

# RALPH VELASCO ON TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

101 Tips for Developing Your Photographic Eye & More



**RALPH VELASCO**  
**ON TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY**

**101 Tips for Developing  
Your Photographic Eye & More**

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## Dedication

*For my mother, the most generous and unconditionally  
loving person I know.*

*The fact that you instilled in me a never-ending sense of  
wonder and curiosity about the world has resulted in my  
lifelong quest to see and capture its beauty in an image.*

*THANK YOU for always being my biggest fan and  
staunchest supporter.*

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# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I'd like to acknowledge Rebecca Foreman for never failing to be there for me with sound advice and support. I will forever owe you a debt of gratitude for acting as my sounding board and continually giving me invaluable input with regards to my photography and the businesses I've created around it. I trust you.

And to my students and clients, I hope my passion for photography comes through to you and that I can be a small part of helping you in your continuing thirst for knowledge and need for artistic expression. You inspire me.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my family for always being there to lend an ear and to provide feedback and confirmation.

*“You don’t take a photograph, you make it.”*

~ Ansel Adams

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# Introduction

It's been said again and again that in order to be a good photographer, one must be born with a "photographic eye." Although I must admit it's a big head start to have one, hopefully two, photographic eyes, I'm a staunch believer that with a clear vision and desire to develop any skill, even photography, that skill can be learned. Not every musician who's ever mastered an instrument was born with perfect pitch, and as such it's my feeling that an aspiring photographer of any level who exhibits curiosity, discipline and passion can certainly learn to see things from a different perspective and then develop the technical skills necessary to capture them on film or in digital format.

Never think that professional photographers don't make bad images. We probably make more than most, simply because of the sheer number of images we capture over the course of a year (and we certainly reveal only the best). The important thing, however, is to learn from those mistakes and to have a desire to continually improve.

This book was designed to act as a tool to help photographers of all skill levels improve their photographic eye so they can recognize and take advantage of more and better photo opportunities, so it doesn't matter if you're working with an inexpensive point and shoot camera or a more advanced D-SLR (digital single lens reflex). I promise I won't discuss too much about aperture, shutter speed, histograms, ISO or other more technical concepts, for those are topics for another book.

These 101 practical tips and hints, most with supporting images to represent the concept, will help you before, during and sometimes even after your trip, recognizing that this journey could be to some far off land halfway around the world, or right out the door in your own backyard, where I'm sure a world of wonder and photographic opportunity awaits.

*So ask yourself: Do you see what others miss, or miss what others see?*





Near Portillo, Chile – 2008

## Ralph's "Zen of Photography"

*It's my feeling that 75 percent of successful photography is just making an effort to put yourself in the right place, at the right time.*

Doing the research to find out the most interesting places to travel, the best vantage points from which to shoot, the ideal times of year and day to be there, and studying what other photographers have captured of the same scenes, will pay huge dividends. At the risk of sounding overly fundamental, the more you make an effort to point your camera at more interesting scenes and subjects, the better your photography will be. It's really that simple.

So what about the other 25 percent? Well, read on....

*“A point-and-shoot in your hands is worth more  
than the perfect D-SLR in your bag.”*

~ Seamus Murphy

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# 1. It's Not About the Camera

Whether your camera is a disposable point and shoot or a high end D-SLR with interchangeable lenses and filters, you can capture great images. Think of how technically simple cameras were back in the early part of the last century when all those wonderful black and white images of the depression and World Wars I and II were made. Although digital technology has made a huge impact on the ease with which we shoot, process and share our images, it doesn't give us a better photographic eye, which, at least in my opinion, is the most essential component of recognizing a potentially great subject, and in turn, photograph.

## 2. Know Your Limits

Don't overextend yourself and purchase a camera or lenses that are so technologically advanced that they intimidate you and so sit on a shelf or in your gear bag. Iconic images have been taken with nothing more advanced than a homemade pinhole camera, and worthless, uninspired images have been made with the most advanced equipment. So chasing megapixels is definitely not the answer. The best camera is the one you'll actually use.

*People make pictures, cameras don't.*

### 3. Make It Automatic...

...at least in the beginning. You may not have expected me as a photography instructor to tell you this, but don't waste too much time experimenting with manual settings, especially if you're new to photography. Let the camera do most of the grunt work while you concentrate on learning to see, feel and interpret the subject. Keep in mind, however, that the Auto settings on all cameras are just the manufacturer's attempt to have the camera "guess" the best settings for the environment it thinks you're in at the time. Cameras do a pretty good job of this and help you avoid having to think about the many variables that make up a scene, such as aperture, shutter speed, white balance, ISO and flash output. It's easy to waste a lot of time trying to remember which functions and settings to use in a particular situation while a once-in-a-lifetime photo opportunity is passing you by.

*"Light + composition + subject = MAGIC.*

*It doesn't matter what technology you're using."*

~ Art Wolfe

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## 4. Keep It Handy

I guarantee you'll miss 100 percent of shots when you don't have your camera with you. Keep a disposable camera in your car, and a point and shoot in your book bag or purse. Have your D-SLR with you at all times that it's practical, so you're ready for the shots that others are missing because they're too lazy to carry a camera with them.

*“Nothing happens when you sit at home.  
I always make it a point to carry a camera  
with me at all times....  
I just shoot what interests me at that moment.”*

~ Elliot Erwitt

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## 5. Check Your Settings

If you're comfortable exploring beyond your camera's Auto mode, each and every time you go out and shoot, or change the environment in which you're shooting, be sure that your ISO, shutter speed, aperture, shooting mode, +/- EV, etc., are set for the new conditions in which you'll be working. There's nothing worse than shooting for a period of time, only to find that your settings were ideal for last night's indoor shoot, but today you're outside in sunny conditions.



Bryce Canyon, Utah, U.S.A. – 2005



## 6. Practice, Practice, Practice

Especially with new equipment, you'll want to get to know your camera gear as well as you can. Photography is one of those pursuits that you cannot get worse at, so the more you're out practicing the craft, the better you'll get. There is no other way.

*“You travel, therefore you shoot.”*

~ *Outside* magazine

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## 7. Be Realistic

No one, not even a pro, can expect that every shot will be a masterpiece. There will be hours, and even days, when you'll feel like you just can't get a decent shot. That's normal, and it's the photographer's version of writer's block, so don't be discouraged. Instead, be persistent and keep at it. The feeling that maybe you've wasted your time will go away eventually, especially when you've captured magic.

*“Twelve significant photographs in any one year  
is a good crop.”*

~ Ansel Adams

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## 8. Shoot with Babe Ruth in Mind

Babe Ruth was the home-run king, right? But he's also famous for recording a lot of strikeouts, and photography is undoubtedly a numbers game. At first you'll shoot quantity over quality. You'll just take a lot of pictures and hope to get some keepers. But over time, that will reverse. You'll start to shoot fewer images, but your percentage of keepers will increase; it has to. There's an old saying:

*Even a blind mouse finds a hunk of cheese once in a while.*

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*“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”*

~ A. Einstein

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## 9. Learn from Your Inevitable Mistakes...

...then shoot some more. With digital photography, there's no such thing as a wasted image, *if* you learn from it. Get out and take several, if not dozens, of images of the same subject or scene, and then narrow them down until you see which ones work best. Then you can toss the ones that didn't deliver, and there is no cost. Don't continually make the same mistakes without spending a bit of time trying to reverse-engineer and understand the problem and how it can be corrected for or minimized.

**Bonus:** Learn from the metadata that each individual digital image is embedded with. This information includes the basics such as the date and time the image was captured, the type of camera used and perhaps even the exact spot on the globe it was taken, if the camera has GPS capabilities. But it also contains more technical information such as the aperture, shutter speed, ISO, focal length and other settings from which you can glean a lot of information in order to determine why a shot did, or didn't, work.

*“Your first 10,000 photographs are your worst.”*

~ Henri Cartier-Bresson

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## 10. Trouble? Shoot!

Don't immediately delete images off the camera that you know are bad by pushing that little garbage can icon. For one, you could develop problems with some memory cards where they start corrupting or giving you other kinds of trouble. Memory cards are so inexpensive that you should never feel like you're going to run out of space and so have to delete images while shooting. Download all images, the good, the bad and the ugly, to your computer's hard drive so that you can learn from the mistakes you made.

*“Which of my photographs is my favorite?”*

*The one I'm going to take tomorrow.”*

~ Imogene Cunningham

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## 11. Back Up Your Images Religiously

Have a means for backing up your images while on the road. When traveling to distant lands, I've always been reluctant to carry a laptop, but now in this age of netbooks, or mini-laptops, I will carry one of those because they're a classic multifunctional tool that also offers Internet access, has word processing capability, has a decent sized hard drive and can typically fit a full version of most image editing software programs. Additionally, an alternative I've used for years is an external hard drive like the Epson P-3000 with its 4-inch display and 40 GB worth of storage space. There are other versions, too. You can also put music or videos on it, rate your images and do slideshows. Then connect it to a computer to download those images to its hard drive and/or make CD-ROMs and/or back up to just about any USB device, such as a flash drive or memory stick. Once your images are backed up, don't erase those memory cards, either; they'll act as an additional archive of your images. Then, as you fill them up, put all the accumulated cards into a watertight plastic bag for safekeeping until you return home. I recommend a minimum of two, even three or four, sources of backups for your images. But it really depends how important you consider those images, as that will determine how much effort you'll put into protecting them.

**Bonus:** Be careful about getting your images transferred to CD-ROMs in other countries, because once you get the CD back home, it may not be in a format that's compatible with your computer.

