

50 PERFECT PHOTO DESTINATIONS



Whether you want to be surrounded by people or capture a place where nearly no one goes, shoot amazing art and architecture, or just visit places of pure magic or drama, we've got 50 of the best places in the world to go. Take your pick—at every location on this list, you're guaranteed to get incredible pictures.

By Stephanie Pearson

CATHRINE WESSEL

BARELY TOUCHED BY HUMANS

Places almost entirely devoid of human impact allow us to focus on what's bigger than ourselves. We can reset our internal clocks to natural rhythms, then catch those powerful moments on camera.

1 The Drake Passage SOUTH AMERICA TO ANTARCTICA

Here's an opportunity to photograph Mother Nature on her best and worst behavior. The Drake Passage, that 500-mile strait separating the southern tip of South America and the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica, is at the whim of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, which carries a volume of water 600 times larger than the Amazon.

The result can be powerful weather that can lead to menacing, 50-foot waves—fun if you want to photograph fierce storms. A few days of nausea are worth it. When the Southern Ocean calms, from the prow of the ship you can watch albatross circle and the sun throw flames across the sky as it sets—sometimes for five hours. And then there's the prize: Antarctica. For what amounts to little more than rock, ice, and penguins, this frontier is phenomenal.

Lindblad Expeditions offers three Antarctica itineraries, all of which include an on-board photography instructor and otherworldly destinations, like the three-mile-long Lemaire Channel. If it's not choked with ice, you'll photograph dramatic, sheer vertical ice cliffs, icebergs larger than the ship, hundreds of penguins, and the most intense shade of blue imaginable, thanks to the way the sun reflects and refracts on the ice and water. Lindblad Expedition's Antarctica trips range from 14 days starting at \$12,350 to 24 days starting at \$21,360 (www.expeditions.com).

“I love the Drake Passage. You've really earned your trip to Antarctica by passing through. They call it the 'Drake Shake' or the 'Drake Lake,' depending on the conditions. In austral summer, you have 24 hours of sunlight and really have to pace yourself, or you'll get what they call the 'Big Eye.' Bring a circular polarizer and a lenshood, even if it's not sunny. It can protect the camera from rain and spray.” —Photographer *Jad Davenport*



2 The Neck

THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

To reach this privately owned, mile-long isthmus on Saunders Island requires a flight from Stanley in a Britten-Norman Islander, an overnight stay with the Pole-Evans family, and a 12-mile, hour-long ride down a rutted, muddy, jeep track. But the wild ride is worth it: The Neck is a melting pot for King, Gentoo, Rockhopper, and Magellanic penguins.

3 Torres del Paine

CHILE
This 935-square-mile park averages 150,000 visitors per year, which is to say there's plenty of wide-open space to capture the natural drama: wild weather, intimidating peaks that stretch like fingers to the sky, eerie blue-iced glaciers, and the turquoise water of the Rio Baker. Bring your warmest layers—the weather can change in an instant.



4 Lake Clark

ALASKA

Photograph grizzlies from a boat in this 2.47 million-acre wilderness as they fish from the shore. Get close enough to snap as they rip open a salmon in 20 seconds.

5 Ladakh

INDIA

This northwestern region sits higher than 10,000 feet and looks like a barren moonscape. In winter (October to May), all roads

are cut off and residents use the ice of the Zaskar River to travel between villages. Plus it's the best place to photograph an endangered snow leopard.

6 White Sands

NEW MEXICO

The fine particles here are really white gypsum; that's why the dunes of this 275-square mile desert glow against the sky. Time your visit for a full moon, then capture it at sunset as it rises.

7 Queen Charlotte Islands

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Visit the “Galápagos of Canada” to capture sea lions, porpoises, humpback whales, and three species of orcas.

8 Mauna Kea

HAWAII

With near-zero light pollution, Mauna Kea is home to a renowned observatory and amazing for astral shooting.

9 The Kimberly

AUSTRALIA

This remote landscape has ancient pictographs, bizarre beehive-shaped mountains, and a huge marine park off the coast.

10 Mongolia

Go 50 miles northeast of the capital city of Ulaanbaatar to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, home to brown bears, 250 bird species, the chilly Terej River, and a granite behemoth shaped like a turtle.



WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

It's that place you never want to leave. It has otherworldly light or anachronistic ambiance or a feeling of sublime peace. You could stay forever, but if you stay too long, it might lose its magic.

1 Antelope Canyon ARIZONA

Any photographer who has been tempted by the American Southwest has heard of Antelope Canyon. The natural Navajo cathedral is an intricate maze through a sandstone slot canyon where, if you time it right, you can capture a ray of sunlight shining through the curved whorls like a beam from a light saber.

As with any attempt to capture magic, you'll need just the right combination of patience and lucky timing. Since it sits on the Navajo Nation, Antelope Canyon requires a guide. Six companies offer tours, which limit the amount of time each photographer can take in the canyon because space in the slots is very limited.

We recommend taking a 10:15 a.m. two-hour photography tour with Charly Moore, owner of Overland Canyon Trails (packages start at \$125; overlandcanyontours.com). He's spent his life photographing these iconic slots in Upper and Lower Antelope Canyon and can pass on tricks like how to capture the Heart of the Canyon, a famous image that relies on reflective light and shadows and requires standing in a certain place to point the camera straight up. He can also lead you to less crowded yet equally compelling secret slots like Canyon X, which calls for a mile-long hike on a steep trail. Plan your trip for the three weeks before and after the summer solstice and he'll lead you to a room in Canyon X where you can photograph a beam of light that appears to be shooting straight down from heaven.

“Upper Antelope Canyon is dark and wonderfully cool. Most first-time photographers don't realize how dark it is. A tripod is absolutely essential and long exposures—sometimes 20 or 30 seconds—are needed. Mid-day, sunlight bounces off the red and orange canyon walls from above, making them glow brilliantly. Wait 10 minutes and the scene changes dramatically as the angle of the sun changes. There are an infinite number of possibilities for a photographer, no matter how many times the place has been visited.”

—Photographer Richard Bernabe

RICHARD BERNABE (ARIZONA); CATHIRINE WESSEL (TUNISIA)

2 Sicily ITALY

Almost everything in Italy is photogenic, but Sicily feels especially lost in time. From hillside Taormina to battle-scarred Palermo to the island of Lipari, Sicily is a photograph a second.

3 Havana CUBA

With cigar factories, curbside checker players, outdoor boxing rings, crumbling façades, and '57 Chevys, this city is a shooter's dream. Visiting takes research for Americans, but it's doable.

4 Gray Whales BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

They're 52 feet long and weigh 36 tons, and every year in November, more than 10,000 trade Alaska's Bering Sea for the warm water of Scammon's Lagoon and Bahia San Ignacio.

5 Aurora Borealis FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Within a ring-shaped region around the North Pole called the auroral oval, Fairbanks is one of the best places to see the aurora. Prime shooting is between late August and April.

6 Waimea Bay OAHU, HAWAII

30-foot waves break here November through February. Head up the bluff and shoot the surfing scene within the larger context of the gorgeous North Shore coastline.

7 Central Park NEW YORK CITY

This oasis holds 21,500 trees in 31 different families. The majestic American Elms are glorious all summer, but time the visit for late spring when the Kwanzan cherry trees bloom and the grass is so green it looks like AstroTurf.

8 Bora Bora FRENCH POLYNESIA

The Society Islands' Bora Bora has two extinct volcanoes ringed by a turquoise lagoon. Bring your underwater housing.

9 Temples BHUTAN

Tiger's Nest Monastery looks carved out of a cliff. More than 10,000 feet above the Paro Valley, it requires a three-hour hike, but the ascent is worth it.



10 Tunisia

With Mediterranean beaches, Roman ruins, Berbers on horseback, and a peaceful political scene, Tunisia is a less photographed, equally exotic Morocco. *Star Wars* fans: Go now before the Mos Espa set is overcome by the shifting desert.

MANMADE WONDERS

Humans create, whether our medium is stone, bronze, or even giant wheatpasted photographs. Sometimes the most satisfying photograph is one that brings others' art and architecture to life.

