

5 STEPS TO BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS

Quick Guide
Written by Karthika Gupta



Call it obsessive compulsive, but there is a reason why we humans are obsessed with traveling and love taking countless pictures of our trips. For some it is the thrill of sharing said photos with friends and family for humble bragging rights. For others it is a way to earn money through travel guides, stock images, and such. For yet others, it is the simple joy of capturing images that will forever immortalize their adventures for years to come. Either consciously or subconsciously, we know that our images have the potential to connect us to our beautiful world.

Images of places, cultures, art, and even food can carry us away from our mundane everyday existence and transport us to a magical place that we once explored and experienced. There is nothing greater than reliving a magical sunset, that mountain summit, or some beautiful architecture when we're sitting in the middle of a snowstorm, is there?




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That being said, here are a few tips to make the most out of your travels and ensure that you have memories that can last a lifetime and more.

What you will learn:

- The benefit of starting early!
- Why you should shoot a variety of pictures of the same scene.
- The importance of scale and an attention to detail.
 - The gear you need with you.
 - Always be ready or you may miss the shot!

 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's Effective Storytelling premium guide.




Photograph by Karthika Gupta

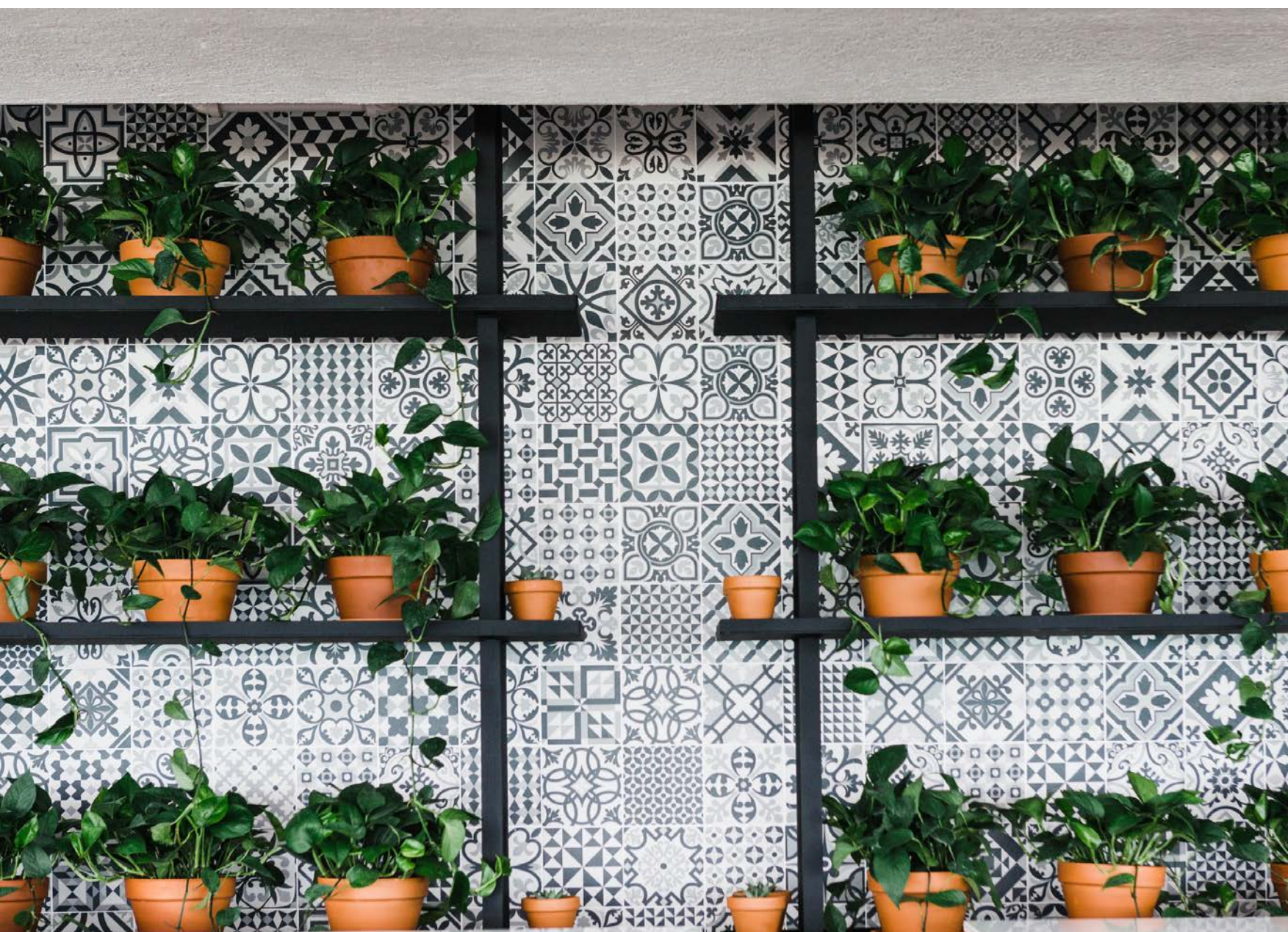
Sunrise over the Tetons – I had scoped the area the day before and when I saw the sunrise, I ran over to this spot which was close to where I was staying in the park.

