What **happens** at a Workshop, *stays* at a Workshop...

...*or does it?*

eBOOKS
VARINA & JAY PATEL

By Varina and Jay Patel

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How do you know which workshop is right for you? There are many important considerations - time of year, length of the workshop, physical requirements, cost, and more. Get as much information as possible so that you can make an informed decision - and then find out what you'll need so that you are prepared when you get there.

It's important to remember that a good instructor is not the same as a good photographer. Just because someone can take great photos doesn't mean they can teach... so find out as much as you can about your instructor before you go, too. Ask around - read what they've written - and read what others have said about them. Finding a good instructor is as important as finding a good workshop. And don't take the instructor's word for it. Look for unbiased sources of information.

Of course, every workshop will be different, but we thought it might be helpful to show you how one of our workshops goes.

Photograph © Varina Patel

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Thursday: Scouting Report

We always arrive at least one day early when we travel for workshops, just in case a flight is delayed or our travel plans are interrupted. Most of the time, everything goes well, and we get an extra day for scouting and shooting.

We got up at 5:30 on Thursday, and headed out to a "corkscrew" formation to shoot the sunrise. The sky was pretty, and we got a few nice shots. It felt great to be out in the desert again – camera in hand. There's nothing like watching the crazy-beautiful mountains light up as the sun rises out here. It's absolutely breath-taking.

We stopped at Bigwater to pick up a portable lunch, and then headed for Cottonwood Canyon road. A "Road Closed" sign blocked the entrance – warning of a rock fall ten miles in. We had hoped to visit "Yellow Rock" – but that would have taken us about 14 miles down Cottonwood Canyon Road… well past the rock fall. Instead, we drove past the sign, and headed for a BLM road about 4.5 miles in. At least we could check out the Wahweep Hoodoos.

Photograph © Jay Patel

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Photograph © Varina Patel

The hoodoos were beautiful – but we expected that. We also took some detail shots of the rocks in the dry wash. Salt crystals had formed as the water evaporated, leaving beautiful white rings and patterns on every stone. We decided to bring our students back to this location – weather permitting. Scouting and preparation always pay off!

We left in time to make it back to Kanab for our group dinner. It was great to see some of our old students back again, and to meet all the new ones. We had a great group this time – 15 of us, all together - including a couple of "significant others"... and "Wendy" the dog... our workshop Mascot!

We introduced ourselves informally, and asked our students to give a brief introduction as well. We always try to get an idea of what each student hopes to gain from the workshop during our first-day dinner gathering. It helps us focus our workshops – and helps our students formulate their own goals.



Photograph © Jay Patel

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Photograph © Jay Patel

Friday Morning: Compositional Challenge

On Friday, we were out of bed by 4:30 am. We gathered our students in front of the lodge at 5:30, and piled into our high-clearance 4WDs - headed for Glen Canyon Recreation Area in Arizona. We arrived before sunrise, and we split the students into two groups. Those who needed help with hyperfocal distance stayed with Varina. She explained the technical details, and then walked each of them through the basic setup until they felt comfortable doing it on their own. Jay took the second group of students to help them work on compositional skills.

The location is a true compositional challenge – and the perfect place to practice. We try to choose at least one or two locations where the students are challenged to see beyond the obvious. Places like this require a little extra thought and creativity.

Check out some of our other eBooks for more information on composition…





… and for everyday tips on learning to see creatively!

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After sunrise, students meandered towards the parking lots – looking for details and macro shots. We spent another hour shooting close-ups, and then gathered for breakfast in Page, Arizona.

Photograph © Robert Beideman

© Varina and Jay Patel



Photograph © Cristina Iacob

Friday Afternoon: Mud Wrestling

Afterward, we headed back to Utah to shoot in Paria Canyon. Vast stretches of sucking mud make this canyon particularly messy – but it's one of our favorite spots for shooting. Colorful sandstone walls provide a beautiful backdrop, and students can photograph the impressive "windows" in the rocks.

Despite the deep mud – at least one student fell in, and almost everyone was muddy up to their knees - it's hard to tear students away from the crazy patterns, and the textured sandstone. We finally dragged everyone away around 4:00 pm – and gathered for a quick lunch of crackers, tuna, and dried fruit at the trail-head.

