

PHOTO

VACATIONS

You'll return from these trips with a memory card filled with amazing pics—because besides traveling through some of the world's most dramatic scenery, you'll receive photo instruction.

BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO

Photographs have the phenomenal ability to tether us to a place; to capture a secret smile of a child behind a doorway; to memorialize a chance encounter with an unfrequented path; to summon up sensual memories like the clamor and spicy scent of a souk. But good photos don't happen by accident. Lou Lesko, a photographer, author and editor at National Geographic Assignment Blog, offers this advice to camera-clad vacationers: "Explore, explore, explore, shoot, shoot, shoot."

Photographers around the world seem to agree with Lesko's basic philosophy and have created outdoor classrooms where exploration and shutter clicks combine to build the skills and confidence needed to bring home not only fond memories from your next vacation, but also the most

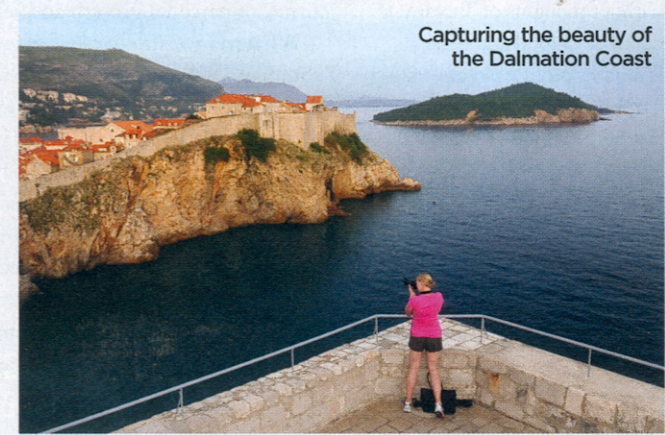
treasured souvenir of all—great photos. Here are five photography vacations to zoom in on.

Dalmatian Coast, Croatia

With more than 1,000 islands flecked with crystalline coves and sun-kissed villages languidly stretched over 3,500 miles from Dubrovnik to Rijeka, Croatia's Dalmatian Coast has become a

must-visit destination for sun-seekers and sailors. Sprinkle in good food and wine and the genuine hospitality of the locals, and photographers keen to capture the essence of Croatia will unearth a treasure trove of frame-worthy images.

"Our guests are usually surprised by the diversity of the region and the photographic subjects they are able to capture,"



Capturing the beauty of the Dalmatian Coast

Photo students travel the varied landscapes of China's Silk Road.

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says Luka Esenko, founder of Adriatic2Alps Photography Tours. "One day we are photographing UNESCO historical cities and the next we're doing long-exposure shots of waterfalls and lakes in one of the national parks."

Adriatic2Alps offers a 15-day tour of the same name and takes shutterbugs from the fabled walls of Dubrovnik to the Alps of bordering Slovenia. The tour is offered in June and September, and photographers of any level are welcome. All that's needed is a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera. The focus is primarily travel photography: "landscapes, architecture, street scenes and more," Esenko explains. But he says it's not limited, and guests can talk to tour leaders about a particular interest. Group sizes range from four to 12 people, and there is a chance for one-on-one tutoring on location with photo guides.

"All our tours were designed by and are led by experienced local photographers that speak fluent English and have a passion for their work and their country," says Esenko. "Guests will take home plenty of cool photos and new skills as well as pleasant memories and new friendships."

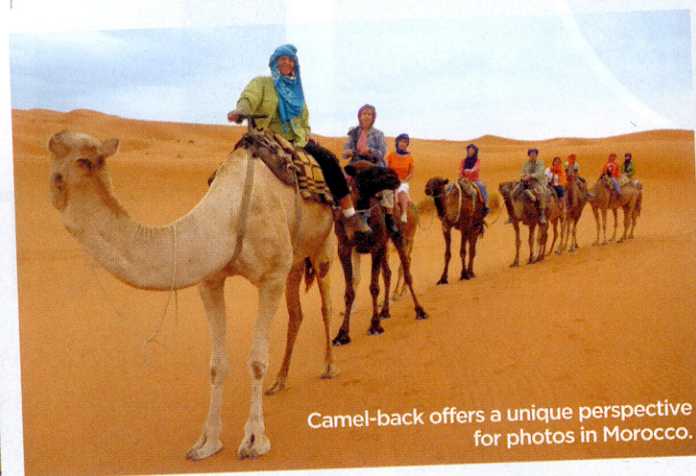
\$3,700 per person, double occupancy, exclusive of air travel; adriatic2alps.com

Groups are kept small, 12 people tops, allowing for a flexible agenda that can be altered if necessary. Beginners and advanced photographers are welcome and must have a DSLR camera. Nilsen also recommends a long telephoto lens (70mm–200mm). Helmed by Nilsen, an award-winning photographer, and his wife, Magrit, the tours emphasize personalized instruction to maximize each participant's learning experience.

Unlike most photography tours, Nilsen's follow what he calls a "slow travel" approach, opting to stay in one location and take daily outings. "This makes it less about the quantity of places that we visit and more about the quality of the images that we take home," says Nilsen.

The next tour is scheduled for May 2012.

\$3,695, single-room supplement \$495, exclusive of air travel; photographytraveltours.com



Camel-back offers a unique perspective for photos in Morocco.

Morocco, Africa

The North African kingdom is filled with imagery and charms pulled straight from ancient fables and exotic tales, and this epic odyssey spans 1,500 miles of exquisite scenery. While there is plenty to point a lens at, from the whitewashed coastal town of Essaouira, to the sensory-stimulating souk of Marrakesh, to skilled artists in their workshops, Focus Adventures owner Karen Schulman emphasizes the camera is merely a tool in what she calls a journey of personal growth and self-discovery.

