



THE LITTLE THINGS...
Don't just focus on landscapes, buildings and people when you travel. Details such as trinkets in local shops can also show where you are and add some variety to your travel album

Create a diary of your travels **16**

Add a narrative to your travel albums by shooting a set of images that tells a story. Why not keep a short travel diary that covers an hour, day or week of your trip. Contributor **Pete Adams** shares his diary of a recent trip to China, to shed some light on a day in the life of a travel photographer.

6.15am. Shaken awake from a deep slumber by the intrusive alarm call. A mangled, jet-lagged body clock has meant a disturbed night's sleep. I get up to check the weather - if it's not raining, I'll be heading out to try to take pictures. It's the start of the trip and I'm anxious to grab images to try and get in the flow of things. I'm only too aware of the time spent planning and the cost of getting here. I need to get some payback. I'm pessimistic, but also fired up at being in a new city. This is China, so I'm not expecting dramatic light. Any appearance of the sun will merit sacrifices to the gods. From past experience, China is usually bathed in low grey tupperware skies at this time of year. After checking my kit bag, I leave the hotel with a knot of anticipation in my stomach.



7.00am. I'm walking on The Bund beside the Huangpu River, with its views across to Pudong, and the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, set beside the burgeoning skyscrapers. Designated for special economic development, the area symbolises modern China. The race to develop as fast as possible means that the skyline is constantly changing, as workers toil round the clock to complete the latest and highest tower. I can't believe my good fortune as I spot a group of middle-aged ladies doing their morning Tai Chi exercises. This is the sort of scene I'd been hoping for, something to visually sum up the meeting of the old traditional Shanghai and the new glitzy, gleaming glass fronted Pudong. Rushing beehive workers in suits on one side of the river and graceful, deliberate Queen Bees on the other. The hazy sun appears, low in the sky, but I decide not to use an ND grad filter. The sky is detailed enough without one, and there will be less chance of flare and light degradation.



I get more excited as the ladies produce some fans to use with their movements. Opened with a flourish, they give off a sound not dissimilar to that of a camera's shutter firing. I anticipate this and press the shutter, echoing their movements. The sun is getting stronger now, so I try to pre-empt the motion of fans and bodies, keeping the scene nicely backlit, but deadening the sun's direct harshness. There are a couple of onlookers, somewhat fascinated by the questionable entertainment I'm providing, but with one or two glances, I persuade them to move out of shot. Instead of moving around, I stay still - waiting for the ladies to move into frame. Soon I'm able to anticipate their movements and intuitively take pictures as the composition falls into place.



I'm onto a good thing here, so I shoot 20 or 30 more frames before the sun gets too high and I move on. There should be a bounce in my step now, but the result of being crouched down for so long means it's decidedly stilted.

11.00am. Back at the hotel, showered and breakfasted. I've downloaded this morning's exposures, mainly to put my mind at ease that everything's working and I haven't forgotten to bring anything. Having been office-bound for the last four weeks, it's a boost to see I can still take a shot. A quick re-read of the guidebook and I decide to head to one of the city's Buddhist temples. I'm invariably drawn to Buddhist temples, and in a bustling city such as Shanghai, they provide an oasis of calm and peace. They can also be immensely photogenic, especially if there are monks present. Unlike many religious settings, Buddhist temples can be quite

laissez-faire - people pray, eat and burn incense, whilst tourists mingle amongst the worshippers. While you need to be sensitive and as unobtrusive as possible, they're refreshingly photographer-friendly places. For my first shot, I decide on a tight frame on the face of a gently smiling, benevolent Buddha. The standing statue rises to the ceiling, so I need to stand well back. I use a tripod for precise framing due to the low light. Effectively, I'm standing in front of the altar and I feel very self-conscious. Nevertheless, sensing that the locals around me are unperturbed, I continue. I then move around to the side, to get a different view using the ornate patterned ceiling as a backdrop to the Buddha's face.

2.00pm. After a lunch break and some excellent noodle soup, I decide to head over to the Antique Market - a couple of streets lined with stalls selling 'old' artefacts, though how much of it is genuinely antique, and not a product of the renowned Chinese counterfeit industry, is open to speculation. The overall scene isn't particularly photogenic - it's slightly scruffy, with stalls scattered higgledy-piggledy among the towering grey apartment blocks. My eye soon starts to roam, looking for detail and I'm particularly drawn to the old Mao memorabilia. On a previous visit I bought a couple of old Communist propaganda posters, and I like this iconic, historic, stylised form of art. I see some bright red Mao badges on a dark blue cloth and decide this could make a strong graphic image. I set up the tripod and the stallholder appears. I'm thankful as he stands back with amused interest without hassling me to purchase. I show him the first few frames on the camera's large screen and, as he smiles, I continue to rattle off a few more, zooming in and out shooting horizontally and vertically. Further down the street I notice an arrangement of porcelain Mao statues. There is one amongst this crowd where he's holding a table tennis bat and I'm amused by the irony of someone responsible for so many ruthless deaths in such a playful pose. I use this figure as my focal point, shooting with various apertures in order to throw surrounding figures out of focus. With digital photography, I find depth-of-field unforgiving, so I hedge my bets. The stallholder urges me to buy and becomes even more animated when I enquire as to price. I'd like to purchase but am wary of getting my 'Mao' safely home. I finally leave the market without having given into temptation. However, in my mind's eye, I hope my images are somehow synonymous with China and graphic enough to make the cover of a guidebook or similar.



5.30pm. I'm back where I started - back on The Bund. It's been a long day and I'm cream-cracked. However dusk shots, when the city lights come on, are an important requisite of the travel photographer's day. Often, cities that look drab and flat during the day come to life at night - a feast of neon fills in the emptiness of the day. However, it's a hit and miss affair. I know from a friend, who was here recently in cold weather, that the lights were switched off to save power for heating. Also on a previous visit, the lights came on well after dark, when all detail and colour from the sky had vanished. Still, I set up my camera with the 70-200mm lens, locked the mirror up and pointed over to Pudong. A few lights rather lazily appear through the murky light, and it's not looking too promising, but I soldier on, aware of how far I've travelled. I notice a well-lit ship moving into the frame and decide that this is a good opportunity to capture some movement, so I select a slow shutter speed. This is necessary anyway in the vanishing light. I fire a frame with the boat to the left, centre and right. I'll decide which works best later.



In a reflective mood, I pack up, hoping that Photoshop might add some saturation and magic to tonight's session. It's been a busy but productive day and there is now the prospect of excellent Chinese food and Tsingtao beer awaiting. Suddenly the pre-trip deadlines and jet lag seem worth it. More of the same tomorrow? Sure thing!