## 12. Additional Stuff I Forgot About Memory

A question I often get is whether or not I use a single large memory card of 8 or 16 or even 32 GB. Well, the answer is absolutely not, I use many 1, 2 and 4 GB cards so that I'm well diversified and don't have all my "eggs" in one basket. Should I lose a card, or one becomes corrupted, or if my camera is stolen, although it would still be a tragedy, I won't lose all my images, just the ones on that card. Now, there's a different school of thought. With all the changing in and out of smaller memory cards, some say there is potential for trouble there, too. Although there is some truth to this, I'm willing to take that chance. Memory is so inexpensive now, there's really no reason not to have at least 50 percent more than the amount you think you'll need for a whole trip.

## 13. Power to the People

Charge your camera batteries wherever and whenever you can, and definitely have more than one *charged* battery with you at all times. If you stop to have lunch or a cup of coffee and you see an outlet, plug in. Depending on the remoteness of the place you're shooting, sometimes you never know when you'll have an opportunity to do so again. You might even bring along a small power inverter with a car cigarette lighter adaptor that will allow you to charge while on the road.

**Bonus:** Be sure you've got the proper outlet converter for the country or countries in which you'll be traveling. Although you'll likely be able to pick one up there if you forget, there may be a language barrier or the price could be much more expensive than at home. Do the research necessary to prepare.

## 14. Get the Lay of the Land

Get an overall sense for a place by taking boats, buses and walking tours, especially if you're short on time. When I get to a new place, I like to take the hokey double decker bus tour or the cheesy narrated river cruise or participate in walking tours led by local photographers and historians. This gives me a really good overview of a place and allows me to get a preliminary taste of the highlights. Then I'll come back and shoot at my leisure.



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004

## 15. Emulate the Pros

When I'm in a new place looking for ideas, I peruse the postcard racks, flip through coffee table books and calendars and thumb through local magazines and guide books in order to see what other pros are shooting. Then I'll decide if I want to look for similar photo opportunities, always keeping in mind that I'm going to add my own personal touch to those shots. There are very few 100-percent-unique vantage points or approaches to photographing famous subjects like the Eiffel Tower or the Pyramids, so don't be afraid to borrow ideas, as long as you're going to make the extra effort to stamp them with your own style. If I wanted the exact shot that someone else already made, I could simply take a picture of the postcard, but how fun would that be? And by the way, it would be opening up a whole world of copyright issues that I wouldn't want to explore.

*“You’ve got to push yourself harder.*

*You’ve got to start looking for pictures nobody else could take.*

*You’ve got to take the tools you have and probe deeper.”*

~ William Albert Allard

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## 16. Avoid the Crowds

Get up early and stay out late. Be out when it's just the local kids on their way to school, or the townspeople on their way to work. In the majority of situations I don't want to have groups of tourists in my images, so I'm out shooting when they're in bed sleeping, so I can attempt to get the really interesting shots. Later in the day there'll be plenty of time to make images when the tour bus lets out or the cruise ship dumps all its passengers off into the town you're shooting.



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004

Early a.m.



Just a few hours later

## 17. Ambient Light

Using ambient light, also referred to as available or natural light, is typically a pleasing way to photograph people. Pose your subjects near a window, or outside, but in the shade and out of direct sunlight where they would be subjected to harsh shadows and unflattering lighting conditions, and position them so the sun isn't in their eyes, forcing them to squint.

*“Find your light, find your picture.”*

~ Patrick Symmes

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Kotor,  
Montenegro  
– 2007

## 18. Avoid Midday

The time of day from around 11 am to 2 pm is usually not ideal for shooting outdoors. Between those times, on a clear day, the sun is typically high in the sky and can cast harsh light that creates dark shadows on your subject. If this is the case, you're probably better off to be out scouting other locations to come back to when the light is better, having lunch, or backing up and working on your images, or shooting interiors, or resting back at the hotel because you were up so early shooting that morning. You were up early, right? However, sometimes you're just in a place at the wrong time of day. That's how your schedule worked out, so make the best of it. Again, try to shoot people in the shade, not in direct sunlight, and be cognizant of how shadows are falling on buildings or the other things you're shooting. Conversely, if it's an overcast day, then the clouds will typically act as a light diffuser or soft box, and this can be a good thing.

**Note:** Depending on the latitude in the world of the place you're visiting, which directly affects the seasons, you may or may not have less-than-ideal light around midday. Winter and summer are usually not good, because the sun is often directly overhead; and spring and fall are better because the sun is lower in the sky and provides a more indirect lighting source.





Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007

Without flash



With flash

## 19. Know When to Use Flash

Often, no matter what you do to avoid it, you'll find yourself in a particular place at a less-than-ideal time of day. This may be a great opportunity to use fill flash. More often than not, I use a flash in the daytime and I don't at night. This may seem counterintuitive. However, when the sun is high in the sky on a clear day, it often casts your subject in harsh light; so if you're shooting people, they'll have raccoon eyes, and shadows under their nose and chin(s) or, if they're wearing a hat, under its brim. Using either a built-in or external flash, assuming the subject is 10 to 25 feet away from you and within the flash's range, will fill in those shadows and generally not affect the background. Again, when shooting on a cloudy day, you may not have this problem.



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004

## 20. Avoid Flash at Night

Again, this may seem counterintuitive, but unless you have a really good understanding of how your flash works, you'll often notice that your subject will be washed out and overexposed because of the harsh light from its output. See the Hold Steady tip that follows for how to address this issue when shooting in low light conditions.

*“The photographic image ... is a message without a code.”*

~ Roland Barthes

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Santiago, Chile – 2008

## 21. Hold Steady

When shooting in low light conditions, such as at night or in a dimly lit church or other interior, where shutter speeds are typically slow in order to provide more light, brace yourself against a tree, lamp post, wall or other stationary object – something solid that will help you remain as steady as possible. Then, while holding the camera against your eye, and your elbows in close to your body for extra support, take a deep breath and gently depress the shutter release, then breathe out. Try not to violently squeeze the shutter release or breathe during the shot, or you'll move the camera, even if just a little. Doing so will surely introduce camera shake, and at a slow shutter speed, you'll likely get blur in the resulting image, which is usually not desirable, unless you're trying to create a special effect.



Ljubljana, Slovenia – 2007

## 22. Use a Stability Device

The general rule of thumb is that you can handhold a shot with a standard 50 mm lens down to about 1/60 second, maybe 1/30 if you haven't had any coffee. You might even get sharp images down to 1/15 or even 1/8 of a second with today's lenses or camera bodies featuring built-in image stabilization (IS, Canon's version) or vibration reduction (VR, Nikon's version) technology. Other manufacturers have their own versions and brand names for this. However, when possible, you should still use some sort of stabilization device, such as a tripod, beanbag or even just resting your camera on a ledge or railing.

**Bonus:** While the camera is on the stabilization device so you don't inadvertently introduce camera shake when pressing the shutter release, you should also know how to use your camera's self-timer function or, better yet, have a remote control for your camera. But be sure to turn off the IS or VR; it's not necessary when using a tripod and could actually work against you.

## **23. Review Images in the Digital Display**

Once you get more comfortable with operating your camera, you may get lax and not check the display as often after having taken a shot. But the reason you should be checking is so you can correct problems on the spot. Perhaps one of the camera's settings is off, or a person walked into the frame without your knowing or there was some lens flare (those geometric shapes of light you'll often see that are caused by light bouncing off the elements inside the lens). By reviewing the image right after each one or two captures, you'll be able to make corrections and retake the shot right then and there. Otherwise, you may not know a shot wasn't right until you get home to see it on the computer, and going back might not be an option.

## **24. Learn to Use Your Histogram**

Most cameras have what's called a histogram. Although there isn't enough space here to explain all its nuances, it's your camera's best tool for determining exposure, or, how much light the camera's sensor (or film) is being exposed to. A simple graph that can be displayed on the back of most cameras, the histogram tells if the image is overexposed or underexposed, and then it allows you to make corrections, if necessary. Make it a point to read up on how to interpret the histogram, and you'll be able to correct problems on the spot. It may look somewhat intimidating at first, but the histogram is really a pretty simple tool to understand and correct for.

## **25. Make a Resolution**

Digital cameras allow you to shoot at a variety of levels of quality, or resolution, often expressed as Basic, Normal or Fine. The higher the quality setting, the fewer images a given card will be able to store. Memory cards are so inexpensive now that there's no excuse not to buy more cards. At one time memory was very expensive; because people wanted to save space on a card, they often shot at a lower quality setting. Today, definitely shoot at the highest quality setting. You can always reduce the image for e-mailing or posting to a website, which requires only 72 dpi (dots per inch), but you can never efficiently go the other way and convert a low-resolution image to 300 dpi.

## **26. Label and I.D. All Equipment**

Sometimes I get grief from people who see my system of putting labels on just about anything I can, but it's my feeling that the vast majority of people are good, and if given an opportunity to get a lost item back to you, they will. So, I use a simple device that creates a label to adhere to my camera body, cell phone, tripod, memory cards, everything. It says, "REWARD \$\$ IF FOUND: me@myemail.com." If I put my phone number, and I'm traveling in a foreign country, they may not know how to reach me, but with an e-mail address I'm much more easily contacted.

## **27. Be Discreet**

I go so far as to put black electrical tape to cover the manufacturer's logo on my camera body, lens and lens cap. Sure, I still probably look like I have a big, expensive piece of electronic equipment hanging around my neck, but you never know how not seeing the brand might throw off thieves and encourage them to move on to other prey.





