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TRAVEL & LOCATION PHOTOGRAPHER

TEN TOP TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY



FREE EBOOK

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As a travel photographer I have spent years shooting assignments for magazines throughout the world. My work has appeared in publications including National Geographic Traveller, Conde Nast Traveller, Travel+Leisure, Lonely Planet, GEO France, Virtuoso Life, Wanderlust, Sunday Times Travel Magazine and BA Highlife, amongst others.

I am often asked about my experiences in the field and regularly receive requests from budding photographers asking for advice on how best to improve their own photography technique on location.

In this free ebook I will outline ten top tips that I believe are the foundations of improving your photography, whatever stage you are along your own photographic journey!

To receive regular updates on ebooks, workshops and up-coming photo tours, follow me on instagram [@richardjamestaylor](https://www.instagram.com/richardjamestaylor) or visit www.richardjamestaylor.com



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THE FUTURISTIC MUSEUMS

To indulge in the parlour game of 'what on earth does this building look like?', the **National Museum of Qatar**, pictured, designed by Jean Nouvel and opened in March, resembles a pangalectic spaceport, a pile-up of flying saucers awaiting clearance for take-off. The cracked-skin structure you see is inspired by desert roses, those miraculous crystalline forms that bloom in the sand. Meanwhile, Dubai's **Museum of the Future**, opening in September, is a giant eye, focusing on solutions to climate change, while the low-slung **Petra Museum** is more reserved, so as not to detract from the sheer sandstone drama of the ancient city. But it's Qatar's spliced sensation, with its mile of galleries covering an abyss of time, 400 million years, that will be regarded as one of the region's finest achievements. The Guggenheim effect rumbles on. RJ



01. RESEARCH

A large part of a photographer's time is spent doing research. This helps us figure out what the location we are covering is all about and what interesting subjects there are that we can potentially shoot. I'll usually start with picture research. I'll look at the travel stock libraries to get a sense of how a place looks and try to get a feel for the landscape, the architecture and the people.

Then I like to dig a bit deeper in order to understand the location in terms of its culture, traditions and its history. Understanding the customs of a place is crucial, as it will help you to understand things that might seem incomprehensible at first glance.

Whilst researching a shoot on Tibetan Buddhism I discovered that the image of the Dalai Lama is banned in Tibet, and to be caught with one means a likely prison sentence or large fine. On the streets of Lhasa I noticed, alongside portraits of Mao Tse Tung, these blank photo frames.

It became clear that these frames were the Tibetans way of defying the ban, and that the locals knew that the frames represented an image of the Dalai Lama.

The connection isn't particularly obvious to an outsider, and without research it would have been unlikely I could conceive of this image of a Buddhist monk holding up a blank frame in front of his face to protect his identity. With that understanding however it becomes quite a powerful image, and an important element in telling the story of Buddhism in Tibet today.

It's an old cliché to say fail to prepare, prepare to fail, but I believe that research beforehand is crucial to the success of any shoot.



A woman in traditional Peruvian attire, including a red dress with intricate white embroidery and a matching hat, stands in a valley at sunset. She is holding a large falcon on her arm, which is perched on a thin pole. The background shows a hazy landscape with hills and trees, bathed in the warm light of the setting sun.

02. WORK WITH LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

This image only came about because I was working with a local guide, and without his assistance I would never have come across this Cabana woman in the Colca Valley of Peru.

I had asked my guide to take me to see a particular landscape looking out across the valley at sunset. When we arrived I could see it wasn't actually likely to make for a great image.

The guide suggested we head off to a small town nearby, where the locals continued the old tradition of keeping tame eagles in order to please the Sun Gods.

He took me to see this amazing woman and we headed out to the edge of town to find a suitable place to shoot, taking this shot just before we lost the sun over the hill.

03. MAKE TIME TO RECCE

Whenever possible I will always schedule in a recce day before a shoot starts. This way you can take the opportunity to understand the nature of the light, possibilities for where to shoot at sunrise and sunset, look out for interesting backgrounds for portraits and generally get the lay of the land.

