

**The Journal of the RPS Travel Group**  
Issue 94 | Summer 2025

# TRAVEL LOG



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## Travel Log



## The Journal of the RPS Travel Group

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Views of contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the RPS Travel Group or The Royal Photographic Society.

## A note from the Editorial Team

### A Broader View and a Fond Farewell

In our last issue, I invited you to help us expand the geographical scope of Travel Log by submitting articles from countries not yet featured during my time as editor.

I'm delighted to say that many of you rose to the challenge!

This issue includes stories from new corners of the globe, helping us paint a richer, more diverse picture of travel experiences. Thank you to everyone who contributed—you've helped us take a meaningful step toward showcasing the full breadth of our members' adventures.

As we continue to explore "roads less travelled," I hope this spirit of exploration carries forward. There's still so much of the world waiting to be shared, and I encourage you to keep sending in your stories—especially from the Americas and other under-represented regions.

This issue also marks a significant moment for our editorial team. After 12 years of dedicated volunteering with the RPS, our sub-editor John Minter is stepping down. John's commitment, insight, and steady hand have been instrumental in shaping Travel Log into the publication it is today. On behalf of the entire Travel Group, I want to extend my deepest thanks to John for his years of service and support. His legacy will be felt in every page we publish.

Let's keep the momentum going—there are still many places waiting to be explored and shared. If you've recently returned from a lesser-known destination or have a story that deserves the spotlight, we'd love to hear from you.

Here's to many more journeys, discoveries, and shared adventure.

Regards from the  
Travel Log Editor  
editortravel@rps.org  
Summer 2025



Cover photo by  
Graham Vulliamy



## A note from our Chair



*Kath*  
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# Judge's Comments

**Nat Coalson ARPS was the judge of the Travel Group Travel Image of the Year 2025 and Best of the Best Monthly Image of the Month 2024 competitions. Nat is the owner of Gallery PHOTIQ (<https://photiq.uk>) in Royal Leamington Spa and teaches all aspects of photography to all levels of photographers. Nat will also be a speaker at the Travel Group's Roads Less Travelled event in October.**

**The following is a summary of Nat's comments but his full comments on all of the award winning and commended images can be seen via the link on the Group's website.**

Expressing pleasure at being invited to judge this year's competition Nat began by outlining his approach to the judging process and to Travel photography in general.

The general considerations Nat makes in all of his judging are in the following order.

**Impact:** As with all effective photographs, a good travel image needs to start with that initial impact, we need to be hooked in by the visuals.

**Engagement:** Beyond the initial impact, we need some lasting engagement, something that will keep us interested intellectually.

**Narrative:** Especially in travel photography, a third element is narrative, as a good travel photograph really needs to tell a story and bring us into the place.

**Composition:** Composition and design, of course, are essential for any strong photograph, especially those that are to be selected as winners in a competition.

**Technical:** Finally, does the image meet the required technical standard? It is unfortunate that, sometimes, images can fully meet the initial considerations but are let down for not meeting the technical standard. If the image is let down by technical criteria, then it can't be considered for a commendation or a medal.

Regarding the Travel category in general, it is safe to say that Travel is a very wide-ranging and vastly encompassing genre of photography that can include elements of adventure, nature, landscape, architecture, portraiture.... All of these can be a part of an effective travel photograph. What we're really

looking for is an image where the main subject itself conveys the experience of being a visitor to a place and what it really feels like to be in this unfamiliar environment, introducing us to different cultures and bringing us to another place.

While aspects of landscape, architecture, portraiture, all of these other genres can be present, a winning travel photograph really conveys the sense of place and a spirit of place. This needs to give us some new ideas, information and understanding about the world we live in and convey a little bit about the cultures of different places as well. So, we're looking for the human element, illustrating the feelings of traveling, helping me, as the viewer, imagine that I'm traveling there too.

So a good travel photograph really must answer a lot of questions. It's documentary in nature, but it also needs to provoke a sense of wonder and inspire an interest in viewing the places bringing viewer into the place that's being depicted. This means that the travel category might be a little bit less about personal expression and artistic impressions and views, less about your own unique perspective and a little bit more about sharing facts and universal truths so that the viewer can really understand the place that they're seeing.

Before moving on to speak about specific images and announcing the winners Nat thanked everyone who entered and offered congratulations to all of the highly commended and the medal winners. And to those whose images weren't selected or didn't do as well as the photographers would have hoped, he said "don't be discouraged: take heart, try and learn as much as you can. Hopefully some of my critique and my comments will be informative."