Ljubljana, Slovenia – 2007

## 28. Shoot in Color

Most cameras allow you to actually shoot the original image in black and white, or sepia, or with some other custom setting, however, it's best to shoot in color, and then, with a few clicks of a mouse, you can easily convert those images to black and white or sepia, or apply any other number of filters in an image editing program. Conversely, if you shoot in black and white, for instance, you won't be able to convert to a true color image from that file without a whole lot of effort. Starting off with a color image, you'll easily have both files and be much better off, and in a much shorter period of time.





Buenos Aires,  
Argentina – 2008

## 29. Work Fast

Things change: Clouds are unpredictable and move or dissipate, ideal light comes and goes and so do subjects, so take the shot now. Don't promise to come back another time and shoot it later, because—and this is usually a good thing—the scene will likely never be quite the same.

*“It can be a trap of the photographer to think that his or her best pictures were the ones that were hardest to get.”*

~ Timothy Allen

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## 30. But Slow Down

Don't rush around just snapping photos, either. Take an extra 3 to 5 seconds to evaluate and properly compose what you're seeing through the viewfinder. This will have you thinking more about what you're actually shooting and in turn eliminate problem parts of your images. The more you can do "in camera," the less time you'll have to spend sitting in front of a computer trying to fix things. My interest is being out shooting, not working on the post-processing part. So spending a little extra time onsite getting the right exposure and composition from the start saves a lot of time in the end, and this allows me to spend more time doing what I enjoy, and less time doing what I don't.

*"Beauty can be seen in all things, seeing and composing the beauty is what separates the snapshot from the photograph."*

~ Matt Hardy

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## 31. Give Yourself an Assignment

Because you're probably not out on a paid job, but likely vacationing or shooting in your own backyard, pretend as if you are on assignment so you can push yourself to get out and look for unique photos. When shooting for your own interest, photography shouldn't become a job for you; it should be a labor of love. So go out and look for photo opportunities that you're passionate about. For instance, if you love interesting doors, make a special effort to seek out and capture all the unique doors you can in a given area during a specific period of time. I guarantee if you start looking for a particular subject or genre that interests you, you'll start to notice it everywhere.



Kotor, Montenegro – 2007





Kotor, Montenegro – 2007

## 32. Shoot with Your Audience in Mind

If it's interesting to you, it probably will be to them. I like to say that I shoot with my mother in mind. She enjoys seeing my work when I come back from these far-flung locations, but I'm not always showing her the incredible landscapes and the interesting people shots. It might be a series of images from inside my hotel room, or a picture of one of those odd toilets in France that's nothing more than a hole in the ground and two footprints. Or, as with this image, I simply wanted to show the interesting way they present a glass of brandy in Kotor, Montenegro. They rest the brandy on top of another glass with heated water in it, just to warm up the brandy a little bit. This image certainly isn't going to win any awards, but it captures an interesting slice of life.





Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008

### 33. Shoot the People (well, not literally)

People are often the hardest subjects to capture, and this is typically because the photographer is intimidated thinking that he or she is invading the personal space of the subject. Although this may be true, there are ways around it. By using a zoom lens, you can often capture candid shots of human subjects from a far enough distance. My preference is to get images of people, without their knowledge, in EDL, or EveryDay Life, simply doing what they do. Perhaps it's the local church lady intently dusting the pews of a magnificent Gothic cathedral, or a crusty old fishmonger weighing and wrapping his wares in the daily newspaper. Now this doesn't mean I want to exploit the locals by any means, or even the tourists, when I'm shooting. I'm just looking for subjects who are acting naturally in interesting surroundings. I will say, however, that after you've gotten a nice series of candid images, make a special effort to try to engage people and ask them if they'd mind if you took a more posed picture (see Tip 41 about posing and Tip 39 about asking permission).

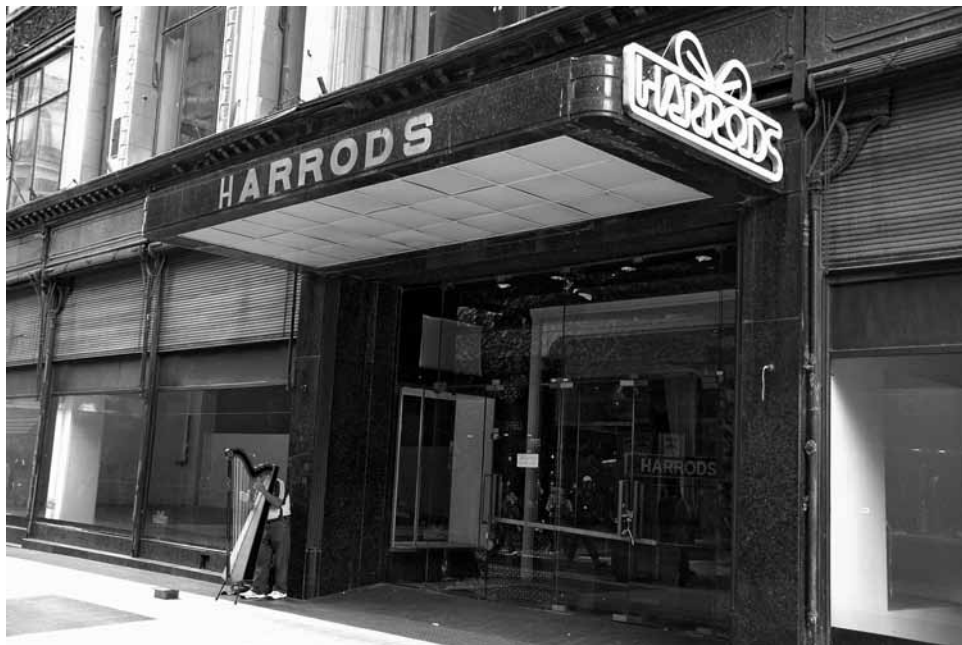




Ljubljana, Slovenia – 2007

## 34. Blend in for Better Results

Particularly when shooting people, arrive a bit early and just hang out. At first, people may notice you and act a bit differently, but after a while, they'll forget about you and go back to whatever it is they were doing. This is when you'll have an opportunity to capture them in their regular environment, not posing or uncomfortable because they know your intentions.



Buenos Aires, Argentina  
– 2008



San Juan Capistrano,  
California, U.S.A.  
– 2009

## 35. Change Is Good (Sometimes)

A question I'm asked a lot is whether I pay people who allow me to take their picture. There's a lot of debate about this subject, but my feeling is that you shouldn't pay people who are just out and about. If it's a street performer who makes his living from the tips he gets while entertaining and posing for photographers and tourists, then I don't mind giving some change or the equivalent of a dollar or so, especially if I asked him to spend some time with me so I can get special shots, as I did with this guitarist in San Juan Capistrano. Often just showing them the results in the digital display of your camera will suffice, or offering to send them a picture via e-mail, or even regular mail; but you have to follow through and actually do it if you say you are going to. Think of the precedent you're setting for the photographers who follow in your footsteps. If you burn the local people, you could be ruining it for all the photographers who follow.

## 36. Timing Is Everything

Here again, patience comes in handy, so shoot your subjects when they're walking by a simple and complementary background, not one where they're blending in to a part of the scene. Or if the subjects are wearing dark clothing, time the shot so they're up against a light or contrasting background. In this image I wasn't able to capture the timing just right, so the dark subject blended into the dark area of the window, which was not ideal.



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004

## 37. Be Bold

If you're a shy person, make an effort to break out of your shell and to be aggressive and bold when it comes to getting the shots you want. In order to remain a good citizen of the world, however, you certainly don't want to be obnoxious. Still, sometimes it's good practice to push the envelope and simply ask for what you want, especially if it's out of your comfort zone. If you're respectful and pleasant, and do things with a smile, you'll likely get what you're after.

*“The traveler is active; he goes strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him.”*

~ Daniel J. Boorstin

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## 38. Bet Big

Just like a gambler increases his bets when on a hot streak, shoot more when the conditions are right, and cut back when they're less than ideal. It's akin to dollar cost averaging in the financial industry, where you buy more stock when prices are low (conditions are ideal) and you buy less when prices are high (conditions are not good).





Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008

## 39. Permission Granted?

Whether a photographer needs permission to take pictures of people is a popular topic. Fortunately, U.S. law provides photographers with a lot of leeway when it comes to capturing images of anyone, including police officers and children, as long as they're in a public place. Now, the clarification is that in order for it to be OK to take the shot, the person being photographed should not have a reasonable expectation of privacy. An example of someone who *would* have a reasonable expectation of privacy, however, is a person in the public restroom of an office building or museum. If, however, you're shooting on private property, you can be told not to shoot or to leave. But short of a court order, no one has the right to confiscate your camera, memory cards or film. I'm not an attorney, and I suppose this information could change at any time, so consult one if you'd like more information.





Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007



Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008

## 40. Use Your Travel Mates...

... and not just to carry your tripod and extra lenses, although that's nice, too! Having someone with you while you're out shooting has a number of advantages. They can act as a subject in your shot, providing a human touch and/or a sense of scale to the scene (see below). The person can watch your equipment while you move fast through the scene getting shots you might not be able to if you were on your own, or can tell you when you need to hurry up because someone is about to walk into the scene. Additionally, your travel mate can help block out an unsightly garbage can (like my subject was doing in this shot in Dubrovnik) or another part of the scene you don't want shown. And last, but certainly not least, your companion can act as a decoy for you while you show interest in the person directly behind, as with this image taken in Buenos Aires.

## 41. Be a Poser

When posing the people you're photographing, a rule of thumb is that if they're looking directly at the camera, they shouldn't be smiling, but if they're looking away from the camera, then it's OK. But, just like any other rule, this one's made to be broken, so try all combinations. (See Tip 17, Ambient Light.)

