

PHOTOGRAPHY

I see the light.

For me one of the most enjoyable experiences while travelling is photographing what I see around me. Some people argue that with a camera constantly glued to my face, I forget to enjoy myself. They tell me the camera acts as a barrier, people resent having a lens thrust in their face and by doing so I treat their communities as human zoos. I say “Bollocks”.

I find photography helps me look harder, irrespective of whether it's appropriate to take the shot or not. My memories are therefore more vivid. By studying every face, peering around every corner, I learn more. I travel better. For me, photography brings markets and busy streets alive.

A picture speaks a thousand words in anyone's language. With the advent of digital cameras I can instantly share (and erase) photos, cut through language barriers and making friends. However, please, if you do promise to send someone a print, make sure you do.

Also, please ask first. If somebody doesn't wish to be photographed or obviously looks uncomfortable, respect that; there will be another, better shot around the corner and you'll feel better for it. One of my most memorable evenings was spent with a man who declined to be photographed riding his donkey cart in Cappadocia (Turkey). When I smiled and put my camera away, he gladly gave me and my friend Steph a cart ride back to town. A few hours later, drunk on aniseed *raki* and enjoying a delicious *imam bayildi* he insisted on being photographed. It's a crazy mixed up world.

A tourist in Northern Kenya who, like me, paid for the permission to photograph the village. Many view this as exploitative and demeaning. The scheme however was set up to discourage begging and allow the cash to be pooled for the collective benefit of the whole village. The money was used to buy medicines and employ a teacher to run a tiny school. Five dollars well spent? Some thought not, preferring to stay in the jeep.



WHAT I USE

People often ask what camera I use. I'm not promoting it and I'm sure it's no better than other brands but for what it's worth I use a Canon 400D digital camera which came with a 18mm-55mm lens. I also brought a 70mm-300mm telephoto lens (the cheap one without the image stabilizer). I found that more than enough to carry.



My friend Chris shares some images with children in Papua New Guinea. Digital cameras can be a great aid to bridging cultural divides and breaking the ice.

All You Ever Needed to Know About Travel Photography but were too Afraid to Ask.

Photography has been made needlessly complicated over the years. When you strip aside all the bullshit, photography is based on a few simple principles. All the rest is just 'bells and whistles'. In photography, like other art forms, it is important to understand the medium in which you are working. The medium is light.

WHAT THOSE LITTLE PICTURES ON YOUR CAMERA REALLY MEAN.

To take creative control of your photography you have to learn to stop seeing the camera icons in terms of suggestions but instead see them as different setting combinations that will produce different pictures – then choose the one that best realizes your creativity. For example, lets say you want to photograph a man running but you want him streaking across your pic in a blur, while those walking about him remain in focus. You wouldn't get this shot by choosing the 'running man icon' but you might get it choosing the 'landscape icon'. Your best chance is to use the 'Tv' mode and set the speed to 1/30 second. Ninety percent of the time I get a good exposure and realise my creativity by using only these four modes.



Action mode:

Forget if you are shooting action or not instead think fast shutter, big aperture.

Good if you want blurry backgrounds, to freeze motion, or have a large telephoto lens that is difficult to keep steady.



Landscape mode:

Think small aperture and good depth of field. Also good if you want slower shutter speeds.



Shutter Priority

You choose the camera shutter speed – be it fast or slow – and let the camera balance the equation with the appropriate aperture.



Aperture Priority

You choose the camera aperture size– be it big or small – and let the camera balance the equation with the appropriate shutter speed. Opposite to the Shutter Priority described above.

Understanding light.

Lets call a perfectly exposed photograph **Z**. To get a perfect **Z** we need two things, lets call them **X** and **Y**. Therefore **X+Y=Z**. It's that simple.

X and Y must **always** add up to Z to be picture perfect. If you change X then you must also change Y or vice versa. It is not arbitrary. Whenever you change one you must change the other. If you make a change to X then you must also change Y to balance the equation. You can have any combination of exposure settings you like, but to be perfectly balanced x and y must add up to Z.

But what the hell is X and Y then?

X and Y are the two factors that control how much light reaches your film (or chip if you are digital). No matter how expensive or how many modes your camera boasts there are, when it's all said and done, there are only these two variables.

