

# Travel Photography - Top Tips and Handy Hints

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## Travel Photography Top Tips and Handy Hints

The following advice is designed to help you get the most from your camera whilst travelling to remote and demanding destinations.

Chris Cartwright – Photographer and Explorer

## Top Tips and Handy Hints

The following advice is designed to help you get the most from your camera whilst travelling to remote and demanding destinations.

### Develop a Photographic Strategy

- Why** Ask yourself questions. What do you want the photographs for; web sites, publishing, presentations, scrapbooks, slide shows, reports, thesis, all these need different styles of photography. Who are your viewers and what sort of impact do you want to have. Are you going to keep a photographic diary to record your expedition?
- Fun** Do you enjoy taking photographs? Do you enjoy the technical aspects of using an SLR? Does the thought of taking photos make you cringe and make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end? It will probably not surprise you to realise that those who are competent and relaxed with the camera tend take the best photos.
- Luck** You create your own luck! You can work out the time of sunrise, the direction, get yourself to the best viewpoint, have all your kit set up ready to capture that special award winning shot - only for it to be misty or clouded over. Be prepared for all eventualities, you might not get the image you expected but it may be a special shot, unexpected.
- Know** How to use your camera and lenses well before travelling. Run several rolls through the camera to test it and make sure you are very familiar with all the controls. Can you operate it with your eyes closed?

### Before you go

- Equipment** Think through very carefully, which camera and lenses are you taking away with you. Prime lenses are best and fastest but you need several and they can be very expensive, against a set of fast zooms? With a set of 3 zoom lenses; 20-35mm, 35-70mm and a 70-210mm you cover the focal lengths of 10+ prime lenses. If you are new to photography then a good quality compact 35mm camera with tele zoom lens with some degree of manual control will be sufficient. If you are after photos with impact then you should buy a 35mm SLR with 3 exposure modes (auto, aperture priority and shutter priority) and a selection of lenses. Medium / large format cameras are bulky/heavy and less user friendly. You need also think about a flash. If you are considering any underwater photography its worthwhile checking out camera housings or waterproof equipment. You will also need a strong blower brush and some lens cleaning tissue. Make sure you have adequate insurance for your equipment.
- Film** Does your film choice suit what you want to photograph? Print or transparency (slide) film? Slide film is much better quality - but offers less latitude. Print film tends to give great results - with a wider latitude (slight mistakes made whilst shooting that can be rectified at the printing stage). If quality and presentations are important then slide film is your 1<sup>st</sup> choice. Fuji Chrome Velvia, Provia 100F and Sensia 400 are all fantastic choices of slide film. How many rolls? You could easily shoot 5+ rolls a day! Think of a quantity and double or treble it. You cannot afford to run short in country. Good quality professional film is hard at best to find if not impossible. Also buy the best film you can afford. Avoid cheap / free film as this tends to be of low quality. See notes on return. Your destination will dictate the type of film required. Take slow speed (Velvia asa/iso 50) for bright light conditions, medium speed (Provia 100F) for more general photography and higher speed for low light such as jungles. If you intend using a tripod you can get away with slower speed film. I generally carry 80% 100 asa/iso film.

**Digital** Digital cameras have their own advantages and disadvantages. The main problems are that they eat batteries (check availability and possibility of rechargeable ones), high quality images require masses of storage capacity (lap top?) and the electronics are highly susceptible to heat (rather than cold). More so than conventional SLR's. As with all cameras lenses and electronics are very easily damaged by sand and damp. Make sure you know how to switch off the LCD screen as this uses up to 75% of your battery power. Oh yes – get used to the idea of sleeping with your batteries to keep them warm at night. Try not to look at your images when its cold or batteries are critical, save it for taking the photos.

## **Protecting your kit from the environment**

**Hard boxes** Such as Pelicases. Suitable for jungles and damp/wet/dusty environments. Pelicases are waterproof and virtually indestructible. They are a bit cumbersome/bulky but afford the best protection.

**Soft cases** Camera and gadget bags. More common because they are cheaper and easy to use. In harsh environments your equipment could suffer. Some made by specialists like Lowe Pro make substantial bags which rival Pelicases in the protection they give.

**Lenses** You should always protect the front of your lenses with a skylight 1b, UV or polarising filter. Its cheaper to replace a filter than get a lens repaired or replaced.

**Films** In harsh conditions you will also need to keep your rolls of film in a sealed environment such as a Tupperware. Its always a good idea to keep your supply of film in a fridge, allow to warm up for 30 mins before loading.  
X-ray equipment in airports: Ideally film should never be x-rayed, although this is sometimes impossible to avoid. Never pack your film in the hold baggage as this is subject to a larger dose of x-rays. Some travellers swear by putting their film in small lead pouches at airports, but others have said that they just upped the dose to see what was inside! Wherever possible I insist on my film being hand searched. You should not have any problems at major international airports. Be very careful at developing world destinations and on internal flights where equipment may be older.