*“Great subjects make great pictures.”*

~ Jim Zuckerman

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Crown Fountain, Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2009

## 42. Your Level Best

Be cognizant of your horizons. Few things in an image will scream “amateur” more than having horizons in your shots that aren’t level. One way to avoid horizons that are off is to line them up with the frame of the viewfinder, especially the bottom. Remember that a horizon can be both horizontal and vertical and natural or man-made. An example of a man-made horizon would be a windowsill or a table or the altar or stairs of a church, or in this image, the glass bricks that make up Crown Fountain. Take that extra 3 to 5 seconds I mentioned to get it right.



Carlsbad, California, U.S.A. – 2009

## 43. K.Y.S.S. (Keep Your Shots Simple)

Anything that doesn't add to your image, takes away from it. Strip away the unnecessary to get to a photograph's core. Remember, less is usually more in photography.

**Note:** Here I've intentionally used a very shallow depth of field and so just the worker in this image, and the flowers immediately surrounding him, were meant to be in focus.

*“Photography does not create eternity, as art does;  
it embalms time, rescuing it simply  
from its proper corruption.”*

~ Andre Bazin

---





Recoleta Cemetery, Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008

## 44. ...But Keep 'Em Wondering

Sometimes it's good to give your viewers an image that they have to stare at and think about, or that you'll have to explain exactly how you captured it, so I don't entirely agree with the quote from Mr. Anonymous here.

*“I always thought good photos were like good jokes.  
If you have to explain it, it just isn't that good.”*

~ Anonymous

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Budapest, Hungary  
– 2007

## 45. Selectively Shoot

Shoot only the parts of a scene that you want shown to your audience. Avoid parts of buildings that are under construction or aren't pleasing to the eye for whatever reason. Maybe there's some ugly graffiti or a broken window that you don't want to reveal in the image.

**Bonus:** I'll often take a picture of the whole scene, too, just to show the part of it I was trying to crop out in camera. That's why I show both versions of the subject, Parliament in Budapest, here.

*“To visualize an image (in whole or in part) is to see clearly  
in the mind prior to exposure, a continuous projection  
from composing the image through the final print.”*

~ Ansel Adams

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Kotor,  
Montenegro  
– 2007

## 46. Go It Alone

Don't be held back by fellow travelers who don't share your interest in photography. Get out and shoot on your schedule, not theirs. If you're an early bird and your partner likes to sleep in, this could be the perfect relationship, because you'll be out shooting, getting the best light of the day, while your partner is snug in bed. If that's the case, then meet for breakfast after your shoot and go out and enjoy the rest of the day together, after you've been out shooting in glorious morning light with few distractions.

*“If you don't like getting up early, then be a writer.”*

~ Patrick Symmes

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Ljubljana, Slovenia – 2007



## 47. Keep Maps and Other Tourist Information

If you're like me, in your research you contacted all the tourist offices and visitors bureaus of the cities, attractions and countries you'll be visiting. Collect and use the information they send you, in addition to the information you'll be accumulating throughout your trip. That way, when you return and you need to name your images, or to provide a description for an image in a book you're creating or a slideshow you've developed, you'll be able to recall where the image was taken and what the name of the plaza, church, fortress or museum is, along with its proper spelling. Even on a short trip, you'll probably visit a number of similar places, and the names and information of each place will all run together. This helps to keep it clear. Also, take a picture of the signs of places upon arrival. You'll know that all the following images are of that location, they make nice placeholders in your slideshows and books, too, plus you'll have the correct spelling. Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, is hard enough to say, but just try spelling it!

## 48. Don't Get Distracted

Watch your stuff. I'll always sit on my camera strap or have it looped around my neck, leg or arm. If I'm carrying any sort of bag, which I try to avoid at all costs anyway, and I stop to sit down, I'll put it between my legs. On the train I'll latch the strap around the luggage rack or the seat leg so that someone can't just quickly snatch it and they'll move on to easier prey.

## 49. Typewriters, Pots & Pans and Cameras?

Again, remember, just as a typewriter doesn't write a book, and pots and pans don't make a meal, cameras don't take pictures, people do. I often hear students tell me "This camera doesn't take good pictures." Well, what they really mean to say is that they don't take good pictures. The camera is just an instrument, like a guitar or a piano. You have to learn how to master an instrument in order to make the best music.

*Did I Mention to Continually Back Up Your Images?*

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## 50. Be Curious

The best photo opportunities aren't usually obvious. Just like other opportunities, they're everywhere, but you'll have to make an effort to seek them out, so wander about looking to find, and even stumble upon, great subjects. As long as it's safe, venture into that back alley, or make an effort to follow that street to wherever it leads. Most photographers aren't doing this, so often you'll find unique images in those places.

*“The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”*

~ Henry David Thoreau

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Prague, Czech Republic – 2004

## 51. Find Your Passion

The more you care about a particular type of photography, whether it's abstracts, people, architecture, landscapes or some other genre, the more time you'll spend making great photography. For me, I really enjoy architecture and skylines.

*“A true work of art is the creation of love,  
love for the subject first and for the medium second.”*

~ Elliot Porter

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## 52. Forget Right and Wrong

There are no correct subjects in photography. Shoot what moves you and that will translate to the viewer of your work.



Cloud Gate (a.k.a. The Bean), Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2009

## 53. Have Vision

If the subject doesn't speak to you, how will it speak to your viewers? Again, quality research will help to clarify your vision.

*“There is nothing worse than a sharp photograph of a fuzzy idea.”*

~ Ansel Adams

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Church of the Assumption, Bled Island, Slovenia – 2007

## 54. De-Emphasize It

If the sky has no clouds, or the ocean in your image has no real interest, for instance a boat or surfer, show only a small portion of the part with little interest to de-emphasize it, and then move the composition up or down to emphasize the part with more interest.





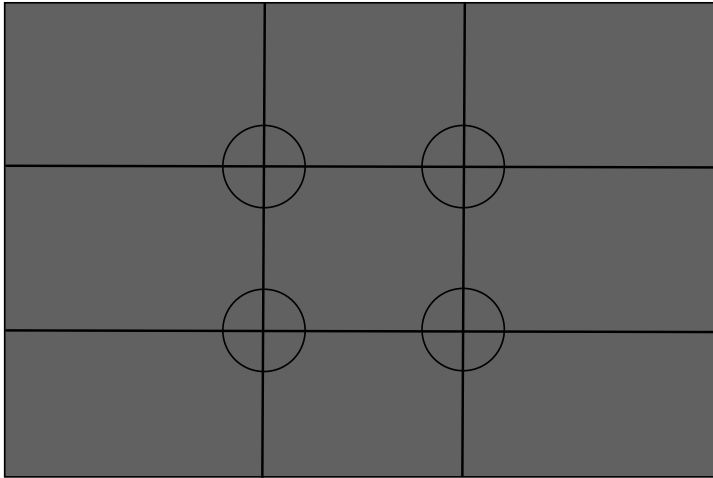
Kotor, Montenegro – 2007



## 55. Leave Room

Know the aspect ratio of your camera. The aspect ratio is usually expressed as a number like 2 x 3 (= 4 x 6 = 8 x 12) or 3 x 4 (= 6 x 8 = 12 x 16), etc. Be sure to leave room around your subject so that if your camera shoots at an 8 x 12 ratio, as mine does, and you wanted to make an 8 x 10 out of the image, you won't be cutting anything off when you crop it down, as I had to with this scene. Or, so you don't have to crop out pixels, take two images of the scene, one with the frame in tight around the subject, and one where you've left enough room around the edges to crop down the image if needed.

8 x12 Aspect Ratio



The Rule of Thirds



Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007



Temecula, California, U.S.A. – 2009



Venice, Italy – 2007

## 56. Employ the “Rule of Thirds”

This “rule” is really a guideline, and has you picture an imaginary tic-tac-toe board across the scene. (See diagram; some cameras even have this feature built in.) This divides the image into thirds both horizontally and vertically. Ideally, for a more pleasing-to-the-eye and well-balanced image, your subject should be placed at one of the four points where two of the lines meet (represented by circles in the diagram). As an example, a sunset at the beach might have approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  sand,  $\frac{1}{3}$  water and  $\frac{1}{3}$  sky in the image. However, as with any artistic endeavor, and depending on the exact conditions at hand, rules are made to be broken.

**Bonus:** Buy an inexpensive mat from an art supply store with an 8" x 10" or 8" x 12" opening (depending on your camera's aspect ratio) and tape some string across it in a tic-tac-toe pattern. Then, walk around framing your environment with the mat. You'll start to see the world with the Rule of Thirds in mind and this will greatly increase your ability to properly compose things and help develop your photographic eye.



Huntington Beach, California, U.S.A. – 2008



## 57. Adjust the “Crop” Out of It!

Even while standing in the same place the whole time, you can work the scene to get a variety of different compositions of what may be a relatively simple scene. Try a horizontal, a vertical, with the subject centered, with it off center. You can zoom in and out, squat down and shoot up, or take a different approach and hold the camera over your head and shoot down on the scene, all without moving your feet at all. This can be a really good exercise for pushing your creative limits, so try it out in a variety of different situations and see how many variations you can come up with.

**Bonus:** Do as much as you can “in camera” to get the correct cropping in your images. Zoom in or out, or physically move in or out, so that you get the correct composition right there, while you’re on site. If there’s a tree in your way, perhaps moving in a bit closer will eliminate it from the frame and make a much better image. Also, move the camera a few degrees in all directions to see how the same scene might be captured differently by cropping out parts and leaving in others. You’ll find that even a very simple scene has many, many opportunities.

