



Viewpoint Mike Smith

What photography gear do you pack for your travels? And what are you willing to leave out? Mike Smith offers a personal view

How far will your photography excess take you? We have that ceaseless itch to scratch, that *need* to take photos, that urge that is always looking for the next opportunity to record the moment, capture the scene, permanently etch those photons onto a JPG for the posterity of history. And, of course, to do that you need to be able to pack enough gear.

I'm all too aware that at the 'ease-of-use' end of the spectrum the smartphone is the ultimate accessory – the image quality remarkable and the ability to edit and share both ubiquitous and instantaneous. But for many AP readers that isn't enough – it doesn't flex the creative muscle sufficiently and, not only that, dedicated cameras are simply... better!

But, the big question: what do you *need* (OK, maybe that should be what do you *want*) to pack for the next trip? My travel 'go to' is the Nikon D700 DSLR, 24mm, 35mm and 85mm lenses, along with a 3Pod carbon fibre travel tripod, Lee Big Stopper and a wired remote. For what I generally do, that is a great set of kit that covers most circumstances, and then some. It packs small, is highly versatile and, with the use of prime lenses, offers both very good sharpness and wide apertures. I have travelled with zoom lenses before, but my style of shooting prefers the ascetic discipline of a fixed field of view. Each to their own.

Lightweight approach

There are two ways to go from this travel starting point. The 'full monty' approach looks to pack more (bigger tripod, flash heads, diffusers, light stands, more lenses etc) to cover a wider range of possibilities. Certainly, that's what I do for weddings. You have one shot at getting it right – no second chances. Then there's the ultra-lightweight approach – how minimalist can you go (over and above a smartphone) in order to achieve your photographic goals.

This was brought home to me recently on a cycling touring trip where I was trying to fit all my worldly belongings into 11 litres of saddlebag. Of course, the photographic equipment took precedence. In the past a flexible camera that I could keep in my cycle top and have



One of Mike's shots from his travels

available to shoot at a moment's notice was crucial. For that role I packed the Sony RX100. However, for this trip I decided that I wanted to print photos on-the-go – bring a little bit of 'film love' to the people and places I was passing through. So, the Fujifilm SP-2 Instax took pride of place in the bag. In the past I have round-tripped JPGs via the Instax app on my smartphone, but this can be a little tortuous to achieve at times. Instead, I took the Fujifilm M1, which, while not as diminutive as the Sony, is still a small camera. And with the 27mm Fujifilm lens in place, it's pretty nifty to shoot with. For portraits, I wanted something a little tighter – in this instance I went for a 1980s pancake Nikkor 50mm lens with an adapter and then used focus peaking to get critical sharpness under manual focus. Those three bits of kit took up a moderate amount of space in my bag, particularly when coupled with waterproofs, shoes and a change of clothes. In fact, they took up so much space that I forgot to pack any underwear! It seemed like the ultimate sacrifice for photography and led to frequent comments of 'printer, no pants!' from my fellow riders.

Mike Smith is a London-based wedding and portrait photographer. Visit www.focali.co.uk

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