

Articles

Traveling with a camera ©2025 Joseph T. Sinclair

If you travel to a certain locale and dedicate yourself to taking specific photographs of a place, that's not travel photography. That's simply a photography project that takes place in a location away from home.



Travel photography assumes that you travel for other purposes than photography. It also assumes that you travel with a traveling companion(s). That typically means that your traveling is not a photographic project. Photography is something you do as a sort of

sideline whenever you get the chance during your travel activities.

Travel activities themselves take time and energy. In other words, your travel requires planning, executing, and attention as well as the demands of companionship, all of which doesn't leave enough time left for doing much precise photography. In addition, you are constrained by the activities of your traveling companion(s), who presumably have little interest in accommodating your serious photography. And don't forget yourself. Presumably, you want to enjoy the pleasures of travel too or you would have stayed home, pleasures that require your attention even if someone else handles all the travel details and tasks.



That brings up the question, what are exactly the conditions of travel that dictate the sort of cameras that are ideal for travel photography?

The first condition of travel is time. If you're traveling normally with another person or other people (non-photographers), you will not have adequate time to do your most careful photography; you will typically be in a hurry to get good shots; and you will always be playing catch-up with the travel activities of your companion(s).

This means that simple equipment is better. No time to set up equipment and accessories. You need one small camera with a zoom lens. No multiple lenses and no tripod. A smartphone camera fits this requirement well.

The second condition of travel is baggage. How will you carry your camera? Typically, during a travel day visiting the sights, you might carry a daypack with a raincoat, lunch (or snacks), and something to drink. If you carry your camera in the daypack, getting it in and out will be a considerable inconvenience. Consequently, you

need to carry your camera separately; that is, carry the camera probably by hanging it around your neck. Thus, the smallest, lightest camera in a small case is the most comfortable. Forget about carrying a photographer's daypack with several lenses and other equipment. You won't have time to comfortably use anything but your camera.

Again, a smartphone camera fits this requirement well. A lanyard around your neck for your phone makes it easy to carry your phone in a shirt pocket, keeps it from dropping, and provides quick access.

The third condition is proximity. You can't always take the time while traveling to adjust the distance from your camera to the subject of your photo. Hence, a zoom lens is very handy for travel.



Sony 24-240 zoom (travel) lens

Nikon and Canon offer comparable zoom lenses

Question: Is this lens a 24-50 wide angle + a 5x telephoto, or is it a 10x telephoto?

A smartphone camera with an *optical* zoom capability fits this requirement.

A substitute for zoom capability is a camera with a prime lens and plenty of MPs. High-MP cameras enable you to crop generously but still retain a high-quality high-resolution image. This provides an effect comparable to a telescopic lens with no loss of image quality (except perhaps for very large prints if you crop too much). For instance, you can carve (crop) five 12MP photos out of a 60MP image giving you the capability to take 5x photos in effect.

Then too, panorama shooting capability is integral to modern cameras giving you the capability to take wide-angle shots without a wide-angle lens. A panorama doesn't have to be seven or eight shots stitched together; it can be just two shots.

The fourth condition of travel is rain. Your equipment needs to be water-resistant, and your case or daypack needs to be waterproof. If you carry your camera on a strap or mount that leaves it hanging on your body unprotected, it's at risk when you're out all day seeing the sights. In many places, the weather can change quickly, and you may not be able to keep your equipment dry without a waterproof case or waterproof daypack.

Many if not most up-to-date cameras and lenses have weather sealing today. But you still need something waterproof to keep your camera safely dry. A \$2 shower cap makes a good waterproof cover for a small camera case or a camera.



Always refer to your shower cap as an
MPD (moisture protection device)
so as not to seem unprofessional, and
men should not use one that's pink

There are other considerations too. Tripods don't work well for travel. They are banned from many public places (e.g., museums). They're also inconvenient.



This Manfrotto MP3-BK might work OK for travel

Fortunately, image stabilization (IS) makes tripods unnecessary. IS is incorporated into

almost all up-to-date cameras. It gives you a 3-7 stop advantage. Make sure you keep it turned on.

Many accessories don't work well for travel. They can make taking photos more time-consuming and may require inconvenient baggage.



What cameras are good for traveling? Some examples are: (1) top-end phone cameras with *optical* zoom capability; (2) top-end point & shoot cameras with a good zoom lens; (3) small mirrorless cameras with small interchangeable lenses and plenty of MPs (e.g., Sony a7CR); or (4) small high-quality fixed-lens cameras with lots of MPs (e.g., Fiji X-100VI).

The name of the game in travel photography is to travel light. That doesn't mean you need to

compromise on quality regarding equipment. Rather, it means you need to compromise on flexibility. You need to become a minimalist. You can't use a full range of photographic equipment that provides you with the flexibility to handle every photo op with maximum photographic agility. Yet, you can still take high quality photos and enjoy your travel.

An old favorite travel camera (film):



A comparable up-to-date camera that you can use for travel (Sony a7CR with small 50mm interchangeable lens):



This is smaller than a typical full-frame mirrorless camera

A small high-quality fixed-lens camera (Fiji X-100VI):



There are many digital cameras today that are small, light-weight, professional-quality, and especially suitable for travel.

Flying

For air travel it is useful to understand airline baggage requirements, particularly because certain bags may increase your airfare considerably.

Largest: checked bag – review various airline dimension requirements and get the smallest so as to qualify on all airlines – you may have to pay a fee. (Typically 62 linear feet = three dimensions added) Not safe for cameras.

Next largest: carry-on bag (cabin bag) – review various airline dimension requirements and get the smallest so as to qualify on all airlines – you may have to pay a fee. These bags have a surprising amount of space. They go in the overhead bin. (Typically 22 x 14 x 9) Reasonably safe for cameras.

Smallest: under-seat (personal) bag – review various airline dimension requirements and get the smallest so as to qualify on all airlines – always free, no fee. (Typically 17 x 13 x 6) Very safe for cameras.

The smallest bag is meant to be something like a purse or small briefcase. But it turns out that you can buy an under-seat bag that is quite large but still qualifies as an under-seat bag. If you use such a bag, you can place your small camera + a small camera case inside the bag and

still have room left over for other things including a laptop computer.

You will be required to put this bag under your seat while flying. I don't like putting things on the floor and then handling them. So, I put my under-seat bag inside a small disposal plastic trash bag when on the floor.

Camera security

An under-seat bag is the most secure means of transporting your expensive travel camera. That is, it's never out of your sight. It has a band across the back for slipping over the handle on your carry-on or checked roller bag.



**A bag designed specifically for fitting
under an airplane seat**

Note, some medium-size daypacks may qualify as under-seat bags.

Medical: an extra bag for medical equipment (e.g., CPAP) is allowed, in addition to a personal (under-seat) bag; there is no fee for it.

Knowing the baggage requirements enables some flexibility in how to take your expensive camera traveling by air.