X = Shutter speed. Inside your camera there is a curtain that opens and closes revealing your film (or chip) to the incoming light. If it opens and closes quickly then only a little light will get through. Similarly, if it moves slowly a lot of light will pass into your camera. The shutter speed is timed in hundredths of a second. 30 is actually 1/30th of a second. 500 is 1/500th of a second and so on. This can be confusing because a larger number (i.e. 1000) corresponds to less light (the film will only be exposed for 1/1000 of a second). Exposures in excess of a second are usually display like this, 4" (4 seconds). This: 4 is 1/4 of a second. Got it?



Try to tell a story. This picture has more than correct exposure going for it. The fact that this Turkish gentleman is wearing an apron and holding a shoe with an over-locker in the background provides context. It tells us he is a cobbler.

Y = aperture. The aperture refers to the size of the hole the light passes through. A small hole will allow less light than a large hole. The higher the number the smaller the hole. The holes are numbered from 2.5 to 32 (although not every lens will have this range). 32 is a very small hole and admits only a little light. 2.5 is the largest whole and admits a lot of light.

Okay sounds simple but understanding this means what?

It means your photos will be perfectly exposed. Like the picture of this Turkish cobbler (opposite), your photos should have a complete **tonal range**. There should be jet blacks in the darkest shadows and brilliant whites in the highlights. Most of the tones should be somewhere in between. A good tonal depth shows great sensitivity, an image that is largely black or white is more dramatic and said to have high **contrast**.

Excellent tell me more.

Each of these two settings have consequences. The consequences are neither good nor bad. Deciding on which consequence is called creativity.

Shutter speed. If you choose a quick shutter speed, your subjects will look frozen in time. Quick moving objects will be crystal clear. Individual drops of water (like those on page 27 in Roam) will be caught in that exact moment. If you choose a slow shutter, quick moving objects will be blurry as they have had time to move during the moment of exposure (like the dancers on pg 108). Deciding on which is a creative decision.

Aperture. If the hole is very large, objects before and after, the point of focus will be blurry. This is called a shallow **depth of field**, (the distance over which objects appear in focus). An example of a photo with a shallow depth of field appears on pg 90. If the aperture is small the depth of field will be greater and both near and far objects will appear in focus (as in the photo of horse riding on pg 170). Deciding on which is a creative decision.

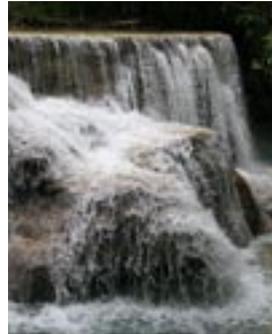
Here's some examples.



This photo has a shallow depth of field because of the large aperture and the blossoms are blurry.



This photo has a deep depth of field and even the distant blossoms are more or less in focus.



This photo has been taken with a fast shutter speed to freeze the water droplets.



This photo has been taken with a slow shutter speed and the water now has moved during exposure.

Why can't I have everything, all at once

The amount of light is a given (z), you're job is to adjust the above two components (x and y) until they balance z. You can always try adding more light by using a **flash** or buying more sensitive film (known as the film's **ASA** or **ISO** rating). However if you fail to balance your equation correctly one of two things will happen.

- 1 You will allow too much light in and **over expose** your photograph; it will be too light.
2. You will not allow enough light in and **under exposure** your photograph; it will be too dark.



The depth of field is too shallow in this picture. The point of focus are the beads on her shoulder. And while I wanted the background blurred it would have been better to have her eyes also in focus.

But what's with all those modes on my camera?

They are automatic settings that simply juggle the shutter speeds and aperture sizes on your behalf. However turning the dial to the 'man sprinting' (action mode) setting is not the way to go simply because your subject is running! See the side bar on pg 4 for fuller explanations.

But my photos are still blurry!

The most common cause of blurry photo's is **camera shake**. There are three solutions.

- 1.** Hold the camera still. Doh!
You will be unable to do this effectively when the shutter speed is slower than 30 (1/30 of a second).
- 2.** Increase your shutter speed so that you jittery hands aren't affecting your shots as much. Long telephoto and zoom lenses make camera shake more pronounced. That is just the way it is. I increase my shutter speed to offset this but then I'm also forced to increase my aperture. (X+Y must always equal Z).
- 3.** Use a tripod or rest your camera on something still – like a bag of rice.

I get my photos back from the developer and they are shit.

