



Travel and Photography – Humanity and Community

by Bill Poorman

We are, all of us, foreigners. Many of us living here in Singapore know this firsthand. By choice or necessity we looked over the horizon and then went beyond it, and with that came the realization that everyone is a stranger somewhere.

Of course, people have ventured and traveled for millennia – that's not new – and in all that time they have also endeavored to record the experience of travel to capture their special broadening and life-changing moments.

Words and artistic renderings served for a long time, but starting in the 19th century a new era began: that of photography. For the first time ever, fleeting photons of light that had disappeared in a moment could be preserved for all time.

At first it was a highly technical and somewhat magical endeavor with backbreaking equipment, hazardous chemicals and the mysterious darkroom. Now, of course, with the advent of digital technology and smartphones photography has become commonplace. Our lives are saturated with images. One could think that, due to this ubiquity, photography could have lost its attraction. But instead the passion for photography has vastly grown, especially when visiting the personally exotic and unknown.

Why do we do this? Why do we take photographs, especially when we travel? We take them to remember. Memory is wispy and unreliable, and when we arrive home, we wish, just for a moment, to be transported back to a unique moment in our lives. We take them to share. Sharing photographs is a way to bond with family and friends. And, let's be honest, we also take them to preen – at least a little.

But photography is not just about remembrance and socializing. We also take photographs to express. We want to say something about ourselves, about the world and take others along for this journey. Through our choices of subject and frame and light and settings, we evoke emotion and mood; we ask question and give answers; we engage in a dialogue, both within ourselves and with others, some of whom we will never meet. Through that dialogue we hope to pique curiosity, which satisfies for a moment, but then demands more. The desire of the photographer is for the viewer to then want to experience the sounds, the smells, people's voices – the full vitality of a place – so that we can together share a fuller, richer life.

In the end, through photography – one of the most modern of the arts – we hope to serve that most fundamental and ancient need among people: community.

Yes, we are, all of us, foreigners, but through photography – perhaps, just a bit – the foreign becomes familiar.

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Photos by Francisco Marin

