



GUIDES

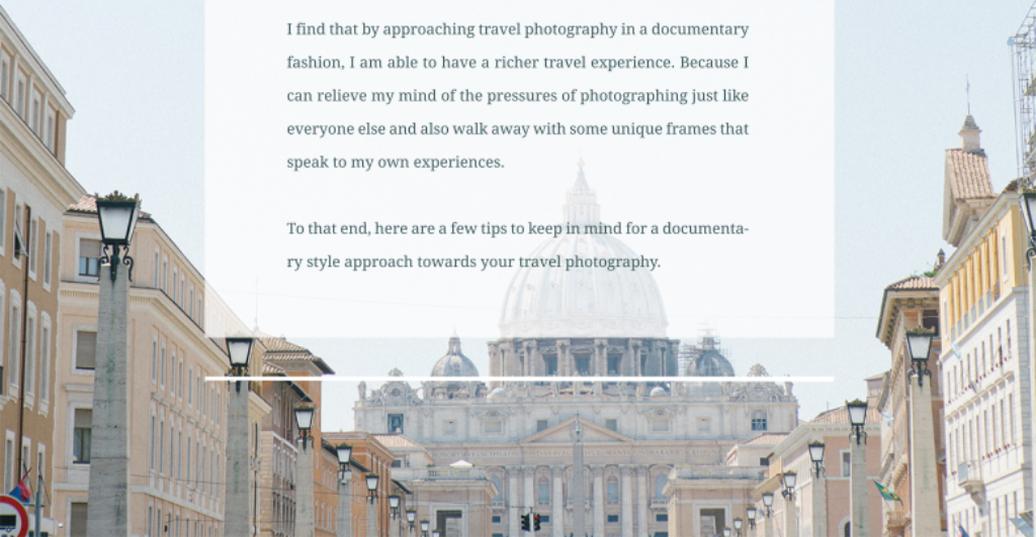
TIPS FOR DOCUMENTARY STYLE TRAVEL PHOTOS

Documentary style photography has long been of great fascination to me. The sheer act of photographing people and places to document spontaneous moments and the imperfections associated with it gives such photography, and the photographer, a sense of being authentic, real, and free to exercise his/her creative freedom.

Officially, documentary style photography has many technical definitions. As per Wikipedia, documentary style of photography is used to chronicle events and environments in a naturally occurring state very much like photojournalism. I like to think of a documentary style of photography as the letting go of my inhibitions and preconceived notions of perfection. That I'm documenting people and places in their natural environment – being or doing what they do on any given day.

I find that by approaching travel photography in a documentary fashion, I am able to have a richer travel experience. Because I can relieve my mind of the pressures of photographing just like everyone else and also walk away with some unique frames that speak to my own experiences.

To that end, here are a few tips to keep in mind for a documentary style approach towards your travel photography.



