



# What is a Photo Travel Division Picture?

Mary Ellen Brucker,  
FPSA  
St. Louis, Missouri

*Vietnam Rice Planters ©  
Tom Tauber, PPSA*

*Farm Boy © Lynn  
Maniscalco, Hon PSA,  
FPSA, EPSA*

When Photo Travel (PT) became a division of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) back in 1972, its founders, led by the late **Charles Bowerman, FPSA**, developed a definition to help photographers and judges alike in making and evaluating photo travel images. The first sentence stated: “A Photo Travel image must express the feeling of a time and place, and portray a land, its people, or a culture in its natural state.” That well-known sentence, with minor revisions, has



guided photo travel photographers for 40 years. But throughout that time, it has not stopped people from asking, “What is a photo travel picture?”

This year the Division approved a new revision of the PT definition, drafted by a committee of PT officers and directors led by First Vice Chairman **George Bebout, APSA**. The new definition states:

*A Photo Travel image must express the feeling of a time and place, and portray a land, its distinctive features, or culture in its natural state. There are no geographical limitations. Close-up pictures of people or objects must include distinguishable environment. Techniques that add to, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. All adjustments must appear natural. Conversion to full monochrome is acceptable. Derivations, including infrared, are unacceptable.*

Sound familiar? It should, but that won’t keep people from asking again: “What Is a Photo Travel Picture?”? Let’s analyze the definition to find out the answer:

*A Photo Travel image must express the feeling of a time and place...* This is possibly the most inspired part of the definition. It places the subject in the real world, but the time can be whatever the environment suggests. Usually, it will be a feeling





At Rest © Eugene Brucker, FPSA

of the present time. But you have a world of places to choose from, so a subject in ancient Rome or Greece, or the cliff dwellings of early Native Americans, could certainly express the feeling of a much earlier time.

*...and portray a land, its distinctive features, or culture in its natural state.*

A *land*, of course, is a territory, settled and civilized, or unsettled and lacking a permanent population. *Its distinctive features* can be either topographical or man-made. Topographical



Chinese Sentry © Lynn Maniscalco, Hon PSA, FPSA, EPSA

features can include popular travel destinations, such as the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls or the Swiss Alps. Man-made distinctive features include such world-renowned structures as the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, or the ancient temples at Bagan, in Myanmar.

*...or culture.* . . Now we reach the heart of humankind. Culture describes how we live, what our customs are, how we relate to one another, how we worship, how we work, how we gain our daily bread, how we play, how we learn and educate our children.

In the end, it is ourselves in whom we are most interested. There is no more satisfying moment for a photo travel photographer than to come across

Any mention of products or services in this article or anywhere else in the *PSA Journal* does not constitute an endorsement or approval of those items.



Tango in Bucharest © Tom Tauber, PPSA





Grandma at her stall © Mary Ellen Brucker, FPSA



Laughing Lady © Mary Ellen Brucker, FPSA

a person who represents some aspect of human culture, and to find that person in front of a good background in the right light and with strong composition. Backgrounds, of course, can depict

a cultural environment and enhance the story in your image.

...in its natural state means that what we see is what we shoot. Like Photojournalism and Nature, Photo Travel is essentially a documentary medium; our goal is to portray the truth of a situation. When we change or arrange elements in a scene for photography, to that extent our photograph becomes untrue. Consider



Devotion © Tom Tauber, PPSA



set-up shoots. They usually are well planned; but the final result is not a real record of what existed there. What to look for in a photo travel photograph with people is spontaneity. Set-ups are the enemy of spontaneity. You may have good results with a set-up; if so, enter that image in an open division. Keep your photo travel images *in a natural state*.

*There are no geographical limitations.* This means that you can take good travel pictures right at home as well as in foreign countries. But they still need to reflect characteristic land features or culture. For example, a photograph of a surfer without something such as Diamond Head in the background could just as well have been taken in California or Australia.

So far, we've concentrated on the heart of the Photo Travel definition. The next sentence deserves attention because it deals with a popular subject - portraits. It reads: *Close-up pictures of people or objects must include distinguishable environment.* Why? Because in traditional portraits, we're interested mainly in the subject's face. Other elements, such as make-up or jewelry, are usually just accent notes. Backgrounds are often monochromatic or non-existent. But in Photo Travel, the portrait must tell the travel story—*portray a culture*—and we do that by showing the subject in his environment. A portrait of a market vendor might include some of her goods for sale; a portrait of a guard or soldier could include some of his trappings—flags, a guard box; a portrait of a child might include his toys, or part of his immediate surroundings—these all help tell the travel story. And images in a theme section are not exempt from meeting the Photo Travel requirements

The last section of the definition—*Techniques that add to, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted, All adjustments must appear natural. Conversion to full monochrome is acceptable. Derivations, including infrared, are unacceptable*—applies to all three of PSA's reality-based divisions in this computer age.

As a travel photographer, you often face unique challenges. You are usually on the go, and seldom have the option of waiting for the best light or the ideal background. But if you stay alert to what's going on around you, watch for subjects, and pay attention to light and surroundings (and don't forget that stormy skies can be a dramatic photo element), you'll be rewarded by photo travel images that capture the feeling of a time and place, and portray a land, its distinctive features or its culture in its natural state.

So welcome to the world of travel photography. If you heed the guidance in the definition, you'll be rewarded by a fresh new



High Tech Begging © ???

catalogue of images—images that show where you've been and what you saw, images filled with brilliant color and the wonders of human achievement—all captured on your adventurous journeys to the far corners of the earth.

Taj Reflection © Lynn Maniscalco, Hon PSA, FPSSA, EPSA

