Saulo Silva

Travel Photography
making it simple
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Introduction

Thanks for downloading and taking your time to read this guide. I wrote it to share my experience of traveling to photograph and what I learned over the years after reading a lot, asking for advice, following and breaking the rules, trying something different and looking back to see how much my photography improved when compared to past trips.

I had my time of thinking that "more is better", cramp a lot of stuff to make it complete, show everything at once, use all filters possible, look serious out on the street and pretend to be a professional, until I realized that this was wasted effort: every time I reviewed my gallery, new photos looked like old photos, nothing improved, and maybe my approach was getting worse.

Looking back at my days of guitar playing, all I wanted was to have a distinctive sound, investing time and money on equipment that was too much for students, but still I wanted to tweak, play loud, sound different. Maybe I achieved that, but I forgot something: my guitar playing was mediocre in the best of hypothesis, then I changed my mindset, got rid of a pedalboard that, though it sounded good, I used to spend more time programming it than studying and playing music, and got a simpler one. No computer programs, USB interfaces, tinkering, just playing. I was back on track.

Then I found myself in the same spot but in photography. I don’t want to remember how much money I spent with equipment, filters, bags, or how much time I wasted in forums discussing about everything but photography. But not all was lost, because with all of this I saw my shooting hadn’t improved a bit, something was wrong. So I started over, stopped trying to look cool and worked to please my eyes, I am the one who needs to like my work in the first place.
If you do a quick research online, you will see countless guides on how to improve, how to make award-winning images, how to process your photographs to the point of being necessary to just shoot a white wall and put stuff that weren't originally there. Well, it is a way to make art one can say, but it doesn't work for me, I'm doing the opposite.

Most guides (and I've read MANY of them) will present you technical, complicated wording like crop factors, field of view equivalent in 35mm, anti-aliasing filters, chromatic aberration, horizontal distortion, softening due to diffraction, sharpness across the frame. A bunch of crap that 50 years ago, the days of those photographers we praise until now, nobody even cared about. But today with the internet, where many turn into senior electronic engineering advisors just by joining a forum, all of a sudden the noise, the sharpness and the color fidelity are the primary concerns.

More importantly, the guides show (rightfully) the absolute best 50 images out of 3000 shots. Of course, professionals have a reputation to preserve, they will not show you what failed even if it is for teaching. Showing what worked pretty well is good, it proves a point, but showing what went wrong or what can be improved is also important, at least for me. This is how we learn, making mistakes and reviewing them, it is the single most important aspect of photography today: the ability to immediately review your shot. For this reason I will share with you photographs that I liked, those which came out the way I wanted AND those that not so much, and why.

The point of the guide is to help you simplify your life when you are out of town for leisure and want to bring home more than just the mugshots, but in a simple way. If you ever listened to David Gilmour, he is the embodiment of "less is more". Enjoy your reading.
This photograph was made in the Jerónimos’ Monastery. I used one of these arches to help with composition, positioning the main tower “inside” this frame. Look around you and see if it is possible to use some structures to your advantage.
Planning the Trip

Everything starts with a visit to those sites that search for flights and hotels. You are doing your research in advance to get the best deals possible, arriving at an early flight and leaving at a late one, a hotel with a large and nice room for a bargain and near the tourists attractions so you can do everything by foot, eh? Yes, we travellers are all the same.

And by reading this small guide makes you and I even more the same. The title of this section can be misleading, because we will not discuss the best time to buy a ticket or the best season to go to a place. Instead, we will plan our shooting, our fun, the approach, the equipment to use, the idea of thinking different.

The way it works for me, and hopefully it will assist you, is knowing beforehand the dynamics of my destination. What does the landscape look like? Am I going to spend more time indoors or outdoors? How do people react to others photographing them? Am I ready to be enquired by someone if I try to photograph them? Do I prefer close-ups or general shots of the crowd? Some of these are difficult to answer without any previous knowledge of the society, that's why it is important, for me, to know in advance. It is not easy to deal with the human factor.

