TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

By Margaret Brown
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Choosing the right equipment

Two critical factors can influence whether you get good photographs when you travel: your choice of equipment and how you use it. Making the right choices will help you to enjoy your trip and knowing how to use your gear will enable you to come home with memorable shots.

Packing a camera bag for a holiday trip is a very personal matter; we all have individual preferences and experience different constraints, depending on the type of holiday we take. People staying in one place will want different equipment from those who will be on the move throughout their vacation. Those holidaying by the sea will require gear that can withstand salt spray and sand, while those going inland may have to provide dust protection for their equipment.
Equipment care

If you’re travelling by air, expensive photographic and computer equipment should always be carried in your hand luggage; not put in checked-in baggage. The restrictions airlines place upon carry-on baggage will probably limit the amount of equipment you can take. When you take your own car these restrictions won’t apply. Train travellers and people on cruises will also be less restricted.

Make a list of all your equipment, complete with serial numbers, well before you set off and leave a copy of it with a trusted friend or relative. Take pictures of your items and bag at home prior to leaving. Then, if anything goes missing while you’re out and about, you have evidence to back up reports to police and insurance claims.

Carry a camera cleaning kit with a blower, brush, cleaning solution and microfiber cloth that can be used to remove grease and grime from the surfaces of lenses and LCD screens. A small, lightweight towel can be handy for removing dirt from tripod legs or salt spray from tripods and camera bags. If you’re going to the tropics, include some moisture-absorbing silica gel packs and rain covers for your bag and camera. Hand warmers can be useful for keeping batteries warm in cold conditions, although modern batteries seldom fail when it’s cold.

Camera cleaning kits, like the one shown here, are affordably priced and small and light enough to fit easily into a camera bag. They can help you protect your equipment against moisture, dust and grease.
Choosing a camera
Travelling photographers can choose from many different equipment types of equipment these days, depending on their requirements. The table below outlines the main advantages and disadvantages of various camera types. While it would be nice to have a compact, affordably-priced camera with a fast lens that covers a wide zoom range and a 36 x 24 mm sensor, this camera doesn’t exist – yet. However, we are seeing a definite transition from DSLR cameras to cameras with larger sensors in ever-smaller bodies, and all-in-one cameras that can claim to ‘do it all’.

These developments are taking place against the emergence of smartphones.

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<th>Camera type</th>
<th>Sensor size</th>
<th>Main advantages</th>
<th>Main disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DSLR</strong></td>
<td>36 x 24 mm</td>
<td>Superior low light performance</td>
<td>Relatively large, heavy equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APS-C</td>
<td>Good low light performance in a more compact body, increases telephoto range</td>
<td>Reduced wide-angle coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CSC</strong></td>
<td>36 x 24 mm</td>
<td>As for DSLR in a more compact body</td>
<td>Limited range of lenses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APS-C</td>
<td>High performance in compact body with smaller, lighter lenses; wide choice of lenses</td>
<td>Resolution lower than DSLRs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M4/3</td>
<td>Small and light, fast autofocusining</td>
<td>Lower resolution, limited lenses</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1-inch type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed lens camera</strong></td>
<td>36 x 24 mm</td>
<td>High performance in a compact body</td>
<td>Little or no zoom range</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APS-C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M4/3</td>
<td>Good performance and ‘serious’ controls in a compact body</td>
<td>Restricted zoom range</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-inch type</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 x 4.55 mm or smaller</td>
<td>Extreme zooms available, small, light and affordably-priced cameras</td>
<td>Reduced resolution, susceptible to noise, relatively slow lenses</td>
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with higher resolution, better lenses and movie capabilities that have largely replaced entry- and mid-level digicams. The latest smart-phones have larger main camera sensors and they can be used to post images and movies directly to social networks as well as making and receiving phone calls. Small wonder so many travellers use them as their main image-recording device.

If your smartphone doesn’t meet your needs, you need to balance size, weight and capabilities when searching for your ‘ideal’ travel camera. Current trends indicate that among the smaller and lighter cameras there are three popular categories:

1. Mirrorless, interchangeable-lens CSCs like the Olympus OM-D and Sony E-mount models and Fujifilm’s X-series as well as the smaller models in Panasonic’s G-series and Samsung’s NX-series cameras,

2. Interchangeable-lens cameras with 4K video capabilities such as the Panasonic’s GH4 and G7, Samsung’s NX1 and NX500 and the Sony α7s.