## 58. Think Negatively

When composing an image, we typically work with three fundamental elements: the frame, the positive space and the negative space. The frame, of course, is made up of the edges of the scene as seen through the viewfinder. The positive space is the main subject, in this case the Mission wall and cross, and the negative space is the blank or empty space around it, represented by the sky, which complements the main subject. This will usually play right into the Rule of Thirds mentioned above, and often results in a much more pleasing image.



Mission San Juan Capistrano, California, U.S.A. – 2009



## 59. It's Mostly About the Light

The word “photography” comes from the Greek and means, “to paint with light.” When concentrating on portrait, macro or flower photography, you have a better chance of being able to control lighting conditions on such a small subject. But with landscape photography, sunset and other “big picture” photography, like architecture, you may have to wait for Mother Nature to do her thing. So start with good light by shooting in the margins of the day, during what’s often referred to as the Golden Hour. Then you can take advantage of the oblique angles of the sun, which create unforgettable light, the kind Rembrandt used to paint.

**Bonus:** The Golden Hour is often defined as the time during and just after sunrise or before and during sunset, but stick around a half hour or so after sunset in order to capture the wonderful hues of twilight.



Joshua Tree National Park, California, U.S.A – 2009



## 60. Watch Your Edges

“Either it’s in or it’s out.” That’s what I like to say. When framing a shot, try to avoid extraneous tree branches peeking in from an edge, or light poles that aren’t completely in the scene, or a person’s leg and foot walking into your shot. Be certain that you avoid cutting off the tops of buildings or trees. Even if it’s just the tip of an antennae or flagpole that’s cut off, as in this image, it’s considered to be a big negative. Simply reframe the image by moving the camera, zooming in or out, or physically moving yourself, so that you eliminate, or include, most or the entire part of the problem.



Lucerne, Switzerland – 2007

Flag cutoff, composition needed to move up

## 61. What's a Pencil?

Now, with digital photography, I hardly use pen and paper anymore. Whether it's a menu board or sign outside a restaurant, or a wine label or a phone number on a poster that I want to remember, I simply take a picture of it. That's what I did here with our metro stop in Prague. Instead of writing it down, I took a picture so I could easily find my way back home!



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004



Kotor, Montenegro – 2007

## 62. Make a 90-Degree Turn

Many people insist on taking only landscape-oriented pictures of whatever subject it is they're shooting. I guess it stands to reason because it's easy; after all, that's the "normal" way to hold the camera. But they work on their sides, too. With a simple 90-degree turn of the camera to the right or left, you can virtually double the amount of photo opportunities you'll capture. If the subject warrants it, and even sometimes if it doesn't, I'll shoot it in both a portrait and landscape orientation, just in case.

*"When's the best time to shoot a vertical?*

*Right after you shoot a horizontal."*

~ Bryan Peterson

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## 63. One Simple Step

The difference between a good shot and a bad shot could be just one step to the right or left. Perhaps there's a telephone pole in the distance that appears to be protruding from your subject's head; by squatting down a bit and shooting up, it can be hidden behind the person, making for a much better composition with fewer distractions. Or maybe there's a garbage can in your scene; by taking one step to the left or right, you can hide it behind a pillar and thereby save the shot.

## 64. Manipulate the Scene

Move around the subject until it does what you want it to do. If you see a rainbow looming in the sky, position yourself until it looks like it's ending in a barn or other building. Or here, while on the Charles Bridge in Prague, I saw this statue and moved around until it appeared to be pointing up at St. Vitus Cathedral on the hill.



Prague, Czech Republic – 2004





Budapest, Hungary – 2007



## 65. Get Around

Capture your subject from all different angles. If you're in Budapest, for instance, and you want to capture the famous Chain Bridge, which crosses the Danube, walk up and down both sides of the river a number of times, and across the bridge itself back and forth, until you've shot it with people and without, from a portrait (vertical) orientation as well as landscape (horizontal), zoomed in on its details and out to show it overall. The number of ways to capture the same subject are countless.



Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007

## 66. Get Above

If possible, show your subject from above. This works especially well if your subject is a city or bridge or other large scene that would benefit from what the film industry refers to as an “establishing shot.” This sort of image establishes the scene and often creates a good starting point for the medium and detail shots that follow of the same location. Climb up a hillside, or take the elevator to the top of the tallest building, or get in a tree or up on a balcony, or take the cable car up to the highest point in the city – anything to capture the scene from above so you can give your viewers an overall feeling for the place.



Above Miami, Florida, U.S.A. – 2005

## 67. Aerials

It's certainly expensive to rent a helicopter or private airplane in order to shoot aerials, but it's easy to keep your camera handy during a commercial airline flight. I always try to sit by a window, near the front of the airplane, and away from the wing. Before choosing my seat, in my research I try to determine whether the good photo opportunities will be on the left or right side of the plane, and from which way the sun will be shining. This doesn't work 100 percent of the time, because often I'll be flying into a place at night or unintentionally sitting on the wrong side of the plane, but if I'm not prepared, I definitely won't get the shot.





From a hot air balloon above Palm Springs, California, U.S.A. – 2006

## 68. Think Diagonally

Diagonals in images are typically a pleasing element, so look for them in nature, in cityscapes, in lines on the sidewalk and in buildings, or wherever you go. They can be subtle or more obvious, they can be natural or man-made or you can create them just by the way you orient the camera.





Rainstorm passing through Perast, Montenegro – 2007

## 69. Embrace the Weather

There's an old saying: "In photography, there's no such thing as bad weather, just varying degrees of good weather." Don't stay inside when the weather shifts. Celebrate when it's rainy, foggy, cloudy, windy or snowing outside. This presents a great opportunity to make unique images of what are likely "overshot" subjects. Famous sites require extra effort to make unique. Everyone's getting a picture of the Eiffel Tower on a sunny day at noon (usually the worst time of day to be shooting). But how about one where it's shrouded in a mysterious early morning fog or is being criss-crossed by a rogue snowstorm at night, or after a torrential rain shower passes through, such as in this shot near Perast, Montenegro? These conditions present extraordinary photo opportunities that not everyone will make an extra effort to capture. Most photographers will be at home or in their hotel room, waiting for the storm to subside, while you're out getting the unique shots.

**Bonus:** Use a simple shower cap or a plastic bag to wrap around your camera to keep it dry during wet weather. It's best if the bag or cap is transparent so you can operate the camera unencumbered. And have a cloth with you to dry off the camera and lens as needed.

## 70. Shoot from the Hip

Practice shooting pictures when your camera isn't up against your eye or out in front of you and obvious, as you normally would. Shoot from where it hangs around your neck or from your waist as you're walking towards an interesting person you don't necessarily want to alert that you're getting the shot. This will take a lot of practice but can produce really great results. Be aware of your zoom length so you're cropped in on the subject to show enough detail. This takes a lot of practice, so be patient and keep at it.

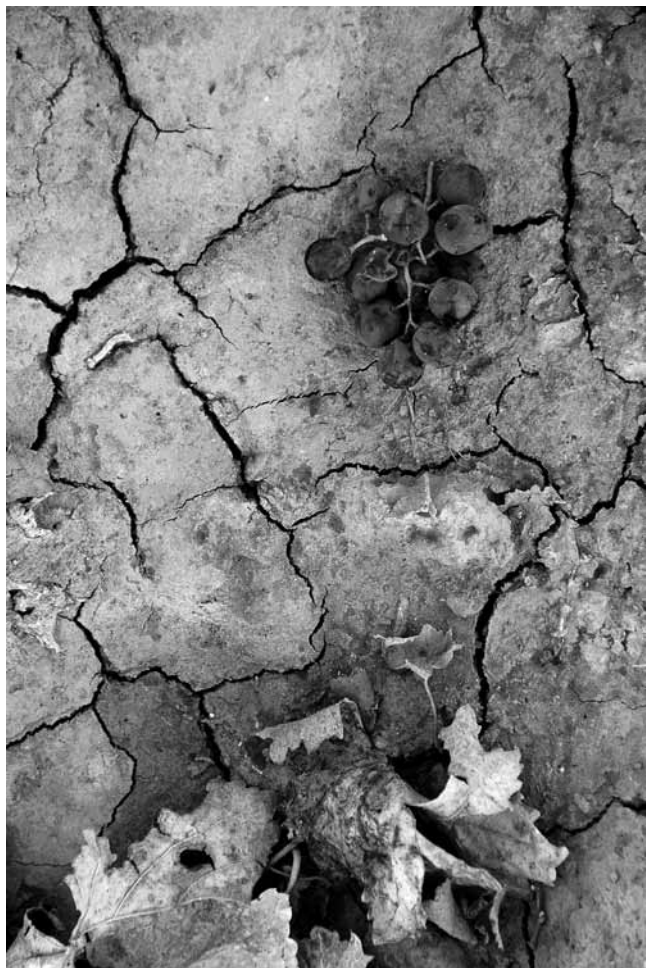
## 71. Look Up

We tend to go through life looking straight ahead and a bit to the sides, but there's a whole world above us. You'll find great opportunity if you'll just look up every now and then. This will provide a unique perspective as well, which is hardly ever a bad thing.



Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007

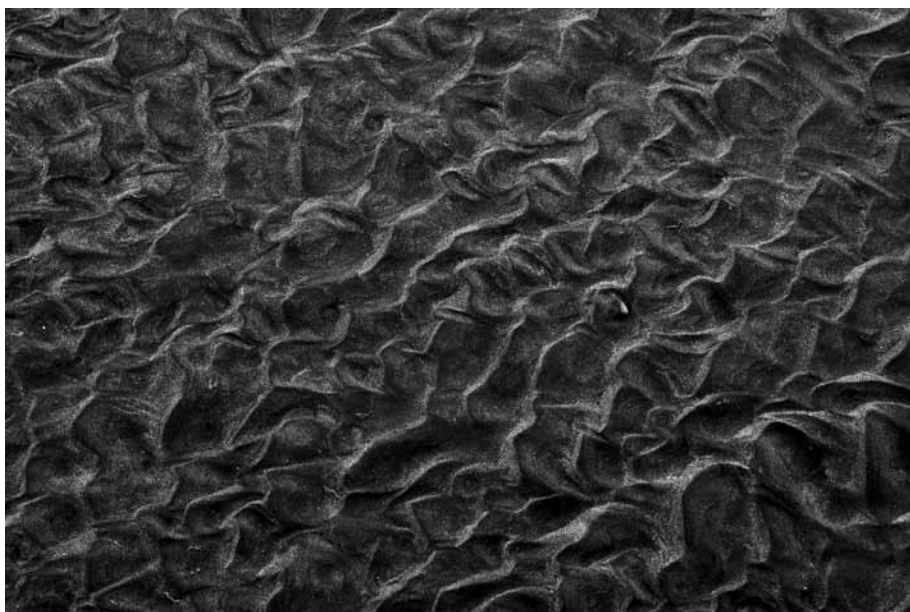




Mendoza, Argentina – 2008



Budapest, Hungary – 2007



San Francisco, California, U.S.A. – 2007

## 72. Look Down

If you feel like you've picked all the low hanging fruit (in other words, exploited the easy photo opportunities) simply looking down to notice the world at your feet will often pay big dividends. So point your camera down at the ground to potentially open up whole new worlds.

*“Life is like a good black and white photograph, there’s black, there’s white, and lots of shades in between.”*

~ Karl Heiner

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Oak Brook, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2005



## 73. Be Paranoid

Every once in a while, look behind you to get a completely different perspective. I can't tell you how many times I've simply turned around, only to find a beautiful moon on the rise or a stunning rainbow I hadn't noticed from the direction I was walking. With this shot, I wanted to put just a little spin on what the viewer might typically expect from an image of a cross, so I framed it on the diagonal and manipulated the scene so the moon was in a good spot for the composition.

## 74. Double Back

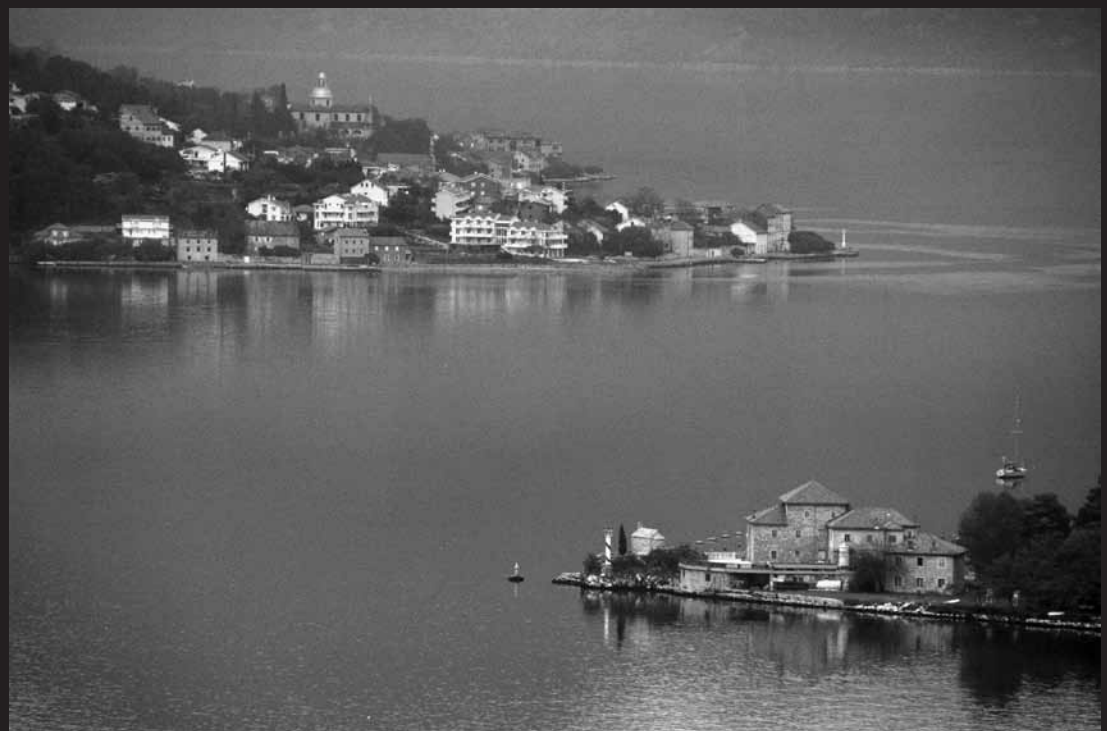
If you find yourself on an interesting street, or passing through a remarkable scene in the forest, retrace your steps and walk back the other way. Even though you've just walked through the scene from one direction, when you double back you'll have a completely new perspective – one that will show itself in different light and be revealed against a different background. In a city or town, the people will be different, the signs will be different and everything will look new to you. This will virtually double your opportunities for unique photos.



Corona del Mar, California, U.S.A. – 2008

## 75. Move Into the Scene

When shooting a subject like a moving car, or a walking person or a foraging animal, more often than not you'll want the subject moving into the scene, as opposed to moving, driving or walking out of the scene. This is a rule that can certainly be broken, but doing so may actually make your viewer a bit uncomfortable. However, if that's your intent, it should work.



Bay of Kotor, Montenegro – 2007

## 76. Picture in Picture

You can find a lot of different photo opportunities within the same scene, no matter how simple you think it might be. Zoom in, and out, with the camera, and with your feet. Take a wide shot at first to get an overall sense of the place. Then make a concerted effort to zoom in on the medium shots and the finer details. Virtually every scene or subject you can imagine will have multiple opportunities for a number of other shots within it. With these two shots I first took the wide-angle version and then zoomed in on the two peninsulas in the distance to show some detail.



Early morning



Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007

Late afternoon

## 77. Same Scene, Different Time

If you have the luxury of being in the same place over a period of time while traveling, or as you probably do around your own home, make an effort to shoot the same scene at different times of day, which will certainly present different lighting and other conditions. You'll find that the difference can be remarkable.



Evening





Oak Brook, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2004

## 78. Be a Man (or Woman) for All Seasons

Shoot the same scene in all four seasons and then examine the results. You may have to return to a place year after year to get it in just the right conditions, but it can be more than worth the effort.

*“I have discovered photography. Now I can kill myself.  
I have nothing else to learn.”*

~ Pablo Picasso

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Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2005

A better angle



## 79. Twist and Turn

In contrast to Tip 42 about watching your horizons, I also recommend experimenting by turning the camera at odd angles, ones not expected by your viewers. Often just a slight turn to one side or the other will convert a good picture into a really good or great picture and you'll be surprised at the results. This works really well with abstract scenes, like this one.



Traditional angle



Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2005

## 80. Seek the Unique

Get on your belly, or on your rear end, or climb up in a tree or safely hang out a window for a different perspective. Shoot from above, below, behind, on the side, from the quarter, etc. Go the extra mile to show your subject from non-traditional angles.

*“If I saw something in my viewfinder that looked familiar  
to me, I would do something to shake it up.”*

~ Garry Winograd

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Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2004



## 81. Have Perspective

Shoot the scene from somebody else's perspective, someone who is also in the scene. Show the magnificent view that a group of diners is enjoying from their table high above the city, or the marathon runners whizzing by from an onlooker's perspective, as I did in this picture.

## 82. See Through It

Frame the scene through windows, doors and arches, or with foreground elements, tree limbs or a person or animal's legs or neck.



Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2009

## 83. Polarize It

A polarizing filter is like a good pair of sunglasses for your camera. It makes clouds pop, gives the sky a deep blue hue (or not), and allows you to play with the reflections in glass, on water or metallic objects. Most circular polarizers work best at 90-degrees to the sun. So, for instance, if you're looking at the sun near the horizon it will have an effect to your right and left, but have little if any effect when shooting at or 180-degrees away from the sun. Note that with a circular polarizer you have to spin the outside ring of the filter until you see the effect come and go. Careful you're not unscrewing the whole filter itself or it could fall off. It's a mistake to think that you just screw the polarizer on the end of the lens and forget about it. You have to "work" it until you see a result.

**Hint:** Don't stack filters. If you do, especially when shooting at a wide angle, you could end up with vignetting, or what looks like shadows, in the corners of the image. Also, if you're working with a point and shoot camera that can't take a filter, try carefully placing your sunglasses in front of the lens and experiment to see what the resulting effect is.