While I was waiting for the tram (Eléctrico) to the Pantheon, this narrow street with traditional Portuguese architecture caught my attention. It invites us to follow it, and people passing by complement the scene.
This challenge of capturing something that doesn’t depend just on patience, positioning, lighting, is what drives many photographers. I have taken a liking to challenge myself a bit and venture into the candid photography, as we will discuss later, but it takes planning and I am aware of my limitations.

Do your homework when going to a place of different culture, research, be discrete and respectful, ”when in Rome, do as the Romans do”. Public places like squares, monuments, bridges, are excellent to observe the crowd and capture a special moment. Take note of such places, spend some time observing, look for interesting angles, prepare the shot and wait for something to happen.

Cities often have beautiful buildings with a lot of people coming and going. Try to stay from a distance to preserve the scale and take this opportunity to capture both the local architecture and people. While checking for your flights and hotel, you certainly read some guides, blogs, and already have a notion of the places. Part of the joy is to discover the city yourself, but with information in advance you can create some scenes in your mind.

The first time I go to a place I try to do an overview of it, with the researches I can quickly make some photographs and walk as much as possible. If the place is nice enough to make me return, then the second trip will be more contemplative, I will spend more time looking around without rushing. It might need more than one trip to make the photographs you want.

Lisboa, 35mm ISO 100 f/8 1/100
The view from the top of Glória’s Elevator. Notice the contrast of the sunny afternoon with this big shadow on the ground level. This is a classic shot of a historical place in Lisboa with its tight streets and the traditional Portuguese architecture.
Equipment

Now this is a sensible section, I know. Rather than creating or destroying myths, the discussion will be focused on what and why do I carry when traveling in my free time. Since I also do landscape and assignment photography, I have the proper equipment for these situations, but when it comes to travel, which for me has the point of bringing back home some beautiful images but NOT at all costs, my approach to it is very practical. I want to enjoy the trip without any obligation of making the sharpest, perfectly exposed, most contrasty and award-winning images. If it happens, great, otherwise I still want to enjoy my time.

There are a number of photographers who point out the importance of equipment for a given task, even though they themselves know that one can make incredible captures without having the most advanced/expensive equipment. Just remember that today we have far better cameras than photographers had in the past, and still they were capable of creating memorable shots that stand the eternity.

Equipment must be unobtrusive, lightweight, easy to access, something that can be used without thinking. Have you ever seen those kids quickly pulling their smart phones to capture a moment of enjoyment with friends, applying some quick effects and sharing on social networks? They are probably having a great time because all they want is to keep a memory of that gathering, the smiles, most likely without thinking about the perfect exposure, sharpness and blablabla. It is about freedom, and as soon as I realized I should be free in my trips, my approach to equipment was vastly simplified.

Brussels, 35mm ISO 100 f5 1/250
The Grand Place under a cloudy morning in June. There are so many people here enjoying themselves, doing their stuff, so many people with cameras that you are barely noticed if trying to photograph someone specifically. Because there are a lot of tourists doing the same thing, it is a very photographer-friendly place.
One of my many influences is Canadian photographer David duChemin. To put it simply, a master. I once read in one of his ebooks that I bought, "your equipment must get out of your way". I can't put this in better words. If you consider photography a moment of pleasure, relaxation, but suddenly you find yourself carrying 5Kg or more of camera, lens, tripod, filters, wasting time packing and unpacking stuff, missing opportunities, constantly stopping to rest your back, it is far from the amusement it should be. I've been through this a few times and they were enough to realize I had to change, then I left all the weight behind and started traveling with far smaller gear, very capable I must say, but with 10% of the burden.

My current travel equipment as of March/2015 is (and will continue to be for quite some time) a Sony Nex 7 body, a Sony 35mm f1.8 OSS lens, a circular polarizing filter, 2 batteries, charger, 1 memory card of 32GB, 1 Lenspen for cleaning and nothing else. We can scrutinize each part to justify why I use them.