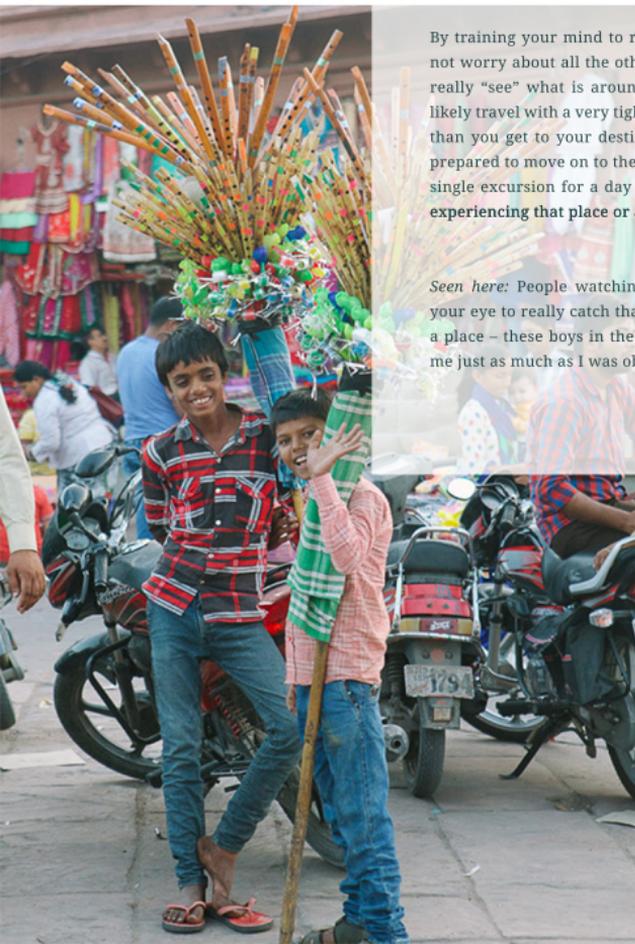
01 *Be present in the moment*

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By training your mind to really live life in the moment and not worry about all the other distractions will also help you really “see” what is around you. More often than not, you likely travel with a very tight agenda and timeline. No sooner than you get to your destination, you are already mentally prepared to move on to the next stop. Instead, try and plan a single excursion for a day and really focus on learning and experiencing that place or activity before moving on.

Seen here: People watching is a great exercise in training your eye to really catch that which is unusual and unique to a place – these boys in the market in Jaipur were observing me just as much as I was observing them!

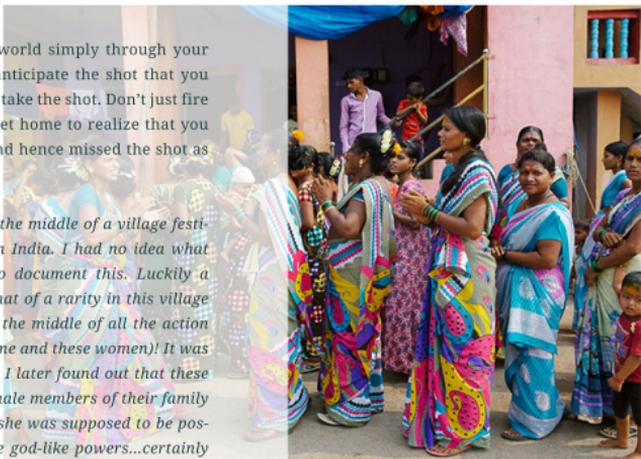


02 Be observant of your surroundings

Life is happening all around you all the time. People interacting with each other, people interacting with nature, nature putting on a grand show during sunrise, sunset, or even during a thunderstorm. But don't wait for some preconceived notion of the perfect moment to take your camera out and take a photo.

At the same time, don't see the world simply through your viewfinder. Observe the scene, anticipate the shot that you really want to get and be ready to take the shot. Don't just fire away at every situation only to get home to realize that you completed missed the moment and hence missed the shot as well.

*Seen here: I once found myself in the middle of a village festival/ritual when I was traveling in India. I had no idea what was going on but knew I had to document this. Luckily a female photographer was somewhat of a rarity in this village and I was given a special seat in the middle of all the action (without a word spoken amongst me and these women)! It was fascinating to see and experience. I later found out that these **women** were taking one of the female members of their family to each house to get blessings as she was supposed to be possessed by a female deity and have god-like powers...certainly an experience I will never forget!*



03 *Be real about your travel goals*

A very famous travel quote says, "We travel not to escape life, but so that life does not escape us" really hits the nail on the head for me. Be real about why you travel and what you want to gain out of each travel experience. If you are traveling to a marketplace and want to get a true sense of local lifestyles and customs, then look for naturally occurring scenes. Don't look for people that you can pose or stage to get your shot.

Seen here: This is by no means a perfect shot but I love the fact that this angle shows just how crazy transportation choices can be in smaller villages and towns in some countries!



04 Be aware of your gear choices

Packing for any sort of travel is an art in itself, especially if you are going away for an extended period of time. Documentary style travel photography requires a slightly different mindset in terms of gear than say perhaps wildlife or portrait photography.