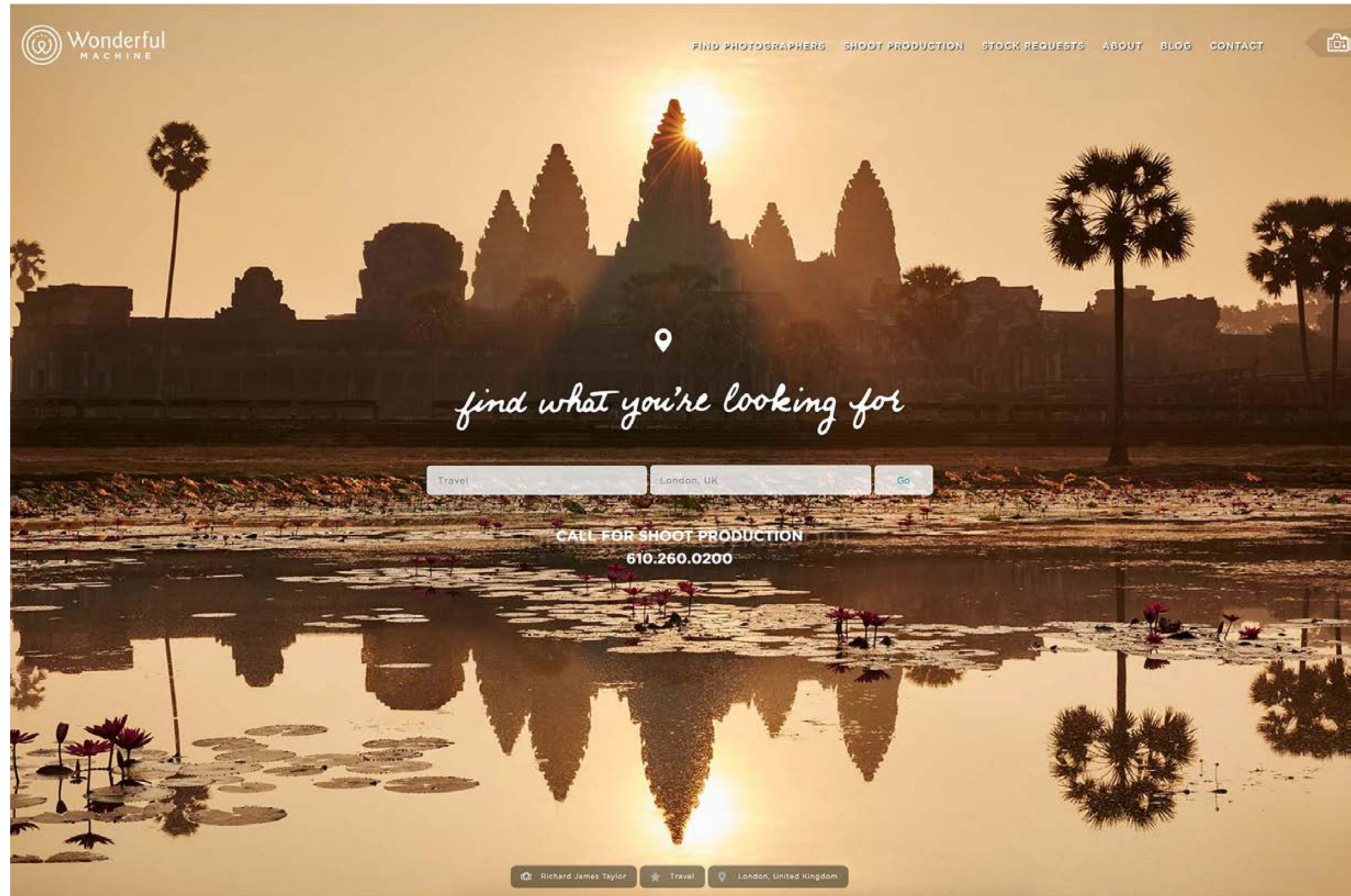
At Angkor Wat I spent an afternoon trying to find the perfect spot for a sunrise shot

I wanted to be in a place where the sun would rise behind the central temple, and so I had to be quite specific about my position.

Any visitor to the Angkor complex in the last few years will know just how busy it gets. I needed to be in the queue early the following morning to stand a chance. The site opened at 5am, I arrived at 2am and already there was a large gathering of people at the main gates!

Within an hour there was a queue half a mile long and when they opened the gates it was chaos! It's quite a distance to get to this spot from the entrance and it was like a sprint race to be the first there.

Within minutes there were several thousand people, all trying to claim a space around the lake. Fortunately I knew exactly where I needed to be; there would have been no chance to look around for the best spot if I had just turned up!



04. ANTICIPATE THE MOMENT

The next tip is to learn to anticipate the decisive moment; to see the shot before it actually happens.

If I may steal a quote from the master of the decisive moment, Henri Cartier-Bresson, who said...

'It is an illusion that photographs are made with the camera, they are made with the eye, heart and head'

In other words the key to successful photography isn't seeing the moment, as by then it is too late, it is sensing what could happen, anticipating and being ready for it.

