

## Be Prepared

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Have they come out all right? I'm, sure this thought crosses the mind of most people when they collect their films from the photo lab. They may not like to admit it, but I'm willing to bet that it also passes through the minds of even the most experienced professional photographers as they await the results of an important session, I know it does mine.

Cameras now have become so automated that many of the earlier concerns about producing good quality images, such as focus and exposure, have been greatly reduced but this does not stop things going wrong, or the possibility of user error.

A quite experienced amateur photographer friend of mine bought a new camera system a couple of years ago before going on a two-week safari and was horrified to discover on his return that most of his slides were over exposed. It turned out that he'd inadvertently left the metering on spot setting throughout the trip.

Many years ago, I went on a five week trip around eastern Europe shooting pictures for a series of travel guides and returned home with several hundred rolls of film. As is my custom, I had a small batch of film processed first, all was fine except for one roll which was so overexposed that I could not identify the subject. With shaking hands I checked my camera, all seemed to be fine at first and then I discovered that my wide-angle lens had a loose shutter blade and this was, periodically, allowing the film to remain exposed to the light after the correct exposure had been made. When all the film was finally processed, and I had gone several shades greyer, I eventually discovered that this fault had apparently developed on the very last roll of film I had shot, but by then I'd aged about a decade.

Fortunately, horror stories like this do not occur very often but even much more minor oversights and carelessness can cause problems and mar the results of a trip. I've become a great believer in being as well-prepared as possible and trying to anticipate all the things which might go wrong and making sure that I have everything I need to hand.

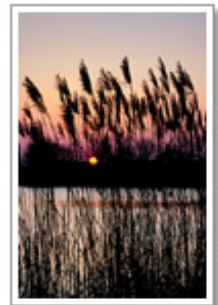
I've conducted a few photographic holiday/workshops in recent years with groups of enthusiastic amateurs and I've seen at first hand just how even the smallest oversight can often hamper the enjoyment of taking photographs as well as threatening their success, such as trying to get to grips with new and untried equipment and missing good opportunities in the process. This is something I'd always advise against. It's best not to take anything away on a photographic trip that you've not become familiar and completely confident with, especially a new camera or lens.

It's also best to keep your equipment to the essentials, especially if you're travelling by plane or planning on much walking. A heavy bag crammed full of lenses and accessories can not only take much of the pleasure away from your photography but can also be a deterrent. Among the things I would not be without is a tripod, at least one spare camera body and a set of filters. I like to carry a shift lens if I'm at all likely to be shooting architecture and a 100-400mm zoom with a converter if I'm intending to photograph wildlife.

It's a good idea to write a check list of everything you need for a trip, not just for the obvious items of equipment and accessories but also those invaluable odds and ends that can help smooth your way. For instance, I carry a [small torch](#) to help me see the camera settings when shooting at dawn and dusk and when photographing dark interiors. Other non-photographic items I like to have with me include my Swiss Army knife, a couple of jewellers screwdrivers, a small spanner for tightening the tripod legs, spare tripod screws, rubber bands, self-adhesive labels, a waterproof pen for marking films and a stout black plastic bag for storing them. A compass is very useful for estimating the best time to shoot, say, a particular building or finding a good location for a sunset scene.

I always take a roll of cloth tape from which I tear off small strips and stick on my tripod legs along with a small ball of Blue Tack under the tripod head so I always have them to hand. This is very useful if you want to temporarily attach an unmounted filter onto a lens for instance, or a piece of card to shield the lens when shooting into the light. I carry a mini tape recorder for on-the-spot note taking and an alarm clock for those predawn starts to catch the early morning light.

I've noticed on the workshops I've held that a shortage of batteries has frequently been a problem for



participants. It's vital with modern equipment to have a good supply of them, especially when travelling off the beaten track. Bear in mind too that batteries have a much more limited life when used in extremes of temperature.

A periodic check of equipment is an essential habit to adopt as well as keeping lens and filter surfaces clean. Spirit-moistened tissues sold in small sachets are ideal for this and I often give them a rinse with shampoo in the hotel bathroom along with my socks etc. - but separately! Make sure your camera's interior is free from dust and grit. I once had some badly scratched film after returning from a desert trip through lack of sufficient care. A useful tip when you spend time in sandy, dusty or damp conditions, such as by the sea for instance, is to keep your equipment in individual plastic bags inside your camera bag until actually needed.

It's a good idea to check the film gate occasionally as a trapped hair or fibre in or near the film plane can spoil a lot of shots - this has also happened to me. Check too if the shutter is firing correctly and the aperture is stopping down as it should to the preset aperture. If you are using more than one camera it's useful to cross check the exposure meters now and again, if only to reassure yourself that all is in order.

Do make sure your insurance cover is sound for the trip you are making. Often the standard all-risks element of a normal household policy is not adequate and it's generally much better to have specialist photo-equipment cover.

It's a very good idea to list everything you are carrying, with the serial numbers, and keep it, in duplicate, inside your passport. This is invaluable if you suffer a loss or theft and it can also sometimes help with over-zealous customs or security officers.

As with batteries, it's best to take a plentiful, fresh supply of your favourite film stock - more than you think you'll need. For a trip of just a couple of weeks there's no need to take elaborate precautions over storing your film, modern films are much more tolerant than they used to be. But do avoid leaving it in places where the temperature will soar, such as the boot of a car, and, if possible, keep both exposed and unexposed films in a cold bag, or wrapped in clothes, to minimise temperature changes.

The new concerns about risk of fogging with aircraft hold-luggage scanning equipment means that I carry all my film now as hand luggage. To reduce the weight and bulk I remove all the cassettes from their boxes and pots, rubber band them together in sevens - it makes a neat package - and then place them in polythene bags or shrink wrap.

All this may sound like hard work but once it becomes habit it's hardly noticeable and it does help to instil peace of mind. My experience has been that the one thing you leave to chance is inevitably that which lets you down and it's well worth a little extra effort to eliminate as many potential problems as possible.

*About the photos* - The images to the right are thumbnail links to larger images with descriptions, which are presented in a slide show format.

### About the Author

Based in the United Kingdom, Michael Busselle has been a professional photographer for over 40 years. Michael has authored 46 books, including [Creative Digital Photography](#), [Michael Busselle's Guide to Photographing Landscapes and Gardens](#), [Better Picture Guide to Travel Photography](#), [The Question-And-Answer Guide to Photo Techniques](#) and [The Perfect Portrait Guide: How to Photograph People](#). Michael's latest book, [Masterclass in Photography](#) was just published by Barnes and Noble in the USA and Pavilion/Chrysalis Books in the UK.

You can view more of Michael's work on his website at [www.michael-busselle.com](http://www.michael-busselle.com).

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