



Photography Tours

Planning A Photography Tour

Picture this:



If you are an avid photographer, and your local neighborhood is starting to be a bit too familiar for you and your camera, it just might be time to consider a photography tour. A truly one-of-a-kind experience, photography tours give you a hands-on opportunity to develop or refine your skills as a photographer while traveling to some of the most amazing destinations across the globe.

Prospective photography tour participants have many options. Whether you're a South America enthusiast or a historical European landmarks buff, there's a tour for you. Whether you're a seasoned, professional photographer or a novice picking up a camera for the first time, there's a tour that caters to your level of experience. The wide range of possible tours and travel arrangements makes it possible for anyone who loves travel and photography to bring both of these interests together and into focus.

Photography tours can also offer much more. Many travelers return from their expeditions having formed lasting relationships with others who have similar interests. They likewise come home with a unique perspective on a spectacular array of locations. Some describe the experience as a much-needed de-stressor that has improved their approach to other aspects of their lives. And of course, you'll have a collection of pictures to share with family and friends.

Top Places for Photography Tours

Most photography tours have a specific theme. Some are centered on the travel destination, while others emphasize an aspect of nature. Regardless of their concentration, however, virtually all of these tours take their participants to some of the most photogenic places on the map.

So where are all the top photography tour hot spots? Obvious contenders are those places that claim to be the most photographed in the world - places such as Paris, the Taj Mahal, Walt Disney World, Niagara Falls, Angkor Wat, and the Acropolis. Beyond these locations, lesser-known places and events are also frequently photographed:



- The Africa "Big Five" animals (lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo) are considered the most widely photographed animals in the world.
- La Digue Island in the Seychelles claims to be the most photographed island on the globe.
- Santorini is the most photographed island in Greece, and is commonly considered the most photographed island in Europe.

- The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta is considered to be the most photographed event in the world.
- Table Mountain is the most photographed landmark in South Africa.
- Den Lille Havfrue (the little mermaid) from Copenhagen is the most photographed statue in the world.
- The Golden Gate Bridge is the most photographed landmark in the United States, and most photographed bridge in the world.
- Neuschwanstein castle in Germany claims to be the most photographed castle in the world.
- The Eiffel Tower is considered the most photographed structure in Europe.
- The Evangeline Oak in Louisiana and the Lone Cypress tree in California are each described as the most photographed tree in the world.
- Ayers Rock is the most photographed sunset in Australia.
- Abbey Road is often considered the most photographed street in the world.
- Niagara Falls may be the most photographed waterfall in the world.

Work with your travel consultant to determine how to best plan your travels. You may decide to venture to your destination on your own, or you may use the services of a tour operator that specializes in photography tours. Your travel consultant will work with you to determine what is most appropriate to your personal goals. While traveling on your own means the ultimate in flexibility in your itinerary, it also means that all of the logistics of being in a new destination, including discovering and mastering the local light, best places to photograph, and local travel and transportation are your own.

One important note - be careful what and who you photograph. Some countries have very stringent laws concerning the photography of government buildings, airports or other facilities. A group of British tourists were arrested and prosecuted in Greece while involved in "plane-spotting" - which involved the photographing of airplanes at a Greek airport. Likewise, some cultures do not appreciate photography and may react directly to prohibit your photographic efforts. Always check into local laws and cultures for any such prohibitions prior to undertaking your journey.

Selecting a Tour and a Tour Operator

Travelers have many options in terms of tour operators. Each operator offers slightly different services and assists travelers to different extents in attaining their unique individual goals. When choosing an operator, your travel consultant will ask you to think carefully about a number of important issues and to ask yourself some critical questions to make your decision well-informed. Note that although it is possible to take photographs on any trip, a true photography tour centers on photo and camera opportunities and is typically lead by a knowledgeable guide well-versed in both photography and the local geography, lighting, culture and history.

Your starting point should be to define your goals and expectations for the tour. While some participants expect technical photography lessons, others want lots of free time to explore the destination's surroundings on their own. Similarly, while some are content with spending hours of their time indoors learning to improve their work, others would prefer to develop their film once they return home. Knowing your goals and expectations helps you narrow your plans and find an operator who will help you achieve precisely what you want to accomplish on your tour.

Next, consider your desired level of photographic instruction. Instructors vary as to the level of training they provide. Some possess vast amounts of technical knowledge and prefer to focus on the nuances of the art of photography, while others offer only basic guidance. Think about whether you want your instructor to ask you to complete various assignments, drop film off at night, and spend time together to go over your work the next day. Decide if you want your instructor to stress the art of composition, exposures, and new techniques, or just turn you loose in the spectacular surroundings you visit.