# Gold

## Judge's feedback

This image is just absolutely beautiful and I would say fully fills all the criteria that I've explained and everything that I'm looking for in a winning travel photograph.

The lighting is just so beautiful that it maybe is even bordering on a fine art application. It has all the elements and everything that a great travel photograph needs. It's got the exotic feeling of a faraway place. It's just the right sort of focal length and distance to show the space and make me feel like I could actually be there. The three figures, three and any kind of odd number in the visual arts is always very strong. We can go very easily between the three faces. The position of the basket between the two women to the right is really creating just a strong, strong counterpoint. And the visual echo and the rhythm that's created among all of the other baskets really all work well together.

I love how the balance of tones, especially the very dark area of the background allows the main subject to really come to the forefront. If there was any creative dodging and burning done to achieve this, I think it's been done extremely well, very effectively because it looks natural. It doesn't look over processed. Everything looks really clean. So from a technical standpoint, it's got it all.

The more I look at it, the more I love it, the more there is to see. Congratulations!

## Ladies making Fishing Traps, Tien Lu, Vietnam - Brian Houghton ARPS





# Silver

## Judge's feedback

This image immediately draws us in but what factors contribute to that impact? The composition is focussed on the centre of the frame. While I think that works well here, it is always worth revisiting your crop to move the focal point of the action off centre to produce a stronger result. Alternatively, a graduated fill could be used to darken the sides to keep the eyes within the centre of the image.

Here the initial impact created by the shapes and the contrast in the middle is fantastic and we are drawn into the main of the milk being poured into this kettle. This is the beginning and end of a circular path with a line leading up, past the milk, the cup, the hand, up the arm, across the man, and down. Once we've followed that path though, there's plenty of other interest in the frame. The smoke or steam catching the sunlight maybe mildly distracting but the other detail that's found in the surrounding area, including the little spigots and the Coca-Cola machine support the narrative.

So this is a picture that I feel contains all of the elements of a winning travel photograph. It's has the impact, it's has the lasting engagement, and it has the narrative and story. The composition is sound and technically, it's really well executed. The colour looks nicely balanced. It's not been over-processed.

Congratulations, a really great images deserving the silver medal.

Tea stall, Peshawar, Pakistan - Jo Kearney ARPS



# Bronze

## Judge's feedback

A Camel Race in Mongolia. A really great action capture. The impact is very strong and definitely grabs attention mainly due to the contrast created by the bright snowy field, the darker figure of the person to the rear and the camels in front.

I might suggest that the image is just the tiniest bit underexposed. I really would prefer to see the snow being more of what I would think of as naturally very bright white. While care would need to be taken to avoid blowing out too many of the brightest highlights, I think a third of a stop or a half of a stop increase in the upper range of the tone scale would improve the image.

Again, the more I look at the image, I might wish to alter the crop of the image – possibly trim off some of the sky or go for a more panoramic crop - but it's important to keep some space at the left side as the action is moving in that direction.

This image went back and forth in my consideration of the medal positions. It is a very, very strong image and not one that is not easy to get. I like to see in the images, commended or not, the skill and technique of the photographer. That is clearly demonstrated in this image.

Well done. Congratulations on the Bronze Medal award.

Camel Race, Mongolia - Ngar Shun Victor Wong FRPS





## Highly Commended



Boat Children Tonlé Sap, Cambodia - Lachlan French ARPS



Boat builder, Madagascar - RM Plummer ARPS

## Highly Commended



Colours of monastic life, Myanmar - Sue Lambert LRPS CPAGB



Morning Exercise, Shanghai China - Ngar Shun Victor Wong FRPS



## Highly Commended



Fishing Boats, Halong Bay\_Halong Bay, Vietnam - Justin Cliffe ARPS



Going home, Rajshahi Bangladesh - David Short ARPS

## Highly Commended



Kerlingarfjoll, Iceland - George Pearson ARPS



Morning exercise, Varanasi, India - Ngar Shun Wong Victor FRPS



Highly Commended



Camel Race, Oman - Sanjoy Sengupta LRPS



Proud artisan, Turkey - Nur Tucker ARPS

Highly Commended



Beneath the waves in Egypt - Nur Tucker ARPS



## Highly Commended



Purification ceremony, Kalash Valleys, Pakistan - Jo Kearney ARPS



School girls, Kalash Valleys, Pakistan - Jo Kearney ARPS

## Highly Commended



Quiet Contemplation, Thanh Kim, Vietnam - Justin Cliffe ARPS



# Highly Commended



Winnowing vegetables, Long Bien Market, Hanoi - John Speller



Tourist Queens Tower of London, UK - Ruth Hanson ARPS

# Winner

## Judge's feedback

So here is the image that I selected as the winner. This image has a number of notable attributes that helped it to sort of rise to the top.

