WESTERN EUROPE

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER PETER ADAMS TAKES A BREAK FROM AIRPORTS AND SECURITY CHECKS TO MEANDER HIS WAY DOWN TO ITALY BY CAR, STOPPING IN AT GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

WORDS & PICTURES: **PETER ADAMS**

Western Europe
1) Germany 2) Austria 3) Italy

COME THE MONTH OF MAY and this photographer's mind turns to red poppies in luminous green fields, mist-shrouded valleys, pasta, pizza, real ice cream and vino rosso. After a winter of long-haul flights, I forwent the delights of transatlantic travel and drove to Italy in three weeks, allowing for leisurely stops in Germany and Austria along the way. Driving also gave me the added bonus of being able to cram extra photo gear in my car boot – probably a lot more than I needed – and camping gave me the freedom to wander at will without having to book hotels and the chance to brew 'proper' cups of tea.

"First stop was Frankfurt, Germany, and was a very short-lived visit. It was as grey and cold as England, so I decided to linger in Austria and Germany on my return leg when the weather would have hopefully improved. I headed south where the forecast was more optimistic.

"As I crossed the Alps, the weather turned bright and warm so I stopped in Piedmont, an Italian wine region, and busied myself taking pictures of grapevines, with the Alps in the background. It's a beautiful area, definitely worth returning to in the autumn when the grapevines turn golden red and brown.

"Eager to see more of Italy, I soon drove on to one of my favourite areas of the world; the rolling Tuscan hills. It's a well-known photographer's hunting ground, particularly near San Quirico d'Orcia. I love the pastoral setting: there are miles of quiet back roads often running along ridges of hillsides with magnificent views on either side. I've made a promise to myself to bring my Ducati back to it's homeland and ride these roads one day! ➤

PREVIOUS PAGE: "A classic Tuscan view of a farmhouse in a mist-filled valley south of Siena, just as the sun was rising."

RIGHT: "A view over an Italian town at dusk. I used a 13 second exposure at f/11 to get the right balance between the street and ambient light, as well as good depth-of-field."

BELOW: "I waited for someone to walk into the frame to get some interesting blur outside the confectioners in Bergamo. I used an exposure of half a second."

FAR LEFT: "The lit shop window features Polenta and Osei, typical Bergamo sweets. I used a 24mm tilt & shift lens to get the wide-angle effect."

CENTRE LEFT: "This is a view of Urbino, a town in Marche, Italy. As I shot directly into a low sun, I shaded the lens using my hand and used a remote switch to trigger the shutter. As it was bright, I also used a quick shutter speed of 1/40sec."

LEFT: "Pienza in Tuscany was not short of tourists walking around, so I waited for the foreground to be free of people, but had enough visitors in the background so the scene did not look totally empty."

Western Europe

"It's rare to get two bites at the same cherry but, having scouted the area the day before, I knew the sun wouldn't reach my second location until a little later on"

MAIN IMAGE: "Frankfurt skyline at dusk makes a great stock photo, as the city is an important financial centre, pictures encapsulating this can sell well. I had to stand on the opposite side of the River Main for this shot, which was taken at 15 seconds to capture the ambient light."

ABOVE: "Opera Square, Frankfurt, has bank buildings in the background and restaurants and cafés, which are always an important part of a travel story. I waited for some people to walk into the scene to add some movement."

LEFT: "Frankfurt's Town Hall is another building worth capturing. Early one morning I waited around until the amount of light falling onto the flags and building was just right."
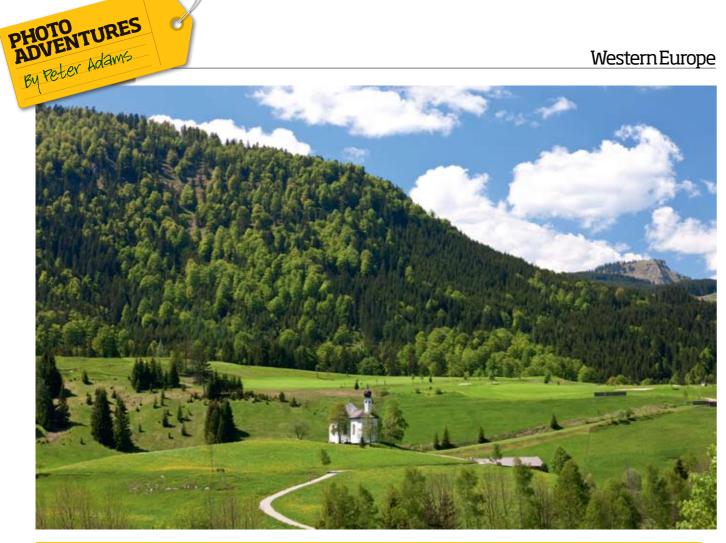
"From my tent I had a stunning view of southern Italy: I could see for 30 miles or more, which is useful when waking bleary-eyed in semi-darkness to assess the cloud cover for a possible dawn shot. Normally I'm in a hotel room that looks onto high-rise buildings that block even a glimpse of sky.

