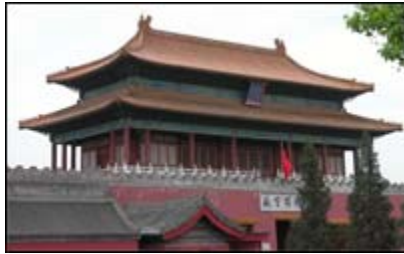


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Quick Guide to Vacation Photos - Part One

by Jerry Rabow



Nothing is "Forbidden" to a digital camera

Next to pictures of your family, the most important products of your digital photography are probably your vacation photos. Perhaps it's because those photos can preserve very special memories, often of once-in-a-lifetime scenes in unique or exotic locations. Perhaps it's because when you're on vacations you truly vacate - you leave behind your everyday concerns, activities, and habits, freeing yourself to notice the natural beauty around you. And perhaps it's because vacations may be the only times when you carry your camera around with you almost all the time (other than a low-resolution cell phone).



Which would you rather carry on vacation (200 photos each)?

In many important ways digital photography can change how you create your vacation photos: Being able to carry a few small memory cards provides an almost unlimited photo capacity. You can take multiple shots of important scenes in order to bring home that "perfect" photo without needing to lug around a separate suitcase just for your rolls of film. And many digital cameras are very versatile, offering a broad working range of film speed equivalents, white balance adjustments, and optical zoom and macro lens settings in a single camera. Finally, there's the promise of using Photoshop when you return so that you can save or improve important shots and end up with perfect prints and emails.

A Guide to Vacation Photos covers a big topic, so I'm dividing it into two parts. This edition of the ***Digital Photography Tutor Members Bulletin*** presents ***Part One*** - Tips on how to plan for your digital photography trip and how to use your digital camera while you're on vacation. The next edition of the ***Digital Photography Tutor Members Bulletin*** will cover ***Part Two*** - How to use the Photoshop Elements 3.0 **Organizer** in Windows XP to save, backup, rename, and organize all those vacation photos so that you'll be able to find the ones you want to improve, share, and print.

I wish you happy vacations and wonderful digital photos!
Jerry Rabow

batteries as well as or instead of rechargeable ones, carrying a few standard batteries is a low-cost solution for having some "just-in-case" extra batteries.



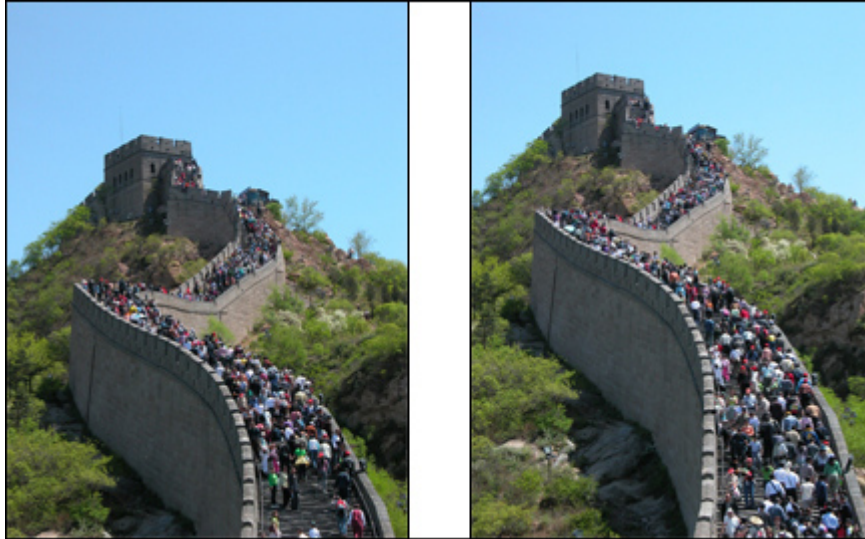
*Voltage Converter (on left);
Plug Adaptor (on right)*

And if you're relying on nightly recharging for a trip outside of the US, make sure you research the power requirements for all the areas you'll be visiting, in order to bring any necessary adaptors (so that your charger plug will fit into the wall outlet) and converters (so that your charger will run on the foreign power voltage). Many chargers that come with digital cameras don't need a converter to work on foreign power voltages (220 volts rather than the 110 volts standard in the US), but you still may need a universal plug adaptor set.