This is often called the 'fishing technique' where the photographer finds an interesting location, sets up and waits for a suitable subject to enter the frame and complete the composition.

It's a technique I use a lot. I am always looking out for backgrounds and scenes that would make a great image if fate is kind and sends the right subject my way.

This shot, taken in the Brooklyn Bridge Park, is a good example of that. I liked the backdrop of Lower Manhattan, which would serve as a perfect frame for the players who would hopefully fill the space by the hoop. There was no one there when I first arrived, but I could see the possibilities for a good shot and so waited.

Eventually these guys turned up and started to play, the player with the stars and stripes shirt on was a major bonus! Whilst I had anticipated the possibility of making a good image, I couldn't have imagined it would work out so well, with a perfectly timed leap from the star man!

This is a great example of how a combination of taking the time to recce, learning to anticipate the moment and remaining patient can really pay off...

It doesn't always work of course, but that's what makes it more satisfying when it does!





05. LOOK FOR A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

This shot was taken in the old quarter of Bari, Southern Italy. There is a famous street in the Bari vecchia where the old ladies sit outside their houses and chat whilst making orecchiette, which they will sell to tourists or use for the family meal.

During my research I saw lots of pictures of the ladies smiling into the camera whilst making the pasta. I spent a few minutes going through the motions, taking a few front on shots and details of their hands working, just so the ladies got used to me being there.

All the while though I was looking out for a different point of view from all of the usual images I had seen.

Once I had established a good rapport with them I asked this lady if I could climb up on a chair behind her and shoot her hands working from above. I think she thought I was a little bit crazy, but fortunately she went with it!

It's good to have an understanding of what has been done before, but the trick is to go beyond that and find a way of doing it differently, to find a more unique and interesting point of view.

06. SLOW DOWN

As a travel photographer I have been fortunate to experience some dramatic rail journeys, none more so than the Beijing to Lhasa train.

At around 48 hours this is one of the world's longest train routes. It is also the world's highest, passing over the Himalayan plateau. It's so high oxygen is pumped into the cabins to help passengers cope with the altitude.

The long journey gave me the chance to slow down and get to know the fellow passengers in my cabin, a father with his two sons, novice monks travelling to Lhasa to continue their studies.

In their colourful robes I knew they would make for a great portrait, but initially they were far too excitable, posing and pulling faces and getting up to all sorts of mischief.

After a while though they got used to me being there and eventually got bored of the camera.

On the second day we were all sat together, looking out of the window at the vast Himalayan plateau. At this quiet moment they seemed to be contemplating what the future would hold for them at the end of the long journey, and it was a perfect opportunity to get my shot.

Over time I have learnt to slow down a bit, consider my surroundings and wait for good opportunities to develop, rather than rush a shot just to move on to the next thing.



07. REMAIN ADAPTABLE

To be a successful travel photographer, you must be adaptable. If you arrive with pre-existing ideas of what and how to shoot, there is always a danger that the circumstances you find on the ground will not fit in with your ideas.

