

Preparing for Photography Adventures, Fitness and Health

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Photography outings, like everything else, need good preparation practices.

You work like crazy to get everything done at home. Then you toss thirty pounds of cameras on your back and hop on a plane to join us in the field. After months of relative inactivity (especially during winter in the northern hemisphere) we hit the trail, cameras on back, in search of great images.

Basic preparations will help you and others traveling with you, have a much better experience.

We do our best to anticipate the types of photography gear and conditions for each outing – and to give you adequate orientation to adjust your pack.

In advance...

First, our prep materials will tell you if there are health issues in the targeted regions. If a disease event crops up, we'll update those in personal communications with you.

You can always go to <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.aspx> to see what the government recommends for vaccinations or travel practices in each country. Understand the warnings there may include a whole country when your adventure might be in a sub-region of that country not impacted by the specific issue. You also need to factor in the activities you intend to engage in (if you don't plan to pet the animals, you probably won't get rabies from them) (if you are going to the Andes in Peru and not the Amazon, that changes the game too).

For U.S. domestic travel, we take health issues just as seriously. Going to high elevations in the Rocky Mountains, the desert in the Southwest, and the cold extremes of Yellowstone in winter, you can be at risk of dehydration and exhaustion if you are not adequately prepared.

We ask you to provide health-related data when you sign up for an adventure. If something changes between sending in that information and the start of the adventure, we need to know about those changes. That data helps us prepare ourselves and the providers along the way to take great care of you – and it might cause us to advise you to cancel or postpone your participation if it presents the likelihood of health problems in the field.

Second, our adventure descriptions spell out the types of physical activity you may encounter in each adventure. We do our best to describe what you will do – and to not sugar coat things so that you'll sign up. If you have questions, let's discuss them before you sign up and/or before we all find ourselves at a trailhead.

Look that over, and think about the gear you might take into each situation. Are you prepared to carry that gear that far under those conditions? Are you willing to do the work to get ready?

If you are planning a more active photo outing, work up to it. Take walks near your home with your camera bag on your back. Load it and reload it to get an idea of how far you can hike with any given combination of cameras/lenses. Work in some hills if you can.

Remember that a mile on the trail at 10,000 feet is harder than the same trail would be at sea level. Note that warm humid conditions “take it out of you” quickly. Plan on the weight of drinking water (and use it in your training too). Think about how much or how little clothing you’ll be wearing when we hit the trail and build that into your planning. And, please, be used to carrying weight over uneven terrain (nature doesn’t always have a smooth flat trail to where the best images are made). Tone your muscles, over time, until you are confident you can enjoy the trail and be ready for photography when the opportunity arises.

There is an old adage that goes “if you take care of your feet, they will take care of you”. That has never been more true than when you head down a trail with 30 pounds of cameras on your back. A pre-toned body walking in good (and broken in) trail shoes or boots will hardly feel the challenge. Buy good footwear ahead – and wear it while you are toning up for the adventure.

Lay out the fragile equipment you think you’ll want on the adventure. Your cameras, your lenses, your hard drives, your computers, etc.! Pack it up and see if you can manage it – all of it. On flight days and transfer days you’ll have all your gear with you. If you can’t manage all of it, think about what you can leave behind.

Please don’t assume you can hand some of your fragile items to an airline or the guy loading our safari vehicle and that they’ll be treated like photo gear. It’s not a fair expectation – and sooner or later someone is going to lose if you play that game

You need to be prepared to lift your camera bag into the overhead compartment. Flight crews are forbidden from helping – because if they are injured your safety is compromised on the flight. Don’t strain your back before you capture your first pixels.

We (Bob and Diane) often take a light camera bag or a waist-belt system that we pack into for longer hikes – or for times that only minimal gear is required. We stuff it with batteries and headlamps and other semi-fragile stuff for the flight, and then pack into it in the field as needed.

For the most part, you can leave behind computers and camera gear in your room at a lodge. Our guides are good at letting us know when there is concern. Either way, don’t flaunt whatever you leave behind.

When we “hit the trail” set a pace you can maintain. You are there to experience nature and create photos, not to find your limits. There are some times we need to make good time, but most of the time it’s about wandering along a trail making images as we go.

Health Issues while traveling with a group...

Normally, a health discussion is about “me”.

When ten or twelve of us set out on adventure together, it is inevitably about “us”.

Part of our job, as adventure leaders, is to help you maintain your health and to support your recovery when a malady strikes during our travels together.

Another, and equally important, part of our job is to make sure that one person’s health issues don’t stop the entire group from having a great photography adventure.

We have to balance those roles.

How can you help?

First, use good common sense. Photography travels take us to places where it is advisable to not drink the tap water – so don’t. Sometimes we’ll advise you to stay away from certain foods – follow that advice.

Clean your hands constantly. When you travel you bring bugs the locals don’t have and they have bugs you don’t have. Money is full of opportunities to transmit illness and disease. Your hands will get dirty holding menus. Don’t play with dogs or cats – and certainly not wild animals. The more often you clean with a hand sanitizer, the less likely you’ll pick up something you don’t want.

Drink lots of water. Sometimes that means bottled water. Take water on the trail. Drink it in vehicles, even if that means you have to stop and duck behind a bush. We see more health issues in the field from people who simply don’t take in enough water than for any other cause.

If something is wrong, let us know. If you pull a muscle or develop a blister, it does help us to know and we’ll do everything we can to help you work around the issue. If you become ill, we also need to know, and we often have to make decisions that secure your safety without compromising the group’s great experience.

Don’t hover over us at meal time to tell us you are ill. You’ll probably ruin our meal, you may expose us to your illness, and you will certainly diminish our sense of sympathy for your malady. Instead, tell us discretely, away from the group – as soon as you know. The group should not have to endure the details of your illness or injury.

Don't assume that you can get advice from a doctor who happens to be traveling in our group. These people are paying clients on vacation, like you, and are not volunteer medical assistants ready to respond to your malady. While some vacationing doctors love to be called into action, that is for them to decide and not for you to suggest.

If you come to us about health issues and we get you to a medical professional or a guide trained in field medicine, we expect you to follow their advice. We will do our best to make you as comfortable as possible while making sure the group is as little impacted as possible. Their adventure needs to continue.

The funny thing is... everyone is eager to think about how to prep for an adventure – when that preparation is related to gear (maybe there's a new lens I need) or clothing (what new styles would look good on me?).

It's a harder sell to talk about preparing your body for the challenges an adventure might hold.

Summary

Your fitness and health are important parts of having a great photography adventure.

Your fitness and health are things you can directly influence, by

- Having the proper vaccinations and immunizations
- Preparing your body for the rigors of the adventure
- Choosing the adventures that are appropriate for you
- Adjusting your pack to meet your personal abilities
- Wearing appropriate footwear, clothing, and sun protection
- Being cautious about what you eat and drink
- Drinking lots of safe water
- Keeping your hands clean, and by
- Addressing health issues as soon as they arise

We will work with you, before and during each adventure, to stay healthy and fit and to be able to get to great places to take great photographs. We will work with you to respond to health situations in the field – and we'll work to make sure that those who don't have health situations continue to have great photographic outings.