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# 5 TIPS TO KILLER VACATION PHOTOS!

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Short Guide

Written by Kent DuFault





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Vacation is a special time for photographers.

In our daily lives, we become overly familiar with the scenery that surrounds us. It can become difficult to find a creative approach when our location is as common to us as our kitchen sink.

Vacation offers the opportunity for a “photographic” rebirth. Freedom of time and new surroundings can give our creativity a major boost.

I began thinking about this quick guide several weeks ago after a friend shared an image with me that he had taken while on vacation in Germany.





DaiLuo  
<https://goo.gl/0EsZCc>

This is not my friend's photograph above. It is, however, almost an exact duplicate of the image that he shared with me. This fact laid out the groundwork for my Quick Guide today.

Let's continue...

After checking out my friend's photograph, I told him it was nice.

I told him that it was technically perfect but that I had already seen this image a thousand times before.

He then lamented that, indeed, when he went to take this photograph, he was alone. But when the sun began to set, and the light turned perfect, fifty other photographers began to surround him. They were all set up in the exact same location, shooting the exact same subject.

And that provides the point for my guide today.

You may be on vacation, and in a famous location surrounded by other photographers, but you don't want to be creating the same photograph that everyone else is.

What's the point in that?

You want your work to stand out.

You want your image to be uniquely you. That's why photography is considered an artistic endeavor.

I'm going to share with you a situation that I was recently in.

I was on vacation. My wife and I were visiting a famous memorial. It was a miserable day. It was crowded. It was pouring rain at times. It wasn't a moment that a photographer would consider ideal.

Unless...

The photographer applied the 5 principles that I'm going to share with you today.

Now, I want to tell you, two of the photographs that were created that day received a lot of attention from clients and colleagues in the art and photography worlds.

One art director went so far as to say he thought one of my *Killer Vacation Photos* was one of the most interesting photographs of that monument that he'd ever seen.

Not bad for such a miserable day! Right?

Right now, I'm going to show you a different photograph that was taken that day at the monument - not the winner - but more in line with what almost all the other photographers were taking. Then I'm going to share with you my "*5 Tips to Killer Vacation Photos*". And finally, I'm going to explain how I used those tips to create my *Killer Vacation Photo*, on a lousy weather day, while on vacation.



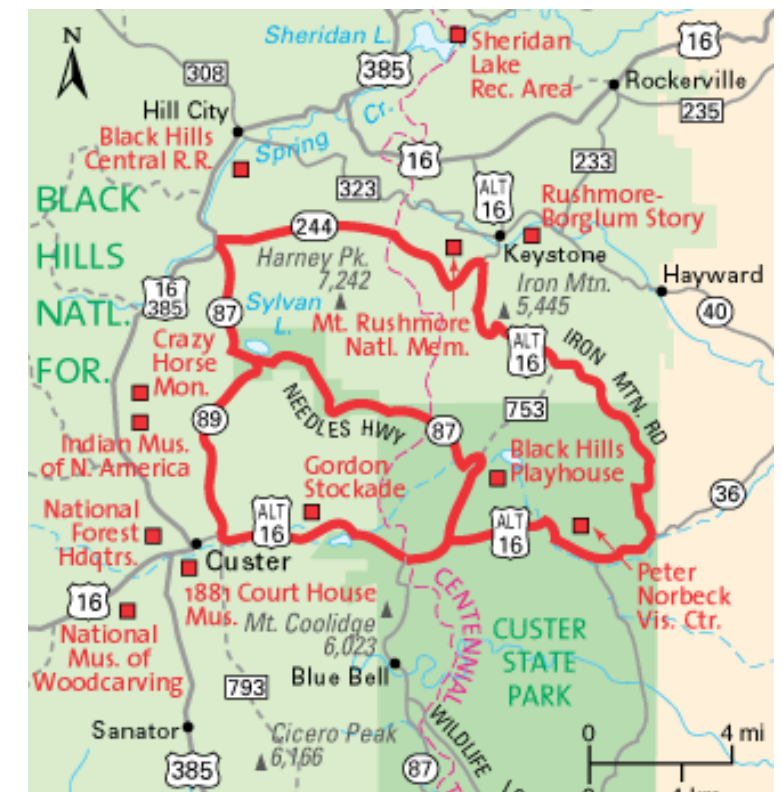
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Now you know, the monument that I visited was Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, United States.

Let me tell you a little bit more about Mount Rushmore and the day that I visited this national treasure of the USA.

The sculpture is carved into the side of a mountain that sits outside of a small town named Keystone, South Dakota.