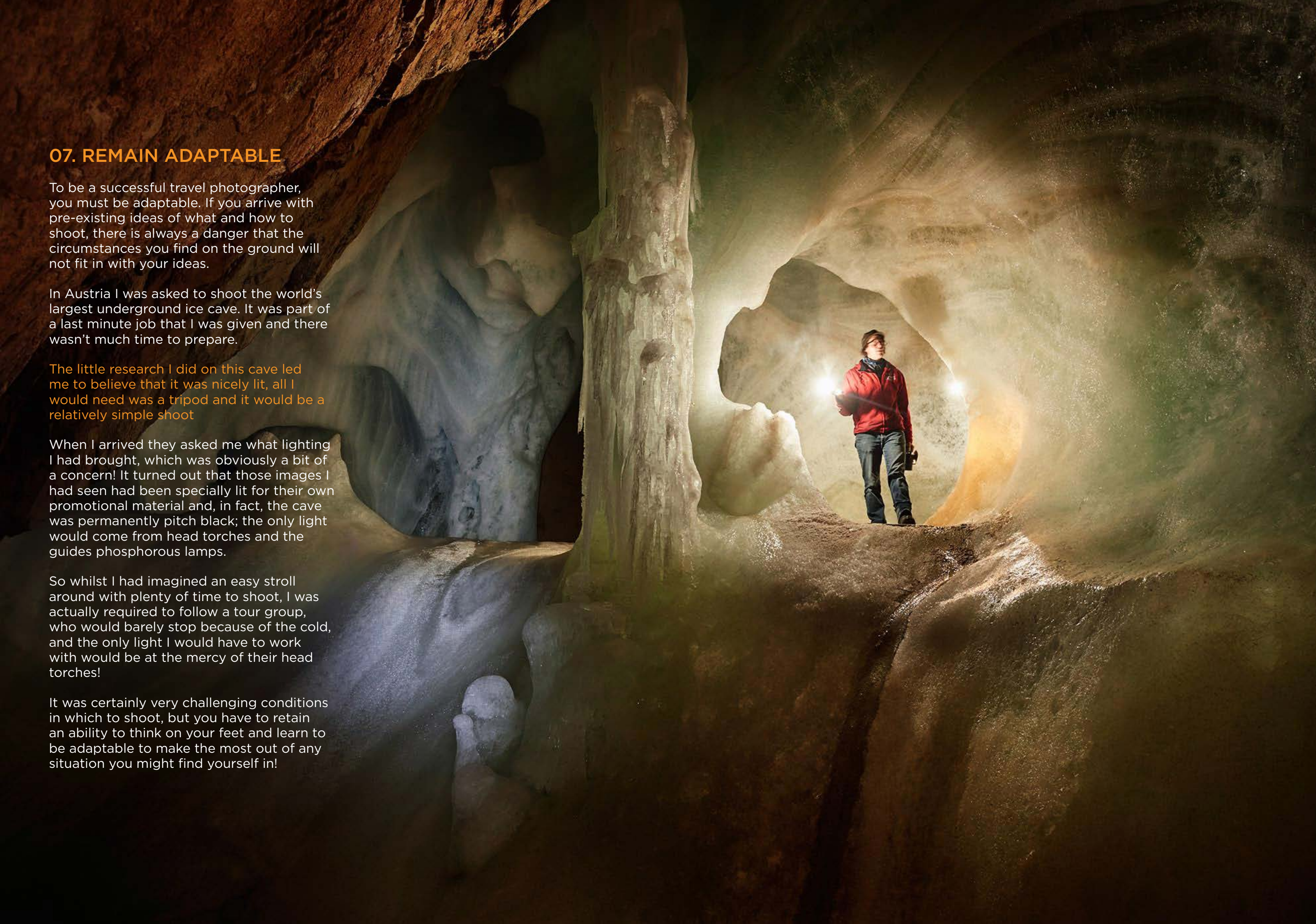
In Austria I was asked to shoot the world's largest underground ice cave. It was part of a last minute job that I was given and there wasn't much time to prepare.

The little research I did on this cave led me to believe that it was nicely lit, all I would need was a tripod and it would be a relatively simple shoot

When I arrived they asked me what lighting I had brought, which was obviously a bit of a concern! It turned out that those images I had seen had been specially lit for their own promotional material and, in fact, the cave was permanently pitch black; the only light would come from head torches and the guides phosphorous lamps.

So whilst I had imagined an easy stroll around with plenty of time to shoot, I was actually required to follow a tour group, who would barely stop because of the cold, and the only light I would have to work with would be at the mercy of their head torches!

It was certainly very challenging conditions in which to shoot, but you have to retain an ability to think on your feet and learn to be adaptable to make the most out of any situation you might find yourself in!



08. DEALING WITH THE WEATHER

I once spent a week in Vietnam waiting for clear weather to shoot a backplate for P&O, the cruise ship company. Twice a day, at sunrise and sunset, I had to climb up one of the karsts in Halong Bay in order to capture the surrounding view bathed in beautiful tropical light.

I never got it, everyday remained drab and dreary, most of the time I couldn't see at all for the sea mist. So the original commission didn't work out so well.

However I did end up with this Lonely Planet guidebook cover with one of the few images I took whilst I was there. It just goes to show that even in poor weather you can make something out of a bad situation!

Of course, the subject of your shoot will usually dictate the type of weather you want; beaches or tourist board shoots tend to require lots of blue skies for example. However, with an editorial feature that doesn't always have to be the case. Dramatic locations sometimes require dramatic weather to make them work.