"Whatever we aim our lens at is a reflection of ourselves," says Schulman. "The more we learn to see with our mind, heart and spirit, the more of an adventure life becomes."

Schulman has been leading this particular adventure since 2006 and says participants not only fine-tune their photography skills and tap into their creativity, but also learn a considerable amount about Moroccan history, the lives of the Moroccan people, their religion, dress, food and other aspects of local culture. She even suggests the tour can be enjoyed without a camera.

For those who do bring one, from the beginner to the savvy lensman, Schulman suggests a DSLR and a backup point-and-shoot.



LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF PHOTOGRAPHYTRAVELTOURS.COM; © KAREN SCHULMAN/PHOTOGRAPHYTRAVELTOURS.COM

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"In some locations the simpler the camera the better the images, especially when photographing people. Small cameras are less intrusive," says Schulman, who has been using her iPhone camera with great success.

The next tour is scheduled for September 21–October 5, 2012; \$3,745 per person, double occupancy, exclusive of air travel; focusadventures.com



Shooting an Alaskan waterfall

Alaska, U.S.A.

There are very few bastions of wilderness left untouched by urbanization and human intervention, but Alaska remains a vast natural wonderland for winged, hooved and finned creatures big and small. At Light Workshops, a Los Osos, Calif.–based company that started leading tours to photograph eagles, Alaska's awe-inspiring wilderness is now the primary focus.

"The Alaska tour is very popular and now includes everything southeast Alaska has to offer," says Victoria Schmitt, director of operations. "We now go four times per year, twice in the spring concentrating on eagles and twice in the summer concentrating on whales."

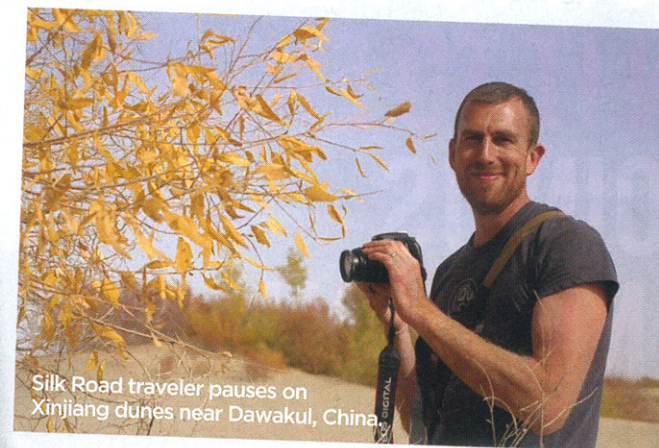
During the eight-day tour, participants can expect to have "a life-changing experience," says Schmitt, with constant photography instruction, including exposure, composition and action, as well as Photoshop and Lightroom post-production tutorials on the side. Because the tour is based on a high-end 85-foot yacht, all the action, drama and scenery of the region is experienced up close.

"Many have described the trip as better than an African safari," says Schmitt, who rattles off a list of potential sightings. "Participants will see humpback whales, black bears, sea lions, birds as well as glaciers, icebergs, mountains and more."

Beginners and skilled photographers are welcome aboard, and guests without a camera will be offered one to use during the intimate adventure.

"We are not the biggest in the industry but our instructors provide amazing training designed to take participants to the next level."

From \$6,850 per person; lightworkshops.com



Silk Road traveler pauses on Xinjiang dunes near Dawakul, China.

The Silk Road, China

The Silk Road was not only an important trade route for goods but also a path for pilgrims, missionaries, soldiers and nomads to transport cultural and religious ideas between ancient China and the Roman Empire. Today the ancient passage is a backdrop for an epic adventure that reveals the stories of these wanderers along with the influences of Arabic peoples and the trail of Buddhism into China.

"People are the essence of culture and travel," says guide and award-winning photographer Ewen Bell. "My style relies heavily on establishing quality connections with people. We take our time to explore each location...and redefine what it means to shoot portraits."

Participants need a DSLR camera, which Bell advises familiarizing yourself with before arriving. Anywhere from four to eight people will be in the group. "We have a very personal approach to our work. I design the tours myself to maximize the opportunities to get great shots, with the help of local operators who maintain that personal element."

The 18-day trip begins in X'ian, former capital of China and home to the Terracotta Warriors, and ends in Kashgar, a crucial trading post along the Silk Road. Detours along the way include Tibetan temples, the remote Lake Karakul and the town of Dunhuang, famous for being home to China's finest Buddhist cave art.

"I care about my guests and love seeing them grow as people and photographers through these journeys. It's an incredibly positive experience," says Bell.

This trip departs April 15, 2013; \$5,800 per person, single-room supplement \$880, exclusive of air travel; grasshopperadventures.com **ET**

KIMBERLEY LOVATO is a freelance writer based in San Francisco who has learned everything she knows about taking photos by pestering her best friend—a photographer.

LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF LIGHTWORKSHOPS.COM; © EWEN BELL OF EWENBELL.COM



Tuscany is one of the most photogenic places in the world.

Tuscany, Italy

Hardly a traveler has set out for Italy without thoughts of Tuscany, a picturesque region near Florence, extolled for its food and wine, its undulating green and gold countryside, and its prolific picture-taking possibilities. Which is why Jim Nilsen of Photography Travel Tours has based his seven-day tour in the heart of the region—in the Val d'Orcia, to be exact.

"This region is particularly blessed with many iconic scenes," says Nilsen.

Nilsen's tour focuses on capturing the various moods of these typical Tuscan tableaux, including wide vistas of the rolling cultivated hills, cypress-lined roads, stone farmhouses and hilltop towns like Pienza and Montalcino.