Click to Play Video!

Shawn mud-wrestling with the Paria River



Video © Varina Patel

© Varina and Jay Patel

Friday Evening: Toadstools

We piled back into our 4WDs, and headed for the Toadstools. Jay and I have been to this location several times, but it was new to almost all of our students. The Toadstools are beautiful on their own, but the area offers incredible finds to those who explore it a little more thoroughly. We stayed to shoot the stars on this moonless night – helping our students determine the correct shutter speed and aperture for night photography, and doing a bit of light painting as well. The return-hike was pitch-dark. We suggest that students bring along head-lamps or flashlights for a reason!

We were back in Kanab around 9:45 pm. Many students stay up late – processing photos or chatting – but Jay and I headed for bed. We need to be alert during the day, so sleep is essential. We always wait to process our photographs when we return home.



Photograph © Radu Iacob



Photograph © Varina Patel

© Varina and Jay Patel



Photograph © Aaron Burdick

Saturday Morning: Catching Rainbows

We let our students sleep in on Saturday – all the way until 5:00 am! Back in Ohio, they were expecting 2-5 inches of snow – but in Utah, we were enjoying daytime temperatures in the 70s. Lucky us!

The Land of the Sleeping Rainbows is named for the unusual bands of color in the mountains. The region is painted in typical Southwest reds and oranges – but they are accompanied by deep purples, greens, and yellows. The challenge was finding an appealing foreground object for wide-angle photography. The ground was cluttered with brush and scrub, so simplifying an image was tough. Everyone seemed comfortable with hyperfocal distance, and they were all working with graduated neutral density filters. We were getting lots of questions about composition and exposure – but for the most part, our students were in their element. And the sunrise did not disappoint!



Photograph © Jay Patel

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Photograph © Shawn Vogt

Saturday Afternoon: Exploring Textures

After our sunrise shoot, we headed toward Cottonwood Canyon Road. The drive out to the Wahweep Hoodoos was a real treat for those who love off-road driving. This was where those 4WD vehicles were essential. We reached the trail-head without losing anyone to the rough terrain, and hiked out to the hoodoos as a group. Our students spent a good part of the day climbing up and down, and shooting these majestic stones from every possible angle. It's great to see so much enthusiasm in the middle of the desert.

The return hike took much longer. Students spent so much time shooting those neat salt crystals and the mud patterns in the wash that we spent a lot more time out there than we'd expected.

We often reserve one afternoon for a critique session, but the remoteness of the particular workshop - and the short daylight hours - made that impractical for this trip. Instead, we reminded students that they could post images for critique on our forums for a few weeks after we returned home.



Photograph © Neal Yu

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In the end, we decided to circumvent mutiny by avoiding the long drive back to Kanab for our planned meal. We snagged a quick convenience-store lunch and rested for a few minutes at the visitor center, before heading back to the Land of the Sleeping Rainbows. We got lucky – the sky was incredible!

At the end of the day, we headed back to Luo's for dinner, and were in bed by about 9:30 pm. Better get some sleep – tomorrow, we'll be up at 3:15 am.

Photograph © Jay Patel

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Sunday - Off to Bryce

Sunday was the last day or our workshop, and we drove North to Bryce Canyon National Park for our sunrise shoot. The drive from Kanab takes a couple of hours in good weather conditions, so we gathered our students at 4 am. The park offers an incredible variety of options for composition – and of course, a spectacular view of the hoodoos in the Bryce amphitheater. Many of our students were visiting for the first time. They were as awed by the beauty of the place as we are every time the sun lights up those bizarre sandstone formations. Getting a good shot isn't as easy as you'd think, though. Jay and I spent the morning working our way back and forth from one student to the next – helping with filters, exposure, and composition. Our students captured some beautiful shots!

