

Getting started as a

Traveling Photographer



Imaging traveling to beautiful and exciting destinations all around the world, trying delicious food, meeting interesting people, and seeing some of the best views that nature has to offer. Imagine taking photos of everything you see and making money from the entire adventure. And imagine even getting paid to travel by the person who hires you to go there.

Maybe you take a few photos of your morning coffee and sunrise, next you video the locals in a special parade, then later you get invited to watch someone's grandmother make mole - and sample the results, of course. Next week you're going on a river cruise of the Amazon, and you're already planning your great Alaska adventure.

The great thing is, it's all paid for via your traveling photographer business. Due to amazing digital technology, it's entirely possible for one person to run a profitable and exciting traveling photography business these days. You just need to understand how it works, whether it's for you, and how to make money. Let's get started.

What Is Traveling Photography?

Basically, a traveling photographer's job is to take photos and possibly a video that record the things that make an area unique, or they may instead be traveling for an event that they are contracted to photograph such as a game, graduation, or a wedding.

For example, on any given gig you'll take pictures of various landscapes, the people, note how the culture is different, the customs that they have, and their unique history. You can depict all of this in your photography. Anyone who documents a local area or agrees to travel to a location-based photo shoot is a traveling photographer.

Travel Photography for Pros and Amateurs

The genre of traveling photography is popular with both amateur and professional alike, with much inspiration derived from magazines such as National Geographic with their photographers like Steve McCurry and Renan Ozturk. Steve McCurry's most famous photo was made while reporting on the war in Afghanistan, and his photograph entitled "Afghan Girl" appeared on the cover of National Geographic in 1984.

You can travel and take pictures while traveling, or you can travel to a location to take pics of something specific like a religious ceremony or another event.

Wide Flexibility

Traveling photography can translate into many format styles of documentary photography. Most shooting will be under natural conditions with ambient lighting of a wide variety of indoor and outdoor subjects. Landscapes, people, culture, customs, fun and emotional events, and history are what the photographer frames as his or her subjects. On the commercial side, tourist attractions, hotels, resorts or anything to do with merchandising travel will often be the topics.

Requires Wide Range of Skills

Traveling photographers must possess a wide spectrum of photographic skills because of the wide variety of the subject matters, which likely encompasses not only portraits and landscapes

but also wildlife, architectural, reporting and events. One day you may be taking pictures of mountain scenery and the next food at a five-star restaurant.

As a travel photographer, you need the necessary skills to photograph basically everything. Patience is essential as well as being well versed in the technical aspects of shutter speed, depth of field, and lighting.

Tourism - a Driving Force in Genre

Traveling photography has been popular with tourists ever since cameras were built for amateurs. The famous Kodak Brownie introduced the concept of the snapshot and was very portable. Now with the advent of smartphones, photography is more convenient than ever. Many tourist attractions today are placed in photogenic areas to entice the public to come and take pictures.

Destination Events are More Common

Due to the love of traveling, there are more destination events than ever before. Because of that, there is more call for photographers who will travel to the location. If you're willing to do that, you can also schedule extra time before and after any event you are supposed to take pictures at so that you can enjoy the local sites on your own - and yes, photograph them for sales elsewhere.

Pros Look in More Places

While popular with amateurs taking selfies, the tourist site isn't where the professionals usually want to concentrate their efforts. Serious photographers want to capture a sense of culture with an image that conveys a story. Also, a photo of that nature is more marketable for the professional.

Choose the Unbeaten Path

A pro would research their destination and look for the unbeaten path that a travel agency would steer people away from. They did not go through all the effort to get there just to get the "cliché" shot. They would rather have portraits of the local people instead of tourists.

Many times, pros will use themselves or a traveling companion to be their subject but not in a "selfie" manner. They will want to analyze a scene and critique it in their mind to work with the composition, keeping in mind where the photo might be used. Then they will ask themselves how it can be made to look better.

Be Friendly

People of different cultures are a big part of what traveling photographers try to capture. The photographer will want to make an effort to befriend and engage the locals and build connections, with the chance of gaining ideas and locations to shoot. Having a friendly rapport will help people open to you and perhaps gain you friends who'll make the trip even more rewarding.