1 Tikal GUATEMALA

Tucked into the lush Maya Biosphere Reserve of northern Guatemala, Tikal National Park covers 222 square miles and is the largest remaining site of pre-Columbian civilization. The well-preserved ruins were once home to more than 90,000 Mayans between the sixth century B.C. and the tenth century A.D. They lived a sophisticated existence with elaborate artwork, extensive agriculture, and elegant temples until their eventual collapse, which most experts believe was due to environmental degradation.

Today the remaining site is a rich contrast of emerald hues and crumbling temples, which conjures up an Indiana Jones mystique. To deepen the mystery, stay in the park at Tikal Inn (tikalinn.com), a simple lodge with a swimming pool that's the closest of three hotels to the ruins. Wake up at 6 a.m. with the howler monkeys and hike the short way to the Grand Plaza, where the mist rises off the cool gray stones of Temples I and II. The 154-foot Temple of the Great Jaguar (Temple I) and the 125-foot Temple of the Mask (Temple II) face off across the green grass of the plaza. Climb the steps of the backside of Temple II to photograph the largest Mayan temple in the Americas, 230-foot Temple IV, mysteriously rising out of the mist and trees.

“Tikal is a magical, spiritual place where you can let yourself slip back 1,500 years to the height of the Mayan empire. Stay in the park so you can walk over to the temples and avoid the shuttle bus from nearby Flores. Although you may not be alone when the park opens at 6 a.m., you will find the quiet ambiance that lets you soak in Tikal's serenity. Don't worry about missing the golden sunrise—the often-foggy mornings are perfect for creating ethereal and moody photographs.”

—Photographer Kevin Steele



2 Museo Subacuático de Arte MEXICO

In the warm Caribbean waters between Cancun and Isla Mujeres, Mexico, Jason deCaires Taylor's sunken "Silent Evolution," 400 life-size human sculptures, lie 28 feet underwater. The ghost-like figures, which double as a manmade reef, are accessible via mask and snorkel, but most of the PADI-certified dive shops in Cancun offer day tours there.

3 The Ice Hotel JUKKASJÄRVI, SWEDEN

Artists from around the world submit room-design concepts. If chosen, they get to carve their vision in ice harvested from the Torne River. The sculptures change from year to year and slowly melt by the time May roles around, but the ice bar and its premium Swedish vodkas are a constant. It's gorgeous but tricky shooting—watch your white balance carefully, or shoot RAW.



4 Grand Bazaar ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Turkey's largest covered market dates back to 1520 and has 4,000 shops under ornate, grand passageways. Go early when goods are abundant and the shopkeepers willing to pose.

5 Jetsonorama NAVAJO NATION, AZ

On buildings lining U.S. 160 from Kayenta to Tuba City, shoot enormous black-and-white photos that Chip Thomas, an artist and

physician who has documented his Navajo friends, has blown up.

6 Botero Square MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

This square is filled with bronze sculptures by Colombian artist Fernando Botero. In July, during the Fiesta de las Flores, photograph their curves along with 50-foot Virgin Marys crafted entirely from marigolds.

7 MONA HOBART, TASMANIA

The Museum of

Old and New Art looks like a postapocalyptic bunker. Capture the building, plus works like "The Remains of a Suicide Bomber Cast in Dark Chocolate."

8 Scotland DISTILLERIES

There is no shortage of whiskey distilleries in Scotland, but the Speyside is home to more than half. At last count that was 15, including the photogenic Glenfiddich, which sits in a pine forest surrounded by castle ruins.

9 Machu Picchu PERU

Visit the 15th-century site via the Salkantay Trek, on which you'll see 30 other people per day and capture stunning images of the Andes and, eventually, the ruins.

10 The Lightning Fields NEW MEXICO

Walter De Maria's outdoor sculpture appears to be 400 stainless steel poles until sunset, when lightning strikes. Reserve six months in advance (diaart.org).

OH, THE HUMANITY!

Whether you want to capture the masses or a singular portrait, these locations serve up people—and lots of them—in all their diverse, fascinating beauty. Getting a brilliant image here is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel.

