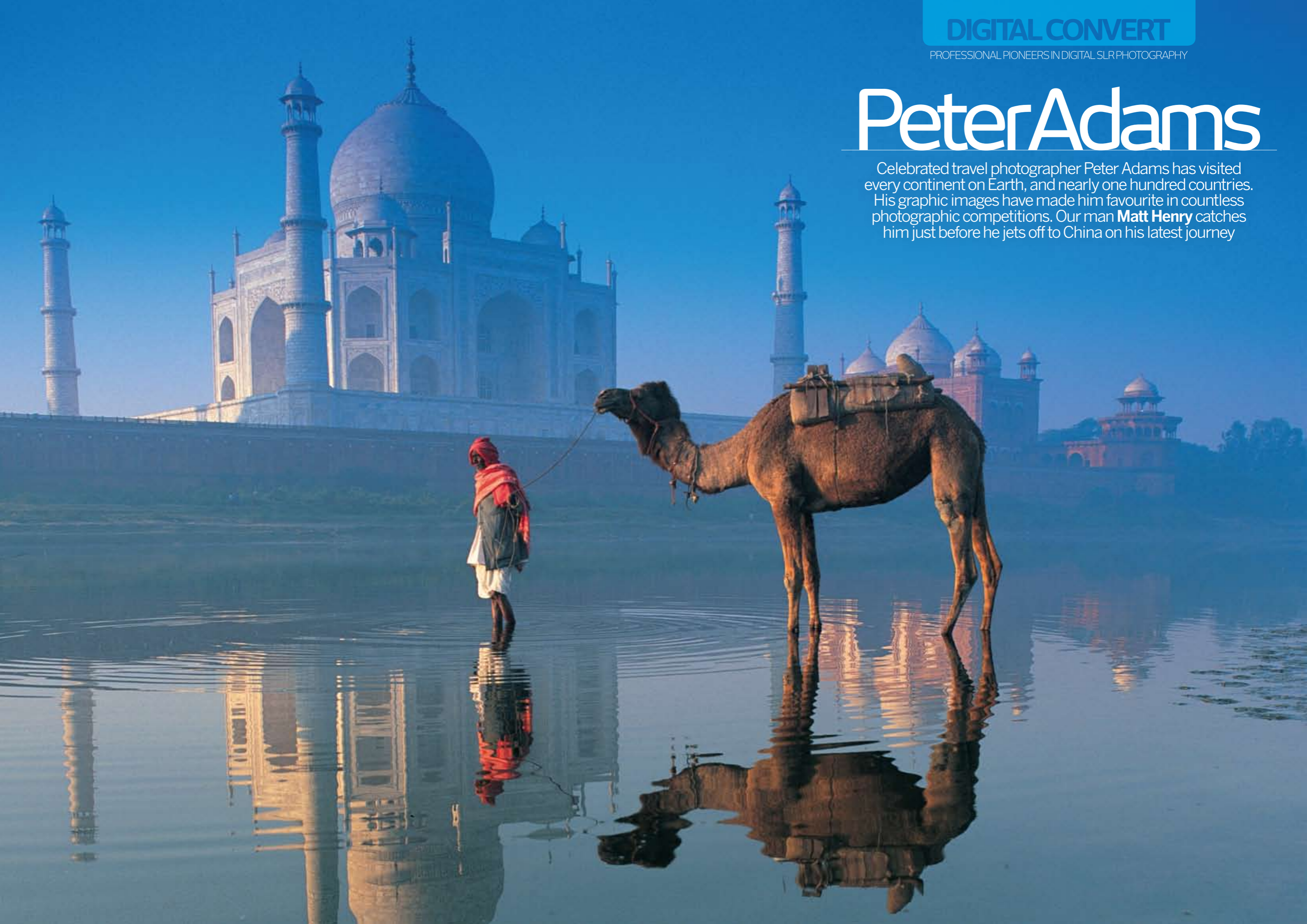


DIGITAL CONVERT

PROFESSIONAL PIONEERS IN DIGITAL SLR PHOTOGRAPHY

# Peter Adams

Celebrated travel photographer Peter Adams has visited every continent on Earth, and nearly one hundred countries. His graphic images have made him favourite in countless photographic competitions. Our man **Matt Henry** catches him just before he jets off to China on his latest journey