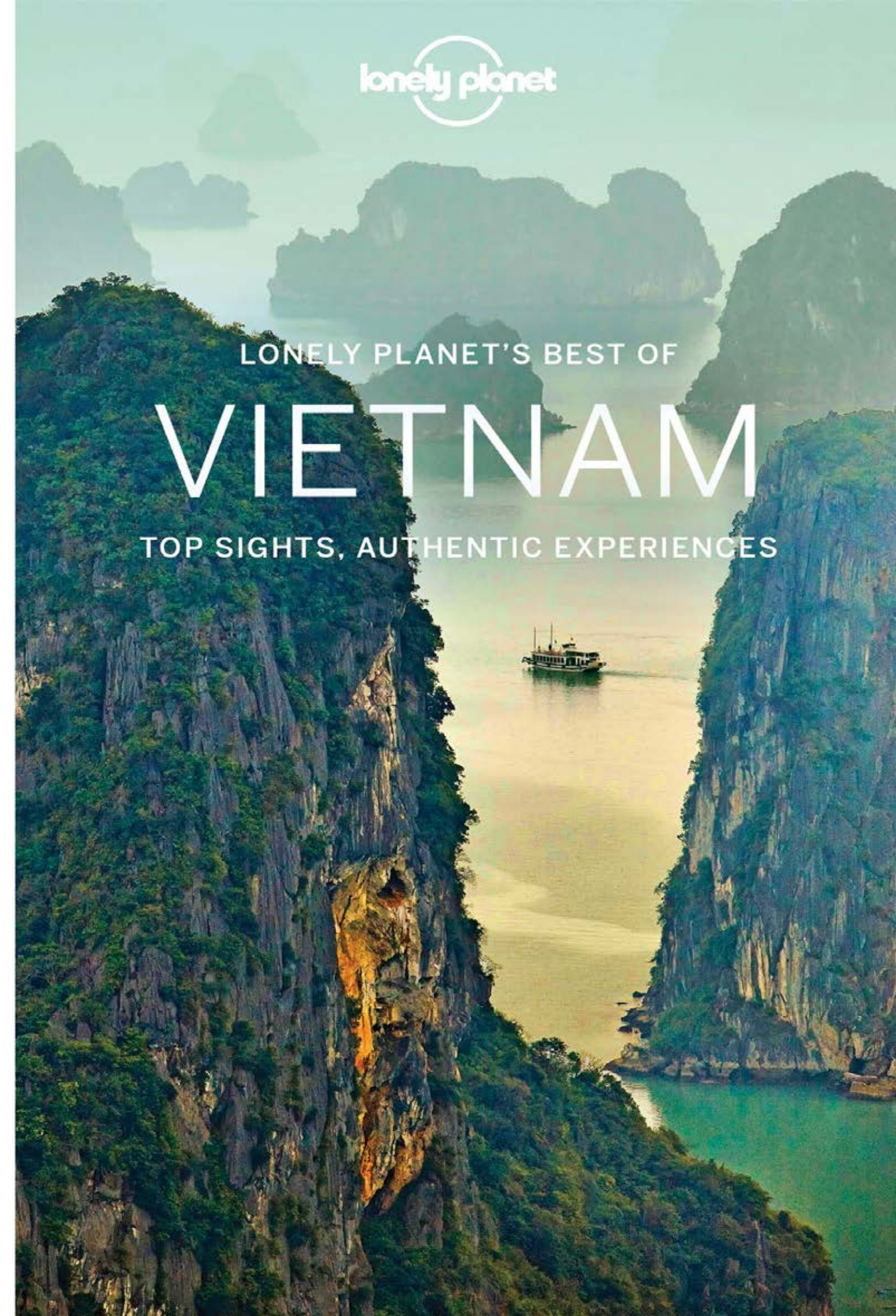
Probably the trickiest situation to find yourself in is changeable weather. On a shoot in Canada recently the weather changed every day, one day clear, the next overcast and raining.

We didn't have time in the schedule to wait so one location would look sunny and the next moody. In these circumstances it is very difficult to maintain a consistent visual for your shoot.

There are however several things you can do should the weather turn bad!

More often than not, there are interior or food shots to do, or perhaps look for some detail shots, where the weather won't be so apparent. Overcast conditions and soft high clouds are also very good for portraits, much better than harsh sunlight, and, if you have to shoot portraits in the middle of the day and the sun is blazing, finding a good location for your subject in the shade and bouncing in some light from a reflector is also a good idea.

You can do a lot to prepare yourself for a shoot but one thing you can never control is the weather. It won't always be perfect conditions, but you will still have to get the job done so persevere whatever, nine times out of ten you will still find something to add to your final story.



09. SMILE!

Shooting portraits of strangers on location isn't always an easy process. For me it can be the biggest challenge of shooting any assignment, but also the part that usually yields the biggest reward!

Unlike landscapes or interiors, which are usually controllable shooting situations (particularly if you have time to wait for the right weather) you never really know how it will go when shooting a portrait of someone on the street. Sometimes you end up with an image that will make your day, other times it just doesn't quite work out.

Be courteous, engaging and approach people with a smile, it usually works wonders!

Speaking a little of the language, however badly, will get you off to a good start and will help your subject to relax. Spend a little time chatting, explain what you would like to do and what it is about them that made you want to take their picture.

