

25 BEST PLACES TO PHOTOGRAPH

Captivating people, breathtaking vistas, awe-inspiring natural phenomena, rare and exotic animals—we know what makes the best photos. This year we broke it down by what makes travel photography exciting and then dug to find the most fascinating destinations. Consider this your ticket to amazing images. *By Kathleen Davis*

Ruins, the traces of once-great societies overtaken by time. Photographers have been flocking to them since they first lugged their glass-plate cameras to the Great Pyramid. So you'll have to work to bring something unique to your photos.

Angkor Wat

SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ ❄️ 🚶

The center of the capital of the Khmer Empire until 1200 AD, Angkor Wat took 25,000 workers more than 37 years to build and remained lost to the outside world until 1860. The temple complex is considered one of the world's most important architectural sites. The central tower is surrounded by four smaller towers and adorned with intricate statues and carvings depicting scenes from Hindu mythology. Most of the temples face east, so the best light is the morning, while west-facing Angkor Wat gets the best light in the afternoon.

Must-get shots: A reflection of the temple complex in the waters of the moat, as well as the massive Bodhisattva head carvings of Ta Prohm, the only temple still unrestored.

For more info: www.tourismcambodia.com.

MONK, TA PROHM TEMPLE
 Photographer Alison Wright advises shooting the temple complex around dawn or sunset, when the monks visit. "The key to avoiding the crowds is to go in an anti-clockwise direction," she says. "Most people end up on Bakheng Hill watching the sunset, but there's no subject then except the sun."

ALISON WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY



Canyon De Chelly National Monument
 CHINLE, ARIZONA

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This canyon is one of the longest continuously inhabited landscapes of North America. The area, populated solely by Navajo people as part of the largest Indian Reservation in the U.S., is most famous for its multistoried cliff-side homes made from sun-dried clay, first built by the Anasazi people between

700 and 1300 AD. A four-hour drive from the Grand Canyon, this 130-square-mile canyon is no match in size, but its 2,000 years of history and color-changing sandstone walls make it a crucial stop for anyone who wants to appreciate the ancient beauty of the southwest. Plan your visit over the Fourth of July weekend for the Navajo Nation Powwow in nearby Window Rock, AZ.

Must-get shots: The

towering solitude of Spider Rock, pictographs on canyon walls that date back to the 4th century.

For more info: www.nps.gov/cach/index.htm.

Chichén Itzá
 YUCATÁN, MEXICO

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The main attraction of this archaeological site is the central pyramid, El Castillo. Built by the Maya between the 1000 and 1200 AD, it is one of the most astonishing

monuments in the Western Hemisphere. Check out nearby cave of Balankanche, which was discovered by a tour guide in the late 1950s. Among the huge glittering stalagmites you'll see artifacts that remained untouched for centuries.

Must-get shots: Visit on either the spring or autumnal equinox to photograph as the setting sun creates a shadow of a snake that slithers down the steps of the temple of El Castillo over

the course of 34 minutes.

For more info: yucatanoday.com/en/topics/chicken-itza.

Petra
 JORDAN

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Referred to as a "rose-red" city because of the pink-hued rock that comprises its sole building material, Petra is an enormous, ancient city that was carved into rock face by the Nabataeans more than 2,000 years ago. The entrance to the city, through the nar-

row, winding, mile-long Siq Gorge, is an amazing photo op in itself. The gorge leads you to the most famous part of Petra, the Treasury, a classical Greek-style temple craved into a 130-foot cliff that dates back to 56 BC.

Must-get shots: Hundreds of elaborate rock-cut tombs with intricate carvings. For an unusual take on an oft-photographed site, crank up your ISO and take a

candle-lit nighttime tour.

For more info: www.visitjordan.com.

The Cave Temples
 AJANTA AND ELLORA
 MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

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Situated in the Sahayadri Mountain Range near Mumbai, the 34 caves of Ellora were carved out of the face of the Charanandri hills in the 5th century AD. The nearby Ajanta caves date

back to 200 BC and are nearly completely covered in astonishing frescoes that are masterpieces of Buddhist art.

Must-get shots: The amazing architecture of the Kailasha Temple near the village of Ellora—almost 10,000 square feet, it took almost a century to build and is considered as the world's largest monolithic structure.

For more info: www.maharashtratourism.gov.in.

Sure, you might be able to photograph these creatures in a zoo, but there's nothing that compares to capturing unusual wildlife in its native habitat.



MARINE IGUANAS, FERNANDINA ISLAND

Alison Wright marvels at how close she could get to some of the animals of Galapagos. "I almost never used a long lens, and I had to be aware of where I was stepping so as not to crush any of the little critters," she says. "The secret to creating some drama to photographing these prehistoric looking lizards: Get down on your belly and shoot low."