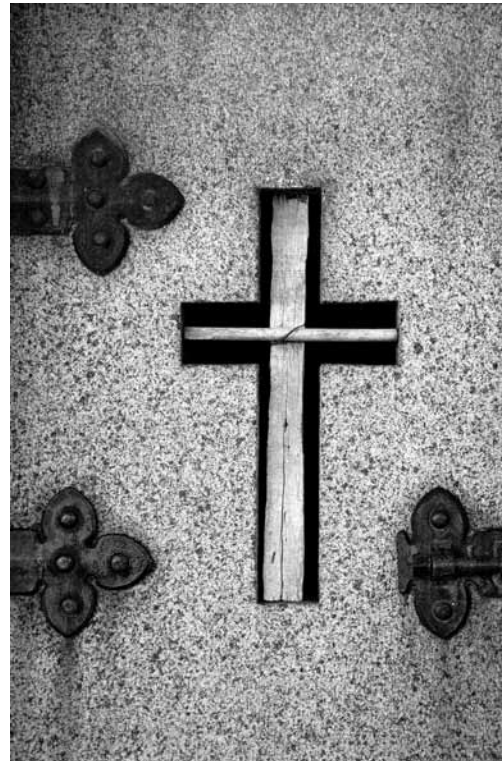
Bryce Canyon, Utah,  
U.S.A. – 2005



Mesa Arch, Canyonlands National Park, Utah, U.S.A. – 2005

## 84. Provide a Sense of Scale

If you're photographing a subject that is somewhat abstract or featureless, it's often difficult for your viewers to get a sense of how large or small the subject is. By including a known element in the scene, you'll be providing a sense of scale. Examples might be a person, a car, a tree or an animal. Anything that will allow your viewer to compare the unknown object to the known will give a sense of how big the abstract subject is.



Recoleta Cemetery,  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
– 2008



## 85. Study It

Having spent a period of time in a place, often you'll notice that you've inadvertently captured a series of images of a certain theme or, even better, perhaps you did it consciously. Having just returned from Buenos Aires, Argentina, I started to work on my images and realized that I had captured quite a variety of crosses. There were wooden crosses, metal crosses, glass crosses and even shadows of crosses. Now I hadn't necessarily set out to create a series of this particular theme, but over time I had accumulated quite a portfolio of images of a variety of crosses, and there are even two more from the same shoot on the next page.



Recoleta Cemetery, Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008



## 86. Experiment with Depth of Field (DOF)

If the scene you're photographing has some depth to it, focus on the foreground and blow out, or blur, the background, and then focus on the background and blow out the foreground. You'll have to use a large aperture, or big opening (small f-stop number), to make this happen. This also works especially well when you've zoomed in on the scene from far away. By using a small aperture (large f/#), you can provide a long DOF, one where more of the scene from front to back is in focus, for instance when shooting flowers in the foreground, a kayaker on a lake in the mid-ground and snowcapped mountains in the background.



Newport Beach, California, U.S.A. – 2006

## 87. Capture Silhouettes

By underexposing a backlit subject, you'll be able to create interesting silhouettes. This is often accomplished by exposing on a bright background so that the lens stops, or closes, down, then recomposing the scene, thus making your subject featureless and black.

## 88. Look in the Shadows

When you go out early in the morning or later in the afternoon, that's when long and interesting shadows will lay down before you. At the worst time of day, usually between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., the sun is directly overhead, so shadows are short and often uninspiring.



Buenos Aires, Argentina – 2008



## 89. Me and My Shadow

At times, when the sun is at your back early or late in the day, you may have to get out of your own way in order to capture images that don't include your own shadow. This can sometimes be a bit awkward, but you'll figure it out. Most of the time I'm doing it just for fun, and I'll deliberately take a picture of my long shadow as it spreads out before me.



Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.  
– 2005



Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. – 2004

## 90. Reflect on It

Look for abstract and engaging reflections as you walk through a city or town. Notice shop windows, the doors on a building, the metallic finish of a car, the chrome hubcaps of a truck, a person's sunglasses, any reflective surface at all, and see if there's a picture of a reflection to be made. Move around the reflective surface until something comes into view, or have your travel partner move around until he or she creates a reflection worth photographing. I especially like to show older buildings reflected in sleek, modern glass or metallic buildings; the contrast usually makes for a great image.





Chicago, Illinois,  
U.S.A. – 2009

## 91. Look for Leading Lines

Examples of a leading line could be a road or a railroad track, a sidewalk or path, a telephone wire or a fence line, something that would naturally lead the viewer's eye into the scene. This would typically direct the viewer to the part of the image that's your main subject or take them from the bottom to the top of the frame, as in this image. It's amazing the control you can have over your viewer if you want to.

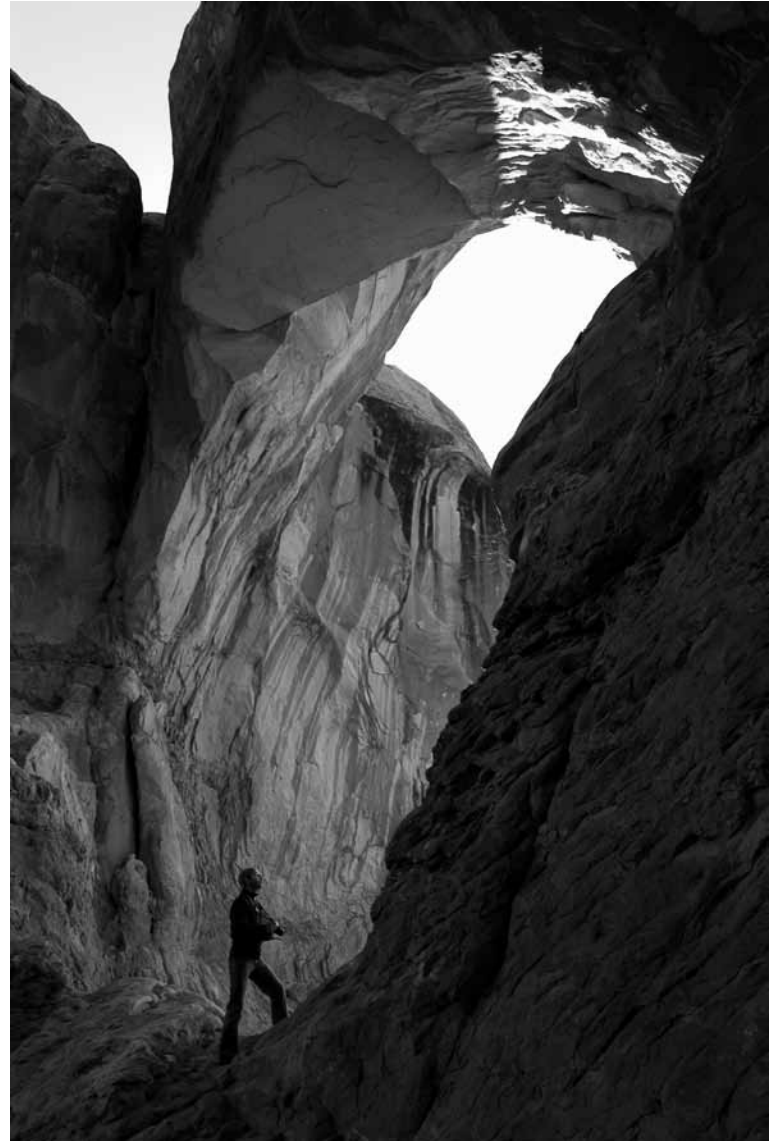
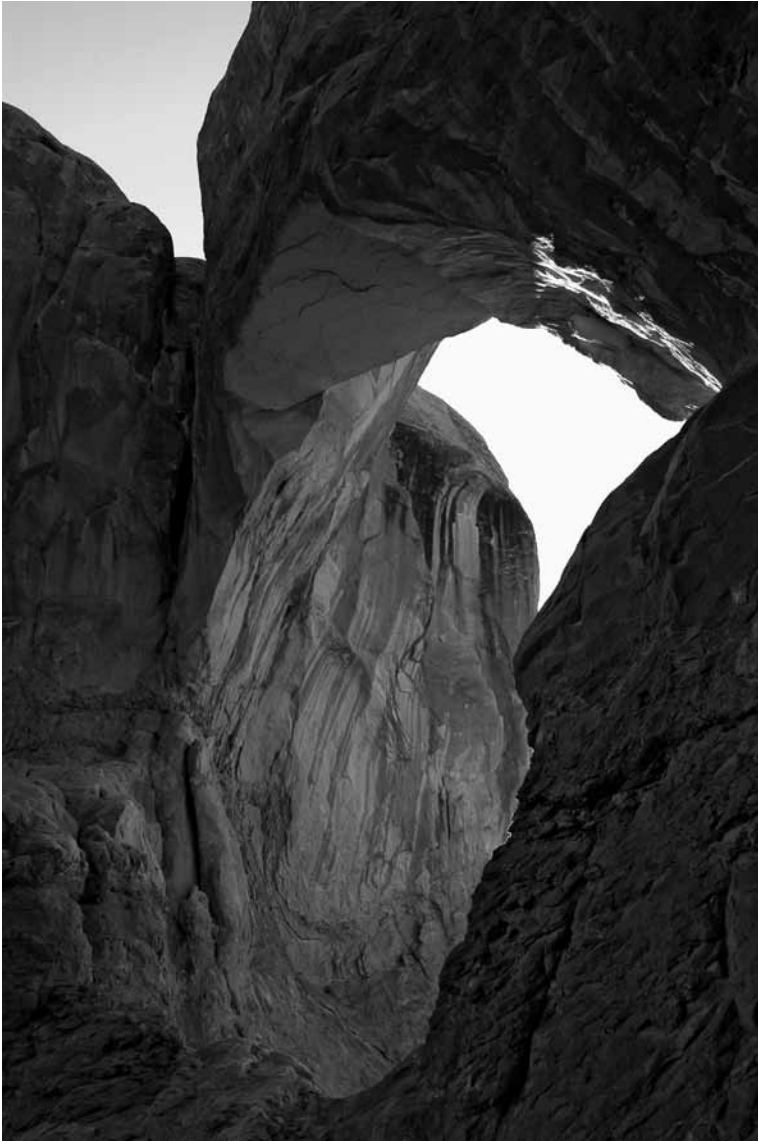


Balboa Island, California, U.S.A. – 2008



## 92. Search for Patterns and Texture

Look for patterns and textures in nature and in man-made surfaces and objects. Get in close on the wood grain and knots of an old, fallen tree, or a series of roof tiles or patch of lichen on a big rock. Surface reflections on water or glass make great images, as does a grouping of bricks or rocks. The potential subjects are virtually limitless. Personally, I like to zoom in on the pattern, whatever it is, but then pull back and reveal the source of it.