Most people are happy to give you their time once they understand what you are doing and will be much more amenable to your suggestion of moving to a more photogenic background or into better light.



10. GET CREATIVE WITH FILTERS

One of the simplest things you can do to take your photography to the next level is to get creative with filters. Not only will the use of filters improve your control of the image in-camera, reducing the need for post processing, it will also improve your understanding of light and the effect it has on your scene.

I often use a neutral density graduation filter to help retain detail in the sky and balance the light levels within a scene. I also use a polariser, which adds contrast to skies and cuts out glare and reflections. Both of these filters were used in the making of this shot in the Dragons Backbone rice terraces in Longsheng, China.

I use a polariser regularly for interiors and food shoots too, again to reduce unwanted reflections and allow detail of the actual surfaces to show through.

I use the LEE Filters system and I can highly recommend them. If you're not currently using filters I strongly advise that you look into it, they will open up so many new opportunities to improve your photography and get creative!

HERE BE DRAGONS

In China's southern provinces, mythical landscapes abound. From the verdant peaks lining the Yangtze River to the towering pillars of Zhangjiajie — inspiration for the film *Avatar* — the region's motley mountains conjure up some fanciful visions

WORDS
STEPHANIE CAVAGNARO

IMAGE: RICHARD JAMES TAYLOR

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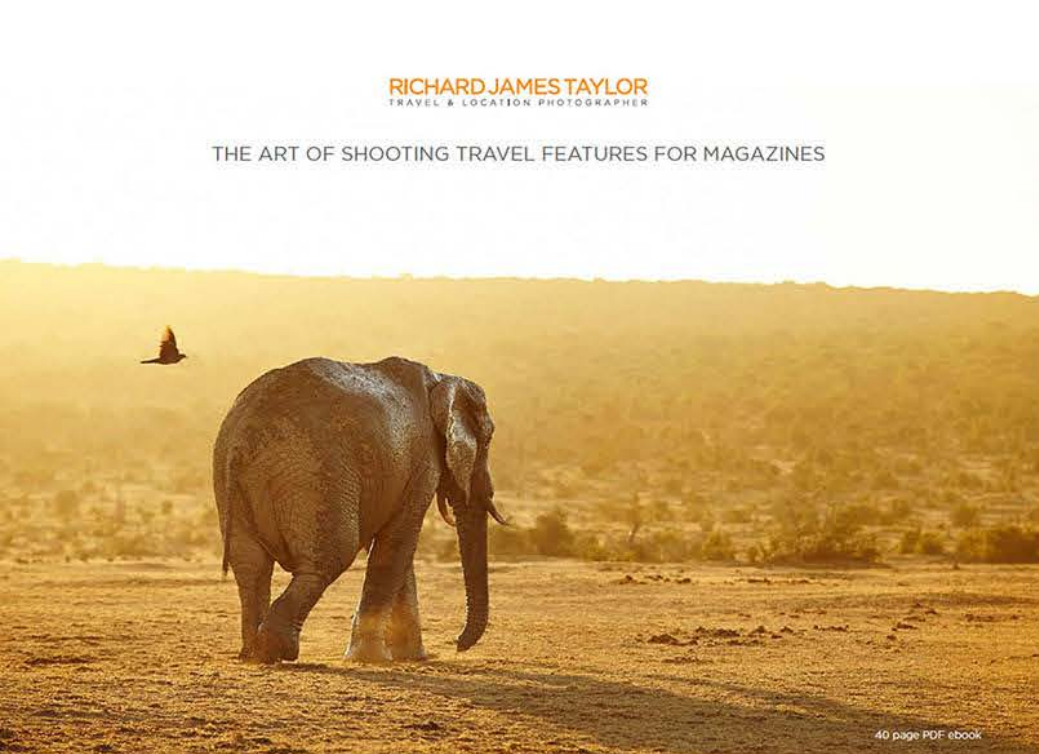
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<https://www.richardjamestaylor.com/BOOKS/The-Art-of-Travel-/1>

The book features 40 pages packed full of tips, tricks and advice including;