Brussels, 35mm ISO 200 f2.8 1/160
Some tourist points never get old, no matter how much they've been photographed. Even if I already knew how the Manneken Pis looked like from all the pictures I've seen in the internet, I needed to have my own shot.
One of the most visited places in Brussels is the Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert, a beautiful classic place with a gorgeous roof and strong lines which draw our attention immediately.
**Sony Nex 7**, released in 2011 and discontinued in 2014. I have used a Nex 5N for years, got used to Sony's system, quickly understood the quirks of their cameras and learned how to overcome (live with) them. I compose better with a viewfinder and also like to have an electronic level to prevent too much camera tilt, the Nex 5N didn't have these features so I swapped it plus some money with a French photographer when I went to Lisboa in 2014, who wanted a smaller camera (and the Nex 7 is already small). Since I was in the middle of a trip, I didn't really want to learn a new system and possibly miss shots because I didn't know how to use the camera. We swapped the bodies and I started shooting right away due to my previous experience with another Nex. That's why it is of utmost importance to know your gear before you travel. Believe me, the more time you spend shooting with an equipment, the easier it becomes and the more it will get out of your way. Yes, I know there are more modern, better cameras out there, but I am used to the Nex 7, it suits me well and I don't consider changing it soon.

**Sony 35mm f1.8 OSS**, released in 2012. Many of my shots were made with the kit 18-55 and, believe it or not, the Sony 18-55 is a very good kit lens, but I once realized that most shots were around 35mm. So I tried the prime 35mm at my local retailer and was immediately hooked by its small size, quality, lightweight and large aperture of 1.8. It also has optical stabilization for hand-holding the camera at slow shutter speeds and has the same filter thread diameter of the 18-55, meaning that I could use my existing polarizer. It is reasonably priced, very discrete being all black, fits in my winter jacket attached to the Nex 7, has a beautiful defocusing and since I bought it, it never left the camera. 35mm is perfect for me when traveling, I don't even think of another lens, remembering that using the equipment must be second nature, it gets out of my way.
• **Circular polarizing filter.** If you saw my other pictures, you probably noticed that the sky is normally dark, even under intense sunlight, and the colors are contrasty. This is the effect of using a CPL filter in addition to removing reflections of some surfaces (water, wood, glass, but not metal). I like dramatic skies while others prefer a more natural look, so it is a matter of personal preference. Just remember that it doesn't work when it is dark or when the sun is exactly in front or behind you. Oh, yes, the brand, I don't know. You will read a lot of stuff in forums talking about brands A and B, the cheap and the expensive filters. I've had many of them, can't tell the difference, but some will swear to the heavens the difference is notorious. Please take these statements with a grain of salt, if you need to magnify something to 300 or 400% to see the difference, the definition of "notorious" is broken.

• **2 batteries and charger.** Mirrorless cameras use batteries of smaller capacity to preserve camera size and weight, and during cold weather any battery loses efficiency. 2 is the sweet spot for me, I never ran out of charge of the 2nd one even in Scandinavian winter (of course, not shooting outdoors the whole day). To be on the safe side, have 3 or 4 of them.

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*Brussels, 35mm ISO 200 f4 1/250*

The Japanese pavillion, photographed from a different angle than the previous shot. Try to see your subject from different places, get close, get far, see if the light favours your subject. If not, go eat something and return later.
• **32GB memory card.** I never came close to filling the card even after a 5 days trip and shooting videos. Each shot of the Nex 7 uses around 24MB in RAW format, so it can store around 1300 shots (if shooting in JPG, it stores 5x more) if you consider it is not possible to fully use the 32GB (oh the technology limitations). Over time I have learned to shoot less and more efficiently, at the end of the day I also review the shots in-camera and immediately delete the out of focus ones. I have other memory cards from my DSLR gear which I can always take if more storage is needed. Remember that I already have figured out what works for me, so if you want to be safe, take 2 or 3 extra cards, buy the fastest model your camera can handle so it is quickly ready for the next shot and you will also be able to use them on newer bodies.