GETTING AN EARLY START

I agree that there is something so wrong about setting an alarm when you are on vacation. But trust me, it is one of the best things you can ever do for your photographer's soul. My travel alarm, much like my internal body alarm, goes off somewhere between 5:30-5:45 a.m. every single day. I have long learned to stop fighting it and to instead embrace it.

This is my photography time – time for just me, my camera, and my surroundings. The light is perfect – a soft shade of pink and the slow warmth of the sun just peeking out of the horizon. This 'me time' generally satisfies my creative juices and I find that I start the day refreshed and ready for all the other adventures that lie ahead.

 **Key Lesson:** A general tip that also works for your early morning photography exercise is to know ahead of time where and what to shoot. Take some time to scope the location prior so you are not spending precious early morning hours just looking for the right spot and the right subject. Track sunrise times and also track the weather using something similar to [The Weather Channel app](#). Scope out locations either by looking at other photographs from the area or even asking in photography groups about the best locations to shoot in. Also think about what you want to get out of this early morning shoot ahead of time. I find that working with an end goal in mind makes getting up early even more rewarding, as well as being an effective use of my me time.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

I fell in love with the décor at a hotel I was staying at in the Cayman Islands. Everything about this wall reminded me of the tropics. If only my house plants were so pretty! I photographed this window while following my own instruction. I shot it several ways!

