

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY: SELLING THE DREAM



Father and daughter, Shine-Ider area, Mongolia.
Photo: Kym Morris, Australia

It's that time of year again! The media is full of advertisements, selling us dream destinations and exciting adventures to tempt us into booking our next holiday. So as our thoughts turn to travel, it's a good time to reflect on the state of travel – and of travel photography.

The global economic problems, and the changes in exchange rate have an immediate effect on people's travel plans and many travel companies are waiting nervously for the phone to ring. Will people not take their annual holiday or will they just book later? January and

February are as crucial to the travel industry as Christmas is to retailers so it's going to be a tense period for many companies for the second year running.

Budgets for good travel photography have been hit hard in the last few years. Much of the travel industry, somewhat surprisingly, sees photography as a luxury despite the importance of the image in "selling the dream". Coupled with the explosion in digital imagery, and the perception that anyone can take a photograph, only a limited number of forward-thinking companies now seem to value the skills of the professional travel photographer.

The travel industry is all about selling aspirations and depends on great images to do this. Increasingly, it's also about selling the experience of the tourists themselves, rather than the images of local life that used to be the standard. This takes us away from the endless images of poor people in far off lands (why do travellers rarely photograph the wealthy or even 'regular' people?) to shots of travel experience and the more conceptual imagery which is so important in the world of advertising. With the dream and the experience comes the emotion. Capture that in an image and you have a winning shot.

It's a global marketplace and the internet has made it easy for someone in, say, Japan to source an image direct from a stock agency in England or Italy. They can also easily find a photographer based in any destination, making images readily available to any international tourist destination.

Some believe that in a recession holidays become more important, and are one of the





Temples and pagodas at sunset, Bagan, Myanmar.
 Photo: *Christopher Martin, Canada*

few things which we're reluctant to forego completely. If this is true, and people cut back on other non-necessities, then the market for travel photographs will still be there. But they'll have to be the right travel photographs, so photographers who shoot travel need to rethink what and how they shoot.

The winners of the 2010 Travel Photographer of the Year awards have just been announced. Over the years these awards have showcased some marvellous and varied imagery. They have also mirrored, and sometimes lead, interesting trends in travel photography. Of course many photographers are still producing the same type of travel images that were fashionable 10 years ago, but of more interest are the

images which take a contemporary or even artistic approach.

The 2010 winners include beautiful and intriguing black and white images, together with joyous, vibrant and engaging images which transport the viewer right into the heart of the experience. Too often travel images are simply observational, yet the new winners of this truly international and prestigious award are much more elegant and insightful about the places, the people and the experiences which they share with the viewer.

Travel photography is very much alive and kicking but not as it's been conventionally perceived. It's changing, and photographers must adapt to survive. If they can, there are opportunities. Especially as the tourism industry clamours and competes for our holiday dollar, euro or pound, with good imagery an effective way to get us to spend. The forward-thinking companies, who pay attention to the photography which they use to promote their products, are the most likely beneficiaries whilst those who only want the images they can get for free, or for very little money, will undoubtedly struggle.

From the travel consumer's perspective, there is a growing realisation that a holiday that is inexpensive can have its drawbacks, when things don't go to plan or acts of God intervene. With this will come a willingness



Mass ordination of 34,000 monks, Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple, Pathum Thani, Bangkok, Thailand
 Luke Duggleby, UK

to pay a little more to travel with companies which provide peace of mind. These same consumers will see a travel company's reluctance to pay for good photography as an indicator of a company's attitude to providing a better quality of service to their paying customers.

To see all the winning images in TPOTY 2010 visit www.tpoty.com.

By Chris Coe

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<http://www.tpoty.com>

