

As a old-time travel photographer who used to lug around all the heavy equipment, I envy travelers today who can get the same or better results with just one little digital still or video camera. And add more envy because you see proofs of your shots immediately, and no longer need to take your film in and wait for it to be processed.

And then, if you once did your own processing, instead of hours in a smelly darkroom, you just look at the little images on your computer screen, scan and edit, and let your desktop printer do the job in minutes.



Doggone it! I was born about 50 years too soon. However, in spite of all the modern doohickeys that help make photography and videography easier, the same basic rules apply on how to get good, better and great pictures. Let me just list a few.

1. A simple rule that always seem to be screwed up. Keep the source of light behind you when you point the camera at your subject. It bugs me when I see photos where the smiling family is just a bunch of silhouettes while the sun or bright lights glare from behind them. Of course, there are occasions when you feel artistic, and you deliberately want your subjects to be just blacked-out images against a sunrise or sunset on the beach. Just don't let it happen accidentally.
2. Shoot close, or if you can't move in, use your telephoto lens. So many times I see that same kind of family pose in front of something important, such as Mount Rushmore, and although Abe Lincoln looks imposing, your gang is just a row of teeny dolls in the bottom of the photo.

You can still get a great shot of Abe, but move in close to your gang, get way down low and shoot upwards to get a much more dramatic shot that includes everything you want within your frame. Look closely at the image in your rangefinder. What you see is what you get.

3. Maybe the worst crime in tourist photography is the useless shot. You point your camera out the bus window to get blurry pictures of who-cares street scenes. Or you take a photo at the Grand Canyon exactly like the one you can see on a postcard. In the old days, I'd accuse you of wasting film, but since digital cameras have no film and offer almost endless shooting, all I can

say is that you're wasting your time and potential creative talent.

4. Maybe asking for creative approaches to vacation photography is expecting a bit too much from those who never studied Art Composition 101. But I believe it will add to your pleasure if you consider the artistic potential of scenes happening in front of you. Even setting up your family for a photo can be part of your creative effort.

For instance, kids sitting on a chair staring at the camera was OK in 1863 when exposures were 30 minutes long. Today, family members, kids with adults, kids with animals, kids playing with other kids and hundreds of other situations make very creative scenes to capture forever. Not only kids, but when Grandpa hauls in that big fish, or Grandma offers you that steaming apple pie, you can let your creative genes go wild.

The same rule applies to every phase of your travel photography. Get in close, compose your subjects, keep the source of light behind you and snap or whirl away.