Galapagos Islands

ECUADOR

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Six hundred miles off the coast of Ecuador, the 58 islands and cays of the Galapagos archipelago are home to more endemic species of animals than almost anywhere else. That's why it was so crucial to Charles Darwin's development of the theory of evolution. And, of course, it's why so many photographers love to take pictures there. In the air, look for pelicans and albatrosses, on land spot 29 species of land birds and two species of land iguana, and underwater look for dolphins and hammer-head sharks.

Must-get shots: The 400-pound Galapagos tortoise, marine iguana, flightless cormorant, Galapagos penguin, and, of course, the famous blue-footed boobie.

For more info: Galapagos Conservancy, www.galapagos.org.

Cape Churchill

MANITOBA, CANADA

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Photographing polar bears anywhere other than a zoo can prove an elusive task. Which is a true wildlife lover should make the trek to the "polar bear capital of the world," more than 600 miles north of Winnipeg in Cape Churchill. The massive predators convene here in October and November to hunt seals while

their newborn cubs frolic in the dramatic, icy landscape.

The location is a little remote, so your best bet is to travel with a tour group that will charter a flight and take you right up to the action.

Must-get shots: Playful cubs, action shots of adults sparring and feeding, and the striking colors of the aurora borealis at night.

For more info: www.nathab.com/north/classic-polar-bear.

Kangaroo Island

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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You'll find more wildlife and fewer people on this 90-by-40-mile island than in many other places on the planet.

Visit during the island's winter (June–August) to easily spot kangaroo and wallaby joeys feeding next to their mothers, baby koalas riding on Mom's back, "mating trains" of the spiky, platypus-like male

echidna, the intricate courtship fights of ospreys, and southern right whales migrating in large numbers.

Must-get shots: Fairy penguins among the perfectly white sand dunes, hundreds of sea lions lounging near Seal Bay, and the surreally (and naturally) sculpted boulders aptly named "Remarkable Rocks."

For more info: www.tourkangarooisland.com.au.

Isiolo

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, KENYA

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Eschew the popular national parks of East Africa for a wilderness excursions on a private wildlife preserve in the foothills of Mount Kenya led by native guides. You'll be able to snap elephants, giraffes, zebras, antelopes, and both the endangered black and white rhinos—without the crowds. And

isn't that all you came here for?

Must-get shots: Relative close-ups of animals in their natural habitats, doing what comes naturally.

For more info: www.magicalkenya.com.

Vanua Levu Island

FUJI

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The waters of Fiji are home to one of the most diverse and populous marine habitats on

earth, including 1,000 species of fish and several hundred types of coral and sponges. You'll also find myriad anemones, mollusks, and crustaceans, as well as reef passages that take you to grey reef sharks, silvertips, and hammerheads. Visit the Vanua Levu Island for the colorful corals of the famous Rainbow Reef and the opportunity to take the dive boat L'Aventure, where

marine biologists will guide you through the amazing underwater world.

Must-get shots: The shallow waters of Naviavia Reef make it easy to photograph brightly colored fish in front of coral, or snap away at pipefish, squid, sea stars, butterfly fish, blue starfish, schools of barracuda, sea turtles, and giant schools of parrotfish.

For info: www.fjime.com.

FAR-FLUNG DESTINATIONS

Sometimes the best reason to photograph a place is that you worked so hard to get there. But while you won't find many tourists here, even the ends of the earth are getting more crowded with visitors.



TIGER'S NEST MONASTERY
Be warned: "On our first visit in 2007 you were allowed to carry cameras into the building and photograph the exterior," says Neil Meyerhoff of this sacred site. "But in 2009, you had to leave your camera at the gate."

Kingdom of Bhutan

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This isolated Himalayan country is nearly 70-percent forest, and photographing there would be a feather in any traveler's cap, as the government limits the num-

ber of tourists allowed in each year. Those dedicated enough will be rewarded with a pictorial feast. Visit in the spring for the blooming rhododendrons and orchids, as well as a peek at the snow-capped moun-

tains. Secure a spot in the spring or fall for one of the Tshechus dance festivals, where local people don colorful costumes and perform masked sword dances and other rituals that date back to the Middle Ages. Truly dedicated travelers should make the several-day trek to Chomolhari, Bhutan's highest mountain, to visit Takt-

sang, the Tiger's Nest, the most revered Bhutanese monument. Must-get shots: Close-ups of red chili peppers, wide views of lush rice paddies, plus yak herders, and women weaving back-strap looms in the eastern mountain villages.

For more info: www.kingdomofbhutan.com

Antarctica

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A continent of contradictions, Antarctica defines isolated. Volcanoes erupt from a frozen landscape comprising every shade of blue and white imaginable. Miles of snow and ice stretch as far as your lens can see, yet less than 6 inches of snow falls each year. A layer of ice up to two miles thick covers the continent. A visit here isn't easy—cruise

and expedition ships are the only way to see this one-of-a-kind landscape. Upon arrival, you'll be rewarded with wildlife, including hundreds of penguins, who so rarely see people that they'll allow you to (respectfully) get up close. Visit during the austral summer (November to February), when temperatures reach an average high of 28 degrees and the sun shines for 24 hours a day.