GETTING A VARIETY OF PHOTOS

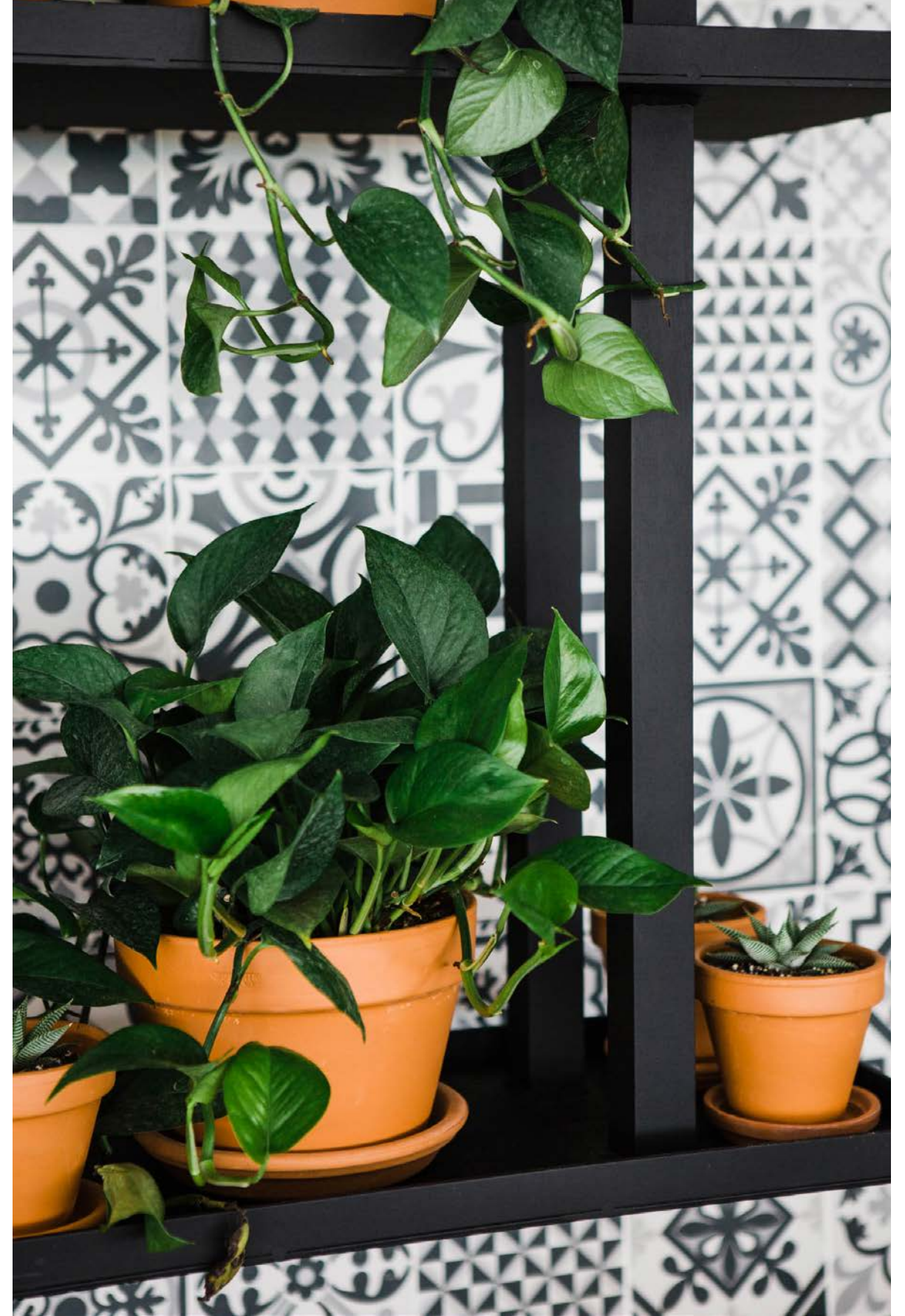
I have a simple rule of getting about three or four shots of one area or location. In fact, I use this rule no matter what I am photographing – either weddings, family portraits, or travel photography editorials. To me, it brings variety into my portfolio and new favorites every time I go through my images.

My **rule of three** is to aim for a horizontal wide angle shot, a vertical view, and a zoomed in (a.k.a. detailed) view of the same scene. Usually, when we travel, we often tend to focus on only one of these three. But don't forget about the others that also make up that moment and help tell the story. You can also try other points of view. Focus on one aspect of some interesting architecture instead of the whole building or shoot a detail of that delicious street-side food stand.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

My second shot was a wider vertical format.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

My third shot was a tighter detailed image.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

The car and buffalo lend a sense of scale to this travel photograph. People don't realize how big bison are until they see one up close and personal.

ADD A SENSE OF SCALE AND NOTICE DETAILS

In order to communicate true scale in an image, always try and include a recognizable object or subject. For example, frame a vehicle, person, or house within a landscape, or a hand for a food shot. This gives your audience a better understanding of the dimensions of the subject in the image.

The old adage "it's all about the details" is so true, especially in travel photography. People want to experience an image and almost imagine themselves in your shots. Colors, textures, and patterns are all details that make up the story. Pick a subject and focus on that subject for details.



If there are any distracting elements in the shot, try shooting straight or overhead to help remove these distractions. On the other hand, if there are no distractions, use the rule of thirds or negative space to draw the viewer's eye to the details. You can also try creative cropping to bring attention to colors and textures by filling the frame with the detail. While it is tempting to do this in post-production, I am a big believer in getting things right in-camera. So, take some time and compose your shots mindfully before pressing that shutter.

Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Always add a sense of scale wherever you can, just to put things into perspective. These kayakers were at exactly the right spot at the right time to add a pop of color to the drama of the mountains in Glacier National Park.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Often times, when I am hiking in the backcountry, the only gear that I can take with me (because of weight restrictions) are a 50-year-old Canon AE1 film camera and two rolls of film. You do the best you can with the gear you have, right?

PACK THE RIGHT GEAR

Be practical and pack smart. The last thing you want to do is lug ALL your gear halfway across the world only to be so frustrated, and not to mention sore, that you are put off by the whole idea of photographing anything. I know this from experience!