3. Premium ‘bridge’ models with larger sensors (larger than 12.8 x 9.6 mm) and integrated lenses, such as the Sony R-series (which includes a couple of models with 36 x 24 mm sensors), Canon’s G3X and G7X, Fujifilm’s X-100T and Ricoh’s GR.

DSLRs remain popular among serious enthusiasts but there has been a move

Interchangeable-lens CSCs and their lenses, like the OM-D E-M10 Mark II camera shown here, are much smaller and lighter than DSLRs with equivalent capabilities.

Mirrorless interchangeable-lens cameras that support 4K movie recording, like the Samsung NX500 shown here, which includes ‘selfie’ shooting capability, are becoming increasingly popular with travellers.
Sony’s RX10 Mark II camera features a 12.8 x 9.6 mm stacked Exmor RS CMOS sensor with fast signal processing and an attached DRAM memory chip that enables it to support 4K and HD super slow motion video capture. Its 8.3x zoom lens has a constant f/2.8 maximum aperture.

Towards smaller and lighter cameras and lenses and cameras with APS-C sized sensors can be a better choice than larger and heavier ‘full-frame’ cameras. Third-party lens manufacturers have long contributed to the huge choice of compatible lenses for DSLRs. Most are also increasingly catering for users of mirrorless, interchangeable-lens cameras.

**Should you buy a new camera?**

Chances are you already have a digital camera but are thinking of replacing it for a special trip – particularly if you’re going overseas. Having a month prior to your trip to learn the ins and outs of new gear will set you up to take much better pictures than you could while learning how to use a new camera purchased at the airport on your way out.

However, you may not need a new camera at all. If the equipment you already have does the job it doesn’t make sense to replace it – unless it provides new and improved features you know you will definitely enjoy using.

Features that can make investing in a new camera worthwhile and the benefits they can provide include:

- A larger sensor in the camera will provide a wider ISO range and be capable of recording more detail in shadows and highlights.
- A longer lens will allow you to magnify distant subjects and is a real advantage
Weatherproof camera bodies and lenses are able to withstand light showers of rain.

- More rugged build quality will make the equipment better able to withstand the rigours of travelling.
- Weatherproofing will make it more resistant to spray and light rain showers.
- A bigger buffer memory will provide more space for recording bursts of shots and is useful when you photograph action or wildlife.
- Faster autofocusing means fewer missed shots. Phase-detection AF is usually faster than contrast-detection AF, particularly in dim lighting and with long lenses.
- Mirrorless compact system cameras (CSCs) are usually smaller – and often lighter – than DSLRs with similar features. CSCs with viewfinders will also be easier to use if you want to shoot movies.
- Full HD video recording provides better video quality plus more scope for frame grabs from video clips. Cameras that can record 4K video often allow users to save 8-megapixel frames as printable still images.
- The Full HD 50i video mode provides scope for slow-motion video and frame-by-frame motion analysis.
Choosing the right equipment

Lens choices

If you travel with an interchangeable-lens camera, you will need to decide which lenses to take. When recording the highlights of a trip, most travellers will want to include pictures of scenery (landscapes and cityscapes), people (locals and fellow travellers) and, often, wildlife in either natural environments or in places established by humans for their protection. Close-ups showing details of subjects are also popular.

To cover all these options, you need lenses that can span from a wide angle of view to a narrow one. Most manufacturers offer kit lenses that cover a large percentage of the focal lengths you will need, usually with two lenses: a wide-angle-to-short telephoto and a short-to-long telephoto.

Kit lenses are usually relatively small, light and cheap. But they’re not fast, which means you will probably need to use high ISO settings when shooting in low light levels. If you’re constrained by size, weight and price, kit lenses will definitely provide the greatest versatility and performance for the buck.

Sports and wildlife photographers will require longer lenses, with the 70-200mm zoom range popular with both ‘full frame’ and ‘cropped sensor’ DSLR users. The same focal length range is also popular with CSC photographers.
Choosing the right equipment

Plenty of options are available from both camera manufacturers and third-party suppliers, the latter often providing excellent performance at very competitive prices.