Firstly, is it definitely conveys this initial impact. That is carried largely by the colour and the contrast. There's quite a lot of fine detail. So the visual structure is quite complex, which draws us in for some further engagement. We really kind of want to see what's going on in this picture.

The composition is very sound. It's well designed, well-proportioned and balanced. The verticals are straight enough to be not distracting. The position of the main subject, the man in the lower right corner repairing the clothes, is really perfect. It really anchors the composition which is very well balanced. It also allows us to roam our eyes around the background where there's the fantastic detail from the other clothes and the textures of the fabrics up to even the smaller little pictures sort of on the wall and on the shelf at the back.

So this image presents quite a lot of narrative detail. There's a lot of visual information being conveyed. In combination with the Arabic lettering on the signage, we get a very clear sense that we're in a foreign country or foreign to us from the UK and Western countries anyway. So it conveys this sort of exotic, faraway kind of feeling.

I really felt that this image was deserving of the best of the monthly competition Congratulations.

## Repairing Clothes, Souk Al Sareh, Baghdad by Donatus Gratius





# Roads Less Travelled

11-12 October 2025

Woodland Grange Conference Centre  
Royal Leamington Spa

A mix of inspiring speakers and activities has been brought together to mark the 55th anniversary of the formation of the RPS Travel Group. At a time when journeying to 'off the beaten track' places was much less easy than it is now, one of the Group's primary purposes was to enable travel to unusual destinations. We do that much more independently now and perhaps put more emphasis on sharing the stories of our travels.

This weekend brings together a range of speakers and skills that will help each of us move forward on our photographic journey and have fun following our chosen paths.

Each will each share their unique 'take' on 'Roads Less Travelled' whether near to home or further afield; whether about photographic style or skill or about the effect of our travel on the places we visit and its importance to communities about whose cultures we learn.

There will also be opportunities to share your ideas both formally and informally and plenty of time to get to know other participants. There will be representatives from a small number of photographic suppliers to demonstrate their products and the popular Bring a Print competition with a prize awarded by Fotospeed.

Royal Leamington Spa is easy to reach by rail, road and air and is very near the historic heart of England, just a short distance from Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick.

If you are not based in the UK and are planning to come, it would be easy to put a programme together for a longer stay.

**For more information on our speakers,  
programme and accommodation please visit  
RPS website**

## How much will it cost?

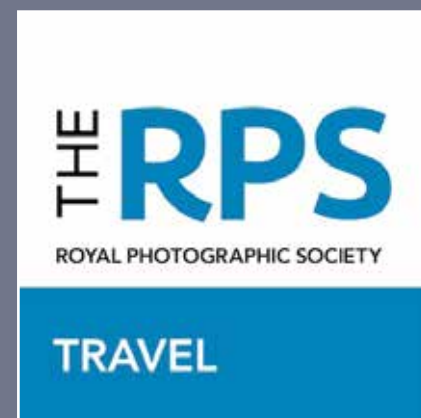
Having been able to negotiate a very favourable day rate to include a three course lunch and free-flowing snacks and drinks in these very pleasant surroundings and due to the generosity of our speakers we are able to offer the full two day programme as follows:

Travel Group member	£105
RPS member	£110
Non-RPS member	£125

## Accommodation

Accommodation will be booked directly with the hotel. **Please call Woodland Grange Conference Centre, Royal Leamington Spa on 01926 310507.**

**If you are staying for dinner on the Saturday night please remember to book your evening meal.**



## Roads Less Travelled SPEAKERS

### Ash Bhardwaj

An award-winning journalist, broadcaster, and author, whose work sits at the intersection of travel, culture, and current affairs. He has reported from over 50 countries for outlets including BBC Radio 4, The World Service, The Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Condé Nast Traveller, and Huffington Post, and he appears as a travel expert on BBC One's Morning Live, Channel 5 and Sky News.