**A**NY PHOTOGRAPHER WILL TELL YOU THAT no matter what they shoot, there is an enormous buzz in finding a mix of colours and a composition that works. Tilting the camera a little bit this way, zooming out to include more of a particular tone, or panning around to arrange your main elements in a different way. It's an ongoing process of experimentation that's largely intuitive. You know when you've finally got something that works and that feeling just can't be beaten. But when the scene you're busy arranging is a camel fair in Rajasthan, the dusty exploits of a Mongolian herdsman, or a colourful pair of stilt walkers in the Dogon Country, you can't help but think that the feeling might just be that little bit sweeter. Judging by the wondrously graphic nature of Peter Adams' travel imagery and the breathtaking scenes he manages to capture, it's clearly a feeling that the veteran travel photographer has experienced time and time again. So, if there's anyone you'd want to listen to about this highly sought-after profession, Peter Adams is your man.

"I do think travel broadens the mind," begins Peter. "Of course you can go somewhere with preconceptions and have them reinforced, but personally I find that people are brilliant and always willing to help you out. Perhaps they have more time in the developing world, but it does seem like it's always the people with the least that give the most. At home, it's all about money and the material. Sure, you might get the odd cab driver trying it on, but you'll get more people with next to no money offering to buy you

drinks. Most people are very proud of their communities, and pleased that you're taking pictures. You're constantly meeting people and making friends. In Bali recently, I rented a guy's car. Afterwards, he invited me back to his house; His mother and grandmother were there, and he put on this great meal for all of us. It was the best food I'd eaten all trip. That sort of thing is brilliant.

"I tend to mix it up a bit in terms of where I stay," he continues. "I'm past staying in shared dorms but don't like staying in soulless hotels either, so I tend to plump for mid-range guest houses – family-run places, where the money is going to local people. People will normally help you out in those sorts of places. In the big hotels, no-one wants to know. I'm 48 so I tend to lie somewhere between the backpackers and the retired lot," says Peter. "I don't really fit in. I think people assume I'm a single man on holiday. I normally end up mixing with the younger crew, which is quite refreshing. I'll quite often team up with someone to share accommodation and transport. A lot of them are keen to save money, so you'll get people who want to share a room with you, though I do get frustrated with people who barter too hard. Some backpackers automatically assume that everyone is trying to rip you off, and they end up haggling people down for the sake of a few pennies. That sort of thing really pees me off!"

Peter focuses more on people than he does on straightforward landscapes, and it's this focus that enables him to make a decent earning from stock photography in a market flooded by landscape and cityscape imagery. >>