That is because the picture is actually exposed twice. Once when the light hits the film (or chip) and again when the light hits the photographic paper on which the image is being transferred. When you drop off your film at a one hour developer's they load it into a sophisticated machine controlled by a computer. The computer takes readings and exposes your film accordingly. If a photo is predominantly dark, except for a spectacular streak of red, the computer will over expose the picture in an effort to correct what it thinks is an under exposed picture. It doesn't see a sunset. You have 3 options.

1. Accept this limitation, find a developer whom you trust and accept that some of the prints will be poorly exposed by them.
2. Invest in a darkroom and associated equipment and chemicals and do it yourself.
3. Invest in a computer and Adobe PhotoShop. A digital dark room as it were.

Three Essential PhotoShop Tools for the Photographer

PhotoShop is a colossal program. It is an extremely sophisticated piece of software that goes far beyond the traditional techniques found in a dark room. A debate rages over the impact PhotoShop has made on the world of photography and in particular photojournalism. Traditionalist's champion the 'purity' of an unaltered image and the skill it takes to capture it in the camera. Others see digital art as an exciting frontier in which previously unachievable images can now be expressed. Others just want to put big tits on their girlfriends.

Whatever your view, these three techniques will improve your photos. Whether you choose to use them or not is up to you but every image in this book, indeed every image in every book and every magazine in the book shop where this book was purchased have been digitalized in order to be printed. Even photos shot on film are digitalized (and then at least two of these three techniques applied) if they are to be printed.

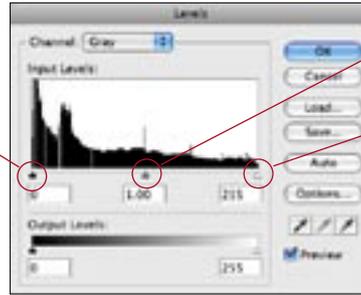
What follows is what I feel to be the simplest way to achieve a desired result. It is not necessarily the only or even the best way to use PhotoShop, (for that you'll need a thousand page manual), but it is all I did to the pics in Roam.

Levels.

This is the most important tool. It is the equivalent of a darkroom and it is here that you tweak the tonal range to ensure that your photo remains perfectly exposed. It cannot correct a poorly exposed photograph in the first place, only enhance a correctly exposed one. To make the explanation simpler I turned the photo of the Turkish cobbler to black and white. (**Image>Mode>Grayscale**. Answer OK when asked if you want to discard the colour information).

Bring up the levels window, (**Image>Adjustments>Levels**) and this will appear.

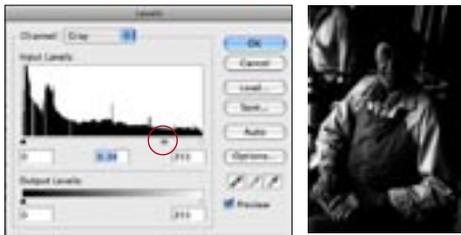
The black triangle refers to the black in the image or the dark tones. Because this histogram has two spikes near the black triangle I know that there are more black (or near black) pixels in this photograph than there are white.



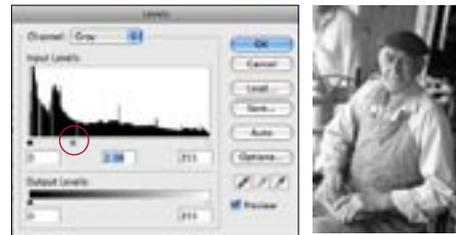
The gray triangle represents the mid tones.

The white triangle represents the highlights or pixels whose value is white.

To adjust this image slide these triangles around and see what happens. If you want to lighten the mid tones slide the gray triangle towards the white triangle. To darken the image, slide the grey triangle in the opposite direction. To increase the contrast slide the black triangle to the right. All the pixels to the left of the triangle will now turn black. Do the same to the white triangle to increase the number of white pixels. Viola, more contrast. Adjustments are usually subtle. Otherwise press **Auto** and the computer will do it for you. When happy press **OK**. Below is the image above with the mid tones adjusted.



This image is now too dark because of the position of the grey triangle.



This image is now too light because of the position of the grey triangle.

Colour images are essentially the same although you have the further option of adjusting individual colour channels and thus alter individual colours. Choose the colour channel you want from the options next to the word 'Channel'. The CMYK colour mode works like the Black and white (grayscale) colour mode above but across 4 colours (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black). The RGB colour mode works slightly differently and is slightly more complex to understand but has a larger range of colours. Give both a try.