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When you drive out of Keystone, the road takes a long vertical incline to the entrance of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

The gateway for vehicles to enter the park is six lanes wide. There are two multiple level parking ramps for vehicles. My reason for pointing this out to you is that as a photographer, one may face massive crowds as they fight for their unique shot of a location.

In a way, the rain provided me a benefit by clearing out some of the crowds- at least a little bit. But make no mistake, there were still a lot of people standing on that observation deck that day. Many of them (most of them) had a camera slung around their neck.

And speaking of the rain...

In the middle of the afternoon, I received a broadcast text on my cellphone. It read (essentially), *flash flood warning*; if you need to get out of Keystone today, you better do so immediately.

I hope that paints a picture for you as to what I faced that day as a photographer.

It was raining so hard; we had to drive up to the park twice. The first time we drove up, the statue was completely covered with low-lying rain clouds. We couldn't even see the monument.

The second time we drove up the mountain, we couldn't see the monument when we arrived that time either. We decided to wait. About 30 minutes into our wait the clouds broke up just enough to see the sculpture for about 10 minutes. After that the clouds filled back in, and that was the last viewing of Mount Rushmore that day.

It's important for you to have this backstory as I lay out the "5 Tips to Killer Vacation Photos" and I explain how I used them in this circumstance.

Here are the 5 tips-

- Look where nobody else is looking
- Think in terms of point-of-view (POV)
- Don't be afraid to include people
- Roll with the weather. Use what you've been given.
- Shoot first. Edit later.

Let me share with you the photograph of which my art director friend said, "It's one of the most unique images of Mount Rushmore that I've ever seen."



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There are countless photographs of Mount Rushmore. There are countless photographs of Mount Rushmore with the sun setting, or the sun rising. There are countless photographs of just “the faces” of the monument. There are countless photographs of people standing in front of the monument. This photograph is a “killer” vacation photograph because I applied the 5 tips mentioned above. By applying those tips, I created a photograph that has a strong graphic element AND a strong emotional context. It stands alone when compared to all the other photos of Mount Rushmore.

Let’s talk about how the creative process occurred in creating this photograph.





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## TIP #1 – LOOK WHERE NOBODY ELSE IS LOOKING

While I was standing on the observation deck for the monument at least 90% of the people around me were looking UP at the statue. This was true even when the monument wasn't visible due to the clouds.

There was also a small contingent of “serious” photographers, who had tripods, big lenses, etc., that were wandering around in search of putting a tree in as a framing element, or using a path as a leading line.

When I'm looking to create a Killer Vacation Photograph, I often begin by looking for “graphic elements”. I think of “graphic elements” as visual objects that “hum” together with energy. They fit. They work together. They create a design. They tell the story of the place in an artistic way.

On this day, when Mount Rushmore was not visible (on my first trip to the memorial), I found this graphic element in a small group of people standing under an umbrella.



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Why did I see this as a strong graphic statement? The scene has distinct components of composition. The three bodies have similar shape, yet two of them are closer together than the third person. This creates a tension. I recognized the overall monotone color, and the fact that the pink band (on the man in the center) would create a focal point. The rectangular tiles and blocks of the wall provided a repeating pattern. The umbrella provided a distinct shape, a juxtaposition, which served as an anchor to the group in the center of the photograph. Many photographers might have passed on this shot because the monument wasn't visible. (That's why we were all there. Right? To see the monument!) I will talk to you more about that in a minute. But, in my mind, I still would have liked this image for my own personal use, even if I never saw the monument that day. It effectively TOLD the story of that day of my vacation. Were there some elements in this shot that I didn't like? Sure, but we will talk about that more when we get to Tip #5. Remember, it was my effort to apply the "5 Tips to Killer Vacation Photos" that eventually took this image to the next level. One shot may not be the final answer to your quest!

When you spot your photograph, react fast. This group stood in the "graphic pose" that caught my eye for about five seconds. That was long enough for me to fire off three frames before the moment disappeared forever.



## TIP #2 – THINK IN TERMS OF POINT-OF-VIEW (POV)

Everyone has the ability to buy a good camera.  
Everyone has the ability to buy lenses. Everyone has the ability to buy editing software.

The *only* thing that can make your vacation photographs *different*, and turn them into *killer vacation photographs*, is your *unique point-of-view*.

When my friend in Germany noticed that all the other photographers were crowding around him... something should have clicked in his head that said, "This point-of-view is not unique". That being said, there is no reason why you can't take those pictures. Mimicking other photographers is a great training tool on the technical aspects of photography.

I also take the pictures that everybody else does. I refer to that as "getting them out of the way", so I can find my unique vision- my unique point of view!