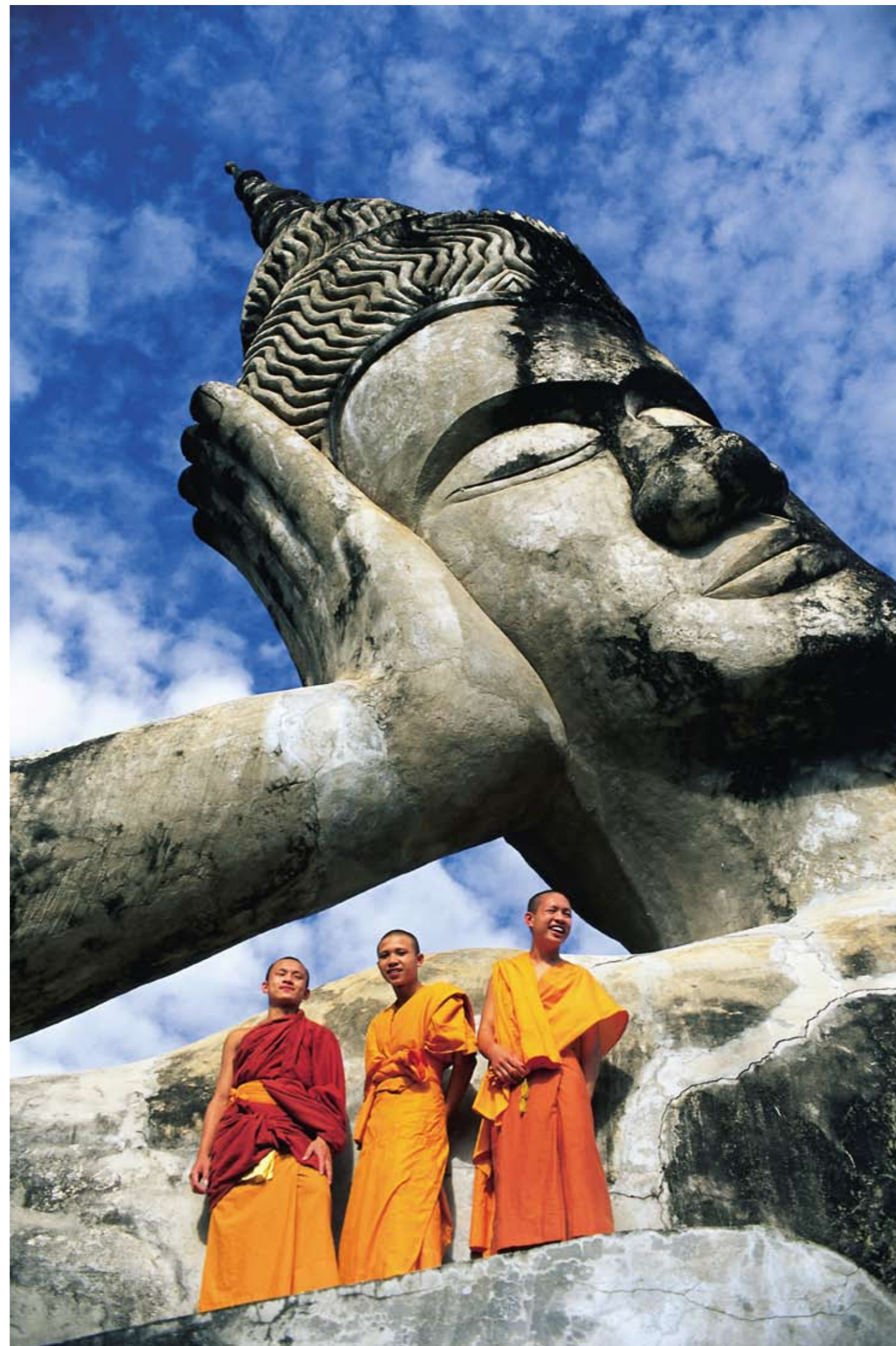
**RIGHT:** "A giant Buddha in Laos was the ideal backdrop for these monks. They thought it was all a good laugh, so I got them in the frame. I used a polariser to deepen the blue sky."

**BELOW LEFT:** "I shot these flamenco dancers at an open air festival in Madrid. I stopped down to around 1/15sec to get some movement in the dress, but not so much as to blur things totally."

**BELOW:** "These kids were walking along the beach on Pemba Island near Zanzibar. The light was nice so I asked if they minded doing a few cartwheels for me."

**INSET BOTTOM:** "The Pushkar camel fair in Rajasthan is very well known. I shot into the light as the mist and fire smoke created the hazy effect. I used my hand to shade the lens from flare."

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**ABOVE:** “There’s no chance of finding the Great Wall of China clear of people unless you are willing to get up very early indeed, almost in semi-darkness. You don’t often get good light there and this particular image was warmed up in Photoshop.”

