

20 Travel Tips for Photographers

By Maggie Sale

The time for winter traveling is coming up but as photographers many of us travel in all seasons to all parts of the world. The following is my top 20 travel tips – I hope you find them useful!

1. Don't leave home without doing your homework! Research your location. Use the internet, apps and guide books for everything from hotels to sunrise/sunset times and tide timetables, etc.
2. Don't be in a hurry – give yourself enough time to get to know the area. The best photos come when you get a feel for the place.
3. Visit the local tourist office for further ideas and places of interest. Look at local postcards to get ideas for photo ops, even if they are tourist hot spots.
4. Check out cultural events, exhibitions, fairs, markets, etc that might be on while you are in that country. All these make for great people photos and will complement your scenic shots if you are doing a travel show.
5. Take only the camera equipment you need for that specific location/trip. Take back-up camera/lenses if space allows, especially on long trips or to remote places.
6. Always carry more memory cards, batteries, etc. than you think you'll need. In many countries these supplies are more expensive, not to mention hard to obtain! Take the right adaptors and power supplies for the country you're visiting.
7. Digital images need to be backed up – take laptops and portable storage.
8. Use a tripod as often as you can. Lightweight carbon fibre ones are the best for hiking and wherever weight is an issue. Use for low light and night photography in cities as well.
9. Keep your equipment clean – especially important with digital sensors. Use special sensor cleaning kits, wipes and micro fibre cloths for cleaning lenses and body. This is especially important when you visit hot, dusty places and near saltwater. Take great care when changing lenses – keep out of the wind, dust etc.
10. Take a small camera bag/pack for days when you don't need all your equipment. There are some good day packs for hiking which include a padded compartment for equipment and a zippered compartment for clothes, lunch etc. LowePro does a great model which also has a tripod carrier arrangement.
11. Keep a journal or make notes as you travel especially if you plan to make a slide show. Take shots of information signs to provide additional info.
12. Take appropriate clothing for the country/time of year and the activities you plan on doing. Decent walking/hiking shoes are a must. Learn about the climate of the area so you are not caught out with the wrong clothes!
13. Take a small first aid kit or make up one yourself. Check if you need shots, vaccinations etc. and don't forget non-medical essentials such as visitor's visas.
14. Pack essential photo gear in your hand luggage. Does anyone still use film?! If so, take it in your carry on. Don't pack it in checked-in luggage as the x-ray machines are much stronger.
15. Be aware of local customs. It's not just geography that changes when you travel – cultural, political and religious differences are the norm. Avoid photographing airports, police, military sites and country borders.
16. Be discrete when photographing people in the street. Try to ask for people's permission where you can (hand signals often work well!) and if they say no, respect this and move on. You may find in Arabic countries that western women won't be allowed to take photos of men.
17. Be as flexible as possible. Plans may have to change due to local conditions, weather, accidents, emergencies etc. Be prepared to vary your itinerary if necessary and you might find yourself with some great pictures you didn't expect to have!
18. Be security conscious. Keep your camera out of sight when not using it (especially in poorer countries) and don't leave any personal belongings unattended even for a moment. Car break-ins are a real problem, so keep your gear in the trunk of your car if you aren't taking it with you. Leave nothing of value in sight inside the car. Laptops are also a prime target for theft. If you are traveling by train with one, don't even leave it on the rack above the seats. Be aware of the possibility of thieves operating together to create diversions (Julian learnt this the hard way in Belgium).

19. Make sure all your suitcases/bags have your personal ID details on them and keep them locked. Be aware that Customs in other countries (including the US) might cut the locks off if they want to inspect them (when x-raying) and will cut into the cases, so you might want to use an extra strap or cable tie around your luggage. It might seem unfair, but under (US) anti terrorist laws you won't be able to do anything about it if your luggage is ruined.
20. Be prepared to get up early, stay out late, delay meals, turn the car around, go off the beaten track, change your plans, ask questions about where to go, what to see, talk to other photographers you meet and above all – ENJOY the art of making great photos!