I find that for documentary style travel photography a zoom lens like the ultra-wide angle focal length like the Canon 16-35mm f/4 or one like the Canon 24-70mm f/2.8 works well for me. While a fast lens is ideal, I don't usually find myself photographing at an aperture lower than f/4 or f/5.6. More often than not, I have more than one subject in the scene and also want to capture some of the background in order to provide content to the shot.

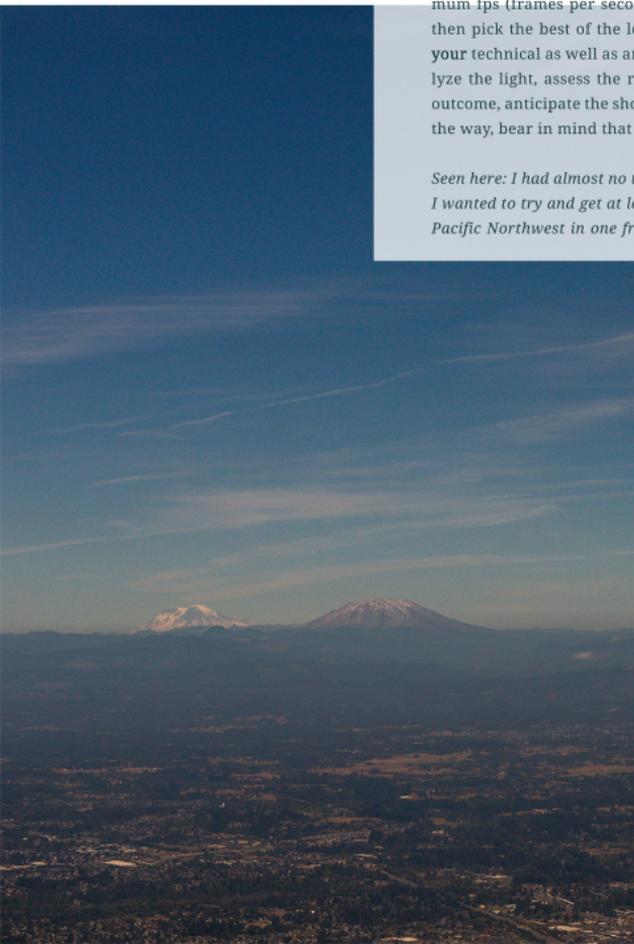
Seen here: I was in Rome for three days this past summer but couldn't get the famous Spanish Steps without people no matter what time of the day I tried. So instead, I chose to embrace the crowds and showcase this famous monument as the tourist attraction it really is!



05 *Be confident in your skills*

Documentary style photography is generally quite fast paced. You are trying to capture a scene as it is playing out in front of you. You don't really have the time or the opportunity to re-compose the shot and then click the shutter. However, this does not mean that you have to just fire away at the maximum fps (frames per second) that your camera can handle, then pick the best of the lot in post-processing. Instead, use **your** technical as well as artistic skills to read the scene, analyze the light, assess the right camera settings, imagine the outcome, anticipate the shot and then take the picture. Oh, by the way, bear in mind that you will not likely get a redo.

Seen here: I had almost no time to really plan this shot. I knew I wanted to try and get at least two of the famous peaks of the Pacific Northwest in one frame while at about 35k feet in the



Conclusion

I hope these tips convey my love for documentary style photography and do not scare you away from it.

This style of photography has its own charm. Even though it may appear to be highly unplanned and random, it is also a good mix of carefully anticipated planning and authenticity. Give it a try the next time you travel and let me know how it goes.

If this was helpful and you would like to see more tips and resources to improve your photography, do let me know. Sign up so you will be notified of more resources as soon as they are added!





Thank you!

I hope these tips help you be more authentic in your travel photography and help you capture the true essence of places you visit.

Note: The materials in this PDF are for people who are interested in learning and improving their photography. No part of this PDF and its images may be reproduced, forwarded, copy or distribute without my permission.

If this was helpful and you want to see more, sign up to be notified of new materials as soon as they are available.

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