Must-get shots: Penguins and seals with an iceberg backdrop.

For more info: www.coolantarctica.com.

Aldabra and La Digue Islands SEYCHELLES

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The 115 Seychelles islands straddle the equator nearly 1,000 miles off the east coast of Africa. Most are only reach-

able by charter flights or boats, and many are uninhabited. While they all offer the kind of remote, tropical beauty that's the stuff of daydreams, two are must-sees for photographers. Aldabra has been open to the public only since 1991. Coined a living natural history museum by biologists, it's home to the giant 600-pound Aldabra tortoises. La Digue is a favorite among photographers for its perfect beaches, blue-green

water, and traffic-free town.

Must-get shots: The tree-like formations of the raised coral reef (the world's largest) in the center of Aldabra and the huge pink granite boulders of La Digue. And those tortoises.

For info: seychelles.travel.

Colca Canyon PERU

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The Colca Canyon was largely inaccessible until the

1970s—a valley seemingly forgotten by the outside world—and the inhabitants lived in almost total isolation until a road was built. At 62 miles long and nearly a mile deep (deeper than the Grand Canyon) Colca is visited by thousands of tourists every year, yet the villages there remain mostly unchanged.

Must-get shots: Cruz del Condor provides a lookout point where condors glide by

the snow-covered mountains above the canyon.

For info: www.peru.info.

Cape York Peninsula AUSTRALIA

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In a country known for low population density, this huge expanse of untouched wilderness at Australia's northern tip still stands out. Considered one of the largest undeveloped places in the

world, it's inhabited mainly by aboriginal tribes. The roads are unpaved and often impassable in the rainy season, while other parts are can only be seen by helicopter.

Must-get shots: Indian Head Falls in Jardine River National Park and Elliott Falls. The Laura Aboriginal Dance and Cultural Festival takes place in June of odd-numbered years.

For info: www.australia.com.

Big festivals can provide good opportunities to photograph people. But if you arrive early, stay later, and travel the country while you're at it, you'll find a lot more to shoot along the way.

The Highland Sing-Sing Festival

MOUNT HAGEN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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This island's remote location—seashells were used as currency until 1933—and vast biodiversity would put it on any travel photographer's must-shoot list, but it's the indigenous population of Papua New Guinea that's the real draw. During August and September, hundreds of people from 700 tribal groups travel for days and dress in elaborate body paint, headdresses, and wigs to participate in a series of shows for the Sing-Sing festival. The event has become popular with tourists, and inevitably more commercialized in recent years, but it's still a must for photos of people that you won't see anywhere else.

Must-get shots: Close-ups of the vivid primary color face paint, detail shots of costumes, action shots of performances.

For more info: www.pngtourism.org.pg.

MUDMAN, POGLA VILLAGE, MOUNT HAGEN
"These warriors dress as spirits and creep through the mist and jungle to scare away enemies," says Chris McLennan. His advice: As long as you're in PNG, visit the remote areas, but get a reputable guide and don't travel alone.

CHRIS MCLENNAN WWW.CMPHOTO.CO.NZ



Queen's Day AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

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This annual celebration in honor of the Queen of the Netherlands, *Koningsinnedag* in Dutch, is surefire for candid. Celebrated now on April 30 (the birthday of now-Queen Beatrix's mother Juliana), the quaint streets and canals of Amsterdam erupt with a million orange-clad revelries for dancing, decorated canal

boats, parades, street theater, fireworks, and a massive city-wide flea market. The craziness starts the evening of the 29th (Queen's Night) and runs to the night of the 30th, after which the city empties out to nurse its collective hangover.

Must-get shots: Famous Dutch architecture, bicycle traffic, street vendors, and endless rows of brightly colored tulips in the fields outside the city.

For more info: www.amsterdam.com

Carnival PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD

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Considered the mother of all parties, Carnival officially takes place the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, but in this Caribbean nation the celebrations begin the day after Christmas when calypso tents

open, limbo competitions start, and steel bands compete in preliminary contests. The spectacle kicks off at 4 a.m. on the Monday known as *Jour Ouvert*. Over the next 48 hours, you'll overload your memory card with images of revelers covered in everything from elaborate beaded and feathered costumes to mud and paint, dancing all day and night to the battling masquerade bands.

Must-get shots: The challenge won't be figuring out what to photograph, but staying up for the entire party to capture it all.

For more info: www.gotrinidadandtobago.com.