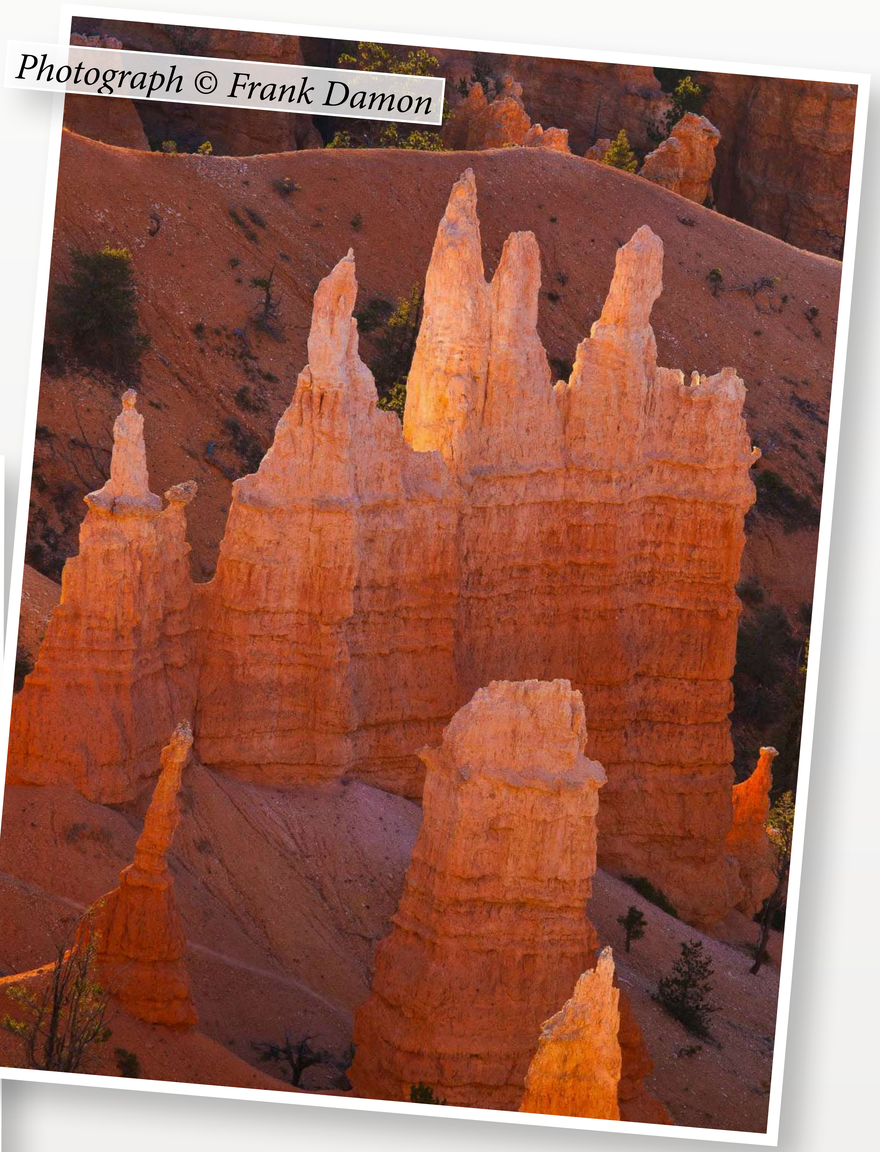


Photograph © Robert Beideman

Some students left early to capture the stars over Bryce. Those low-light experiments at the Toadstools on Friday really paid off!



Photograph © Shawn Vogt



Photograph © Frank Damon

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Photograph © Aaron Burdick

When the morning shoot was done, we drove over to Ruby's Lodge for breakfast. We enjoyed one last meal with our students - looking at each other's photos and discussing plans for future trips. It was an absolute pleasure getting to know all our students better, and we feel honored to count them among our friends.

At last, we said our goodbyes and headed out - driving toward Zion National Park. A bald eagle flew overhead as we left the valley – this truly is the Land of the Free.

We had several hours to kill before we needed to be at the airport, so we planned to spend some time shooting the Autumn colors along the Virgin River. Of course, some of our students had the same idea. :) We waved and shouted as we drove past, but couldn't find parking nearby, so we continued on our way.

