

# Decisions. Decisions. What To Take?

By Susan E L Lake  
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At the moment it doesn't feel like I'll ever again get to see and photograph a world bigger than my backyard sanctuary. That's not a terrible fate because I love the photographic opportunities it gives me, and I've taken full advantage of this quiet time. However, I'm pining for far away vistas. Someone suggested I plan my next photographic adventure as a way to satisfy this need. But truth be told, I can't. "Why not?", inquiring minds might ask. Because I don't plan my trips with my camera in mind. I just go and then capture the moments as they occur. I know. I know. I've read the articles that say one should survey what is likely to be available with a mind to what is particularly popular or significant. It sounds like a great plan, but for me it would be wasted prep time. I don't want to seek out those sights. I want instead to respond to the moment and the adventure. I want to stumble upon that fabulous statue or wonderful garden. Yes, I do end up getting the same images others do. There's a reason those sights are photographed so often – they are memorable. But I also get lots that others never notice. These are the shots that so often touch me when I get back home. They aren't iconic; they are just personally memorable.



Besides this point and shoot, I need to bring a few more things with me. Can you tell it's seen a few miles?

But there are some actions I do take in preparation. To start with, I make a text file to take with me that lists each day's activity even if it only says "at sea." If we are going on an excursion, I copy the details usually provided by the cruise ship or travel company. This information is helpful before we leave for the day and after I return. It gives me some idea in advance of what I "might" see and then helps me afterward identify some of the images I did take. When I need the name of that church with the amazing window, the excursion details often give me the answer. However, even if the brochure tells me that we will be seeing a church with a famous window, I don't go looking for it. If it wasn't an image that "talked to me," then I prefer shooting something that does. I don't make my living doing travel photography; I make memories instead. It gives me the freedom I like.

Deciding in advance what equipment to take to make these memories is both hard and easy. As I've written about before, I no longer take my fully equipped DSLR with multiple lenses. As much as I love that camera, it's no longer "travel appropriate" for me. It's too big, too heavy, and too complicated. Don't get me wrong, at home I love the options it provides, but traveling means switching lenses when time is of the essence. I could purchase a lens that shoots a wider range and would if the first two issues weren't still there. But they are, so it drops off my "what to take" list.

Never fear though, that still leaves me with lots of good camera choices. I have my trusty iPhone which takes wonderful photos, but I also have my Sony point and shoot as well as a waterproof Olympus for underwater shots. So what do I take? ALL of THEM. "But what if you aren't going snorkeling and don't need an underwater camera?" those same inquiring minds ask. I take the Olympus for peace of mind. I was once on a fabulous trip to see whooping cranes and at the worst possible moment my camera died. I missed the shot of a lifetime as

well as those ordinary ones during the final hours of our trip. I vowed never to be without some kind of backup. But the Olympus is good for more than peace of mind. It's a nice point and shoot that doesn't give a flip if it gets wet. Excursions happen regardless of the weather. I've been on some that required us to leave the ship by tender (lifeboats) with rain and waves pouring in on us. Once on shore, it wasn't much better camera weather. Those are the moments when I dig out my waterproof/backup camera. No, it's not my camera of choice, but it is good enough when I can't use my other one. And if one is going to ride on the Maid of the Mist when visiting Niagara Falls, it's pretty nice too. On a side note, yes, I know that there are plastic covers to put over cameras to protect them. But as long as I have the waterproof one with me already, I'd rather use it. It sort of makes me feel like I had a good reason to bring it along.

Besides cameras, I bring along a mini tripod. I'd love to bring my full size Manfrotto, but it presents the same problem I've already mentioned: size, weight, and convenience. On excursions where someone else is deciding where I'm going and how fast, there's no time to set up one no matter how much it would improve my shot. Even if I know I'm going to be someplace where I get to decide, it's still too much equipment to lug around for those few moments. So it stays home and I direct looks of envy toward those who have theirs. But my little bitty one works pretty well in a pinch. It keeps my camera stable and fits into my fanny pack. I even have a clip for it that attaches to my iPhone if I need it.

It goes without saying that I pack multiple batteries, chargers, and required cords. I've taken to using a label maker to put the name of the camera on each device other than batteries. Manufacturers have gotten better about using the same micro mini cable as a charger attachment, but that hasn't always been the case. Some chargers look much like others so it's just easier to KNOW that I've picked up the right one.

How many batteries do I take? All that I have which is at least three. One goes in the camera, one goes into my pouch, and one is on the charger. If I have more than that, all the better. Trying to find a battery for a specific camera when one is nowhere near an Amazon pickup is not an experience I want to have. I have found it useful to mark each battery with a number using a sharpie type pen. It makes it a little easier for me to remember which one has been "used up" and which I want to grab next. I also have both an internal charger and an external charger. I had to purchase separately the external, but it's a life saver because it means you can always have a battery ready.

And speaking of batteries, I also take along at least one portable charger for my iPhone. If I'm using my phone a lot, it won't get a whole day on a charge so this is a great backup. The ones I have are small (about the size of a giant lipstick tube) and inexpensive or actually free (mine are corporate "giveaways"). Even if one has to buy them, they are well worth it.



The waterproof Olympus is a great secondary camera.





A mini tripod and iPhone clamp can save the day.



Sometimes it's easier to charge a battery in camera. Notice that I've labeled the little brick to make sure I have the correct one.



A portable charger for an iPhone doesn't have to be huge or expensive.



External chargers means that I can charge a battery while I'm still using my camera.





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This memory card plug is so worth its price.



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It doesn't take much to number my memory cards, but it has saved me much frustration.

The answer for how many memories cards to take is pretty much like batteries. The more the better. Three is the minimum for me, but much



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A pen and a small notebook are a great way to record those pieces of information you will forget.



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Having a business card with you never hurts.



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A waist pack or "fanny pack" turns out to be a great way to carry my equipment.

depends upon the size of my card and whether I'm shooting JPG, RAW, or both. Just as I mark batteries, I also number each plastic case that the card came in (although I could use a pen directly on the card as I did with the batteries). I don't erase cards until I'm home and KNOW that I have transferred them to my computer. Looking at the card cases, I can easily know which one I need to use next.

One piece of equipment that is always at the top of my "don't forget" list, is the tiny card reader that plugs into my iPad so I can transfer images into it each day. Not only does it let me use my tablet as a backup, but I can also begin the process of selection using a much better screen than the one on my camera or phone.

And that brings us to bags and such. My Olympus camera, cables, batteries, and cards go into a net bag with a zipper (so I can tell quickly which it is) that gets stowed away unless I need it. It's actually pretty small and takes up little space even though it has a "floatable" strap to keep it from sinking into water if dropped.

I have a great Samsonite waist pack (yes, I know they aren't cool), that holds my Sony Cyber-Shot DSC-HX99 as well as my iPhone, my mini tripod, lens cloth, batteries, and memory cards. I add my ship key card, a pen and tiny notebook, business cards, and a little pill container. There's even a mesh "hanger" for a water bottle. And as an added bonus, I tuck in one of my small power banks and cable to recharge my iPhone along the way. I know it sounds like a lot, but it's not. Meanwhile, it means my hands are free and everything is easily accessible.

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