• **Lenspen.** It is a simple dry cleaning kit with a soft brush on one end and some sort of rubber on the other end. It works well for me, but if you don't like it, make sure to bring along some cleaning kit of your preference.

No tripod for me when traveling light, and I have a lightweight Manfrotto MKC3-H01, excellent for mirrorless cameras, but still a load that I don't like carrying around specially if I plan to walk a lot. Tripods require a backpack and most of the time I even leave my Wenger sling bag at the hotel, storing the camera in a pocket of a winter jacket. If I can't shoot something at night with ISO 3200, a wide aperture and a very slow shutter with a stabilized lens hand-held, well, sorry. I stopped regretting shots that could have been made if only I had GEAR_NAME_HERE with me, it used to be so stuck in my head that I could barely enjoy the rest of the trip. Now it is only one more reason to return and make the missing shots with proper gear, IF I still think about it when I return home. Of course it doesn't apply to trips that I am going specifically for long exposures, where I need a heavy tripod and more battery.

Here is my travel equipment, works wonders for me, most photographs in this guide were made with it. If you take the Lenspen as a scale, you can see everything is really small. This Wenger sling bag, which is general purpose, can carry this equipment plus a pair of gloves and a scarf, and during hot weather I take a sandwich and a bottle of water instead of winter stuff. Charger stays at hotel. The bag will normally stay at the hotel too if I am using a winter jacket, where the camera + lens, extra battery and Lenspen fit in the pockets. Notice the leather strap on the camera, I bought it for 4 US dollars with shipping from China to Norway and liked it so much that I got another one for my film camera.
In September/2014 I went to Dreamhack at Stockholm to watch some good Starcraft 2 games and meet the players. My trip was just 2 full days, so I took a backpack with clothes and a sling bag with my DSLR, a Nikon D7000 with the excellent 24-70 f2.8, this way I wouldn't miss anything.

The first day was excellent, I left the backpack at the hotel and had just to carry the camera for the whole day. A 3Kg load just so you know. But the next day I would go to the airport after the finals late at night, so I had to walk the whole day with the camera AND the backpack because there was no locker at the event. At the end of the day I was destroyed. But I was pumped and didn’t care much.

In November/2014 I went to Dreamhack Winter at Jönköping for the Starcraft 2 finals, a much bigger event than in Stockholm, but this time I avoided 2 hassles: the equipment taken was the Nex 7 and the 35mm, and a return flight the next morning so I could leave the luggage at the hotel and sleep at night. These were the best decisions possible, my compact equipment was more than enough to capture absolutely everything I wanted: close-ups from the players, wide shots from the crowd, videos while walking around the event. Yes, sometimes I could have a longer lens for shooting from my chair, but during the intervals I could walk to the players booths and practice room and shoot as needed, at the end of the day I had enough shots and was not tired because the equipment weights less than 500g. You can see the pictures at my eSports page: www.saulosilvaphoto.com/esports.html and some samples that I included here.
The million-dollar question: what camera to buy?

Sometimes I am asked, just like I also asked others, what is the recommended equipment to take for a trip. There is no easy answer, we have different needs, styles, budgets, so the discussion will be around the following subjects: compactness and weight, type of photography, how much you are willing to spend. Just keep in mind that, in order to give an unbiased opinion, favoring one brand over others, I will not mention any maker. You can read online buyer’s guides to see what is in the market and for what price.

The first, compactness and weight, you already know what I think is best for me: the less stuff I carry, the better. Take into consideration how much you are going to walk, if you will cycle, spend time on a train. The way you commute will define the weight of your load.

For the type of photography, this is probably the hardest. Some people prefer zoom lenses that cover a usable range, like a 18-105mm or 18-200mm, you go from wide to short/mid telephoto. Remember these tend to be a bit bigger lenses, not necessarily heavy, but large. If you don’t mind carrying stuff on a backpack, packing and unpacking or having it hanging on your neck, than go for it. I found my place on a fixed 35mm, which is my focal length of choice for travel. A small equipment draws less attention, which you might consider important depending on your destination.