**FAR RIGHT:** “This is Sanna, the capital of Yemen. I asked to get on top of a hotel roof to get this view. There were some quite dark clouds just coming in, which made it quite moody. It was just before sunset and the lights were starting to come on in the town.”

“Visiting a country is really about the people who live there, and it’s the people I enjoy photographing. The sort of places I shoot tend to vary; big cities, national parks, local festivals. I’m always looking for colourful people and you have to see the situation before deciding on your approach. If you’re in a village, you need to spend some time chatting to people before you can bring your camera out, though sometimes you do have to grab a shot. It’s very much about sussing out the situation beforehand. I’ve had people throwing tomatoes at me in a Bolivian market! I normally like to ask permission first, and if I say I’m going to send someone a picture I make sure I do. It’s a nice basis to do things on, though I’m not averse to paying if required.”

Peter looks to go away for no longer than three weeks if possible so he’s not separated from his family for too long, and normally aims to do about five or six trips a year. Long haul destinations tend to command the full three-week stays (he’s about to go to China for three weeks) while he’ll manage to cover some European destinations in a week. “I’m into world music,” he says, “so often tend to tie my

visits in with music festivals. I recently went to one in the Mali desert, which was an amazing experience. Robert Plant was there, as were lots of tribesmen in colourful attire. I’d say that my interest generally lies more within the developing world. I gravitate towards places that are different. If I could time travel I would!

“I don’t necessarily prefer the hot countries though, despite my default setting being South East Asia in the British winter time. One of the best trips I’ve done was to Northern Sweden where it dropped to -30°C outside our ice hotel at one point. Anything down to -20°C is fine with the right clothes, but -30°C is pretty uncomfortable. But their houses are so much cosier than ours. They’re not at all drafty, but I guess you can’t afford to have drafts when it’s -30°C! We went to a winter fair in Jokkmokk, which was great, and I rented a car and did one tour by myself to the Lofoten islands. I was quite lucky there really as conditions on the first day were brilliant; there was snow everywhere and sunshine. It was a really beautiful scene.”

Peter is sure to carefully research his destinations >>



### Biography: Peter Adams

Peter Adams is 48 and lives in the Cotswolds with his wife and two children, aged 9 and 14. He grew up in London and is a self-taught photographer, learning largely through books and magazines. He assisted a commercial photographer in Bristol briefly, before setting up on his own, using a government-assisted scheme for small businesses, which gave him the princely sum of £40 a week as he built up his commercial portfolio. He worked for design and advertising agencies before realising travel photography was far more interesting than shooting packs of salmon, and slowly built a living shooting travel stock. “At college, I’d gone to India and come back with a scrapbook of images for my family and friends. It all grew out of this really. First, the travel was more important, but now, it’s the love of photography that drives me.”





**LEFT:** "These Cormorants are meant to dive for the Chinese fishermen, but they're now more on display for tourists; I'm not sure how much fishing is actually done these days. I shot it at dusk, so used the lamp to throw some light on his face."

**BELOW FAR LEFT:** "I shot this monk outside a Buddhist temple in Mongolia. He sometimes stops to feed the pigeons on his way to school in the morning. I used a shutter speed of 1/30sec to add a bit of motion blur."

**BELOW LEFT:** "The cross-legged guys here were part of a festival in the Philippines and were waiting for the event to start, so they could walk along with the parade. The beauty of events like this is that people expect to have their pictures taken."

**BELOW:** "These two military guys were cycling in Tiananmen Square. I used panning to show some movement in the wheels, whilst retaining a little sharpness in the cyclists. I was close in so the shutter speed was about 1/15sec"

**BELOW RIGHT:** "This shot is of a herdsman in Mongolia with his goats. I used a long focal length of 180mm to compress the perspective. It was taken in the morning, around 10am. The animals kicked up lots of dust, which created a wonderfully simple backdrop."

before planning a trip, both in terms of the marketability of places and where to head for on his arrival. "There's a difficult balance between planning and spontaneity," claims Peter. "There's nothing worse than coming back and finding out that you've missed something important; but at the same time a guide book doesn't really mean a lot when you're reading it at home – the pages only come alive on your arrival. When I'm at a destination, I normally pick a place to visit just to get myself out of the hotel, even if the thing I'm heading for isn't that great. It's on the journey that you normally encounter things. In Shanghai for instance, there are things you should photograph from a commercial point of view, such as the skyline which is ever changing, but it's the quirky little backstreets you negotiate on your way that provide the more interesting imagery."

