

Flying & Travelling





Above: Fields of Gold Panorama, WA. Canon 1DsMk3, 16-35mm @ 30mm, 1/100sec, f/16, ISO 100 **Opposite: Cloud Reflections, WA.** Canon 1DsMk3, 16-35mm @ 27mm, 1/200sec, f/16, ISO 100

Resist the Desire to Pack Everything

Photographers are notorious for wanting to travel with every piece of equipment they own. Yes, it's terrific to be able to take an ultra-light flight over Victoria Falls, pull out your 10mm f/2.0 ultra-wide angle lens to capture the panoramic majesty of Mosi-oa-Tunya (the "Smoke that Thunders") and ten minutes later land on the bank of the Zambezi, pull out a 500mm f/4 telephoto lens for some eye details of the miniature kingfisher as it swoops down to catch afternoon tea. But how realistic is this?

For each travel scenario photographers need to make some hard choices about equipment. Additionally the most recent airline restrictions on carry-on baggage can be 'hellish' for photographers.

As a wildlife/nature photographer who spends a considerable amount of time travelling each year (this year:

Australia, Kenya, Patagonia, Antarctica and Argentina) I see my equipment as tools when it comes to packing. But before even thinking about packing I spend a great deal of time researching where, what and how I am going to photograph.

Researching Before You Pack

This aspect of travel photography has nothing to do with cameras, lenses, memory cards or back-up systems but rather the time you spend researching before you pack. Investing time in studying the places you have determined to visit and planning a 'wish list' shooting itinerary will vastly increase the number of photo opportunities you come upon and the quality of the final images you bring home. You probably won't get to capture every image on your 'wish list', but at least you have done your best not to miss any hidden gems.

The best way to learn about a place is to be diligent in reading everything you can find on it. When I am planning a photography trip I trawl the internet, read travel and nature photography magazines, newspaper travel sections, guidebooks

with Camera Gear

By Denis Glennon AO

(e.g. *Lonely Planet*), and most of all I visit the websites of the best wildlife/nature photographers who have already visited and photographed the places I have selected. Many of these websites have helped me, time after time, to plan and refine my travel route and shooting itinerary. Also, photo-sharing sites like Flickr, Zoomr, Picasa, Photobucket, Photoshop Express, Photo.net, Pbase.com, etc., are great resources because you can see what other photographers have shot in the particular places you wish to visit.

Don't overlook the most obvious resource – your nearest public library which will have atlases, books, journals and maps of virtually every location on earth. Finally, if you plan to self-drive, the latest Google Earth maps are awesome in detail.

Now you have fixed your list of places and you know what it is you are most likely to photograph, you can complete the final chore before you commence packing the optimum equipment for your shooting itinerary, namely prepare and print out a packing list that includes not only photography equipment, but 'best' clothes, documents, passports, visas, insurances and personal medical requirements.

This short article deals only with photography equipment but you ignore the others at your peril, especially if you are planning to travel in remote locations. I have broken my suggested photography equipment packing into two parts: "Basic Camera Equipment in the Bag", and "Nice-to-Have Equipment".

Basic Equipment in the Bag

- **Camera Back Pack:** Essential for walking around with enough gear to give you a choice of lenses, etc., and to protect your equipment. I use Think Tank bags but other good choices are Lowepro, Kata, Tenba and Tamrac.
- **Camera Body #1:** This will ideally be a digital DSLR, but the choice will be dictated to some extent by your photography genre and your budget. For me it is a Canon 1DMkIV because it shoots at 10 frames per second, which is ideal for wildlife.
- **Lenses:** If you can, pack a wide-angle zoom (say 16-35mm), a mid-range zoom (say 28-105mm) and a longer-range zoom (say 100-400mm). This selection or similar will give you all the flexibility you need to come home with some great images,



Think Tank Airport Security Camera Roller Bag.



Above: Golden Hour Panorama, Rottneest Island, WA. Canon 1DsMk3, 16-35mm @ 23mm, 1.3sec, f/16, ISP 100

whether they are landscape/seascape, people, culture or wildlife.

- **Batteries:** Take along a spare battery (or two) for the camera and flash (if you pack one).
- **Battery charger and Leads:** Charge all batteries up every night so that you are ready to go early every morning. If on a photo safari take the charger and leads with you as many vehicles will have facilities to use it; also can be used in cafes, motels along the route.
- **Memory Cards:** If you shoot in raw you will require at least two additional/back-up cards. I find that 4Gb or 8Gb cards work well for me, instead of trying to fit all my day's shooting onto a larger card. If I lose it or it gets damaged, all is lost! Consider carrying more than two extra if you do not intend to download images every night whilst travelling.



Lenses in My Bag on Photo Safaris in Africa (Range:50mm – 800mm).



Lowepro 600Aw Backpack for Canon 800mm Lens.



LightWare Carrying Case for Canon 400mm DO f/4 Lens.

- **Lens Cleaning Cloths and Blower Brush:** The cloths are essential if you are photographing in dusty conditions and the blower is required if you get dust onto the sensor. Keeping lenses and sensors clean cuts down the time spent on the computer later cleaning up images.

Nice-to-Have Equipment (for those with larger back pack/extra room)

- **Camera #2:** This can be a second DSLR body that will take the lenses you carry or it can be a less sophisticated 'compact' camera. Having a second camera/lens

combination all set up to shoot can be a great advantage in situations where there is plenty of action, or when you may wish to photograph a pride of lions as well as capture some close-ups of lion cubs.