The last one, price, is tricky. We tend to think more expensive means better. Better for what? You already know the gear won’t do the photographer’s job, and that the best camera is the one you like and feel comfortable with. If you have some extra bucks to spare, consider a camera with a large sensor such as an APS-C, one good lens, or an equipment that is weather/dust resistant if you want to shoot under rain or at a desert. If you are not into the interchangeable lens business, there are very good point-and-shoot models from many makers, they are pocketable and offer lots of features for the money. Some go for excellent price, while others go for a premium. Make sure you try before you buy, see if it feels good in your hands and ask for other people’s opinions.

Brussels, 35mm ISO 100 f4 1/400
The Method

The section title looks a bit pretentious, doesn't it? There are types of photography that we prefer over others. Landscape, candid, animal life, sports, documentary, photojournalism, stars, they all require their own approach (and equipment) to be properly made.

When I travel, I mostly do landscape and candid. The reason I believe landscape to be the first attempt to many photographers is that one doesn't need to ask permission to shoot a given view (though some special historical sites require previous authorization to do so), there are no human elements as main subjects, nothing to question you "why are you taking a picture of me". I've been in this stage for some time because I didn't know (and still don't) how to properly approach someone, a stranger, and make a good shot. Others do landscape because they like, they mastered it after doing it over and over. Check Bruce Percy's or Darwin Wiggett's landscape work, they are some of my favorite.

I really like the architecture particular to a place, such as Portuguese, Scandinavian and Dutch. I pay attention to prominent and discrete buildings all the same, historical neighborhoods, the moving crowd on a square, a bridge, running water. These are my primary goals when traveling, capturing the environment. But then I also need to capture those who interact with the environment, people doing their own things, rushing to work, riding a bike, a moment of spontaneity without interference. The candid photography, man, this one scares me to death.

Bruges, 35mm ISO 200 f4 1/400
Imagine your kid enjoying an ice-cream in a scene that many would consider a great photographic opportunity. Now someone comes close and photographs your kid right in your face, just because it is a beautiful and natural action. What would you, as a father or mother, or older brother, do or say after seeing it? Now imagine yourself eating a sandwich, sitting on the sidewalk under a tree, a very mundane and spontaneous situation, and you notice someone with a large 200mm pointed to you just because he/she wants to capture this candid moment. Would you let it be or would you walk to the photographer to ask what is going on? As a photographer, you will face it sooner or later, not everybody likes a large camera pointed at them, they don't know what you are going to do with the photograph later.

It is a good exercise to put ourselves on the subject's place to evaluate the reaction. If you want a setup shot with defined gestures, it is better to approach your subject in a friendly manner, earn their confidence, show your work, talk a little bit to break the ice, pave the way to ask for a photograph and be prepared for a "no, sorry". There is no book of rules, some people are better doing it than others, that's why we only had one Cartier-Bresson, that's why we have only one William Klein. If you are into photographing people when traveling, make sure you know the habits there, get information beforehand about people's reactions when being photographed, it varies from place to place. For example, I never had any problem photographing people in South America, in fact if you are noticed, they will do some gestures and pose for the shot. But in Scandinavia people don't like to have a camera pointed at them, I was asked at least 2 or 3 times by people who thought I was photographing them.
There are some tricks to avoid these problems. The first I can point out is the equipment, I use a small camera and lens, all black, which allow me to go among the crowd without being noticed. The 35mm lens is wide enough to capture the ambient, people, action, without alarming anyone I am photographing them. The Nex 7 has a 24 Megapixels sensor, it makes big images, there is plenty of space to crop unwanted parts and better highlight the subject. The screen also tilts, so I can shoot from the waist and go absolutely unnoticed even when shooting someone specifically. If you are using this "camouflaging" it will be difficult to perfectly align the shot and fill the frame, but at least you will have your photo.