We all have a unique POV of the world. Finding your POV is your challenge. Have you ever noticed how some photographers always shoot wide? Others always shoot with a long telephoto lens. And yet others only shoot looking up, or down, or using HDR, etc. They migrate back to those techniques again and again because that's their style- their POV.

My POV is including a strong graphic element. I have been shooting like that since I started photography at the age of fourteen. In the beginning, I didn't know why I was creating pictures like that. It just came natural to me. It took years for me to learn, and realize, that this "graphic vision" was my unique point of view. When I had my commercial photo studio, my clients called it "The Kent Effect". If you look at my online portfolio, [Kent's 500px](#), you'll notice a consistent pattern of strong graphic elements.

Strong graphic elements are almost always the basis of every photograph that I "see". It doesn't matter what the subject is.

Spend some time thinking about how you see the world, and how you can make that vision your unique POV.



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## TIP #3 – DON'T BE AFRAID TO INCLUDE PEOPLE

Please excuse the rather rough Photoshop job you are about to see here... it was done strictly to illustrate a point for you.

If my photograph had been created without the group in the foreground, it loses all of its impact. What does the group do (beside add the graphic element)? It adds depth. The foreground disappears without them. The group of people also adds scale. They help to give a sense to the size of the monument. They also help tell the story of the day (it was raining and miserable and there was a lot of waiting to get to see Mount Rushmore!).

Including people won't be the answer to every image. However, you should always address the question when you're out creating Killer Vacation Photos.

This brings me to the second Killer Vacation Photo from this particular trip that received interest from numerous photography buyers.

Let me share that photograph with you now.





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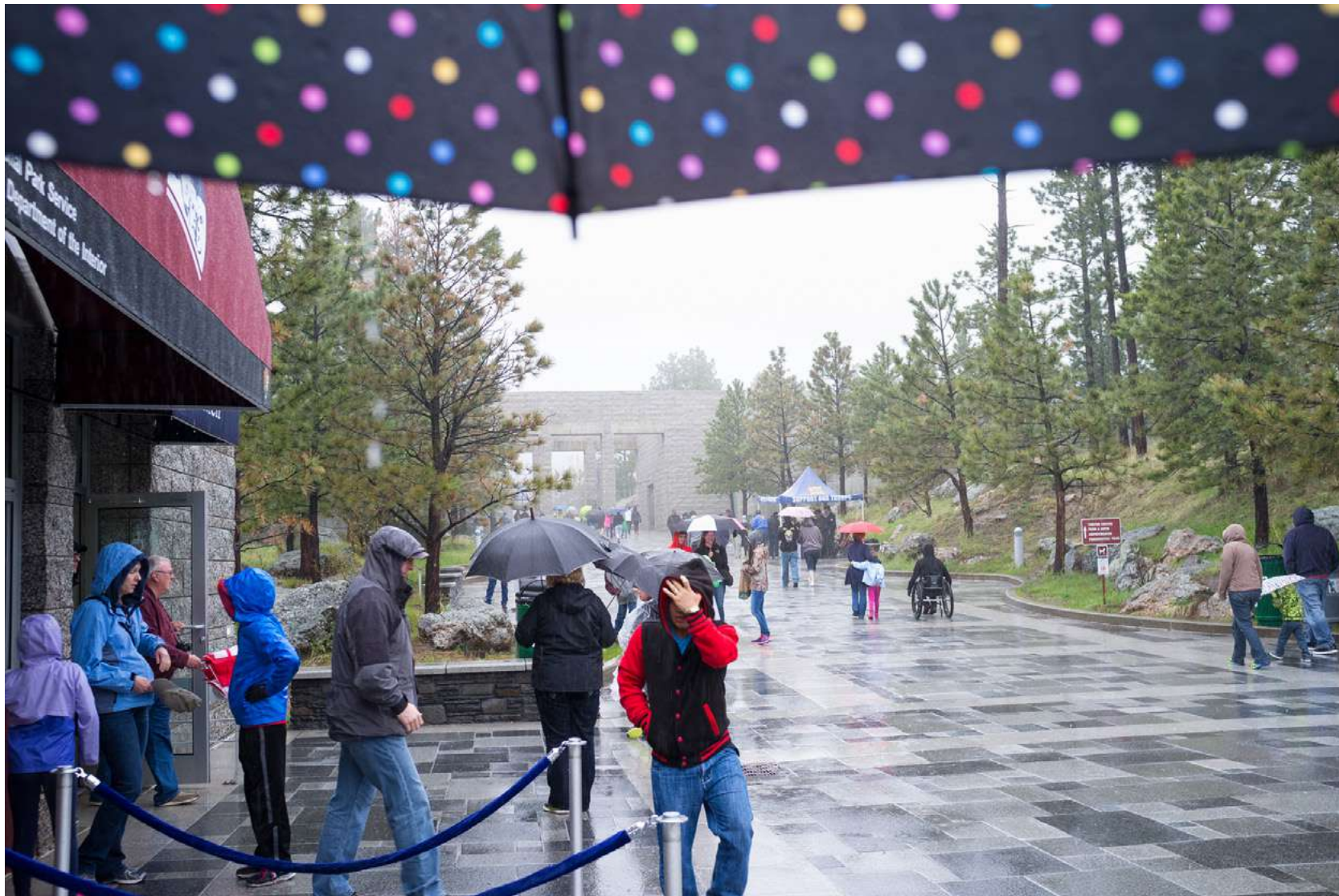
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This area is known as the “Badlands” of South Dakota. It is located within a several hour drive from Mount Rushmore and is a National Park of the United States. I wanted to share this image with you because I believe it re-enforces the value of including people in your Killer Vacation Photos- even when the image is a landscape. If you put your thumb over the small group standing on that point, doesn’t this image lose all of its impact? In fact, in my mind, the image would be almost worthless without them!