**Extremes** Above all try and avoid the extremes of cold (for cameras) and heat (for films) sand and dust (for all equipment and films) damp and salt water (for all equipment) and humidity (for all equipment and films) Research before you go so you know what to expect.

## **Recording**

**Notes** Get into the habit of carrying a notebook and pencil to take notes whilst you shoot. An OHP pen will also be useful for marking the number/date on used rolls.

**Technical** Record the aperture (f stop), shutter speed, lens, compensation, flash, names of people, caption information, date, subject (detailed on frames 01 and 36 so rolls can be ordered chronologically upon return)

**Geographical** Country, area, region, town, village, mountain range etc.

**Scientific** If you are collecting data record notes against the shooting information to aid recognition / classification at a later stage.

## **In Country**

**Basics** Understand the relationship between shutter speed, aperture and quantity of light - exposure



With landscapes have something in the foreground to add interest.  
Check the position of the horizon to avoid cutting off heads with walls.  
Position people so you avoid trees growing out of people's heads etc.  
Rule of thirds. Position the main element on the intersection of imaginary lines  $\frac{1}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> in from the sides of the frame (in from both top/bottom and left/right - giving a grid of nine squares). A subject placed in the centre doesn't have life.  
Try and shoot features that lead the eye into the Image, a linear feature such as a row of trees or a river.  
Don't forget to photo the daily routine, in the rain, food and cooking, general camp life etc.  
If you are interested in selling images when you return then remember to take several of each subject with some having room for titles or text etc.  
Try selecting an unusual viewpoint of a common subject.  
Look for light, colours, patterns and textures.  
Horizons should be straight.

**Stance** Stand with your legs apart to add stability, elbows tucked in, hand supporting the lens.  
To release the shutter squeeze - don't jab it.  
Shoot both portrait and landscape format  
Fill the frame - for impact get in close.  
Be aware of backgrounds, distractions etc.  
Think why do I want this image.  
Above all, don't be afraid to experiment. Just keep some notes so you can reproduce (or not) the effect.

**Composition** For consistent results remember the Rule of thirds.  
Fill the frame/get in close, get impact  
Make sure you have a sharp focus on subject - especially the eyes.  
Shoot when the quality of light is best. Early mornings and late afternoons to evenings are best.  
Capture the action with a fast shutter speed  
Using a slow shutter speed can add movement to your image.  
Increase the depth of field with a smaller aperture (f22).  
Give extra support for the camera with beanbags, tripod, tree, umbrella, rucksack, wall, monopod etc.  
Avoid harsh lighting (around midday in the tropics) as it gives dark shadows (especially under the eyes).  
Bright overcast days are good in rainforest and jungles - as highlights aren't burned out.  
In tricky conditions bracket the exposure - take a series of 3 shots at  $-\frac{1}{3}$ , 0 and  $+\frac{1}{3}$ .  
In landscapes, the addition of a person can dramatically add scale

**Wildlife** The eyes are the most important feature to have in sharp focus.  
Take a variety of shots covering distinctive features such as markings, position, location etc.  
For moving subjects pan the camera with the subject.  
Pre focus for anticipated movement - wait for the creature to move into the pre-focussed area.  
Be patient; do not make quick movements or loud noises that may startle the subject.  
Get to know the characteristics of the subject so you can anticipate them.

## **Cultural and Ethics**

**People** Respect their wishes, values and beliefs.  
Find an acceptable balance between your wants and their needs.  
For effective people photography get to know them, be friendly and patient.

With a long lens you can take superb candid shots.  
Seek permission from the subject.

You need to ensure that any images with people who can be easily recognised in the UK have given you their permission to take the photo. This is called a model release, which they should sign.

- Religion** Understand the religion and respect their wishes.  
Research in guidebooks for do's and don'ts before you depart.  
Be aware of body gestures and postures that may offend.  
Check out acceptable clothing requirements before going into religious establishments.  
Be aware that you can cause offence if you use the flash at ceremonies
- Property** You may need to seek permission before taking photos of property.

### **On return from travel**

- Processing** Match the processor with the type of film you have used, one hour processors are a mixed bag! For consistent results take your good quality film to a professional photographic processor rather than the local chemist type.
- Storage** Assess your photography and reconcile the images against the notes you made.  
Having spent lots of cash by now collecting your photos you need to spend time collating them, writing captions, placing them in albums and for slides archival quality sleeves or trays for slide shows.

Please use this as a reference guide; it's based on my experiences whilst travelling with my camera to some of the worlds remotest and wildest places