My recent trip to Amsterdam allowed me to practice something interesting: having the scene ready, pre-focused and waiting for some subject to enter the frame, and shoot. The city has wonderful corners that you can frame with the canals, lamp posts and wait for someone on a bike to cross your shot. They will be your main subject without knowing it. Set your camera to the desired aperture, shutter speed and leave it focused, but to do this it is needed to know your gear intimately, as we said before, the more you use your current equipment, the more productive you will be with it by acting preemptively. The most advanced and expensive camera in the world won't do it for you.

Bruges, 35mm ISO 200 f4.5 1/80
The shot of this swan looks lovely, doesn't it? But pay close attention and you will notice something wrong: the swan is not sharp because my shutter was not fast enough, the bird moved when I clicked. We can't get it right all the time.
In nearly every city you will find the local musicians playing in public for some tips. Most of them are known figures and make for excellent opportunities to exercise our approach to close-up shots. They may not necessarily pose for you, but they will not complain, they are part of the scenario and are used to people stopping to see and photograph them. Try different angles, wait if he/she looks at you, get close but don’t invade their space, be respectful, and make sure to leave a tip... you were allowed to learn and made a good shot, while also listening to some music.

I have many captures of local artists of my city, they remember me because I often show up to photograph them in different situations, different seasons, and always leave a tip. You can do this exercise before your trip, get your camera and go to public places where the street artists can be found, shoot under different lights and from multiple angles, try to isolate just the face for an expression, then shoot the whole scene for a sense of inclusion. Don’t care much about equipment, use your mobile phone if it is easier, go there to exercise your thinking and break the ice.
If you have no chance to shoot a close-up, try a more inclusive capture, environment and people. This photograph was taken at the Eléctrico on my way to the Pantheon. In travel photography I like to keep memories of local habits, even if it is a simple shot.
People enjoying the boat ride around the canals while I was waiting for my turn. This time with a faster shutter speed I could freeze the action. It is a matter of how you prefer the aesthetics of the shot, this one could be made with a slower shutter leaving the boat blurred, giving a sense of motion.
Reviewing some Photos

This section shows some photographs from various trips and what I was thinking when I made them. As a reader, I would say this is the most important of the guide, it is here that we practice what was discussed previously. Some shots are better than others, some that I like, you may not like, in this case keep your thoughts on the intention, see if something makes sense to you and if you can apply any of these ideas to your process, just for the sake of getting started. You will eventually figure out what works better for your style.
Near the Kensington subway station I found this spot with people coming and going and tried to make an old-looking photograph. In fact, I just photographed black & white at night in Kensington, it really provides the right atmosphere. It is also a bit underexposed on purpose, I was trying to forget about always keeping as much detail visible as possible.

I really like how active the nights in London are, these traditional cafés and bars, colored signs and people gathering around the table. I still need to properly visit London for leisure, my trips are always for work so far.
There is a lot going on here. This monument draws the attention real fast, but see the lines that lead to it. There is a mix of colors too, the sky is dark blue because of the polarizer, which I like, there is a lot of green and this gray / light brown of the ground. I miss someone walking along, even waited if any person would show up and walk this path, but nobody did until the red bus Hop On Hop Off arrived. Well, move on.

