

Reflections of a Pro Photographer turned Tourist Dad

So I have just completed an exhausting but unbelievable day at an amusement park with my family in Florida. Can I tell you that this was one of the more challenging photo shoots I have done and yet, incredibly fulfilling. Can't wait until the photo book of our trip is complete and until then we have much more fun remaining on our trip. But for now, let's get to the purpose of this blog post. What are some of the things I learned today as I reflect on over 500 pictures that my wife and I captured?



Equipment has to be minimal but don't forget the must have's – My rig for the day was a Nikon D7000 camera (lighter weight than my pro bodies), a Sigma 18-250mm all-purpose lens (fun to play with but just have to get use to the zoom lock switch and zoom direction all being backwards from the normal Tamron 18-270mm in my hands), a Nikon SB-700 flash unit (more about this later) and a Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens (figured if it cannot be done with the 18-250mm than the only other thing that would be cool would be the fisheye). All of this was carried around my neck or some of it in a zoom holster bag by ThinkTank. What did I learn here? I learned that I brought all the right stuff today but carrying the camera and/or zoom holster is not as easy as I thought on a rollercoaster! Yes, I had grandiose plans of holding the camera with the fisheye in front of me and the family while flying down on a roller coaster only to find that I was just holding on for dear life and would have lost the camera (and probably seriously injured someone below) if I had taken it on the ride. Also I confirmed that when you are outside and there is bright sun, a flash is a must! I did find myself getting much better results with the accessory flash because of its power than the built-in flash so I was glad I brought it. For the amusement park in a couple of days with the “mouse” which I am figuring has more inside rides, the fisheye will likely be switched out for a 35mm 1.8 prime lens. Oh, and did I say that I had a little fanny pack that was only large enough to hold the flash or a lens but that thing worked out great. Guess I need to see the closest thing that Think Tank makes like this and order it!

Keep moving because kids are not patient – Wow, while I thought I was fast at capturing images, keeping up with two children under 10 who are having the time of their lives requires a lot of energy and planning. Looking for the key shots and trying to get all the settings ready to capture those has to be an almost never-ending process. You have to keep going and be thinking ahead about the next activity and thus, what the next shot will be.

Tell a story – Most of the time when I am shooting, I simply want great images that do not need to tell a story but rather, are just interesting and effective on their own. However, family travel photography can be different. Getting those overall shots of the location, the kids in front of the entrance signs and anything else in the park they will pose next too and much more is all part of telling the story. Yes I can even capture some “artistic” or natural images of the surroundings throughout the day but not at the cost of missing the highlights that we experienced as a family. All of it will be expertly designed into a beautiful photo book so we can easily review the images down

the road and relive the memories. You can be creative but shooting everything else is also required.

Know your default settings and keep them on the defaults unless you have to change them

– Locking down things like your AF, ISO, WB and Mode will ensure you get more good images than if you do not keep up with these. My settings for most of the day were:

- Mode: A or P
- Aperture: F8, Shutter Speed: 1/60th or higher depending on any subject movement
- ISO: 400 or higher
- AF Area – Auto Select
- AF How – Stationary focusing (Continuous when the subject was moving at a high rate of speed)
- WB – Auto (this day was overcast so I found Cloudy was more accurate)
- Exposure Comp. – 0 or +.7 most of the day as many of the pictures were underexposed with no compensation.

Don't forget the complete family picture – You do not want to get home and have pictures where you and/or your wife are never with the kids because you were always behind the camera. I say this even though my wife has the same photography background I do and can help spread the load of capturing images. Don't be afraid to set your camera up on a table or tripod. You can even ask a stranger if they would be kind enough to take your family's picture. Why not? You can have already set the functions properly so that they just have to hit the shutter button. After all, how many times do we do the same with someone's smartphone when they ask us? At least we will get a good quality picture.

Good Tourist Photography is really hard – Seriously, coming from the guy who shoots lots of high profile events, some pro sports, quickly changing landscapes and more, this was very difficult shooting. Be willing to miss some shots in exchange for a pleasurable experience for those you are traveling with. Know that some shots are just not ideal but being prepared as much as possible is key.

I think I am gaining some helpful perspective on family travel photography versus the dedicated photo trips I am usually leading. The importance of the pictures is very high (up there with the work I produce for my clients) and yet, the challenges of balancing general photography with the needs of your traveling companions can make life interesting. However, when you get that perfect picture of the family having fun and you see all the smiles of life on vacation, there is nothing better than being a photographer (and a Dad).