"For one dawn shot I headed to a well known photo spot where a Tuscan farmhouse nestles in a valley that is often enveloped by early morning mist. It was something like my fourth visit to the area and I had previously shunned this location as being too much of a cliché, but I have succumbed to its charms. And I wasn't the only one: I immediately bumped into two guys, a Canadian and a Spaniard, there on a photographic holiday. Somewhat taken aback by the 'chatty' atmosphere, which I'm not used to at that time of the morning, I had to quickly run through a mental check list before I started shooting: did I lock the mirror up, secure the tripod firmly and set f/11? Thankfully, 'auto-pilot' must have kicked in as the images turned out fine. Even though I had recced the location the day before, I wish I had allowed at least half an hour before sunrise to set up and compose myself, because the scene was ready to photograph almost as soon as I arrived.

"I left my new friends, as I was anxious to get to another location down the road before the sun had completely risen. It's rare to get two bites at the cherry but, having scouted the area the day before, I knew the sun would not reach my second location until a little later on. It was an archetypical Tuscan scene with a dirt track lined with Italian Cypress trees leading down to a farmhouse on a small hill. I was relieved when I arrived to find the sun was still behind a hill and had not reached ➤

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the valley yet. I knew the sun would rise behind me and although ideally I wanted side-lighting, I did have a great sky. The white wispy clouds filled the sky and, with the help of a polariser filter, they bolstered the shot.

"After six wonderful days travelling around Siena, I moved on to explore the quieter and lesser-known region of Marche, east of Tuscany. I headed to Urbino, a town renowned for its Renaissance culture. The impressive medieval skyline made a great backdrop for pictures and there are so many interesting historical features, narrow streets and viewpoints to try out.

"One of my favourite views of Urbino is from a perched spot on a hillside but unfortunately this doesn't coincide with the ideal angle of the sun this time of year. In May the sun rises behind the hill, with light falling straight onto the town, while in the evening I'd be forced to photograph into the sun. The golden hour, shortly before sunset, was best bet, so I mounted my Canon EOS-1Ds and 70-200mm f/4 lens on the tripod and shaded the lens with my hand, using a remote release to fire the shutter. My hands aren't as steady as they used to be, especially after a couple of glasses of vino bianco, so I shot several frames to make sure I didn't get any lens flare. Further exploration of Marche included Sirolo, a quaint Italian town perched on dramatic cliffs with excellent beaches and bays. I enjoyed a couple of days by the sea before heading north again and slowly making my way back home. The last stop before Austria was Bergamo in Italy, northeast of Milan. Despite the first rain of the trip, I took some shots of the town in its dramatic setting and witnessed The Giro d'Italia cycle race as it passed through.

"On my way to Sylvenstein Lake and Bridge in the Bavarian Alps, just on the Austrian-German border,

St Anna chapel in Tirol, Austria, caught my eye and I tried to get some low-angle views through the yellow flowers and grass, using the path as a lead-in line. Sylvenstein Lake and Bridge is in an unusual setting, which makes for a great stock photo, but there's no proper viewpoint to shoot from. However, having seen images of the bridge while researching for the trip, I knew a scramble up the wooded hillside was possible, and I balanced my tripod carefully to capture the view.

"Travelling around Italy was laid back and enjoyable but hard work, as it's a case of early mornings and late nights to photograph landscapes at dawn and dusk, while driving for hours to reach locations. My four days in Germany, on the other hand, were spent trying to get access to city buildings for viewpoints and in a way was more productive because I was not so dependent on the weather. If it rained, I could shelter my camera with an umbrella for night shots or get interesting reflections in puddles on the pavement. There is never a shortage of things to photograph in towns and cities. Frankfurt, for instance, is Germany's financial centre and images of its night-time skyline and landmarks can sell really well as stock images for financial reports and the like, which I captured quite a few of during my stay.

"Before heading back to the UK, I also sampled the delights of Bamberg, in Germany, a UNESCO-listed town with numerous breweries that produce a unique smoky tasting beer. It also has some attractive squares, tudor-fronted buildings and ironworks. Part of being a travel photographer is experiencing local cultures, so as I sipped a strong German brew in a Bamberg Square, I reflected on the trip and the wonderful variety Europe offers, and how lucky we are as photographers to have all this on our doorstep."

ABOVE: "This is St. Anna chapel in Tirol, Achenkirch, Austria. The shades of green in this scene really sang out to me and I waited for some cloud to appear in the sky to balance the composition and complete the scene."

Peter's kit

Two Canon EOS-1Ds MkIII bodies with 70-200mm f/4, 24-70mm f/4, 17-40mm f/4, and 24mm TS-E tilt & shift lenses, plus a Lensbaby Composer. Manfrotto 190CX Pro3 tripod with Arca Swiss ball-head & RRS camera plates. Also a small Lastolite round collapsible reflector for portraits.

"Sylvenstein Lake and Bridge in the Bavarian Alps, Germany, was one stop I didn't want to miss on my journey across the Austrian border. Some serious climbing was involved in finding this viewpoint looking down along the bridge."