Spending some time at Grand Place while eating some belgian chocolate and watching people enjoying themselves. In order to have the point of view of your subjects, sit down to see from their level. An active place like this will provide opportunities for shots, remember that Brussels attracts many visitors and people in general are easy-going when photographed.
This simple shot of the Chinese pavilion in Brussels has something that I like: the contrast of opposing colors. Do you notice the dark blue sky and the orange/yellow of the building? If you look at the colors wheel, these are at opposite sides, meaning that a scene like this draws our attention, it is the cold/hot contrast. If you have a colorful environment under bright light, try to compose with opposing colors and see the result.
As I mentioned earlier, I went to Dreamhack to watch some gaming and have fun. For this trip I took the DSLR (Nikon D7000 and 24-70) to have a flexible focal length range. I got the job done, but at the end of the event I was just too tired of carrying a backpack and a heavy camera all day long. This was my last trip with a DSLR if the purpose is just leisure.
This is the StarCraft 2 champion of the venue, Korean player Solar from Team Samsung Galaxy.
Dreamhack Winter Jönköping, 35mm ISO 1600 f2.5 1/40
This is the Korean StarCraft 2 player MC warming up before his match on the main stage. The next photographs were made at the Dreamhack in Jönköping when I took the Nex 7 and the 35mm. First thing to notice is the slow shutter speed, yes, you can still hand-hold it, but not only this equipment is MUCH lighter, requiring less effort to firmly hold it, but the lens has optical stabilization. Each brand has a name for this mechanism of preventing camera shake when shooting with slow shutter. This gives me great confidence to shoot without the risk of blurry images. Last but not least, lenses with fixed focal length generally have a wider aperture than zoom lenses, meaning that it lets more light in, a critical advantage when shooting dark indoor events like these without flash.

Dreamhack Winter Jönköping, 35mm ISO 1600 f2.5 1/100
Setting up for his match, this is Korean player Hero from Team Liquid (not to be confused with CJ Entus Hero) in the booth. Because it is not a zoom lens I need to get closer to the players to make a shot like this. During the intervals it is no problem, everybody is stretching their legs so no risk of losing my seat.
Panel host Smix interviews the Korean player Life from Team KT Rolster (played for Startale previously) after his victory.

Dreamhack Winter Jönköping, 35mm ISO 800 f2.8 1/160
This is the StarCraft 2 champion of the venue, Korean ForGG who plays for Team Millenium, holding the trophy. Now compare the 4 shots from each Dreamhack and try to tell which is better. You won’t be able to, the images aren’t large enough, all look equally good, but even with enlarged prints you will have a hard time deciding, and still you won’t be able to. This DSLR combo of D7000 + 24-70 (a premium lens from Nikon), is considerably more expensive than the Nex 7 + 35mm combo, but these shooting conditions just don’t favor the extra features of the DSLR. If I go shoot under rain, snow, at a desert or require very fast response from the camera, then I have to use the DSLR. Keep this in mind when deciding your travel equipment, it is easy to throw money away with confusing wording, marketing strategies and overestimating our real needs.
For this photograph I used a very common technique, described in the previous section: leaving the scene and camera ready and waiting for the subject to cross the shot. There is a big shadow because the sun was already setting, but I see no problem with soft light, and this corner was just too beautiful to not photograph.

In the same afternoon I walked to another part of the city, where there was a bit more light. If you have the time, walk a little bit and try to shoot the same idea with a different composition. Because cycling is strong in Amsterdam’s culture, I couldn’t come back without some shots.
The first day in Amsterdam was a bit rainy, there was no way to stay outside and walk with all that wind. The boat ride through the canals is a must-do anyway. This nice lady was the boat conductor, I was sitting at the first seats and just left the camera ready to click as soon as she turned her face.

And now I focused on the steering wheel, leaving other parts out of focus. Notice the texture of the wood, very rough, contrasty. I really like this effect on the right surface. It is possible to isolate the steering wheel, but it already draws attention even with this inclusive scene, where we see the boat’s panel and all accessories, glass cleaning kit, that the conductor uses when doing her work.
Wrapping up

Thanks a lot for reading this small work. I wrote it in the hopes that it can assist you in your photo trips and to share what I have learned by my own experimentations, readings and trips. Even going very well prepared and with the mindset ready to take this or that shot, other things out of our control can happen, a bad weather, cloudy sky, low light. There are ways to overcome difficulties but one must also be open to the fact that not everything can be photographed at any time. If you are not getting the shot you want, sit a bit, think your process, look around, drink something, return later, enjoy your trip.