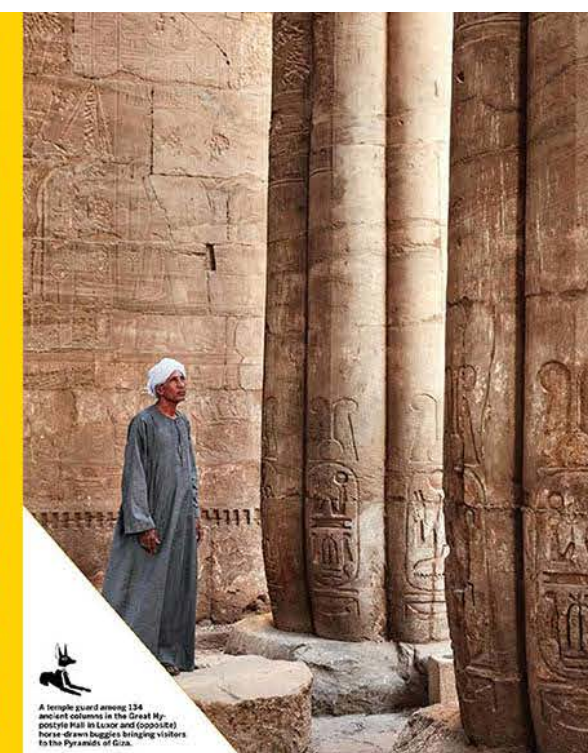
- How to get your foot in the door of the travel photography industry
- Twelve essential tips for creating successful travel images from research to understanding layout considerations
- My process when shooting a travel feature, using a recent shoot for National Geographic Traveller as an example
- Information on pre-production, shooting on location, editing and post-processing
- An overview of the essential equipment I use when shooting on location
- 45 images showing published layouts and screen grabs showing my computer work flow

As well as gaining an insight into the world of professional travel photography you'll also pick up lots of ideas to help improve your own photography techniques and work flow. The complete ebook is available for a limited period for just £2.99, payable by PayPal or credit card, via the books section at www.richardjamestaylor.com or via link in bio of instagram @richardjamestaylor



Contents

- BREAKING INTO THE INDUSTRY**
Over the years I've learnt a few lessons on how to maximise my chances of picking up assignments from travel magazines and I'll begin by running through some of these with you.
- TWELVE TIPS FOR CREATING SUCCESSFUL IMAGES**
Want to shoot interesting and engaging images for magazine assignments? Here I will explain my top tips for making successful images, from research and making the most of your contacts to remaining adaptable in the field and understanding magazine layout considerations.
- SHOOTING THE ASSIGNMENT**
Being able to take a good picture is only the start. Next we will look at my usual routine for shooting an assignment, from pre-production, shooting on location, post-processing and delivering the final edit. For this I will use a recent shoot in Iceland for National Geographic to illustrate each step of the process.
- EQUIPMENT**
A quick look at what is in the camera bag and the equipment I wouldn't leave home without.



Build your online presence

Once you have a body of work you are proud of and would be happy to show to the world, it is time to work on building your online presence; website, blog, Instagram etc. When I started out all I really had was my book, a printed portfolio, to take around to show potential clients. I still believe it is important to have this, as your pictures will never look better than when they are printed and many picture editors still like to see work presented this way.

There are a lot more opportunities in this digital age to get your images in front of potential clients, but these same opportunities have also created an excess amount of people showing their work, making it more difficult than ever to stand out from the crowd.

Of course it is the pictures that matter the most, so you must have the work to back it up, but it is also important to have a clear idea of what you are all about as a photographer, with a professional online presence that represents that. This should take into account the kind of photography you want to do, your shooting style and of course your personality.

Join photographer directories

Another way to get your name out there is to consider joining a few online photographer directories. I know quite a few picture editors who use these to find photographers based on their specialism and geographic location.

Ones to look out for are Found, Wonderful Machine and Production Paradise. These platforms are usually invitation only, so you have to have a portfolio demonstrating a professional standard of work before they will let you join, and they can be quite expensive. They are however a great way to get your work in front of contacts you don't know and expand your client base.

Launching Soon...

Myanmar (Burma) Photo Tour 2022

Join professional travel photographers Richard James Taylor and Tom Bourdon on a twelve day adventure through one of the world's most mystical and photogenic landscapes - Myanmar.

Myanmar is not only a photographers dream, it is also an explorer's paradise... register your interest now and be the first to know when bookings open!

