

Yale *Educational Travel*



TEN TRAVEL PHOTO TIPS

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1. Early Morning light is great and there tends to be fewer crowds. Late afternoon light is referred to as the “golden hours”. Many times I’ve found that photographing right up until dusk can produce beautiful photos. The night sky is best just after sunset, when there is just enough light to make the sky go deep blue while effectively rendering the details of buildings and lights. I try to avoid harsh midday light, especially when photographing people. Portraits are much better when taken in open shade.
2. Sometimes less is better. Unless you are looking at your trip as primarily a photographic adventure, I’d advise taking as little equipment as possible. One DSLR camera or point and shoot with a zoom lens (wide to telephoto), should be enough. Extra lenses, tripods, filters, and extraneous gizmos will inevitably be a burden both physically and I believe, aesthetically. Sometimes limiting your choices (having only one lens) frees you up to be more creative. Too many choices can make you think more about your equipment than about your subject. I’ve taken some wonderful photos using only a decent quality point and shoot.
3. Shoot more not less. After you get a “classic” shot, have some fun and be creative. Look for unusual points of view. Move around a subject. Look up and look down. Change the context. This seems like obvious advice, but on occasion I still walk away from a photo shoot and later think of alternative shots I could have taken that may have been more compelling if I’d just opened myself up to more possibilities.
4. Edit in the field. As I’ve just urged you to shoot more photos, I also urge you to edit as you go. Rather than return from your trip with a daunting mountain of photos to go through, delete the obvious failures or duplicates either as they occur or at the end of each day. Not only will this ease your burden when you return, it can also be a learning process as to what types of photos are successful.
5. Do some research beforehand about the places you will visit. This will give you an idea of what to expect at the various stops on your itinerary. Google is a great resource. A quick image search for a specific destination, say a cathedral, will probably offer multiple views. One caveat: try not to let yourself be influenced by the photographs of others. The light will be different, perhaps the time of year as well. Maybe there will be renovation or construction. Any number of subtle and not so subtle differences will open up possibilities for

your own unique view.

6. Remember the three elements of a good photo essay: “large, medium and small”. Take an establishing photo. That’s the “large” one. This puts your other photos in context. Using our cathedral as an example, this shot would be an architectural view of the entire cathedral. A “medium” photo might be an interior of image of the nave, alter, ceiling or tapestry. The “small” photo would be a detail of stained glass, or an ornate door handle or a close-up of lit candles. If you use this general approach to photographing your entire trip you will come back with a compelling narrative.

7. Do not use your trip as a time to learn how to use your camera. Spend some time before you leave getting familiar with your equipment.

8. Keep your camera close at hand and ready to go. Sometimes the most engaging photographs are those that manage to capture the spontaneity of a moment. When I walk across the Yale campus I always make sure that my camera is set properly for the existing light conditions. I carry it on my shoulder. I do not use a lens cover. You can buy an inexpensive “skylight” filter that protects your lens. When it gets scratched, you simply buy another. If a situation presents itself and would make for a good photo, I am ready to go. While I always recommend carefully composing a photo, sometimes in situations such as these there is not much time to do so. In cases like this it’s always best to capture the moment and then crop the photo after the fact to make the best composition you can.

9. Although I believe that composition is fundamentally intuitive there are some general rules that can help. There is the so-called “rule of thirds”. This divides the viewfinder into 9 areas delineated by two horizontal lines and two vertical lines. By placing the most interesting elements of your photograph where these lines intersect will help “balance” the image. Look for things that will frame your image: archways, trees, mountains, windows etc. and put them at the edges of your frame. Don’t always put your subject in the center of the frame. Look for interesting patterns, shadows, and reflections. Look for elements in your photographs that will lead the viewer’s eye into the frame. The classic examples being roads or rivers.

I think the main thing to remember is not to just look at your main subject. Look at the entire frame edge to edge. How comfortable does it feel? Can I make it better? The best advice for determining what elements are working for a composition is “ if it isn’t working for you, it’s working against you”. In other words, know what to leave in and what to leave out.

10. Don’t forget to bring what you need. Your camera’s instruction manual, extra memory cards, batteries and chargers (with appropriate adaptors). Does your camera take two memory cards at once? Use the second one for back up. If you have a laptop or tablet download your photos every day as an additional back up.