Traveling photography requires that you not only have photographic skills, but also the ability to communicate with people to make them feel comfortable and trusting. As well as that, business

and marketing skills are needed. This means that a person who wants to be a traveling photographer needs to be well-rounded in their knowledge. But don't let that scare you away; there isn't anything here that you cannot learn.

Do You Have What It Takes?

Are you the kind of person that can be a traveling photographer? Some people find it's not right for them, while others call it living the dream. If you've ever wanted to travel the world with your camera for a living, this may be the perfect job for you. Having said that, you still have to carefully consider what the job involves.

You can find many websites glorifying the image of a traveling photographer, giving you a lot of superlatives and implying that all the businesses are clamoring for shots, while not offering much information about the real-life commitments required to make a living doing photography. And if you don't already know how to use your camera, there is a big learning curve. However, it's certainly not impossible if you really want to do it and are committed to learning the things you need to know about your camera, the market, and business.

Going from Hobbyist to Pro

Practically everyone starts doing photography in the field as a hobby or as a part-time profession. Going to full-time photography is a big leap of faith. It's not a case of just learning how to make good photos that people want - there's also the issue of being able to make enough money to survive doing it. Some may forgo trying to make more money but instead take work to gain experience and network for more prospects, until they can earn enough to at least meet their basic needs.

May Require Some Sacrifice

You may have to sacrifice time with loved ones if you are married. A working spouse will gain you some economic stability, but if both spouses work independently, you can do it together even if it will be riskier financially. While you can be somewhat flexible, most photographers understand that there are certain times of the day that are more conducive to good natural lighting.

Likely you will be at the mercy of the time of an event or the weather, with no recovery time for jet lag or unforeseen delays in travel. This means you will be tired on the job and may miss opportunities for eating, so you also need to be willing to go hungry sometimes. Pack snacks just in case. Above all, you must be patient.

You will be in situations that are not under your control. Be ready and waiting even if everyone else isn't, but you cannot allow anyone else to be waiting on you. You must be prepared to capture any moment, especially if doing event recording.

You Need Planning Skills

Likely when you have been doing traveling photography for a while, you'll learn how to plan better. But each new place you visit will bring new challenges, and you're dealing with the learning curve again. The trick in succeeding in this profession is planning efficiently. You'll want

to use time well enough to complete the job and still have enough time for yourself to recharge or unwind and enjoy the locations you get to visit.

Once you arrive at your destination, you should be the type that can hit the ground quickly to complete any tasks you can get out of the way. You will want to free up whatever time you may have available to explore for yourself while you travel, assuming that was one of the appealing features of the job. If the weather is cooperating now, use now instead of waiting for tomorrow.

Finally, you must never get tired of traveling, else you'll be tired of the career. There are ways to avoid being burned out, such as planning extra time on each trip to recover from traveling and to enjoy some free time. If you're willing to learn photography and business and you don't mind living out of a hotel, you may be the next great travel photographer.

Can You Make a Living from It?

The short answer is yes, you can make a living from it. However, not everyone will. You must find the right niche and be willing to think outside the box about ways to sell your work. You cannot get tied up in how it was "traditionally" done. Things are different now with high-speed internet and super-powerful cameras, even on smartphones.

Stand Out by Being Good

The competition among travel photographers has driven earnings down, which makes some professionals claim that as a traditional career traveling photography is dying. There are still people working in the field, but they only seem to survive and not thrive to the level they wish they should be making. There is an exception, though. If you think of this differently in terms of business and what your audience wants from your photography, you may find a fantastic opening to tap into an unlimited income.

Writers Supplement with Their Own Images

If you can write, you can supplement your photography income by blogging about the places you travel to, while also sharing your photography. Many writers turn to photography to support their articles due to the high cost of stock photography, or instead of having to pay a professional. When it comes to the travel industry, having the additional skill of writing will add to your bottom line. That is one of the areas catching favor to the professionals when they can't seem to sell to traditional markets or publications.

Expensive of Traveling

One of the requirements of travel photography is of course travel, which costs money. Some photographers are always on the move going all over the world. They sacrifice home ownership and all the responsibility that comes with it. Why pay someone to mow your lawn when you're going to be in a hotel on the beach or in a chalet in the Swiss Alps?

You can find many travel vloggers who often use vlogging, blogging, and travel photography as their sole sources of income. They often report spending, on average, about \$2000 a month traveling which includes meals, accommodations, and general mundane items. The travel

photographer who wants to make a good living will likely investigate several sources of income to stave off shortages of work in any area.