### Nat Coalson ARPS

Owner of Photiq Gallery in Royal Leamington Spa, Nat Coalson is an internationally recognised artist and trainer who has spent his entire adult life working in the visual arts. Since 2003 he has focused on the photographic arts, initially with a passion for landscape and nature photography, evolving into pure abstraction.

### Peter Brisley ARPS EFIAP DPAGB BPE2\*

Extensive travelling over the past twenty years to countries including Libya, Ethiopia, Japan and Mongolia has provided Peter with a wide range of subject matter for his graphic and 'fine art' approach to photography.

### Leigh Preston FRPS EFIAP MPAGB

Leigh has been taking pictures for over forty years. His work has been mainly thematic, making images as a series. He has a relatively specific approach to what he chooses to make pictures of, and relies heavily on atmospherics, dramatic lighting and strong storylines to convey an individual style.

### Sue O'Connell FIPF MPSA EFIAP/d3 DPAGB ABPE

Sue has been a keen traveller all her life - the further and more remote the better - Colombia, Angola and Bangladesh being recent destinations. She enjoys a wide range of genres including landscapes, documentary, wildlife and abstracts, but above all, loves photographing people.

**Prof. Lindsay Stringer** is Professor in Environment and Development at the University of York and Director of the York Environmental Sustainability Institute, an interdisciplinary research centre that brings together people across disciplines and sectors to tackle some of the world's big sustainability challenges. Lindsay has travelled extensively across all continents both for work and pleasure, and is always trying to find new ways to balance travel with sustainability.

**Christopher Roche** was born in Quebec, Canada to Irish parents. He has since lived in Africa and several cities around Europe. Dividing his time between working as a filmmaker and a photographer he is now based between London and Bath.

**See RPS website for more information on each speaker and the programme.**

# Bradt GUIDES LATIN AMERICA TRAVEL FESTIVAL

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One-to-one advice from specialists on where,  
when and how to go

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Handbook

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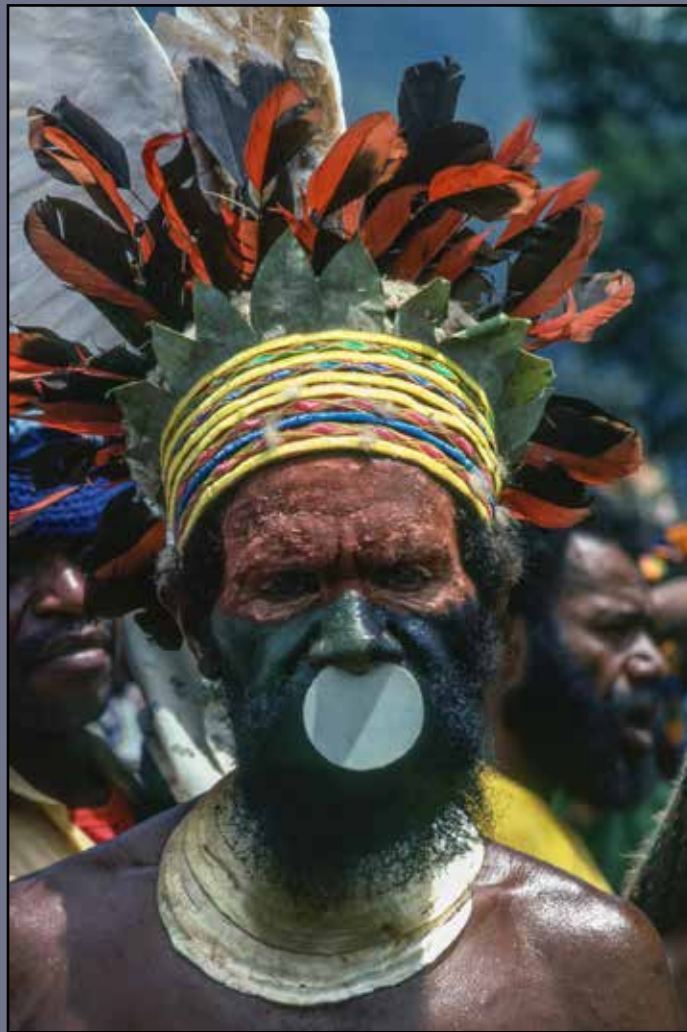
Emon Choudhury (winner, Race Across the World), Rory Jackson (director, Bruce Parry: Tribe), Shafik Meghji (author, Small Earthquakes), Hilary Bradt (founder, Bradt Guides)... with many more to be announced

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Above - Annual sing-sing show in Kundiawa in Chimbu province

Left - Mekeo sing-sing in Central province to celebrate the ordination of a local Catholic bishop

# Travels in Papua New Guinea

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Graham Vulliamy LRPS

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the eastern half of the large island of New Guinea just north of Australia. Western missionaries first visited the southern coastal area of Papua at the end of the nineteenth century but the central New Guinea Highlands in the north were only first explored in the 1930s. This resulted in a much shorter period of colonisation than in other parts of the world with the country gaining its independence from Australia in 1975.