If you want to saturate the colours in your image choose **Image>Adjustments>Hue/Saturation** and adjust the saturation slider.

The Cropping tool

The cropping tool is used to re-frame the photograph. Sometimes there is too much sky, sometimes there is too much ground and sometimes there is an ex-partner in the shot that you wish really hadn't been there.

No worries, simply select the cropping tool from the tool bar (shown right), drag a marquee around the part of the image that you wish to save and let go of the mouse's button. A line of 'marching ants' appears indicating the area you have selected. By clicking and dragging on the various handles you'll be able to fine tune your selection. The corner handles also allow you to rotate your selection which is great for straightening horizon lines if you didn't hold your camera level. There are even pictures to be found within pictures. Like below.

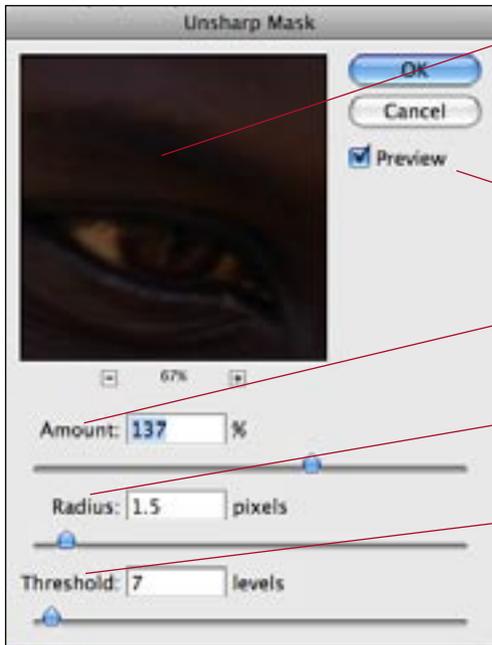


When you crop an image you can change the emphasis.

Unsharp Mask

This unlikely named tool is used to sharpen out of focus images. This is ideally suited to situations in which the image is only slightly out of focus, it cannot correct images that are more than a little blurry. It works by re-aligning pixels that occur where two colours meet. By emphasizing these colour changes, images will appear sharper. However if you apply too much unsharp mask your pictures become jazzy and will no longer look natural. So go easy tiger.

To bring up the Unsharp window choose **Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask**. The following window will appear complete with a preview window that allows you to check how your adjustments are affecting the image.



This preview window shows an enlarged portion of the image so you can better judge the results of your adjustments. The + and – buttons immediately below the preview allow you to increase or decrease magnification.

*By checking the **Preview** option, changes will be made in real time to the whole image.*

*The **Amount** slider governs how severely the pixels that are selected will be sharpened.*

*The **Radius** slider defines over how many pixels the sharpen will affect.*

*The **Threshold** slider is the most difficult to understand. The higher this value, the more this filter will ignore gradual colour shifts.*

Unfortunately there is no magic setting. This is a resolution dependant action which means the same setting will yield different results on images with different resolutions. For example, a 100 dpi (dots per inch) image sharpened by a radius of 5 pixels represents a sharpening of 5%. A 300 dpi image sharpened by the same 5 pixel radius only represents a sharpening of 1.6%.

The best way is simply by eye, hence the preview window.



In this series of images the first is the slightly blurry original.

The second image has been sharpened using the settings above and still looks natural.

The third image has been over sharpened and looks worse than the original.



A FEW IGNORABLE TIPS

- 1. Smiles are fleeting, they flicker across faces and disappear the moment a camera appears. Decide on the appropriate exposure mode, and pre zoom your lens before you even raise the camera to your face. Take a photo instantly **before** your subject can react. If the shot still exists then fiddle with your settings for a more thoughtful second shot.*
- 2. Tell a story. In this photo of Kyrgyzstan horsemen I can tell many things. The horse's mouth in particular is very emotive. The yurt in the background, the snow on the hills all add context.*
- 3. Be ruthless. If it doesn't support the story it's visual clutter. If you want to show someone's face zoom in, so you can really see it. Don't be afraid to chop the top of someone's head off, like the girl on pg 21*
- 4. The rule of thirds states that if you divide a picture into horizontal and vertical thirds a strong composition will result if you utilize natural points of interest by placing key elements where lines intersect. Also be aware that Westerners eyes instinctively travel left to right, top to bottom.*

