

Travel and Adventure Photography

by Doug Elbinger

Kremlin Wall at Night. This is a hand held (8th of a second) night shot taken in a snow storm. The temperature was about -20F. I used a 'pocket' camera, and did not take my gloves off. I braced myself against a light pole to hold as still as possible. Note the motion 'blur'.

combination of mythology, choices, and attitudes. In addition to this, I usually count on a considerable portion of luck. Some of my favorite photographs were accidents that will never happen again, and then there are those that are deliberately planned.

Myth #1: We Carry A Camera To Make Pictures

This couldn't be further from the truth. So why are we carrying a camera?

We carry a camera so the natives will automatically identify us as tourists. It is a role we've played since youth, when our parents took us to a Fourth of July picnic or Disney World for the first time. They taught us how to be tourists. I'm sure you have your own family traditions relating to how to behave outside of familiar home turf. Carrying a camera may also provide a sense of security...because you will be able to identify other tourists.

Traveling with a camera is a universal custom that is shared on a global scale. For instance, there are more cameras in China than there are telephones. The Chinese are among the most prolific amateur photographers in the world. Photography is one of the single most popular hobbies in the world. Most people, from any country or culture... wouldn't leave home without a camera. You carry a camera so you can show yourself, your family and friends where you've been. Interestingly enough, nobody really cares where you've been...but don't let that deter you.

Myth #2: Colemans Law

According to the noted photographic writer and critic, A.D. Coleman, "the most common mistake in making a photograph is thinking that what you're experiencing while making the picture is what's being recorded on the film."

Observations and advice about traveling with a camera for students, families, businesspersons, or anyone planning a trip or vacation.

So you don't have to read any further, I'm going to skip the part about remembering to check your batteries and tell you right up front...

The secret of successful travel photography is that there are no secrets. Right. There are no wrong ways to make a photograph...you can't go wrong...that's one of the reasons it is so much fun. With the simplicity and ease of cameras today there is really no excuse for not having your photos 'come out'. The question then becomes what do you want to photograph. Start by thinking about why you took your camera on your last a trip or vacation?

Would you do it again? What would you do differently? Did you get the

satisfaction you were expecting? What did you do with the photographs?

Do you ever look at them? Did you show your friends, neighbors, children? Did you send/e-mail copies to the people you met on the trip? Did you hang them on the wall in your den or office?

Imagine making photographs as a Zen art; a creative activity that requires a mix of the conscious and sub-conscious mind. Taking pictures is easy...and it should be..... the trick or 'secret' (didn't I just say there were no secrets) is being in the right place at the right time with the right equipment, the right film, the right exposure and of course, the right processing. All this contributes to making memorable images. Anytime you touch your camera is the right time, but spontaneity and intuition are also important ingredients in this formula.

For travellers who use thir cameras frequently, photography is usually a

This is a very interesting concept and you might want to consider this more carefully while you are waiting for your laundry to dry.

Myth #3: Quality/Quantity

The quality/quantity of your out-put in the photographic endeavor is proportional to the distance you travel. Will a trip to Nepal or Katmandu make me a better photographer than a trip to Toronto or Memphis? I say it will ...the farther, the costlier, the greater the distance, the more foreign the culture, the more important it is to record these experiences. Did you ever take a camera to the grocery store or mall to get family snapshots? Try it sometime pretending to be a tourists. It's really good practice.

Mistake #1: Failure to R&D

Read and digest everything you can before you actually leave on that trip. Take some time to study the customs, cultural and history of the places you'll visit.

Look for the most recent magazine articles and books with photographs of the places on your itinerary, so you'll have an idea of what to expect. Find a 'what to see... what to do' book. Buy one. You'll have something to read and inspire you on the plane.

Do some research. Try to anticipate your 'photo opportunities'. Think about what



The Pyramids of Giza. I spent an entire day hiking around the pyramids. This shot was taken from at least a mile away with medium telephoto lens. I set the camera on a rock and used the maximum 'depth of field' to keep the foreground and background in focus.

you want to see and do on your adventure and what you'd like to photograph....people, monuments, museums, parks, the desert that was just delivered to your hotel room or your companion swimming nude in the pool at night.

Mistake #2: Didn't Take Enough Film.

Need I say more. Before you leave on a trip shoot a full roll of film through your camera and make sure that you try and understand all features and functions including the flash. Have the film processed by your usual lab to verify that all systems are go. This is also the time to make sure you understand how the camera operates. Many fatal errors occur in simply loading and unloading the film. This may be a good time to read the instruction manual. Remember, finding film and batteries in a strange location, if not impossible, will be very expensive.

MSU Rodeo. This is an example of 'motion blur'. You can sometimes use it to your advantage. One evening at the MSU rodeo I was seated by the rail. It was too dark to stop action and I would not even consider or recommend using a flash in such a situation. I set my camera on the rail to keep it steady, set a slow shutter speed and waited for the action to come into view.



Myth #4: Size Counts

The size, cost, name brand of your camera, or the length of your lens means you'll get better photographs. Not necessarily true. Whether you use a disposable camera or a Hasselblad should have no bearing on the quality of your images....unless you're on assignment for National Geographic. Photographs are usually too personal to expect others to understand anyway. Now on the other hand, having a wonderful new technological delight of a camera over my shoulder, may give me the confidence to explore new territory, or it may inspire me to be more adventurous and make more if not better photographs.

Choice #1: Do I Shoot Slides? Prints?? Digital???

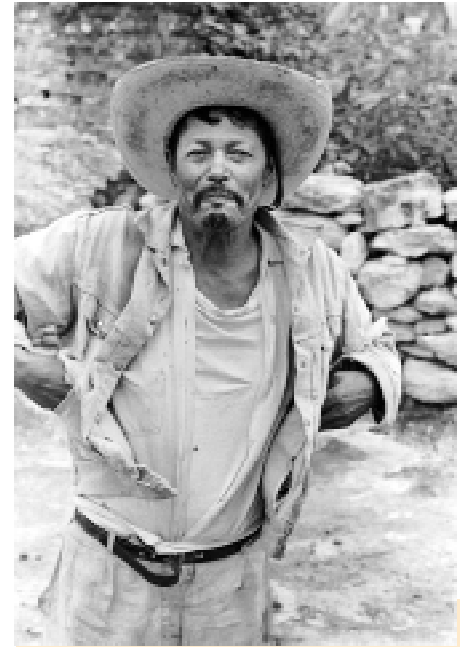
This has been one of the greatest questions perplexing western civilization for the last 70 years....It really doesn't matter anymore. You can have

incredible prints made from your slides....You can have slides made from your prints. With digital you can do anything including download them right on to your home computer and e-mail them to people who could care less where you've been.

FREE ADVICE

When you get home with your freshly processed photos, find a comfortable chair in a private spot with a nearby trash can. This is where you quietly go through your photographs and throw at least half of them away. If you have two or three similar shots, pick the best one and trash the others. This is called editing and you should be tough on yourself. If you don't think the image is worth the effort it takes to save it..... trash it. I would never show anybody a roll of film that I haven't edited. Many professional photographers I know consider themselves lucky if they get one or two 'keepers' on a roll. √

Bon Voyage!



Lost in Mexico. When I started carrying a camera as a teenager, I realized that it was an easy way to meet people. A camera around your neck is an excellent tool for opening a conversation with a stranger...especially if you are lost or need to find a good restaurant.