Traditional tribal ways of life have been preserved in much of the country. This is for two reasons. First, the topography of numerous isolated high-altitude valleys in the highlands and dense tropical rainforest in the coastal areas has resulted in transport difficulties and the consequent isolation of different tribes. Second, the recent short period of Australian colonisation was relatively benign with, for example, 97% of the land remaining in traditional ownership at the time of independence.

PNG is the most linguistically diverse country in the world. There are an estimated 850 mother tongues, excluding dialects, which is illustrative of the wide variety of cultures within the country. There are also two main lingua francas (Tok Pisin in the New Guinea Highlands and Hiri Motu in coastal Papua) with English as the national language in the educational system and the modern sector.

I visited PNG as an educational researcher for seven months in 1979-1980, five months in 1982 and three months in 1985. These visits acted as my introduction to photography – buying my first SLR cheaply in Hong Kong en route for my first trip in the expectation that it would prove to be a very photogenic location. I took slides, which for this article have been digitised in a scanner together with some minor editing in Lightroom and Photoshop.

There was no tourism as such in PNG at that time. Even today organised tourism is limited to a few cruise ship stops (ranging from larger coastal towns, such as the capital Port Moresby, to village locations in the Trobriand Islands) and more specialised tours within Papua and the New Guinea Highlands. I travelled very extensively throughout PNG. My main research schools, where I would spend about six weeks at a time, were in coastal Papua (Milne Bay and Central provinces) and on islands in New Guinea (Karkar in Madang province and in West New Britain province). These fieldwork trips in rural areas were punctuated by return trips to the University of PNG in Port Moresby. I also spent two months teaching at Goroka Teachers' College in the central New Guinea Highlands.



Volcano on Karkar Island



Kandrian Harbour, West New Britain





Images this page: Top - Women returning from their gardens; Left - A village market in the Highlands; Right - A bride price (wedding) ceremony

Images opposite: From Top - Urban PMV stop in Port Moresby; A rural PMV; A light aircraft; Highlands family and housing; Right - Housing in a large coastal village



Transport in PNG is mainly based around a limited number of roads (most of which are unpaved) and air travel. Public road transport is provided by public motor vehicles (PMVs) such as minivans and trucks, which are privately owned. In the capital, Port Moresby, there are organised routes for these with set stops, although no timetable. In rural areas they are less organised. Port Moresby is not linked by road to any of the other major towns. Many highland villages can only be reached by light aircraft or on foot, whilst coastal villages can also be accessed by boat.

PNG is one of the least urbanised countries in the world with about 90% of its population living in rural areas. Houses in rural villages are made of bush materials and in coastal areas are often on stilts to protect against flooding and snakes. Subsistence farming is the dominant form of agriculture, with a large portion of the population relying on it for their food and livelihood. Traditionally, whilst men do much of the initial heavy work of clearing land and building fences, women do the everyday gardening and selling produce in local markets.

The people of PNG have a rich cultural heritage as varied as the country itself. A central part of this heritage is the sing-sing – a traditional ceremony involving music, dance, ornate body decoration and feasting. Driving through the Highlands in particular we came across many of these just by accident. For example, the bride price ceremony is accompanied by payment from the groom's family to the bride's family as compensation for the loss of female labour when the bride moves into the groom's family. We were told that the bride price in this case was 2000 Kina and you can see some of the notes adorn her body in the ceremony. Also, part of the bride price included three cassowary birds and 10 pigs, important in a culture that ritually revolves around the pig.







Images this page:

Top: Outstation students building a new classroom  
 Bottom: Outstation students loading Copra on a canoe to transport to Alotau



Images this page:

Top: Outstation students took turn to run the trade store  
 Bottom: Secondary school classroom in Alotau







**Images: Top - A coconut husking competition; Left - Outstation student carrying a copra bag; Right - Outstation student making coconut milk**



In parts of the Highlands there are also annual shows which bring a wide variety of traditional clans together for a large extended sing-sing that attract tourists and locals alike. The photos at the beginning of the article were taken at the annual show in Kundiawa in Chimbu province.

