

Nine easy tips can improve vacation photos

By Douglass K. Daniel

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — My shoe boxes of travel photographs bring back memories of the pictures that got away.

Mom in Paris in springtime, except the Eiffel Tower is sticking out of her head like a rocket. My friend Russell on the steps of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence, not that you can tell because of the low-light blur. Australia's Uluru, better known as Ayers Rock, looking really big but really boring.

It's frustrating to spend lots of time (and dollars) on a trip only to return with lackluster pictures. Yet there are easy ways to improve the odds that at least one shot among your vacation photos will earn a place in a frame. Here are nine tips to help.

Start shooting before you leave home.

That's especially important with a new camera. Reading the manual on the plane is not enough, says Eliot Cohen, a Washington-based photographer who teaches digital photography classes.

"At that point it's way too late. Practice with it before you take important pictures," Cohen says. "You don't need all the functions on the camera, only about 10 percent of them."

When photographing a landscape, make the foreground interesting.

"A rock, tree or statue can work," says Scott Stuckey, author of National Geographic's "Ultimate Field Guide to Travel Photography" and managing editor of its Traveler magazine. "Even better is a shot of a person doing something that relates to the landscape — a fisherman tending his nets, a cowboy on horseback, even a tourist taking a picture."

Sunsets aren't all that interesting, Stuckey says. "Turn around and photograph the landscape where the setting sunlight is falling, with the sun at your back. That's where the interest lies."

Go beyond the posed picture.

"Vacation pictures are about remembering moments, not just places," says Susan Walsh, an Associated Press photographer in Washington. "Sometimes a posed picture doesn't tell the whole story." Shots of your companions in action will capture

the fun of a trip.

"They remind you what you were doing," Walsh says, "whether it's how hard it was to climb up that mountain or splashing in the pool or paddling a canoe."

Don't forget to include the locals, Stuckey advises. "They reveal the character of a destination more than any other photographic subject," he says. "Shoot them while they're interacting with a member of your party."

Get as close as you can. Get closer.

Let safety and other considerations be your guide, of course, but try to move in and "fill your frame," says Charles Dharapak, an AP staff photographer in Washington. "If you can get closer, the results will be sharper."

Avoid using the camera's zoom in low light. The zoom lens engages a slower shutter speed to collect more light, which increases the chance of blur from movement.

"If you're outdoors, say, at the Grand Canyon, it's not much of an issue because it's bright," Dharapak says, "but if you're in an indoor setting, like a museum or a cafe, it won't be that great."

Plan your outdoor photos for the first and last hour of sunlight.

Midday sun tends to make pictures flat and shapeless. The day's "golden hours" give objects more shape and definition.

Regardless of the time of day, Cohen recommends using light from the sides of the frame. "For people, look for softer light, more diffuse, even in shade, for more revealing detail," he says.

For shooting buildings, Stuckey suggests balancing sky light, street lights and lights from within. "At that point, the building is glowing, looking its best," he says. "Add life to your city shots by putting interesting human activity — children playing, a mime performing, a vendor selling balloons — in the foreground, with the famous building only in the background."

Know when to turn the flash off and when to turn it on.

It's not always obvious. For example, faces and other objects in shadows cast by a bright sun may need that extra light.

"Many people figure if they're outside, they don't need the flash," says Baltimore photographer Walter Rowe, editor of the *Travel Photographers Network* website. "Flash can help lighten up those areas so they don't appear so dark."

At night, not using the flash in favor of natural light might be the best way to capture an image. But for a longer exposure, the camera will need to be steady to avoid blur caused by movement.

Use the timer to avoid the downward movement that comes with pressing the shutter button, says Rowe. Steady yourself against a wall or another stationary object. Try placing the camera on a flat surface, even a drinking glass turned upside down.

Check the edges of the frame as you compose a shot.

Train yourself to look for objects you don't want in the picture. At the beach, it might be a trash can; in the city it might be an orange construction barrier. Aim down; most people cut off feet and leave lots of room above the heads. Then reframe the shot.

"Most people tend to shoot from wherever they're standing and not think about eliminating unwanted information from the edge of the picture," Cohen says. "You have to learn to really see all the details as well as the piece you're interested in."

When using a digital camera, review all the ele-

ments once again after taking the picture. If a post of a tree is sticking out of someone's head, reshoot.

"Maybe you can move yourself a little bit," Rowe says, "or move the person a little bit."

Buy the largest memory card you can afford.

And bring extra batteries or the battery charger and an adapter, if needed. "Don't be afraid to take a lot of pictures," Dharapak says. Walsh adds, "You've already paid for those megapixels, so use them."

On a long trip, look for a photo store that can download your pictures to a disk you can pack or even mail back home. You risk losing all your photos if you drop your camera in a river or if it's misplaced or stolen.

Digital cameras don't make you a better photographer, but they do allow for more chances to get it right.

Like my picture of a sailboat catching wind in Sydney Harbour. Taking a dozen shots from the side of a ferry, I managed to freeze the boat at just the right angle in the water and with the sun outlining the clouds.

A frame, not a shoe box, for that one.

Editor's Note — Douglass K. Daniel is a writer and editor with the Washington bureau of the Associated Press.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE

Sunday

12:08 a.m. — Closed door on building at Meadow Lake.

12:38 a.m. — Security check at the American Legion.

1:32 a.m. — Security check at Twister's.

2:42 a.m. — Security check at Oasis.

3:14 a.m. — Call from Citizens Medical Center wanting a welfare check on subject that left there. Subject made it into residence on S. Mission.

3:17 a.m. — Decatur County Communications requested help to locate a subject that had someone else's billfold en route to Colby.

11:58 a.m. — Caller had domestic dispute with subject who left residence. Report filed.

1:10 p.m. — Vehicle reported going wrong way on eastbound I-70 from Range, then used wrong westbound on-ramp to come back into city. Not found.

5:36 p.m. — Domestic report filed.

8:11 p.m. — Fireworks reported being shot off in the 600 W. Eighth. Not found.

Monday

4:54 a.m. — Security check at the old hospital.

9:57 a.m. — Helped woman locate her teenage son whom she thought was missing at Oasis Travel Plaza. All OK.

2:45 p.m. — Spoke to subjects about combines parked on city property in the 700 block of E. College Drive.

2:46 p.m. — Helped ambulance

crew on call at 985 W. Third.

6:19 p.m. — Report filed on hit and run at 115 E. Hill.

7:18 p.m. — Dog at large at 1775 W. Fifth returned to owner.

8:07 p.m. — Report filed on incident at 1150 S. Franklin No. 49.

10:40 p.m. — Fireworks being shot off at Amber Waves Apartments. Not found.

10:54 p.m. — Alarm went off. Owner on phone with company, everything OK.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

Monday

7:50 a.m. — Two calves in north ditch near fence of westbound I-70 at mile 47. Owner arrived to handle. Highway patrol assisted.

12:49 p.m. — Calf out on U.S. 83 mile 166. Contacted owner.

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