When we finally found a free parking spot in the park, we followed a small trail towards the water. Varina heard a rustling in the tall grass, and without further warning, a terrified stag leaped directly into her path – so close that she could see the whites of its eyes. It was as surprised to see her as she was to see it – but it made a split second decision to turn tail and run. It's a darn good thing it didn't decide to plow right through her – that set of antlers was impressive!



Photograph © Varina Patel

© Varina and Jay Patel

Photograph © Varina Patel

We decided to drive out to The Valley of Fire in Nevada for a sunset shoot instead. We hadn't been to this park before, so we spent an hour scouting location - then chose a parking spot and started walking. As the sun dropped lower in the sky, we searched for interesting foreground. There were leading lines everywhere, and the incredibly rich colors in the rocks left us speechless.

At last, the sky began to glow. The colors were fantastic - a perfect compliment to the crazy-colored sandstone at our feet. That last shoot was a glorious finish to another great workshop.

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What's Next?

Some students needed help with the fundamentals of photography - exposure, histograms, and filters - but most had a pretty good grasp of the basics. Our more advanced students focused on composition, hyperfocal distance, live-view, and bracketing. We also worked to help our students think creatively, handle "poor" lighting conditions, and shoot in low-light situations.

When the field work is done, the workshop isn't really over. Students are invited to showcase their work on our forums after processing. The exchange of critiques (both giving and receiving) is an essential part of the learning process. Some of our students have already signed up for other workshops with us this year. We can't wait to see them again!



In the Windows at Paria River

"Hand over the camera!"



We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to all our students for joining us in Utah, and for their generosity in allowing us to include their photos in this eBook. We had a great time, everyone!

And Tex - thanks for those great hats!

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Shades of White
© Jay Patel



The Dreaming
© Varina Patel



Monster's Ball
© Jay Patel



Stand Tall
© Varina Patel



Ghost Stones
© Jay Patel



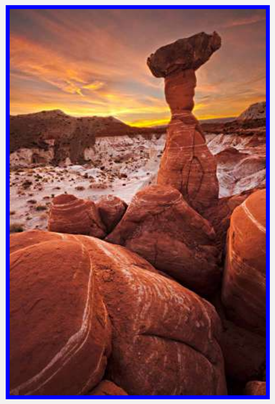
Survival
© Jay Patel



Missing Moqui
© Robert Biedeman



Paria Canyon
© Cristina Iacob



Land Before Time
© Radu Iacob



Story in Stone
© Varina Patel



Devadatta
© Aaron Burdick

More Thumbnails

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More Thumbnails



The Burning Bush
© Jay Patel



Shallows
© Shawn Vogt



Cracked
© Neal Yu



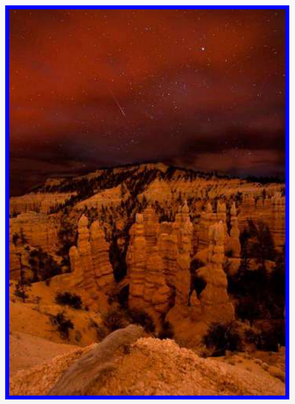
After Glow
© Jay Patel



Hoodoo Dawn
© Frank Damon



Bryce Canyon
© Shawn Vogt



Checkmate
© Robert Biedeman



Path of the Two Vehicles
© Aaron Burdick



Soft
© Varina Patel



Fire in the Valley of Fire
© Varina Patel



Around the Bend
© Varina Patel

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Jay Patel

Seeds of Jay Patel's appreciation for beautiful places were planted early in his childhood on numerous trips to some of the most breathtaking locations on the Indian subcontinent. His passion for such magnificent places now manifests itself in a continuous search to capture nature's majesty with his camera. Jay's career in photography began in the summer of 2001 when he purchased his first digital SLR. In subsequent years, he spent much time reading photographic magazines and Internet articles and studying the styles of great landscape photographers. He has had no formal education or training in photography.