1 State Fair MINNESOTA

Over a 10-day span from August 21 to September 1, an estimated 1.8 million people will gather at the 360-acre St. Paul fairgrounds to eat their way through the dog days of summer at booths offering questionable delicacies such as spaghetti-and-meatball-on-a-stick and heaping buckets of chocolate chip cookies. Stomachs sated, they move on to watch cows, sheep, goats, and pigs give birth, gawk at 90-pound, carved butter statues of Princess Kay of the Milky Way, then head over to the Mighty Midway to ride the Riptide roller coaster or Air Raid acrobatic flight.

More sedentary folks can watch a demonstration of craft-beer brewing or sideline the daily 2 p.m., 14-block parade of high-school marching bands. No matter where you wander here, humanity is in your face—from a small child wailing over a dropped ice-cream cone to an ecstatic teenage 4-H champion with the finest swine. The largest crowds, sometimes 150,000 strong, show up on weekends.

Arrive when the gates open at 6 a.m. and stay until they close at midnight. For a birds' eye view, ride the gondola that spans the width of the grounds or take it all in from the 330-foot Space Tower. When the sun sets, the Grandstand, built in 1909, gets busy. This year's headliners: Kid Rock and Linkin Park & 30 Seconds to Mars. (Adult daily admission \$13; www.mnstatefair.org)

“ I look at the State Fair in terms of dawn and dusk. At sunrise every day, it's kids getting their animals ready to go at the livestock competition. They are the only people up at that time. In the middle of the day when the light gets harsh, I look for interesting things inside. When the light starts to get tamer, I'll go out and look for what the last light holds. And don't miss sunset in front of World of Wonders. It's visually loaded. ” —Photographer Joel Sartore



2 Copacabana Beach BRAZIL

This 2.5-mile long beach, book-ended by Sugarloaf Mountain, is a riot of beauty and color. Bodies—all wearing as little as possible—run, swim, surf, and bask in the sun. The less skin you show, the more you'll stand out. Photographic opportunities are endless, but the more photographic bling you bring, the more vulnerable you are to pickpockets, so pack light.

3 Shibuya Crossing TOKYO, JAPAN

The population density surrounding the world's busiest street corner is more than 13,000 people per square kilometer. The best way to capture the masses—like ants in a colony—is from above. Head to the square's north side, and hit the Starbucks in the Tsutaya building: Arrive before the morning crowds swarm, order a latte, and secure a spot near the second-floor window.



4 Kumbh Mela ALLAHABAD, INDIA

In January and February, the world's largest religious gathering draws 70 million pilgrims. The ritual includes processions of naked, ash-smeared holy men and women performing ritual puja ceremonies to the gods.

5 Cowboys Game DALLAS, TEXAS

Nearly 80,000 football fans attend the average Dallas Cowboys game. To capture the beer-

goggled, face-painted legion in full splendor, buy a ticket for the first home game on September 9.

6 Lei Chau Island HONG KONG, CHINA

The world's second-most densely populated island houses 86,782 in less than one square mile. For a bird's eye view, climb the 643-foot Yuk Kwai Shan mountain.

7 Fireworks CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

More than a million gather on July 4 to

watch the fireworks over the Navy Pier. Rise above the throng at the 10,000-square-foot, fourth-story rooftop bar at the Godfrey Hotel, where you can photograph with an unobstructed view.

8 Papal Audience VATICAN CITY

Every Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. from spring through autumn, the Pope holds an audience in St. Peter's Square. Arrive at 8 a.m. for the 10:30 blessing; portrait opportunities abound.

9 Blue Lagoon ICELAND

To capture the largest crowds, visit on a weekend from July 1 to August 10, when the Lagoon is open until 11:30 p.m. and take advantage of the midnight sun.

10 The Metro MOSCOW, RUSSIA

Its 194 stations are some of the world's most beautiful. The Kom-somolskaya, with its yellow ceiling and elegant chandeliers, makes a stunning backdrop for portraits.

JOEL SARTORE (STATE FAIR); BRIAN PINEDA/BIG LEO PRODUCTIONS (SHIBUYA)



HIGH DRAMA

Some photographers BASE jump off cliffs just to shoot the fall. But there are other ways to get a thrilling shot. So even if taking shots like these doesn't almost kill you, the results will leave your viewers dying to know how you got them.