WHILE YOU'RE ON THE TRIP

Even if you're taking a typical consumer-level camera on your vacation, there's no law that says you can't use it to shoot your vacations photos just the way the pros do with their expensive digital cameras when they're shooting on location. Just follow these pros' tips:

Take Lots of Photos



The shot on the left seems static and doesn't guide the viewer's eye. The almost identical shot on the right emphasizes the crowd and then leads the eye up the Great Wall for dynamic visual interest. (I didn't know this until later; I was just trying different camera angles.)

In the days of film cameras, the typical tourist would take one shot of each scene, trying to reduce the costs of purchasing, developing, and printing film, as well as avoiding the burden of traveling with a huge supply of 35 mm film rolls. We were all aware that professional photographers did things differently, working with budgets that permitted taking lots and lots of photos of each scene or subject. This was one reason why they could get the "perfect" shot that we couldn't afford to capture. Well, digital cameras have changed all of that.

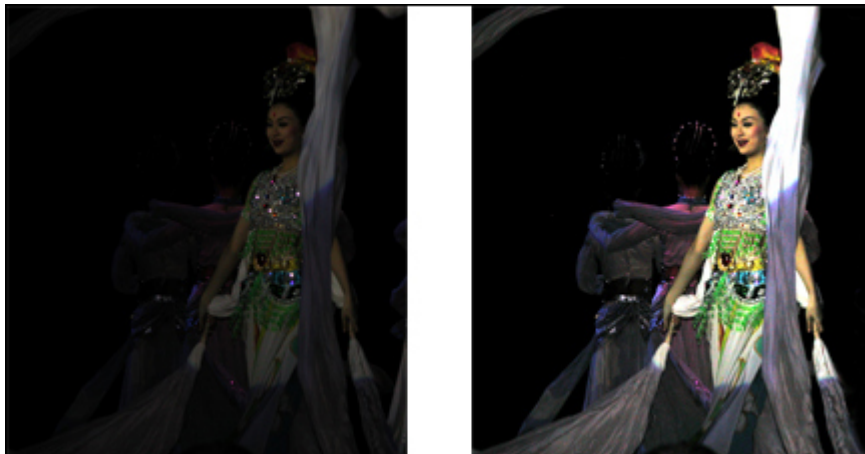
Now you too can (and should) take multiple shots of every interesting scene and subject, even if that means coming home with hundreds or even thousands of images. Most of those shots won't be very good (after all, you and I aren't really professional photographers) but I can guarantee you that several, and perhaps quite a few, will be candidates for gorgeous large prints. And your film budget will be exactly the same as today's pros - Zero! (Most of the pros are now shooting digital too.)



If the ancient lion won't move away from the modern construction in the background, then you try moving

But taking multiple shots doesn't mean taking exact duplicate shots. Here's the opportunity to change your camera angle and shooting position to capture your subject in a variety of aspects. While good photography calls for a creative eye and a steady hand, don't forget your feet. Very often if you want to capture an image that will have the power to move the viewer, you must be the one to move first, trying different camera positions.

Favor Focus Over Exposure



The original shot (left) was taken from the back of the theater with a flash to shorten exposure time and avoid motion blur. A simple Photoshop adjustment brings out the "hidden" colors that the camera captured. MORAL: Don't delete those "bad" photos on the spot; you never know.

Armed with Photoshop at home, you'll be able to rescue and improve many photos that look quite bad when you see them right out of the camera. Photoshop gives you a second chance to nail the perfect white balance, brightness, and color. When you use Photoshop to improve your photos you'll even be able to uncover details in the shadows areas that you can't see with your own eyes. But even Photoshop has its limits - don't expect it to do a good job of creating sharp focus for a shot that was badly focused or where the subject or the camera was moving. (Yes, Photoshop's magical Unsharp Mask filter can't accomplish everything.)

If you're shooting a distant subject in low light, your camera will try to create enough light for the photo by slowing down the exposure time - this is just an invitation to spoil a photo with motion blur. Advanced digital cameras can usually be taken out of automatic exposure mode, permitting you to set a short exposure time even if that darkens the image. But you can also do this with a simple point and shoot automatic camera: Try using the flash despite the subject being beyond the 10 or 15 foot range of your camera's built-in flash. For some cameras, using the flash will avoid the motion blur resulting from long exposure times, and there may be enough detail hidden in the dark image to recapture later with Photoshop adjustments.