Also be sure to ask what the size of your group and its level of experience will be. A photography tour on a bus with 30 people will be a very different experience from one in a van with only a few people. Smaller tours generally provide individual photographers with greater freedom to explore the destinations and shoot photos on their own and greater access to the group experts and guides. Larger tours offer participants the opportunity to interact with more travelers, and are generally less expensive. Determine the tour size you prefer and find an operator who will accommodate your desires.

It is advisable to travel with a tour operator who is an expert in the destination you are planning to visit. This will help you navigate easily and learn as much as possible about the area. He or she should know where the best photo opportunities are, and the best time to be at any given location. It's also helpful when the operator knows locals and how to communicate with them, is familiar with wildlife behavior, and knows where to find and photograph specific animals. You'll be even better off if he or she knows foreign languages, can handle foreign currencies, is cognizant of cultural differences, and knows how to create effective photo opportunities for travelers.

As for the logistics, some tours arrange for special photo opportunities-such as with models or animals-for individual members or the group as a whole. Some also allow photographers the opportunity to take advantage of the best lighting for their photography and, when traveling on a tour bus, to make those all important spur-of-the-moment stops for rare photo opportunities. As far as transportation is concerned, you may prefer to travel in a van that's always in go-anywhere, stop-anytime mode. If you travel in relaxed, flexible fashion and visit the best out-of-the-way locations, you will be more likely to meet and photograph the people and places that provide the richest cultural experiences.



Once you decide on the bigger picture issues, review the possible itineraries carefully to make sure they contain the right schedules for you. Some operators custom design their agendas for photography by choosing certain times of the year, building in extra time for various visits, and allowing interested travelers to make repeat visits to key hot spots throughout the tour. Keep in mind that the best times for photography are usually the early morning and late afternoon, so you may want to confirm that your itinerary includes many photo opportunities during those times.

Verify that your operator is experienced in dealing with 35mm, medium, and large photo formats depending on your choice of media. If you're attached to your new digital camera, find out whether your operator caters to digital photographers. Travelers using digital camera technology will generally require an on-board screen. Some taking digital photos may also wish to burn back-up CDs and DVDs, and have recovery software on hand in case of any major disasters. Some operators conduct Adobe PhotoShop sessions as well.

When narrowing down your possible tour operators, don't forget to consider an operator's track record of efforts to accommodate travelers. Some photography tour operators actively assist travelers with carrying their equipment on trails if the going gets rough and will fetch items from the van for them so they can continue shooting. Some offer to pick up travelers at the airport, where relevant, and return them there at the end of the tour. Also consider if an operator will bring some spare cameras, lenses, and compact flash cards along; such items will be indispensable if you happen to need back-ups, or to recover lost image data while out in the field.

Finally, don't forget to find out exactly what is included in the total cost. Travel consultants are familiar with tour operators offering a wide range of travel arrangements at different prices and will make the numerous inquiries necessary to help you find the best deal. Some tours include all domestic transportation, meals, and quality hotels chosen carefully for their convenient access to exciting photo opportunities. You may want to look for these features in addition to all the other characteristics you are seeking in an operator's services.

Preparing for Your Photography Tour

You can, and should, begin your photographic travel adventure before even stepping outside of your home. Find histories, biographies, plays, and novels taking place in the destination you've chosen, and familiarize yourself with the distinctive and significant features to photograph after you arrive. Literature such as picture books and back issues of *National Geographic*, as well as any films shot on site, enable you to learn more about and truly enjoy the trip you are about to take.



Make sure you have all the equipment you'll need over the course of the tour. If you're going with a photography instructor, be sure to get a pre-trip checklist with information on the photography gear you will need as well as other general information you should bear in mind while getting ready for the tour. One common piece of advice is to err on the cautious side and pack extra film. Also check your photography equipment and bring the owner's manual, spare parts, and extra batteries. And remember to find out whether you'll need a tripod, filters, and flashes during the tour. If you're taking a tripod, you should also bring a strap so you can carry the tripod over

your shoulder when you want to take a photograph or when you want to be hands free to do something else.

If you want to take all precautions to insure that your unique set of photos will survive the trip, go on the tour prepared. In particular, don't get stuck without cleaning accessories, notebooks, pens, and plastic zipper bags. If you think you might want to sell your photographs one day, pack model and property releases as well.

Since all of these items will surely add up, make a concerted effort not to pack too much. While all photographers have their favorite equipment for shooting, keep in mind that being on the road, often in harsh circumstances, means taking only the most necessary items along for the trip -- be sure to take only those that will be most useful and leave the rest of your collection at home. And leave room in your luggage for souvenirs in case photos are not the only thing you take home with you.

Photography tours exist for almost every traveler and photographer. No matter where you're going, a photography tour will enable you to capture one-of-a-kind images as a main objective of your trip. You will finally be up close and personal with the people and places you'll photograph - and that you'll never forget.