Photographers mainly focused upon shooting scenery may be able to get away with using just one lens, provided its range includes a decent wide-angle (24mm equivalent in 35mm format) and adequate telephoto extension (105mm or 135mm equivalent in 35mm format). This range will cover scenery and people but will probably fall short for shooting wildlife.

Be wary of so-called ‘super-zooms’ unless you are prepared to accept their limitations. They are certainly convenient and they’re likely to cover most, if not all of the angles of view you will require when travelling.

However, to keep longer lenses portable, manufacturers must use smaller and lighter elements, which means less light is captured. You will require effective stabilisation plus a camera that performs well with high ISO settings.

Smaller maximum apertures also reduce depth-of-field control, making it more difficult to reduce ‘busy’ backgrounds to a smooth and attractive blur. You will probably notice edge softening in shots, particularly at wider aperture settings, along with distortions, particularly with wide angles of view.

Specialist wildlife photographers who shoot from vehicles or hides usually favour fast telephoto prime lenses which are large and, often, heavy. This photograph of birders was taken in the Kgalagadi National Park in South Africa, where it is too dangerous to leave the vehicle.

Other equipment

A lightweight tripod is one of the most useful accessories for travellers, even though most cameras and lenses come with some kind of stabilisation. Travel tripods can be small enough to fit easily into a camera bag or airline carry-on and robust enough to pack into your checked-in baggage.

The ideal travel tripod should have a folded length of less than 55 cm and a maximum weight of less than 110 grams – including the head. It should be capable of extending to 125 cm without extending the centre column more than three quarters of its total vertical length. Most compact travel...
Carbon fibre tripods are compact and light enough to be easily portable but provide good stability for shooting at night. This shot, taken in Sydney’s Darling Harbour, shows a Sony A7 mirrorless interchangeable-lens camera with Voigtlander 15mm f/4.5 lens set up on a Sirui T-1204X tripod plus K-10X head. © Rene Vogelzang.
Choosing the right equipment

Aluminium tripods are the cheapest but carbon fibre tripods are lighter in weight and usually stronger as well as being easy to grip in freezing temperatures without losing skin. Tripods made with magnesium and titanium are also available but at higher prices. Most travel tripods have twist-lock legs, which are self-adjusting and fold up compactly; some have flip-locks that are quicker to set up and fold. Adjustable leg tips with spikes or points for use outdoors and rubber cushions for indoor use are a plus, as is a reversible two-piece centre column for low-level shooting.

Many travel tripods come with heads included; with others, the head is a separate accessory. Ball heads are more compact and easier to pack as well as lighter in weight than comparable three-way heads with a panning handle. The latter are more suitable for shooting video or panning to follow action.

The equipment you take and the bag it’s packed in must be suitable for the types of activities you will participate in. Lowepro’s Dryzone Duffle 20L bag (shown here) is a good example of a compact waterproof bag that accommodates a DSLR camera plus a couple of lenses.
Backpacks are popular with DSLR shooters as they are comfortable to carry for long periods and provide plenty of space for photographic and personal gear. Lowepro’s Flipside Sport 20L AW (shown here) is a lightweight pack that can fit two camera bodies and three lenses plus accessory items. Side access lets photographers remove equipment without having to take off the pack.
A tripod with a hook below the centre post lets you hang a weight (camera bag, etc.) to improve stability. Pressing down lightly but firmly on the yoke at the top of the legs at the point of exposure can also help minimise shaking.

Camera bags come in many different styles and sizes and you need to match your choice with the equipment you plan to use and the environments in which you will be shooting. Make sure you can carry your bag comfortably over the distances and terrain you plan to cross.

Backpacks are favoured by many outdoor photographers as they can hold a lot of gear and are usually comfortable to carry. Sling-type bags that can be easily rotated to the front of your body makes equipment easy to access.

Satchels can be useful in urban environments since they provide a high degree of security and don’t look obviously as if they contain expensive gear. Waterproof bags and cases are available for photographers working in aquatic environments.