Be the first to know when bookings open by registering your interest by email to info@richardjamestaylor.com



Announcing Myanmar Photo Tour 2022

-- A GOLDEN LAND OF TEMPLES AND BUDDHISM --

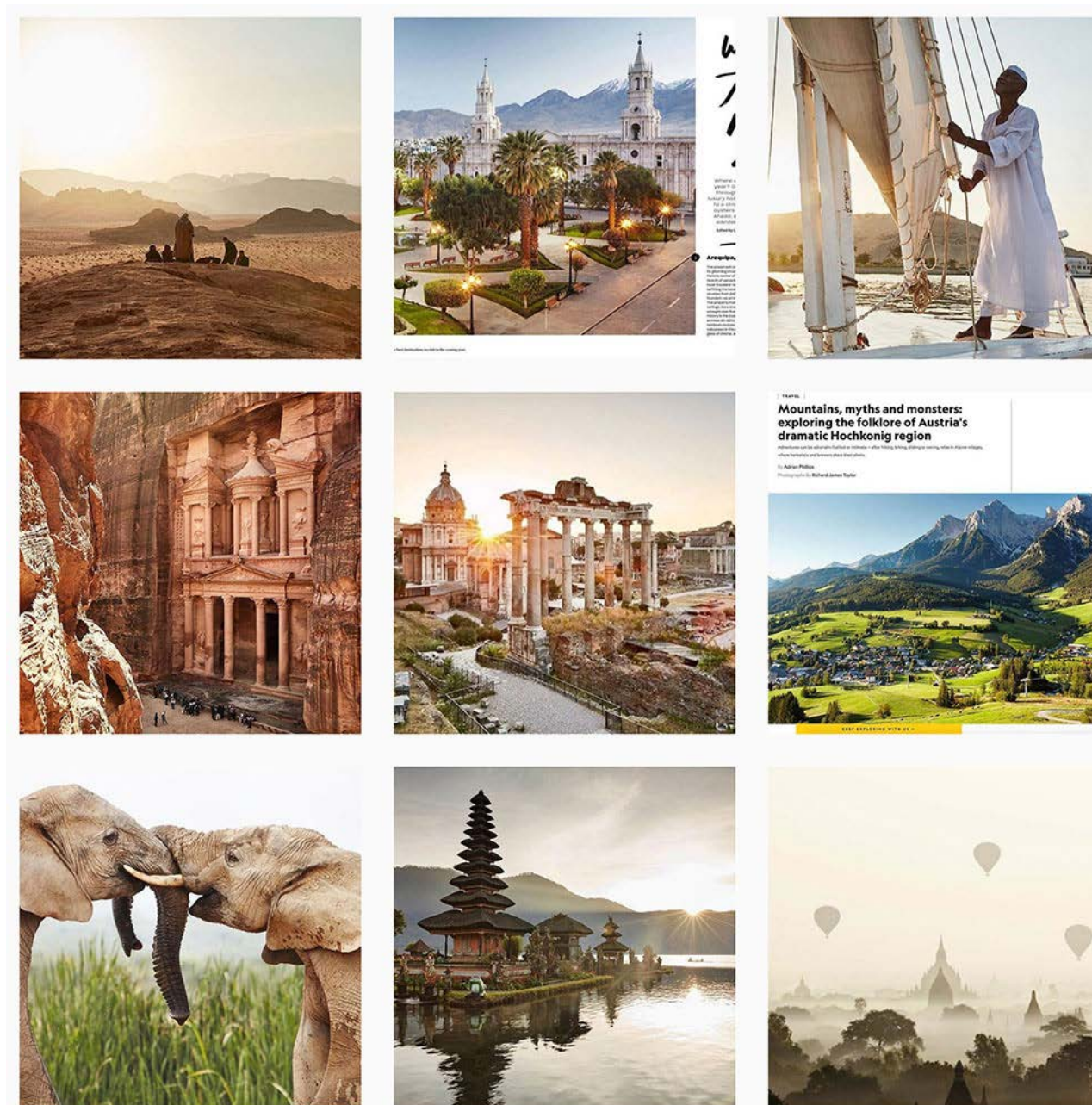
Join professional photographers Tom Bourdon and Richard James Taylor on a twelve-day adventure through one of the **world's most mystical and photogenic landscapes** - Myanmar.

Starting in Yangon, you will explore the bustling streets and markets of the old town before witnessing the awe-inspiring golden stupa of the Shwedagon Pagoda at sunset. From Yangon head north to explore the ancient temples of Bagan, discover the secrets of the last Burmese Kingdom in Mandalay, walk the world's oldest teak bridge in U-Bein and paddle with the Intha fishermen on Inle Lake. Between photographing **novice monks and traditional artisans** there will be opportunities to visit **authentic tribal villages** in Kalaw and enjoy a misty sunrise on the dreamy Irrawaddy River.

You will be accompanied every step of the way by two leading travel photographers, National Geographic Traveller photographer and LEE Filters ambassador Richard James Taylor and Gurushots Guru Pro and documentary photographer Tom Bourdon.

Myanmar is not only **photographers dream**, it is also an explorer's paradise... book your place now and join us on a truly unforgettable photographic journey!





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