Traditional Newspapers and Magazines

Traditional work such as with magazines and newspapers are not in all that much demand, although some have managed to get a long-term travel photography contract and sell thousands of image licenses to them. It's something that you can investigate that will supplement your bottom line nicely.

Spending a large portion of your time marketing your work is going to be a necessity. You can outsource some of this once you have an income, but until then you will have to spend time marketing your business. One thing to do is to choose the income sources you want to pursue, set up a marketing strategy, and then get started.

You can create multiple streams of income by teaching, selling stock photography, client-direct sales, leveraging social media, blogging, and YouTube to create a six-figure business if you plan it realistically and are patient.

YouTube Travel Channels

There are several people with their own YouTube travel channels with thousands of subscribers. A channel with about 5000 subscribers earns around \$125 per month. Having a travel photography website can do some of the hard work to get your product to market. Utilizing social media and honing your negotiating skills is just as key to success as your photo equipment.

Build Up a Large Stock

Learning to market to advertisers and to seek out buyers of your images will probably occupy a great deal of time. It will help to build up a large stock of images. Get out, go everywhere and start shooting everything. Upload some of your best photos to sites like 500px (<https://web.500px.com/>), where you can offer your images for licensing. With a stockpile of photos, you will have something on hand to sell. You'll also have something to place on your social media as examples, and for your web pages to do advertising.

Regardless of how well other people are doing or not doing, there is a demand for travel photographers who are willing to be freelancers and find their own opportunities. You don't have to wait for a client to tell you what to take pictures of. You can travel to any destination you want (even close to home) and start taking travel photos now so that you can start building your portfolio and business plan.

What Skills and Training Do You Need?

The interesting thing about travel photography is that while you do need some basic skills, you don't really have to know everything to get started. What it does require is a long-term commitment to continuously learn about your equipment and craft. There honestly will never be another day that goes by when you cannot learn something new about photography.

It Requires Training and Dedication

For some people, becoming successful as a travel photographer comes quickly as they are naturals at photography. However, you don't need to rely on natural talent. Instead, you can depend on dedication, effort, and education to master the profession. A diverse set of skills are needed to be a travel photographer, such as the fundamentals of photography based on the type of pictures you want to take - plus business and marketing skills. And of course, a certain measure of bullheadedness and determination.

Some photographers specialize in areas specific to travel photography such as travel portraits, landscapes, or documentaries but they are still skilled in shooting all aspects of photography that they need to capture what their audience wants them to capture.

Planning and Research Skills

A lot of time will be devoted to doing research about the places and destinations you cover. Knowing where to find resources and information for your research and planning is a key part of the travel photography business.

For example, you'll need to know the type of travel gear and photography equipment you need to pack and what documents you need to fill out before you can work in certain foreign countries.

Know the Territory

Before you start your travels, you will need an understanding of the history and customs that make the area you're visiting interesting for your photographs. People skills are needed even if your subjects are not human. You will still need to navigate the area and ask questions that will help you facilitate working in the field.

Note Taking

The ability to take notes about things like your first impressions and how you feel about the destination after you arrive will help you develop your creative instincts for composing shots. Being able to transcribe not just the observational senses but all senses and emotions will be a factor in what you bring to the camera and your presentations. Those are just a few of the skills needed to succeed in storytelling through your pictures.

Know the Hardware

Digital cameras are packed with features that you're going to want to master. Study the manual to learn how to set the appropriate settings that the conditions and subjects demand. Then after the camera is mastered, the software you'll use to organize and edit on the computer will have to be learned as well. If you plan to make money from your first trip, you probably want to ensure you know how to use everything, including the editing software you've chosen.

Try Some Training

The real test comes in mastering the principles of what you compose for a picture. There are online courses and blogs especially for training in the field of travel photography which are low enough in price to take, just to get your feet wet.

Some of the courses will also train you on how to market your work and how to cover the costs of running your own photography business. Also, they may help you develop a portfolio to get you started. So, investigate some of the available classes online if you feel unsure.

The critical factor here is that you identify the training gaps that you currently have to be successful and fill that with training. The training can be paid or free. The important thing is to learn what needs to be known; whether it's the camera, the editing software, marketing education, or learning to travel inexpensively - get the training you need to succeed.