"There are some festival websites that are very useful for ensuring that your trips coincide with some interesting local events", Peter claims, and he recommends the *Sunday Times Travel Magazine* (the standalone magazine rather than the newspaper supplement), the *National Geographic* as well as the French magazine *Geo*, for destination ideas. He considers the *Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet* to be travel essentials, but claims not to use the hotel or eating information as it's either out of date, or you end up somewhere packed full of other guide book readers. Where they're really useful, he says, is for making sure that you've covered all the major landmarks and local markets and such. "I also make use of the foreign office website to find out if any places are too dangerous to visit," says Peter, "and use the Trip Advisor website from time to time to get reviews on tours and local sites."

"There are no countries really that I wouldn't visit," Peter continues. "I've been to every continent and nearly 100 countries, and try not to come away with a bad impression of any place. The first time I went to Mexico I did have a bit of a bad experience, so was determined to return for a good one, which I got thankfully. The only place I'm not sure about is Russia. I had a stopover in Moscow and that was hard going, but really I wouldn't like to write anywhere off. »

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Sometimes places don't live up to expectations, but plenty of times they do; the Taj Mahal and the Grand Canyon to name but two. Sure the travel does get you down and sometimes you wonder what you're doing when you're delayed at yet another airport. I do tend to start off in a negative frame of mind, but once you get to a place and you start taking shots you realise why you're there and the enjoyment comes. I'm learning to ride through the lows and remember that the highs might be just around the corner."

As a relative latecomer to digital, Peter was finally convinced to convert with the arrival of the Canon EOS-1DS MkII in 2005. "The transition has been good," says Peter. "It's been a sharp learning curve. I was reluctant at first and had my frustrations but a lot of good has come out of it. It's opened up so many more opportunities. There are things I can do that I couldn't before, such as shooting in relatively dull situations, where a scene can be rescued with a little saturation boost. The instant review also encourages me to shoot more. Before, you were weighing up issues of film cost too. On the whole, it's been very positive, and I'd never go back. I find it difficult to understand why some people still want to continue using film."

His main source of income comes from stock sales with agencies Getty, Alamy and John Arnold Images and he first joined the stock photography market in the mid-1980s when things were really taking off. "I almost look back to those as halcyon days now," says Peter. "You just sent in your trannies and your captions and that was it. Now you've got all the politics of libraries and the headache of Metadata keywording to contend with. Plus, it's much more difficult to get things placed. Some of the more out of the way places can sell quite well. Everyone's seen a hundred pictures of this or that city from a bridge viewpoint, but a strange mud dwelling in Mali, for example; there aren't really so many of those types of pictures around. I generally like to find somewhere different anyhow. »

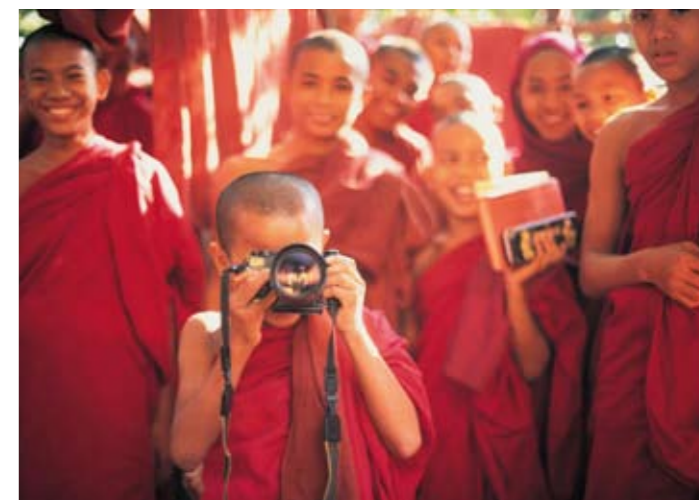
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**RIGHT:** "This is Dogon Country in Mali. The still walkers are taking part in a traditional local event, taking time out at this stage waiting for things to start. There was nothing in the sky behind, so I actually dropped in another sky."