A focus for much of my educational research was on the use of high school outstations, which were an attempt to reorient the inherited colonial academic system of schooling to make it more relevant to the government's rural development strategy. There was a fear that those students who had followed a mainly academic curriculum, but who failed to get a wage job in the formal sector of the economy after leaving secondary school, tended to be inadequately prepared to return to self-employment in their home villages and would drift towards unemployment in towns instead.

One of the cases I examined looked at students at the main secondary school in Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay province, who were sent to a bush-outstation, where I lived for a month in 1979 and 1982. It was situated about 25 miles up the coast between two villages and in the middle of a derelict coconut plantation overlooking the sea. Each of the school's grade 9 classes (aged about 16), containing around 35 students, went to the outstation for periods of about a month at a time. There they did a mixture of classroom work (English, maths and science) and practical activities such as subsistence gardening, running a tradestore, making copra, a furniture-making project for the boys and a baking one for the girls. Attempts were made to integrate the classroom and practical work so that, for example, the maths programme was on tradestore and business maths. Students then took turns in operating the tradestore and keeping its daily accounts.



**Images: Top - Villager at the bush outstation; Left - Papua New Guinean secondary school teacher; Right - Group work in the outstation classroom**



# *South America*

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Michael Cook



*Chile - Valley of the Moon*





Ecuador - Quito

### Central and South America

The editorial of the Winter/Spring 2025 issue of Travel Log remarked upon the absence of features on the Americas. For several years between 2009 and 2016 my wife and I chose central and south America for our 'long-haul' holiday, on several occasions travelling to the southern hemisphere during the British winter to soak up some sunshine. This is a taster of what we saw, (excluding photographs of some of the more familiar destinations like Machu Picchu).

We visited Ecuador (including the Galapagos), Chile, Peru and Costa Rica, whilst managing short breaks in Argentina (Buenos Aires) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro and the Iguacu Falls) en-route to or from the main destination. An add-on to the visit to Chile was a four-day expedition cruise through the Chilean fjords. Most were tailor-made or small-group escorted tours rather than specialist photography holidays.

The Galapagos and Costa Rica need no introduction as havens for wildlife photography but all countries have their particular attractions, whether scenic, built heritage or ancient civilisations.

#### Ecuador

The visit to Ecuador began in the capital, Quito, situated at an altitude of 2,850 metres. From there we travelled through the Avenue of Volcanoes in an unusual mode of transport – a purpose-built single deck bus running on rails, the Chiva Express. We continued on to Alausi and then to the Devil's Nose railway, a switchback track carved into the side of a mountain involving a steep descent with vertiginous drops and spectacular views.

From there the onward journey was by road to Cuenca, visiting an important Inca site en-route. Cuenca is a very attractive city with colonial buildings, red-roofed houses, pretty squares and cobbled streets. A city tour included a visit to a Panama hat factory. Further excursions included visits to artisan villages and orchid gardens.

We then flew from Cuenca to Guayaquil where the tour visited a Hacienda before taking a flight to San Cristobal on the Galapagos Islands.

There are different options for exploring the Galapagos Islands: larger ships with a maximum of 100 passengers or smaller vessels with typically sixteen passengers. We chose a larger ship. All island landings were led by expert local naturalists and though time ashore was controlled to limit disturbance it was magical to walk amongst the wildlife unfazed by our presence as there is no history of predation by humans.

Returning to the mainland, flying directly back to Quito, we travelled a few kilometres north to straddle the equator, one foot in either hemisphere, and visited the market town of Otavalo where many handicrafts and textiles were on sale.

#### Chile

We travelled to Chile arriving in the capital Santiago, located in the central region. A city tour followed, incorporating the elaborately decorated cathedral, a bustling market and a vineyard tour. Then it was a flight and road trip north to the Atacama region, allegedly one of the driest places on earth, but it rained so heavily the roads were washed away and so we were unable to continue beyond San Pedro de Atacama.

Excursions included the Valley of the Moon, a striking landscape eroded by water and wind, and a lagoon with edges of white crystallised salt which is home to flamingos.