Where and How to Market Your Photography

This is an exciting aspect of travel photography. Okay, the traveling is impressive too. But making money so that you can keep traveling is even better, right? That's why you need to learn how and where to market your photography. If you're not selling your products, you won't make money no matter how many pictures you take. Getting the images that capture the essence, the stories, and the emotions of the destinations is only part of the task of travel photography when you are in it to make a living.

Somehow all those pictures must be converted to money so that you can at least fly back home. Many photographers may not be under contract, and all those traveling expenses are out of their own pocket. But no worries - it can be done.

Big Business of the Travel Industry

Commercial travel photography is a huge industry, globally worth around \$1 trillion. Advertising by travel agencies, resorts, hotels and tourist attractions is usually done with imagery, so naturally, there will be a demand for photographers. Merchandising prints and postcards are also big markets for the industry. Having contracts with multiple travel agencies will allow you to sell thousands of image licenses for years. They may even pay for your trips.

Advertise Yourself

To get more exposure, put some of your work online for display or upload to stock photography sites such as Alamy, Adobe Stock, Crestock, Etsy, Shutterstock, 500px or any other place that suits your needs. Check their requirements and terms of service, so you know how you'll get paid.

Educate Yourself about Your Audience

Today the market arena is in the internet world, global in scope as far as sales go. Gaining information about who buys photographs, what kind of people are marketable to your work, where they may live and what appeals the most to them, will allow you to generate leads for potential customers. Create a tailored mailing list considering all forms of clientele to enable you to find art directors and editors who give out travel assignments.

Stand Out among the Competition

There is plenty of competition in the photography market. Hundreds of thousands of students every year are getting into the field to begin careers. Working to stand out among the crowd means having your own style and bringing out the emotion attached to the subject of your images. When a publisher is putting together an article of a subject, they may select your pictures because they fit the mood or conjure an emotional connection to the described scene. When you understand what the audience is looking for, you can stand out.

Get Your Portfolio Ready

One thing you need to do to stand out is to generate a portfolio that identifies you as an accomplished professional photographer. When meeting with prospective clients, your portfolio must contain your best image examples with competent editing that is thoughtfully arranged to hold the attention of whoever looks at it. Your portfolio should be on your own website with a business-like domain name and a professional hosting service. Don't be cheap about your site.

Start Your Own Stock Site

One way to make money with your travel photography is to start your own stock photo site. Charge a membership fee and let the members use your photos in their work with specific rules and conditions that you set.

Start a YouTube Channel

Another way a lot of travel photographers make money is via a YouTube site. But don't worry, you don't have to do a YouTube video where you talk or are the "personality." You can literally put up your pictures with relaxing music and still earn money. Plus, if you provide all the right information about licensing, the channel can act as a traffic generator to your website.

Making money from travel photography doesn't have to be done in the standard way of taking a photo and selling the picture. It can look more like taking video, taking photos, and then combining them in different ways to make money. You can make money via a YouTube channel, by selling stock photos, by being paid directly for your photos, and more.

The Importance of Understanding the Local Culture and Language

You don't have to learn every part of every language before you visit countries that don't speak your native language. However, it is a good idea if you at least study the culture a little bit, plus learn a few important phrases based on your normal needs when you travel. Don't forget that you can also use technology to help. With such resources as Google Translate available to everyone with a smartphone, you're going to be just fine.

Find Resources to Pick Up the Culture

Go to the library and research travel books and find brochures from a travel agency. Talk to people who have been there to get first-hand information. Knowing the culture of your destination is important. You want to be able to smoothly traverse the area in a manner that doesn't draw attention to yourself.

Blend In and Don't Be the Distraction

Try to blend in to make yourself least noticeable to the locals. You want them to be the subject of your images and catch them behaving as naturally as if you were not there. To be less noticeable likely requires you to be able to converse some in their language at least. At least learn common phrases for asking directions, how to order in restaurants, direct cab drivers and exchanging pleasantries.

One key phrase to remember is how to say, "Can I take your picture?" In many countries, you can get by in English if you at least try. For example, in many European countries you can get by with only speaking English because many people there can converse in it, but they will respect you more if you just try to speak their language. Even if you butcher the language, they will still appreciate it if you make an effort.