The compact camera will allow you to capture surprise photographic opportunities unobtrusively or where a DSLR would be conspicuous or unwelcome. My second camera is a Canon 1DsMkIII, mainly used for landscape and panorama compositions.

- **Long Telephoto Lens:** If your focus is wildlife you will come home with better images if you carry a larger telephoto lens (say a 500 or 600mm); not for everybody because of cost and weight. These lenses will generally require a universal



HDR of 33 Images: Rice Fields, Bali. Canon 1DsMk3, 50mm, 1/100sec, f/22, ISO 400

mount such as a Wimberley Head, but work great on a good beanbag.

- **Tripod or Monopod:** Carbon fibre composite tripods herald the end of carrying the heavy-weight units of the past. These light weight units can be easily strapped to the side of a back pack.
- **Shutter Release Cable:** Essential for long exposure shots and will improve landscape/seascape/panorama shots immensely.
- **Flash & Flash Cable for Off Camera Usage:** Not used much in nature/wildlife photography (except with an additional unit such as a Better Beamer), but desirable for evening/indoor photography.
- **Ball-Head:** Wonderful for ensuring precise panning when capturing shots to later stitch together to make panoramic images. Can be easily fitted to tripod and monopod.
- **Dual Axis Bubble Level:** Will ensure camera body is precisely level both vertically and horizontally when panning. Small enough to fit in shirt pocket.
- **Bean Bag:** Can be used instead of a tripod sometimes and almost indispensable for wildlife photography when using large telephoto lenses.
- **Laptop:** Must be very lightweight to not become a burden. Allows you to download images from memory cards each evening and do initial culling of images when on the road.

Don't forget to bring the laptop charger.

- **Card Reader:** For downloading images to laptop. These are much faster than downloading from your camera. I use a Laser unit (cost \$19.00) which downloads at 25Mb/sec and is powered by my laptop.
- **Small External Hard Drive:** To make back-up copies of your images, in addition to the images retained on your laptop C-drive. You come home with at least two copies of your selected images.
- **Electrical Adaptor:** If you are travelling overseas you will require a plug adaptor to charge batteries and laptop. An inexpensive universal adaptor is fine.
- **Camera Manual:** Do carry one or place a copy on your laptop.

Getting It All Through the Airport Check-in

It is a great feeling to have all your equipment packed in your fully padded roll-on bag, only to arrive at the airport and be informed all your work has been in vain... your bag is overweight or too big to take as in-cabin baggage. I am never separated from the essential camera equipment I need to start photographing immediately I arrive at my destination. This means taking nearly all of the equipment in the above two lists on-board and not checking it into the aircraft hold.

It is possible to do this but you must first ensure the roll-on bag or back pack you select complies with the dimensional requirements for cabin baggage and will fit into the overhead locker. Unless you are travelling first class there is no way around this obstacle.

These dimensions are well known to camera bag makers and are generally split into two categories: national and international travel. Manufacturers make bags/packs to fit into the overhead lockers found in smaller and larger aircraft. Do ensure you select the right size when ordering. This takes care of the size issue. What of the excess weight?



Power Board for Overseas Travel (showing UK & South Africa plugs).

The Ultimate Backpack



Tamrac camera bags are designed by adventurers who also happen to be photographers. Our bags protect and organise your gear on the inside. They're also tough outside, ergonomic, nature-proof. You can go anywhere, take everything. Tamrac bags are made from materials such as neoprene, ballistic nylon and suede. With pouches, shoulder harnesses, straps, clasps, clever compartments and wheels.

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Photographer's Vest with lots of Deep Pockets.

I thus arrive at the airport with a light bag and a bulging vest, but knowing I will not encounter difficulties in taking my equipment on-board. The bag can be re-packed once I get through the formalities.

Another option is to split your equipment between a roll-on bag and a smaller back pack; most airlines will allow two pieces of hand luggage providing they are not overly large looking. If you are travelling overseas especially into Africa and you allow your equipment to go in the aircraft hold you can only hope or pray that you will see it again.

Some Final Thought Bites from a Travelling Photographer

I try to be one of the first to board the plane so that I can find overhead space for my carry-on pack. Prior to boarding commencing I generally stand as close to the gate as possible with

boarding pass (and passport if needed) in hand. For comfort, I request aisle seats, which allows me to get to my baggage easily if needed.

If I am unable to get an aisle seat when purchasing the tickets, I respectfully ask again at the check-in counter or connecting gate. Sometimes I have been rewarded with the requested seat change and when the Gods are smiling I have been welcomed aboard "XYZ Airways Sir" as the kind lady handed me a complimentary upgrade.

What a delightful way to start a photography tour!

Cyan Waters, Rottnest Island, WA. Canon 1DsMk3, 50mm, 1/25sec, f/16, ISO 100

My best advice is to purchase a "photographer's" vest with as many large pockets as possible. I purchased mine in an army surplus store (\$100). Go to this link to see photos of different kinds of these vests: [*photographers vests – Google Search*](#). Prior to leaving home I pack all my equipment into my bag and weigh it. It is always over the allowed weight. Then I gradually remove items that will fit into the pockets of my vest until the bag reaches the legal weight for cabin.