Contact: pateljx@gmail.com
Website: http://www.jaypatelphotography.com

Varina Patel

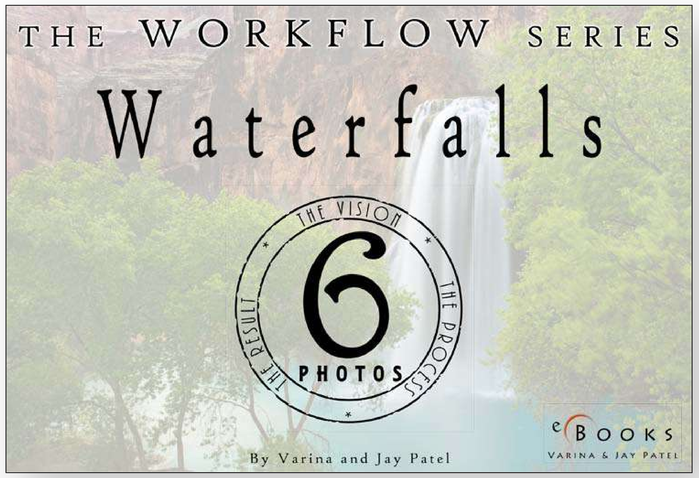
Landscape photography is demanding. It is not unusual to climb a steep trail and wait several hours for sunset – despite intense heat or numbing cold – only to climb back down in the dark without getting the shot because the light wasn't right. Varina is more than willing to return to a location many times if necessary. She doesn't mind cold hands, wet feet, muddy clothes, or aching muscles – if in the end, the photograph makes an impression. She loves hiking long trails through wilderness, crossing rivers on slippery stones, and climbing sand dunes by the light of the moon. Varina thrives on rising before the sun in order to capture those first rays of sun on the mountain, and she is irresistibly drawn to the challenge of finding the right light, in the right place, at the right time.

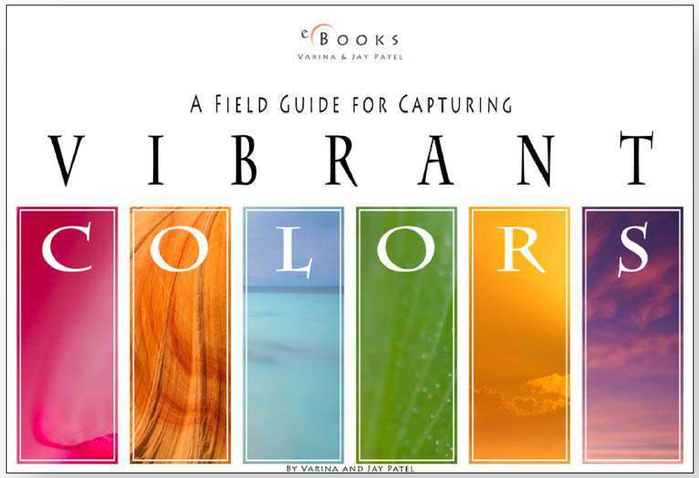
Contact: varina.patel@gmail.com
Website: http://www.photographybyvarina.com

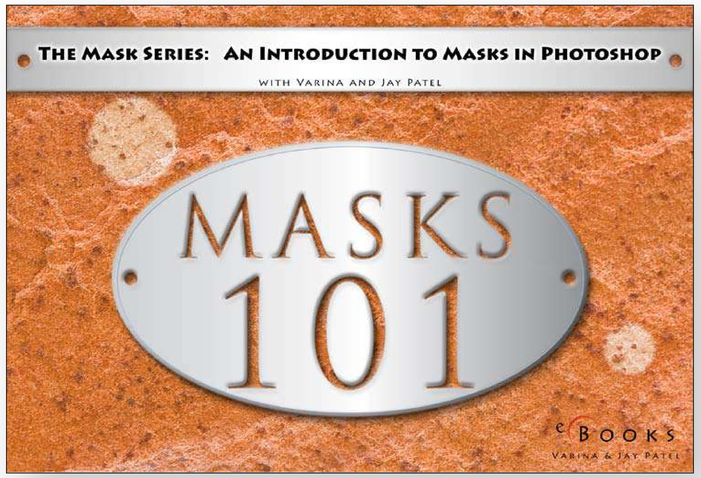
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