Find an Online Language Course

There are a few online language instructors to get you started, as well as plenty of YouTube channels to gauge how well your understanding has progressed. Things like learning the Spanish alphabet can be learned from Sesame Street videos. You can't learn it overnight, though, so give yourself plenty of time. You might also try something like [italki.com](https://www.italki.com/home) where you can learn to speak any language naturally. <https://www.italki.com/home>

It's never too early to start. The more you know the language, the less you'll have to rely on interpreters or guides - which also may save money. While learning the language, you'll pick up some of the customs of the culture too. Some are easier to learn than others, with the Asian languages and cultures often being among the hardest to pick up.

Show Respect

For example, most people know to take off their shoes when entering a temple if they are frequented by tourists, because they'll have signs in English to remind you. However, remember to also do so at anyone's home you go in.

Be aware that you are not to step or stand or sit on the raised threshold at the entrance of a temple; always walk over the threshold without touching it. When it comes to cameras, some temples allow photography while others expressly forbid it. Be aware of the local customs before you go anywhere so that you can show the proper respect to them.

Seek permission first before having your camera out in view. In Indian temples, there could be a strict dress code you may have to adhere to in order to enter. As with any culture, the more you become familiar with the traditions and customs, the easier it will be for you to get around to accomplish the job and perhaps help you enjoy the profession.

In many foreign countries, you don't want to do something and ask forgiveness later because that could end up with you being at odds with the law. Instead, ask before you do anything and always learn about the customs before going.

General Traveling Photographer Business Tips

Making money as a travel photographer is a multifaceted business that has a lot of income streams available. You need to be able to take good photos, keep them organized, and offer them in the right sizes and formats that your audience needs for their use. You must also understand who your audience is and how to get your product - the photos and videos - in front of them so they can make a purchase.

Invest Wisely

To run a business, it's best to learn good entrepreneurial practices. Don't invest too much money or time until you can prove to be profitable. Never bite off more than you can chew. Try to find nearby projects that will help with gaining photography experience and help with building a portfolio without breaking the bank.

Stick with the common-sense business practices and invest only what you can afford to stay comfortably afloat. For example, only use an adequate camera to start out with instead of the top of the line one.

Even if you can afford the top of the line, buy something less expensive until you figure out all the risks of the profession. Losing or ruining a cheaper camera is not as catastrophic to the budget and will help you keep on going.

Start Locally to Save On Travel

Start in your hometown and eventually work further into the country. When enough capital has been built up from domestic work, go for overseas travel. Start with photographing places you would like to visit that interest you the most and just shoot a lot of pictures. Remember that to others, your home area is a travel destination too.

Shop for Price

Find out how to bargain shop for trains, planes and hotel fares. Keep in mind that the less money you spend, the more money you earn. When starting out and you can't afford to travel, just go out locally and shoot digital photos to build your portfolio. Start licensing the photos to stock photo sites on the internet to get yourself into the market.

Try Exchanging Services and Promote Expertise

Try bartering images for services like lodging at a resort. You are merely trying to advertise your product in the early stages. Once you are established, you can name your price. Clearly define your area of expertise and know how to express your qualifications with accuracy and confidence. A potential client will want to know about what your specific skill set entails. The name of the game is to get out and find business and sell yourself.

Network

Offer your photographic services to every travel or tourist business in your current area. Design a logo for your company. Make it memorable but straightforward, not more than three colors are

usually suggested. Have some business cards made after you polished the look of your logo. Then have a professional create a website to sell your images and present a good portfolio.

Don't skimp here and put any old cheap HTML type site up. Either study long and hard on how to put one up yourself, or have it done by an experienced pro. Then keep working on marketing yourself by engaging in social networking, in-person networking, and generally getting your name out there.

Use Social Media

Join a few social groups and participate in their forums and groups that are in common with your field of photography. Members may know where work is available and might be willing to convey that knowledge to you. You may also be able to ascertain what you can charge for your services by seeing what your contemporaries are getting for theirs from the forums or the photographer websites that they have. Like any good business, the key is understanding how others succeed and figuring out how that can work for you. Then, fill in the gaps and make it better.

To Sum Up

Your travel photography business can succeed and make money. The important thing is to get started. But get started with the right knowledge. Understand that you need to know how to take good photos and put them in the correct format for your buyers to use. Plus, you need to know how to travel to places safely and affordably, navigate the area, communicate with the people, and the ultimately take the best photos with an idea in mind of who will buy them.