

The Long Road to Great Travel Photography

A VETERAN SHUTTERBUG PONDERS WHAT IT TAKES TO CAPTURE INTERESTING IMAGES



Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
Settings: 1/30s at f/8 (ISO25), focal length: 135mm
An Aboriginal boy covers himself in white clay during a burial ceremony.

I don't really consider myself a travel photographer, although that's how people know me. For me, photography is principally about colour and light. When I travel, I like to try to focus on things that are not usually photographed. I try to travel at least two or three times a year, and I never spend less than two weeks in a place. Above all else, getting good pictures takes time.

TIP 1 | TRY TO MAKE FRIENDS DURING YOUR JOURNEYS. IT HELPS IF YOU RETURN ONE DAY.

I don't wait for assignments. If there's a place that comes to mind that I'd like to shoot, I'm off. When you work this way – without the pressure of needing to produce results for a client – you can have more passion and drive. All serious photographers, even those that regularly make money from their work, should do this regularly – even if they have to spend their own cash doing it. There's a higher chance that

you'll get your most creative photographs that way; then later you can approach editors and agencies and offer them something really unique.

Here's a collection of further things to consider about getting the most out of your travels with your camera...

WHAT TIME OF YEAR TO GO

It's best to go to a place out of season, often when the weather would be considered less-than-ideal by tourists. Aside from being free of the hordes of holidaymakers, I find the quality of light in the days before poor weather absolutely fantastic. Colours are rich and the light is neither too contrasty nor too dull. Blue skies are fine, but they are also very predictable. Some feisty weather can add a little needed drama.

TIP 2 | REMEMBER: YOU CAN TAKE A THOUSAND IMAGES, BUT ULTIMATELY ONLY A FEW WILL SET YOU ON FIRE.

WHERE TO STAY AND HOW TO TRAVEL

Try and stay in small hotels, rather than the big international chains; you'll probably get a better feel for how the locals live. Don't rough it out unnecessarily, though; air-conditioned lodgings will be highly desirable after a day or two in the desert or the jungle. If you can, go it alone; being on your own will allow you to focus on what you're doing with your camera. If you travel as a tourist, with a group, you're unlikely to get unique photographs. Another option, for safety reasons, is to go with a like-minded photographer.

TIP 3 | TALK QUIETLY AND BE HUMBLE, AND PEOPLE WILL GET CLOSER TO YOU.

GUIDEBOOKS AND LOCAL GUIDES

Never go to a place unprepared. Read up on your destination before you leave; there's lots you can digest from the Internet or a good travel guide. Many photographers rely on instinct – and luck – when they get to their destination. I always get a guide and a

TIP 4 | FOCUS ON YOUR USE OF LIGHT AND THE COMPOSITION. USE YOUR LCD PREVIEW AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE; REVIEW YOUR IMAGES AT THE END OF THE DAY.

driver. Remember: you're in an unfamiliar place where you don't know anybody, probably don't speak the language, and are unaware of the local customs.

A local will not only help you to get you around efficiently but will allow you to communicate with others and gain valuable access not available to the typical tourist. Ask your guide to take you in the opposite direction to the tour groups. So while they go and visit the standard landmarks, you'll be checking out the nooks and backstreets of the city. Keep your eyes peeled for unusual photo opportunities in unconventional spots. Try and get an invitation to see inside a private home.

Upon arrival, I usually don't pick up my camera on the first day. I hang around in cafés, watch life go by, take in the sounds and smells, and observe people.



Agra to Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
Settings: 1/50s at f/11 (ISO200), focal length: 120mm
At a Hindu ceremony in a rural community, a woman catches the photographer at work.



Luang Prabang, Laos
Settings: 1/60s at f/8 (ISO25), focal length: 20mm
Girls from the Muong tribe dress up for an annual water festival.



Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
Settings: 1/400s at f/8 (ISO200), focal length: 58mm
An elephant fills the frame with its colourfully adorned body.

TIP 5 | SOMETIMES IT IS BETTER TO TAKE HOME A MEMORY THAN THE SHOT. LET THE IMAGES COME TO YOU, INSTEAD OF CHASING THE IMAGES.

WHAT GEAR TO BRING

Everyone's preference is different, but my choices of camera bodies are the Nikon D700 and Nikon D300s. I'll also have a good selection of lenses: a 12–24mm wide zoom, a 24–120mm standard zoom, and a fixed 50mm f/1.4 and fixed 180mm f/2.8 telephoto. I'll sometimes have a 300mm with me as well. A laptop is bulky and very much optional. But with that and a Web connection, there's the advantage of being able to upload images via FTP and keep files organised and properly labelled.

Although there's rarely any need for them, I'll also haul a tripod and flash with me. Using flash, unless it's in the subtlest of ways, nearly always produces an unnatural result. Tripods often slow things down

TIP 6 | DON'T DWELL ON IT IF YOU MISS A GREAT SHOT. THERE ARE ALWAYS PLENTY MORE OPPORTUNITIES AROUND THE CORNER.

too much; great moments are very often fleeting, and taking the time to set up a tripod is only rarely worthwhile. Still, both can be useful, and leaving them at home is asking for trouble.

Don't forget a raincoat, plastic bags, note pads, and a small flashlight; and I never go anywhere without my iPhone.

GUNTHER DEICHMANN, a paleontologist by training, was born in Germany and lives in the Philippines. His pictures have garnered numerous international awards and appeared inside and on the cover of magazines across the world, including the cover of *Time*. His extensive picture story in German magazine *Stern* on the killing of Australia's wild horses was covered worldwide, including on *CNN*, and helped put a stop to the inhumane practice. Gunther also conducts photography workshops throughout Asia and has recently returned from his latest ones in India and Nepal. He is also a Certified Apple Pro Trainer for Aperture and is on the Apple Aperture Advisory Board in Asia. www.deichmann-photo.com



Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
Settings: 1/25s at f/8 (ISO250), focal length: 90mm
Everyone gets a good coating of multicoloured powder at India's famed celebrations for Holi.



Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
Settings: 1/800s at f/5.6 (ISO200), focal length: 90mm
Just after sunrise, pigeons bring the landscape around the Amber Fort to life.



Nyaung Shwe, Myanmar
Settings: 1/125s at f/8 (ISO200), focal length: 85mm
A novice monk gazes out from the Shwe Yaung Gwe Monastery.