There is no right or wrong in photography. There are just the photographs we like and the ones we don't, you can read a few "cookbooks" to get initial guidance as to what rules we follow when learning. At some point those rules will be holding you back, you will feel confident enough to break some or all of them, and develop your style. Studying other photographers is also a good idea, specially those who are known for doing or to have done what you are aiming to do.

Travel photography, in my simple view, is about enjoyment and experimentation. You live in a city and make your shots there, then you go to another city and do the same shots, because this is your comfort zone, you are used to it, it works for you. If you let me, a piece of advice I can give is: don't be afraid of changes, don't be afraid of missing opportunities if you tried something different, think out of the box, do extravagant tests, know your camera and use all embedded filters, break the chains. It is about freedom. You don't like a shot? Delete it. Don't try to save pictures you know are not good, deliberately giving yourself more work when reviewing your shots.

Amsterdam, Heineken Museum, 35mm ISO 400 f2.2 1/250
There was a master of the past called Ansel Adams, who used to say this about lifeless photographs: "there is nothing worse than a sharp image of a bad idea". I regularly review my collection and often delete pictures that I know they are bad, but was trying to find a use for them. After years I still haven’t and often forget they are there, because they are just bad. Each time I see a shot soon to be deleted, I learn from them: what the hell was I thinking when I shot this? For me this is the use of my bad shots, I evaluate what is it that I don't like, and try to avoid doing it again.

The process of making better photographs is a spiral, step forward, step backward. When traveling I am conscious that if I mess up, the opportunity will be gone, so I have to be ready for the next. When deciding the aesthetics of your shot, try the camera settings beforehand, the shutter, aperture, ISO, filters (if JPEG), think the scene before it happens and be ready. Do all photographs need a fast shutter to freeze the subject? Not at all, blurred subjects give sense of motion. Do all photographs need to be noise-free? Impossible, no camera is immune to it, many of my shots look good (to me) because of the texture added by grain. Also, check the difference between grain and noise, they are not the same. Do all photographs have to follow the rule of thirds? No, but it is a good practice to use it when learning, it helps to frame. What about diagonal lines? They definitely make a photograph stronger because our eyes are attracted by them, but there are other ways to make a strong shot like a distinctive subject in front of a blurred background, opposing colors together, strong contrast. Contrast is: make your whites white and your blacks black.
You see? These elements are not something we learn in a few months. It takes years, takes many, many shots to understand one aspect, then it will take countless others to harmonize "rules" and to use some advices given here, which in turn I learned from others and by experimentation. The first time I went to Lisboa I didn't make all the shots I wanted, missed many opportunities, but at least I enjoyed the trip. I will return with a different view, will make new shots using techniques learned over time and possibly bring better photos. If you ever came back frustrated from a photo trip, well I know how you feel and share the disappointment with you, I've been in your place many times and still get frustrated. Don't believe in secret techniques or miraculous equipments, practice is the only way to improve. Most importantly, you are the one who needs to like your photos, not others, please your eyes first, return as much as needed to place you like, shoot with heart and confidence, many times, you will get there.

Amsterdam, 35mm ISO 400 f5 1/125
Make shots that are simple and colorful yet meaningful and representative of the city's culture. This is a known bar at Rembrandtsplein. Notice the name, the people, the bikes and the scooters. Pretty much what the city is popular for.
Saulo Silva is a photographer, motorcyclist, occasional computer gamer and geophysicist based in Norway. When off-duty from the industry, he seeks the place, the light and the angle for unique captures. Always "armed" with a camera to not let opportunities slip away, he will strive to bring home images to please the eye, be it a brief witness of nature, a beautiful smile or a unexpected gesture. Works as an assignment photographer on weekends and holidays.

As a StarCraft 2 enthusiast, Saulo Silva attends premier tournaments to bring great images to the community and also sponsors online tournaments to encourage players in pursuing the pro-gaming career.

Visit Saulo Silva fine photography homepage for updates, downloads and eSports. Check the shop for exclusive fine prints and postcards, for you or to gift someone you love. They are made with passion.