Try a Tripod

One way to spot professional photographers is that they usually carry a tripod and use it to avoid camera shake, especially when they're going for high zoom-lens magnification. You can do the same, or if a regular tripod is too inconvenient to carry on your trip, consider a monopod (some even convert into walking sticks) or a hiker's miniature tripod that you can place on a rock or a car hood or strap to a tree or light pole.

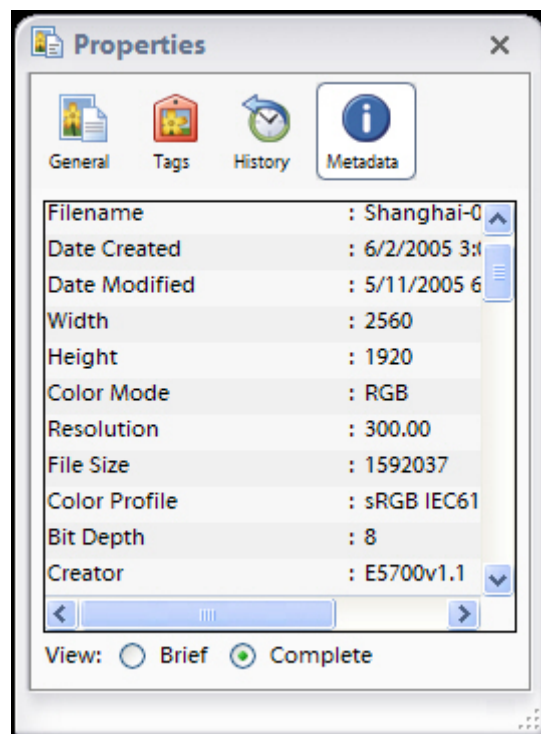
Protect Your Negatives

transfer speed and battery consumption issues that may limit practical use to only low-volume daily shooting (definitely not my vacation style!).

If you're staying in an urban center, you may be able to find a camera store where you can make a quick CD or DVD copy of your camera card files.

If none of this works for you and you don't have any backup drive available on your vacation, you'll have to be content with handling your camera memory cards carefully and making sure that you don't erase them during the trip. You're really at no greater risk than when you used to travel with a conventional film camera and brought all of your film rolls home for developing and printing. (You may actually be at a little less risk, since digital camera memory cards are small enough to carry on your person rather than trust to baggage, and digital media cards are reportedly not susceptible to x-ray fogging from airport security screening).

Keep Notes



The Photoshop Elements "Metadata" panel shows detailed camera settings data for each photo. It can help you learn what you did right or wrong when shooting.

Since you'll be taking a lot of photos, it's especially important that you can remember what each image represents. Most digital cameras record camera information (often "Exif" data such as date, time, and camera settings) as part of each image file. You can view this information as image "metadata" in Photoshop, but you may also want to relate the information to a fuller description by maintaining a trip journal or making some notes on your daily itinerary so that you'll know more about what you photographed.

Remember that unless you want to reset the date and time on your camera (which I prefer not to do), your camera will be recording your hometown date and time even when you're halfway around the globe. This means that you might have to make adjustments in date and time to understand when the vacation photos were taken in their foreign time zones. Nevertheless, I leave the camera date stamp alone so that the hometown date and time data recorded for vacation shots will not overlap the dating for the photos taken just before or after the trip. (Many programs, including the Elements **Organizer**, arrange image files according to their date and time.)

CONCLUSION



My wife claims that I don't take enough shots of people when we travel. I guess this will show her!

I hope that these digital photography tips will start you off on your next vacation trip ready to capture and bring home some great images. When you get back, look for the next issue of the **Digital Photography Tutor Members Bulletin**, featuring **Part Two** of this **Quick Guide to Vacation Photos** -- How to use the Photoshop Elements 3.0 **Organizer** to save, backup, rename, and organize your vacation photos.

Meanwhile, if you have any particular digital photography questions, please remember that as a registered buyer of the **Digital Photography Tutor** eBook, all you have to do is email me to receive a personal reply. The question and answer may even be able to help others as an anonymous posting on my **Ask the Tutor** page at www.DigitalPhotographyTutor.com.

I hope that you'll visit that website frequently to keep up with the latest developments and catch the latest tips and tutorials for your digital photography.

Please email your questions to:

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Jerry Rabow
The Digital Photography Tutor

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