Useful links
What gear to take on your holiday? www.bit.ly/travelphotogear
CSC accessories www.bit.ly/cscaccessories
Big trip planning www.bit.ly/bigtripplanning
DSLR video accessories www.bit.ly/dslrtravelvideo
Choosing the right equipment

By Tamron Ambassador Glynn Lavender

The gear I travel with often depends on the purpose of the journey. If the trip’s focus is just to shoot then I load up with two camera bodies, usually one with a 35mm sensor and one with an APS-C sensor. This effectively gives me two sets of lenses as each body gives different viewpoints with each lens.

As I walk around a location I have both cameras ‘out and ready’ usually with a 70-200mm lens on the 35mm body and a 10-24mm lens on the APS-C body. This gives me a good, versatile range to walk around with and will cover most of the ‘reaction’ shots – the ones where you walk into a scene that grabs your attention and you need to shoot straight away so you don’t miss the moment.

If I am just heading out for a short trip with family, then I drop back to a single body and a lens that covers a wide variety of shooting options such as the Tamron 16-300mm lens. This is a great

Camera: Canon 5D MkII, Lens: Tamron 70-200 f/2.8 VC (A009), Focal Length: 195mm, Aperture setting: f/4, ISO 100. © Glynn Lavender.
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versatile lens that covers most situations you are likely to encounter with family. As a father of two young girls it’s a fabulous range as I can capture them easily whether they are close or some distance away all without having to chase them around!

My main ‘go to’ lenses are the Tamron 15-30mm f/2.8 VC (A012) Ultra wide (Review: www.bit.ly/tamron15-30mm28), Tamron 70-200mm f/2.8 VC (A009) Medium tele lens and Tamron 90mm f/2.8 VC (A004) Macro lens (Review: www.bit.ly/tamron90mm28). With these three lenses I can cover most of the angles for the images I enjoy making.

I love getting in close for portraits with the 15-30mm zoom. There is something very intimate about photographing someone from so close that really adds a dynamic element to the images.

The 70-200mm is the ideal ‘discrete’ street shooting lens. It lets you hold back, watch the action unfold and capture images without your presence changing the story you are trying to capture.

The 90mm macro is my ‘go to’ portrait lens when I am directing my subjects. It allows me to stay close enough to keep connected with my subject and offers the perfect perspective for portraits as well as offering tremendous close up ability. It’s also a lot lighter than a 70-200 2.8 and that means it is much easier to hand hold.

A great backpack is essential. It allows you to pack in a huge amount of gear.

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Doorway Portrait
Camera: Canon 6D, Lens: Tamron 90mm f/2.8 VC (A004) Macro, Aperture setting: f/4.0, ISO 400. © Glynn Lavender.

Left: Camera: Canon 6D, Lens: Tamron 70-200 f/2.8 VC (A009), Aperture setting: f/4.0, ISO 400. © Glynn Lavender.
Choosing the right equipment

and helps you keep that gear safe by not having to put it down to shoot. I usually have both my cameras out and ready to shoot with my 15-30mm, or 10-24mm and 70-200mm lenses on the cameras so the bag just needs to keep my other lenses, batteries, memory cards and snacks and drinks.

My current back pack, the Lowepro Flipside Sport 20L AW is well-known for its body-side access. It is perfect as it doesn’t allow access to my gear from behind. This ensures great peace of mind when travelling.

Probably the one item outside of my camera gear that has ‘saved’ me on many occasions is my Hoodman Loupe. A simple device that allows me to see my

Baker Brothers
Camera: Canon 6D, Lens: Tamron 10-24mm f/3.5-4.5 Di II LD (B001), Focal Length: 24mm, Aperture setting: f/4.0, ISO 3200. © Glynn Lavender.
Choosing the right equipment

Tea Lady
Camera: Canon 6D, Lens: Tamron 10-24mm, Focal Length: 15mm, Aperture setting: f/4, ISO 400 © Glynn Lavender.

screen when I am outdoors. Being able to check to see if a shot is exposed and in focus in the areas that you want in an image is vital and this tool gives me the confidence to know I have the shot and then move on to the next one. It’s great to know when you have the shot in ‘the bag’.

The other essential is a smile. Walk around with a smile on your face and when people look at you they are very likely to smile back and as soon as they do you have a connection and that connection can lead you to some fabulous images.

► Glynn Lavender
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