Reasons for adding the human element-

1. Humans are interesting.
2. Humans can help establish scale and distance.
3. Human interaction can help tell the “story” of what is happening in the photograph.
4. Proper placement of a human within your photograph can help establish your composition. A human creates a natural focal point.
5. If you wish to sell your images, including humans greatly increases the value of your image.





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## TIP #4 - ROLL WITH THE WEATHER. USE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN.

It's easy to become discouraged when the weather isn't providing the lighting and general setting that you'd hoped for.

My best advice is to try and use it to your advantage.

I think the Mount Rushmore image clearly shows how some creative thinking can provide opportunity, no matter what the situation is.

When I first arrived at the Mount Rushmore Visitor Center, this was the view from under my umbrella. Normally, you would see the monument in the background (behind those arches). It was a miserable, wet, windy day. It would have been easy to just put the camera away. However, when you apply the "5 Tips to Killer Vacation Photos", you never put the camera away. You simply adjust your thinking.





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As you adjust your thinking, you may begin pointing your camera at subjects other than your original intention. It might be a macro shot, or an abstract image, or an indoor photo, or any other number of subjects.

In fact, I went through that process myself on this day...

As I attempted to "roll with the weather, and use what I had been given", I shot this photograph in the area surrounding the observation deck. It's nice. However, it doesn't have the same visual "graphic" impact as my two Killer Vacation Photos.

As you are rolling with the weather, it is important that you keep shooting. Keep your unique point-of-view in a highly charged state. Be reactive. Happy accidents occur all the time!

Which brings me to our next photograph...





Earlier, I told you how the clouds opened up for about 10 minutes. During this “window” the monument was barely visible. My mind went to work...

And that brings us to...

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## TIP #5 – SHOOT FIRST. EDIT LATER.

When the clouds opened up (ever so briefly) I thought back to my earlier shot of the group under the umbrella.

It occurred to me how cool it would be if they were seeing the monument through the parting clouds.

Could I Photoshop the monument into that image? I wondered.

In all honesty, I wasn't sure.

But, I wanted to have the ability to try.

And that, folks, is what tip #5 is all about.

Think about the present. Think about the past. Think about the future.

Can you "create" something that was better than what God gave you that day?

This is what was going through my mind when the clouds parted.

I immediately returned to the approximate spot where I shot the group under the umbrella. I wasn't sure exactly where I had stood, but I was close.

I needed my angle on the monument to match the previous photo of the group under the umbrella as I created five shots (similar to the one above) with each shot showing the Presidents to a varying degree (the clouds were blowing by quickly).

Now, it was time to see if I could put it all together.



I had three shots of the group standing there. However, the umbrella was blowing in the wind. Only one shot had a nice sharp image of the umbrella. But, it wasn't the best group shot. So, I moved the umbrella from one shot to the other. I also removed the two plaques and the vent cover as they distracted from my "graphic" point-of-view.

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After moving the umbrella, I selected the President's faces from the shot above. I used a wide feathered selection and pasted it onto a new layer in Photoshop.

I spent some time fussing with the settings until I was *Super Happy* with my *Killer Vacation Photo*.

Once again, here is the end result...

So, there you go. Keep these Killer Vacation Photo tips in mind, and have fun on your next vacation!



# Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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