Double Arch, Arches National Park, Utah, U.S.A. – 2005

## 93. Add a Human Touch

Previously I mentioned getting up early and staying out late so that you can have few if any people in your images. However, this can sometimes go against you, and just when you want to provide a sense of scale or give the image what I like to call a “human touch,” there’s no one there and an otherwise interesting photo opportunity feels empty and barren. Here’s where using your spouse, a fellow traveler or a local comes in handy, but often times you’re just alone and there’s not much you can do.

**Note:** This does present a great opportunity for you to push yourself to still find something in an otherwise unappealing setting. If you seek, you shall find – I’m sure of it.



Rather typical view



Non-traditional view  
San Francisco, California, U.S.A.  
– 2007

## 94. Minimize Clichés

Once in a while it's OK to capture a cliché – I mean it's staring you right in the face, isn't it? But typically you'll want to keep them to a minimum. There are very few original ideas or subjects to shoot, but pushing yourself to represent an otherwise ordinary scene in a unique way will pay dividends in the variety of images you can create around a cliché.



Belgrade, Serbia – 2007



## 95. Tell Me a Story

Not every image needs to be a masterpiece. Sometimes it's much more important to tell a story. Take your viewers behind the scenes of your travels by showing them the parts of the story that you might normally edit or crop out of the scene. I often tell the story of when I was in Budapest, Hungary, and I looked at the website of the hotel we were going to next in Belgrade, Serbia, in order to find out how to get there from the train station. In so many words the hotel's site said, "When you leave the main exit of the train station, you take a right on Main Street and then a left on 4th Avenue, etc." Well, when I got there, all the street signs were in Cyrillic, with no English translation. So I captured an actual street sign in order to more easily tell that story back home and have a visual to support it.



Nantucket,  
Massachusetts, U.S.A.  
– 2008



## 96. Capture the Essence of a Place

By creating a shot list specific to the place you're traveling, you'll be preparing yourself with a really powerful foundation for a well-rounded portfolio of images to show your audience back home. There's nothing worse than sitting through a slideshow of 300 of even the most beautiful landscapes or interesting people shots in the world, but after about the 10th or 12th one, enough is enough. The idea is to mix it up in order to keep the attention of your viewers, and a shot list gives you a good outline from which to work.

**Bonus:** Sample shot list categories include: Architecture, People, Food & Drink, Monuments & Landmarks, Fashion, Flora, and Transportation, among others. Look for the cultural icons that make a place unique; these will allow you to capture its spirit, or essence. This is surely what your viewers crave. Answer the standard Who, What, Where, Why, When and How questions your viewers are likely to ask. I teach a whole class on this topic, so it can be very involved, but it's one of the most important concepts in travel photography, so look for it to be the subject of my next book.

## 97. Get Lucky

Once in a while you're just in the right place at the right time, so keep shooting, even if you think there's nothing going on. I've often come home from what I thought was a non-productive day only to find that I captured an opportunity that I didn't even know presented itself when I was at the location. This can happen with fast moving subjects like flying birds or surfers getting crushed by the waves. Is this your day to strike gold?



Newport Beach, California, U.S.A. – 2006

## **98. Continue the Educational Process**

Even as a photography instructor and guide, I wish I knew two weeks ago what I know today about making better images. I'm constantly seeking new knowledge and techniques, or trying to understand, but not chase, the latest technology—anything that will help me better hone my craft. Take classes, attend workshops, read books (like this one, of course), go on walking tours, get individual instruction, watch TV shows and rent DVDs about photography, listen to podcasts and continually practice. You'll only improve, I guarantee it.

## **99. Share and Share Alike**

In this world of digital technology there is a seemingly endless array of ways to share our images upon returning from a trip, or any photo shoot, really. Nowadays you can have your own website, post your pictures to a variety of image sharing communities and create incredibly complex and professional slideshows and presentations. You can also make books, posters, t-shirts, mugs and mouse pads with your own images. Oh, and you may even want to print some of your photographs to show family and friends; but that might be a little too old fashioned, don't you think?

## 100. Do the Research

I mentioned in the Introduction how important research and preparation are to any trip, but I'll stress it again here. In my mind, preparing for a trip is half the fun, and knowing that I'm prepared for a trip is just about the other half. At least it takes a load off my mind when I'm confident that I've studied all the information I could find in the library, online from the various tourist offices I contacted and in my conversations with other photographers and travelers who've been where I'm going. It's my feeling that one can never be too prepared. Additionally, it's good karma to share the information you've learned with those who follow in your footsteps.

This tip is so important that it deserves two quotes:

*“People only see what they are prepared to see.”*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

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*“I will prepare and someday my chance will come.”*

~ Abraham Lincoln

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## 101. Most of All, Have Fun!

If it's not fun, you probably won't make an extra effort to get out and shoot. So make it a game, when you can, and enjoy the process, from image capture to admiring and sharing the end results.

Dubrovnik, Croatia – 2007



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## Afterword

Now that you've read this book, I'm confident that if you go out into the world and put these tips, hints and techniques into practice, you'll come back with better images. No matter your level of experience as a photographer, nor the type of equipment you own; if little by little, over time, you can implement these tips and the other photographic knowledge you'll accumulate from all different sources, you can't help but improve.

Continually put your own spin on what you see other photographers shooting, and soon you'll develop your own style. And remember:

**Always think outside the camera!**

*“The world is a book, and those who do not travel  
read only one page.”*

~ St. Augustine

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## About the Author

Ralph Velasco teaches a variety of photography classes from his base in Southern California. These classes include Improve Your Travel Photography, Capture the Essence of a Place and Experiential Photography. He's the owner/operator of [RalphVelasco.com](http://RalphVelasco.com) Photography, and his experience has stemmed from over 30 years of documenting his travels throughout the world to over 40 countries on 5 continents.

He's the founder of [PhotoWalkingTours.com](http://PhotoWalkingTours.com), a unique series of walking tours developed to provide a hands-on, in-the-field experience for both individuals and small groups looking to improve their photographic skills and the understanding of their cameras, all while shooting in some of the most idyllic places in the world.

As the founder and lead instructor of PhotoEnrichment Programs, he develops and facilitates team-building exercises that have a creative twist; that's right, photography. Combining the many benefits of traditional team-building, including leadership, time management, negotiation and strategic planning, among others, PhotoEnrichment team-building events provide a practical take away: namely, better photography, a skill that participants can immediately put into practice, whether traveling around the world or around the corner.

Velasco's photos have won awards both online and in print, and his images have appeared in the Travel sections of both the Los Angeles Times and the Orange County Register, as well as in the Chicago Tribune, The Daily Pilot and The Newport Beach Visitors Guide and on NBC5 television in Chicago.

He's a member of the Professional Photographers of Orange County, the Circumnavigators Club, the Travel Photographers Network and Arts Orange County.

Velasco was named "Photographer of the Year – Open Category" by the Professional Photographers of Orange County in 2009.

## Contact Information

RALPH VELASCO

[ralph@RalphVelasco.com](mailto:ralph@RalphVelasco.com)

[PhotoWalkingTours.com](http://PhotoWalkingTours.com)

[PhotoEnrichment.com](http://PhotoEnrichment.com)

[Facebook.com/photoenrichment](https://www.facebook.com/photoenrichment)

[Twitter.com/ralphvelasco](https://twitter.com/ralphvelasco)



# RALPH VELASCO ON TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

As a photography instructor and guide, my main goal is to help people make better images of their travels, whether they're venturing around the world or around the corner. This book is based on the classes I've developed and have taught to over 1,000 people and counting, and the information has been distilled from my over 30 years of experience having documented my travels throughout the world. I'm confident that by implementing these practical tips and hints, photographers of all levels will be able to recognize and capture more and better photo opportunities and, in turn, bring back higher quality images from their travels.

## TESTIMONIALS

- "More than my money's worth. Would definitely come to another class by Ralph. I can't wait to get up with the dawn to try some of your techniques! Your class totally changed the way that I shoot and I'm reaping the rewards! Your class resonated with something in me and really opened me up. And my confidence is through the roof!" ~ *D. Cross*
- "Excellent presentation. I can't think of any suggestions. Really enjoyed the variety of photos shown, plus the presentation and instructor's knowledge. Very informative and fun to hear info...I'm motivated to take better photos!" ~ *Julie M.*
- "Great class. Ralph presented a well-organized, thought-provoking overview on this subject. He has given me several ideas of what I need to focus on during my future travels." ~ *Anonymous*
- "I can't wait to take what I learned from your class into everyday shooting – not just travel." ~ *Christy H.*
- "This class was very informative. I wish I had taken it before my trip." ~ *L. Wolder*
- "I really learned a lot. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" ~ *Jessica W.*



Professional photographer Ralph Velasco teaches a variety of classes from his base in Southern California and guides photo tours locally, domestically and internationally. He's the founder and lead instructor of PhotoWalkingTours.com and PhotoEnrichment Programs (PhotoEnrichment.com).

For more information visit [RalphVelasco.com](http://RalphVelasco.com).

[OnTravelPhotography.com](http://OnTravelPhotography.com)

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