

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Expert tips for memorable vacation photos

TALES FROM THE ROAD



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Well-crafted photos can provide lasting memories from a summer vacation.

Whether you're embarking on a grand tour to far-flung lands or spending a week at the lake, keeping a few simple techniques in mind can make a big difference to the quality of your photos.

There's a saying that painting is the art of addition, while photography is the art of subtraction.

A painter starts with a blank canvas and decides what to add. If the scene has an unattractive dead branch in front or garbage on the beach, the painter can exclude those elements.

As photographers, we see all of that through the viewfinder and have to figure out how to eliminate or minimize what we don't want in the frame.

Something as simple as trying a different angle by moving to one side or the other or getting closer to your subject can often make a huge difference.

Look at photographs that win competitions and you will see that most are free of distractions.

Distracting backgrounds are tough to work around.

When taking photos of friends or family, watch to see that you haven't positioned them so that a tree appears to be growing out of their heads. (On the other hand, it's fun to purposely do that when you're in a mischievous mood.)

Light quality is key.

Bright sunshine gives your photos snap, colour and depth, but it's a double-edged sword.

Nothing beats the warm, magical sunlight of early morning and evening, but midday sunlight is harsh and unflattering. This is the worst light for people shots, especially close-ups.

It becomes doubly difficult when people wear hats because half their faces tend to disappear into dark shadow.

The most flattering light for people pictures is an overcast sky when shadows and highlights are even and softer, but these are perfect conditions for capturing the details of any subject.

A wildflower meadow may look great in full sun, but if you want to get close and show detail, cloudy conditions make it easier to see subtle colour differences.

This is also the best time to photograph in the forest because the light is diffused.

Overcast skies tend to look white and nondescript, so minimizing the sky or cropping it out usually improves the photo. However, the sky can add drama to your images when clouds are distinct or storms are brewing.

Photos generally look better when you avoid placing the horizon in the centre.

If your main subject is in the fore-



This is an example of breaking the rules. While it's usually best to avoid putting the horizon across the centre of a photo, this image of Mountain Lake in northern Saskatchewan works because of the strong reflection in the calm water.



Photographers wait at sunrise in Death Valley National Park. To get the best light, be prepared to get up early.



While the sky is overcast and foggy, the even light helps bring out details on these wildflowers in Riding Mountain National Park.

ground and the sky looks blah, then the horizon line should be quite high.

Photography's rule of thirds suggests that you shouldn't place your main subject dead centre but rather about a third of the way from the edge of the frame.

When people or animals are off to one side, it's best if they are looking or moving toward the centre of the frame rather than the outside. The purpose is to draw your eye into the photo.

Another way to do this is to use leading lines. A curved road running into the scene is a classic example.

Most important, and most fun, is trying different techniques and using rules only as general guidelines.

Sometimes great photos break the rules completely.

For example, a reflection on a calm lake may look best if the horizon is dead centre, cutting the image in half.

There is no right or wrong. The most successful photo is the one



A storm approaches Peyto Lake in Banff National Park. Sometimes bad weather can make for the most dramatic photos. | ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN PHOTOS

that gives you the effect that you're after.

For more information on Kar-

pans' latest book, *Photographer's Guide to Saskatchewan*, visit www.parklandpublishing.com.

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