**BELOW:** "This is the Inle Lake in Burma (now called Myanmar) where the fisherman are famous for rowing with one leg while they use their arms to handle their nets. It was shot early in the morning and a polariser was used to bring out more colour in the lake."

**BELOW CENTRE:** "I'd seen this backstreet the previous day in the Hunan province of China but when I turned up the next morning to shoot it, there was another photographer there with the same idea! I had to crop in hard to avoid him."

**BELOW FAR RIGHT:** "I walked into a temple in Burma and these young monks were hanging around in between classes. I had this idea of them taking pictures of me. They were interested in the technology so I gave them one body and used another to take the picture."







**ABOVE:** "This vast salt pan in Bolivia goes on for miles and miles, and has these great big islands in the middle of it. I got down low to get the pattern of the ridges on the salt. The colours here are all natural and I shot just as the sun got up on the horizon."



**RIGHT:** "I saw this colourful scene in the Peloponnese in Greece on the way to catch a ferry and was so struck by it that I decided to stay another night so that I could capture the scene early the following morning. The side lighting here worked well."

**FAR RIGHT:** "I paid a guide to take me out into the Sahara desert in Morocco. We camped out there and I used him as a model. This was early in the morning and I got him to walk the three camels on a ridge of dunes."



"MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE BLEAK ABOUT THE MARKET AND ITS FUTURE, BUT I TRY TO REMAIN OPTIMISTIC. AS LONG AS PEOPLE ARE TRAVELLING, THERE WILL STILL BE A LARGE MARKET OUT THERE. IT'S A JOB I ENVISAGE DOING RIGHT UP TO MY RETIREMENT"

#### Pete Adams: Travel kit

Peter shoots on a Canon EOS-1DS Mk III with Canon 70-200mm f/4L and 24-105mm f/4L lenses, and recently added the 17-40mm f/4L to his arsenal on a friend's recommendation. His preference is to get in close and shoot relatively wide, but he does find himself using all extremes of his lenses, though the 1.4x extender he also owns rarely gets out of the bag. He has a Manfrotto 190 tripod with an Arca Swiss head and Really Right Stuff camera plate and uses a Mac laptop for downloading while travelling, with an Epson P4000 and a Lacie hard drive for back-up. He does continue to use a film-based camera for panoramic shots, but with Photoshop's Photomerge feature, he now plans to give up film entirely.

You don't want to walk in the footsteps of others, but it's so difficult now in the era of cheap air travel; everyone's been everywhere. I have actually seen people with sheets of other photographers' pictures printed off the internet holding images up and trying to replicate them!

"But just when you think it's all been done, you find something new. Communities are changing quickly and stock photography must reflect these changes. There was a period when stock agencies weren't taking anything that they already had, but now things have eased up a bit. You do always need fresh stuff to keep your images at the top of the search pile though – you just have to be a bit creative. There is no point in taking a straight-on shot of the Eiffel

Tower or Taj Mahal. It probably won't get accepted. You've got to look for a different angle.

Many photographers are bleak about the market and its future, but I try to remain optimistic. As long as people are travelling, there will still be a large market out there. It's a job I envisage doing right up to my retirement. I'm also doing a bit of video these days as I think that's the growth market. More and more people are buying clips from the web as broadband gets faster. It's fun having movement in your pictures and great learning new techniques, though for me it will never take over from stills. Stills are my real love and I don't think there will ever come a time when I'm not shooting stills." <<