UFO Festival ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

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On July 8, 1947, an object fell from the sky near this desert town, and the ensuing

(alleged) government cover-up has sparked decades of conspiracy theories. Plan a trip for the July 4 weekend for the annual four-day celebration of all things extraterrestrial.

Must-get shots: People and their pets dressed in alien, sci-fi, and space-related costumes, the pancake (a.k.a. flying saucer) eating contest, and the intergalactic fashion show.

For more info: www.ufofestivalroswell.com

Festival of World Sacred Music FEZ, MOROCCO

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Visit Fez during June to get a chance to photograph musicians from all over the globe. You'll hear everything from Gregorian chanting to Harlem gospel performed (and sometimes danced) by people in traditional garb—whirling dervishes, included—in multiple daily outdoor concerts.

Although music festivals like this take place in many cities around the world, no others boast a backdrop of crenelated fortress walls, scalloped arches, minarets, and brightly colored mosaics.

Must-get shots: The medieval town's narrow, winding streets overflow with markets and shops—and a wealth of photo ops.

For more info: www.visitmorocco.com.

It can be thrilling when Mother Nature fights back—boiling over with molten rock and steaming water, casting huge clouds and multicolored lights in the sky. All you have to do is capture it.



Geothermal Wonders

GEYSIR NATIONAL PARK

Under an overcast sky, Dylan Toh of Overlook Photography used a split neutral-density filter to balance the bright blue of Blesi hot spring in the foreground with the erupting Strokkur in the background. “Use an intermediate exposure (0.5 to 1 sec) to capture the geyser,” he advises. “Use a tripod and have wet-weather gear plus a cable release at ready.”

ICELAND

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This misnamed country (it’s about 89% ice-free) is home to mud pools, hot springs, lava fields, geysers, glaciers, enormous craters, volcanoes, mountains and waterfalls, and a million other photo ops. In Kverkfjöll, hot springs beneath a glacier have created amazing ice caves, and in many places you can see layers of white and black ice, formed from volcanic ash covered with snow. Spot icebergs floating on picturesque lakes, such as the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon in the south-east. Drive the 860-mile, two-lane ring road. Visit in the winter for the contrast of snow against black lava fields and a glimpse of the Northern Lights.

Must-get shots: Bathers in the Blue Lagoon—a natural, blue-green, steaming, thermal swimming pool. And be sure to shot the Geysir area, where the geyser Strokkur produces a high column of boiling water every 15 minutes.

For more info: www.visiticeland.coma.

Aurora Borealis

TROMSØ, NORWAY

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One of nature’s most photogenic natural phenomena, the Northern Lights are visible on cloudless nights from late November to early April from several arctic locations and even many places much farther south. But this Norwegian city is the largest north of the arctic circle, making it one of the most popular locations to view

the whirling, color-shifting lights in their full glory. Local guides can take you deeper into the mountains where the lights are most intense and you can avoid the light pollution of the town.

Must-get shots: The display is perfect for long exposures and time-lapse photography—frame with the snow-covered mountains or city lights in the foreground for added impact.

For info: www.destinasjon.tromso.no/english.

Lunar Rainbows

VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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The mist from these mile-wide falls can be seen from more than 40 miles away, and the cascade of crashing water to the gorge below create a near constant display of rainbows. If that’s

not enough of a natural phenomenon for you, three times a month, from the Zimbabwe side of the falls, lunar rainbows are formed by the bright moonlight between dusk and dawn.

Must-get shots: Breathtaking aerial shots of the size of the falls from the “Flight of the Angels” plane rides, and don’t miss the changing pink and orange hues of the mist at sunrise and sunset.

For info: www.zimbabwe.tourism.net.

Supercell Clouds

GREAT PLAINS OF THE U.S.

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It’s impossible to guarantee that you’ll get a photo of these enormous UFO-like clouds, but with a little research you can plan a trip that will put you in the path of some severe weather and possibly some of nature’s

most phenomenal cloud formations. Storm-chasers block off a chunk of time in spring (May is optimal) and obsess over weather patterns, load up their cars, and keep on top of storm movement by checking radar images. Then the chase is on.

Must get shots: Almost any photo of a supercell from a safe distance is sure to be awe-inspiring, but try to frame one with an object

such as a tree or silo to give your picture a sense of scale. For more info: www.nssl.noaa.gov.

Stromboli Volcano

ITALY \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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Stromboli, which occupies its own island in the Aeolian Archipelago between Sicily and southwestern Italy, has been erupting nearly continuously for more than two

millennia. Currently the most active volcano in the world, it erupts about every 20 minutes. Called the “Lighthouse of the Mediterranean,” it typically produces small explosions that throw clots of molten lava tens or hundreds of feet into the air.

Must get shots: The incandescent fountain of magma against the colors of the setting sun.

For more info: www.italia.it 🌐

DYLAN TOH/EVERLOOK PHOTOGRAPHY