1 The Pillars TASMANIA

These 1,000-foot-high dolerite spires on the eastern shoreline of the Tasman Peninsula jut straight out of the Tasman Sea, and could double as the backdrop for Dante's ninth circle of hell. In fact, the British convicts who first sailed past the cliffs to settle the colony of Port Arthur in 1830 probably did think they had arrived in Hades.

Fast forward to the 21st century and the vertical pillars are prime targets for world-class climbers like The North Face team of Heidi Wirtz, Matt Segal, Cedar Wright, and James Pearson, who conquered them in 2010. For mere mortals, however, the rocks are accessible in two ways. The first is a wild, 46-mile coastal ride with Pennicott Wilderness Journeys in a 43-seat rigid inflatable boat. While the sea can be rough, the boat captains are sensitive to photographers' needs and are always in search of calm water right below the spraying sea stacks and intimidating rock masses. They'll also steer as close as they safely can toward dolphins, humpback whales, albatross, seals, and white-bellied sea eagles. (Three-hour wilderness cruises with Pennicott start at \$114 [U.S.] per person; tasmancruises.com.au.)

The second way to visit comes in the fall of 2015, when Capes Haug, Pillar, and Raoul, all of which rise hundreds of feet above the Tasman Sea, will be connected by the 40-mile Three Capes Track (parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=21484). The hike will take three days of rugged climbing, but the views and photo opportunities are unparalleled on Earth. Unlike most U.S. National Park trails, there are very few obstacles between you and a 1,000-foot drop into the Tasman Sea. Belly up to the edge and point the camera down.

“ There's so much potential for drama with those steep, dark, foreboding cliffs. The day I shot this photograph it was stormy and I was right out on the end of a peak called the Blade, looking back along the coast. If the wind is blowing in the right direction it's almost like it can support you, but you wouldn't want it to drop off at the wrong time or you'll fall off the cliff. ”
—Photographer Grant Dixon

2 The Alps SWITZERLAND

From the top of the 13,661-foot Breithorn, photographers have views to the French, Italian, and Swiss Alps, with the Matterhorn front and center. Summitting isn't easy, but neither does it require vast expertise. Find a guide in Zermatt, take the Matterhorn Express gondola to the top, rope up with your guide, and pick your way across the peak. The effort—and the resulting photo of Europe's iconic mountain—will be worth it.

3 Maasai Mara KENYA

Two million wildebeests migrate 1,800 miles from Serengeti National Park in Tanzania to the greener pastures of the Maasai Mara National Reserve every year from July through to October. That means cheetahs, lions, and hyenas are close behind. Catch the wildebeest as they bunch up at the Mara River, crossing the crocodile-infested waters, and snag their predators, too.



4 Day of the Dead OAXACA, MEXICO

Most villages in Mexico pull out all the stops for this late-fall celebration, but few are as rich as the Tlaxiahuacan, Ocotlan, and Etla valleys of Oaxaca. Book with traditionsmexico.com. The founder is a pro photographer.

5 Ouray Ice Park OURAY, COLORADO

More than 200 ice and mixed climbs are located a 15-minute walk from the park entrance.

Safely capture the climbers wielding ice axes and crampons as they ascend the vertical ice pillars from the lower or upper bridge-viewing platforms.

6 Masaya Volcano NICARAGUA

At this active volcano, little in the way of fencing or security stands between the photographer and the crater. As the light goes down, the boiling lava below wafts out of the crater, ready for its close-up.

7 Grand Canyon ARIZONA

Ninety percent of visitors see it from the South Rim, but most of this national park is wilderness. The most dramatic way to shoot it? From the Colorado River in a wooden dory (go to www.oars.com).

8 Macau Tower MACAU, CHINA

At 765 feet, China's Macau Tower hosts the world's highest bungee jump. Record the epic leap with an action cam.

9 Gray Wolves YELLOWSTONE N. P.

In winter the Yellowstone Association Institute offers a course on the park's gray wolves. Led by a Wolf Project biologist, you'll likely manage to photograph one.

10 Holi Festival INDIA

Use your camera in a housing during this spring Hindu love fest, where revelers sing, dance, and fling dry paint mixed with water at each other.