Nowadays, I really think long and hard before putting a piece of gear into my travel backpack. Do I really need a 35mm lens and a 24-70mm zoom? Sometimes it is also helpful to leave my heavy DSLR at home and shoot solely on my handy iPhone, especially when I am location scouting for a shoot. In fact, there are some incredible tools like iPhone lenses and small tripods for smart phones that make it easy and convenient to photograph only with a smart phone.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

In most other cases, my Canon 5D MkIII and a 10-year-old Canon 24-70mm f2.8 lens are my go-to gear. Seventy percent of the photos in my portfolio are taken with this lens. It is heavy, but it's so very versatile that I don't need to carry anything else with me.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta



BE READY FOR THE SHOT

This one took a bit of getting used to because I was always conscious of the camera early in my career. But nowadays my camera travels everywhere with me, so it is almost second nature for me to take photos of things that interest me when I am traveling. If that is you, keep your camera handy; you never know what you are going to get. I love to capture those in-between moments that would otherwise go unnoticed. We tend to drive a lot as a family, so my gear is always under my feet, ready for an interesting shot. If your camera is always within reach, you've got a good chance at capturing all the in-between real-life moments too.

Photograph by Karthika Gupta

This man saw me with the camera taking pictures and went back to reading the paper. I took it as a sign that he was okay with my taking his photo. Had he said no, I would have respected that.

Having said that, I will say that not everything needs to be photographed. Especially in travel, you might find situations and people who don't appreciate being photographed. Respect those rules and sentiments and put the camera down.

At the end of the day, don't forget to focus on what really matters: the people you share the experience with and all of the memories you make. Photographing your experience is great, but don't get so caught up in documenting it that you forget to live it. Candid images, blurry images, and motion are as much a part of the experience as is the perfectly posed and perfectly lit shots.

Take a step back and take in the scene, and then bring the camera to your face and take a shot. Don't let the anticipation of photographing every minute of your vacation be the reason you travel! Schedule some camera-free days to get yourself energized and rejuvenated as well.



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Self-Check Quiz:

1. How can The Weather Channel app help you?
2. What is the Rule of Three?
3. How can you add a sense of scale to your travel pictures?
4. True or False: Carrying lots of gear is important, so that you always have what you might need!
5. If someone indicates that they do not want their picture taken, what should you do?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karthika Gupta is a wedding, lifestyle, portrait, and editorial photographer based in Chicago. Her style of photography is fun, fresh, and organic. She strives to capture authentic emotions and interactions among her clients and emotive imagery in her commercial work.

She loves connecting with other creatives and photographers and is always ready for an engaging conversation about photography and the art of storytelling.

She can be found online at www.karthikagupta.com and on social media at:

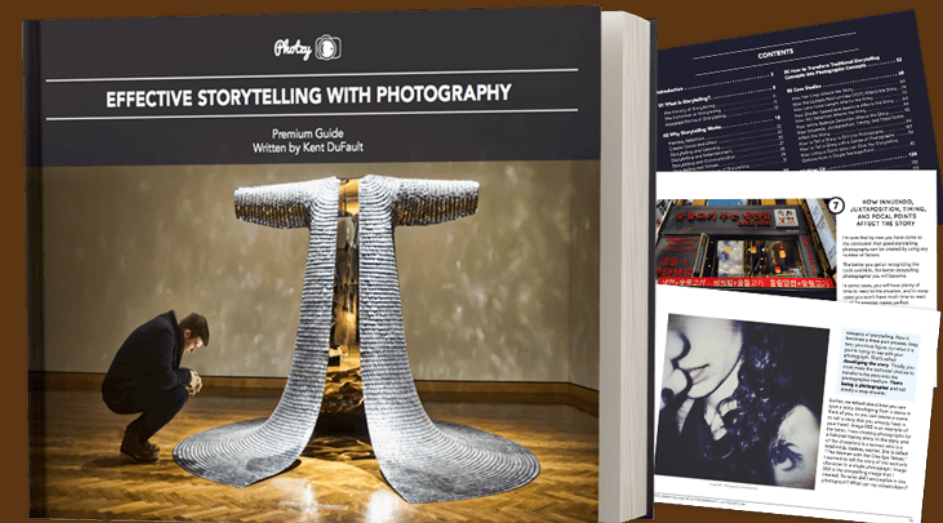
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