to them revolves around intent. With travel photography, my intent is to carry a light kit of one body and one to three lenses, along with some spare batteries, SD cards and possibly a tablet. More importantly, the bag needs to be inconspicuous and comfortable enough to use on a full-day outing.

PEAK DESIGN EVERYDAY MESSENGER 15 (CHARCOAL)

I've traveled all over the world with my Peak Design Everyday Messenger and can say with certainty that this is my favorite bag to use in any urban environment. It's thoughtfully designed with a photographer's needs specifically in mind. I can easily fit a camera and three lenses in there, along with every accessory I'd need on a day out. More importantly, it has a slim profile, is unobtrusive and is extremely comfortable to wear for extended periods of time.

Price: \$249. **Website:** peakdesign.com



MINDSHIFT GEAR BACKLIGHT 26L (CHARCOAL)

If you're more of a backpack person, you should take a look at the BackLight 26L by Think Tank Photo's sister company, MindShift Gear. The primary reason why I selected this bag is because it blends a thoughtfully designed 26-liter storage area with back-panel support. The latter feature is especially worth pointing out because it provides an added layer of security and prevents others from accessing your gear while you're roaming around.

Price: \$249. **Website:** mindshiftgear.com



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Photo © Jan Gonzales | FUJIFILM X-Pro2 Camera and XF56mmF1.2 R APD Lens at 1/100 sec at F8, ISO 100

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