Southwards to the Chilean lake district and the region often referred to as Patagonia with scenic views of countryside, volcanoes and villages then onward by air to Punta Arenas and the Otway Sound, home, seasonally, to colonies of Magellan Penguins. Continuing on to the town of Puerto Natales and into the spectacular scenery of the Torres del Paine National Park. Whilst mountains had been ever-present throughout the journey the craggy peaks of the Torres del Paine were breathtaking.



Ecuador - (Top) Devil's Nose; (Bottom) Panama hats







Chile - Torres del Paine



Ecuador - Galapagos Blue-footed Booby



Peru - Rio Metropolitan Cathedral

A boat trip on the Grey Lake with close-up views of the Grey Glacier and a city tour of Punta Arenas rounded off the land based part of the trip after which we joined the Stella Australis for a four-day expedition cruise through remote wilderness regions, passing along the Beagle Channel, and 'glacier alley' (six glaciers terminating in the channel, each named after a different country), viewing a penguin colony from zodiacs, visiting Ainsworth Bay and the Pia Fjord with spectacular views of a calving glacier. To top it all the weather was good and we were able to land on Cape Horn.

For the homeward journey to the UK we opted to go via Buenos Aires, a welcome break in the journey and an opportunity for a short stop-over in that amazing city (the 'Paris of the Americas'). The La Boca area is so vibrant and colourful it is well worth a visit as is the Recoleta Cemetery where many notable people are buried (perhaps most famously Eva Peron, 'Evita') and with many fine and elaborate mausoleums. Additionally there is attractive architecture and pleasant squares, much of which is walkable. A tour with a local guide helped to assimilate the highlights in a brief visit.

#### Peru

This time we took the opportunity to break the outward journey by spending a few days visiting Rio de Janeiro and the Iguacu Falls. A full day tour of Rio encompassed the main highlights, Sugar Loaf Mountain, Corcovado Hill (Christ the Redeemer), the

famous beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema and the impressive modern Metropolitan Cathedral. With free time we then explored the Copacabana Fort at the south end of the beach. An internal flight took us to our next destination, a two-night stay near the Iguacu Falls, the scale of which with its many cataracts is quite a spectacle. The services of a local guide made it easy to view the falls from both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides. Excellent walkways gave access to numerous viewing points. The next morning was at leisure with an afternoon flight to Lima, arriving late in the evening.

The first point to make when contemplating a trip to Peru is to be aware that much of the visit will be at altitude – up to 4,900 metres. An itinerary which progresses a gradual acclimatisation is to be recommended; ours was Lima – Arequipa – Colca Canyon – Lake Titicaca – Cuzco – the Sacred Valley – Machu Picchu – Cuzco – Lima.

Lima and Arequipa are attractive cities with grand buildings, former monasteries and convents, leafy squares, markets and much more.

The Colca Canyon requires an early start in order to arrive as the sun generates thermals on which the Condors and other large birds soar. Watching these magnificent creatures with a 3-metre wingspan will appeal to any wildlife enthusiast. The drive to the canyon features pre-Inca terraces brought into sharp relief by the early morning light, (though photo stops





Rio from Sugar Loaf Mountain

were deferred until the return journey in order not to miss the spectacle of the Condors).

Onward to Puno and Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world, noted for its inhabited floating reed islands. A full day tour of the islands provided an insight to how the Uros people construct the islands and their houses and boats from the totora reed. Their way of life is sustained by tourism; visits are regulated and the islanders receive a fair share of the tourist trade and the opportunity to sell their craftwork.

Departing Puno on the Andean Explorer, which is modelled on Pullman style coaches, we passed through the market at walking pace, hooting continuously to warn of our approach, densely populated with stalls on either side of the track selling every imaginable commodity. The tide of humanity parted to allow the train to pass and immediately closed behind it. An open observation car at the rear of the train was ideal for photography as we passed through the Andean plains, climbing to an altitude of 4,200 metres with dramatic views of snow-capped mountains.

And so to Cuzco, once the capital of the Inca Empire. Many Inca walls, arches and doorways remain despite attempts by conquistadors to remodel it. Situated at 3,300 metres a walking tour is best taken as a gentle amble, admiring the many fine buildings, narrow streets and colourful textiles for sale. Linger in a balcony coffee shop overlooking the main square to soak up the atmosphere.

Peru - Puno market

The ultimate destination was Machu Picchu, which more than lived up to expectations. The location, scale and quality of the ruins is truly memorable. Though much photographed and familiar through travel brochures it does not disappoint.

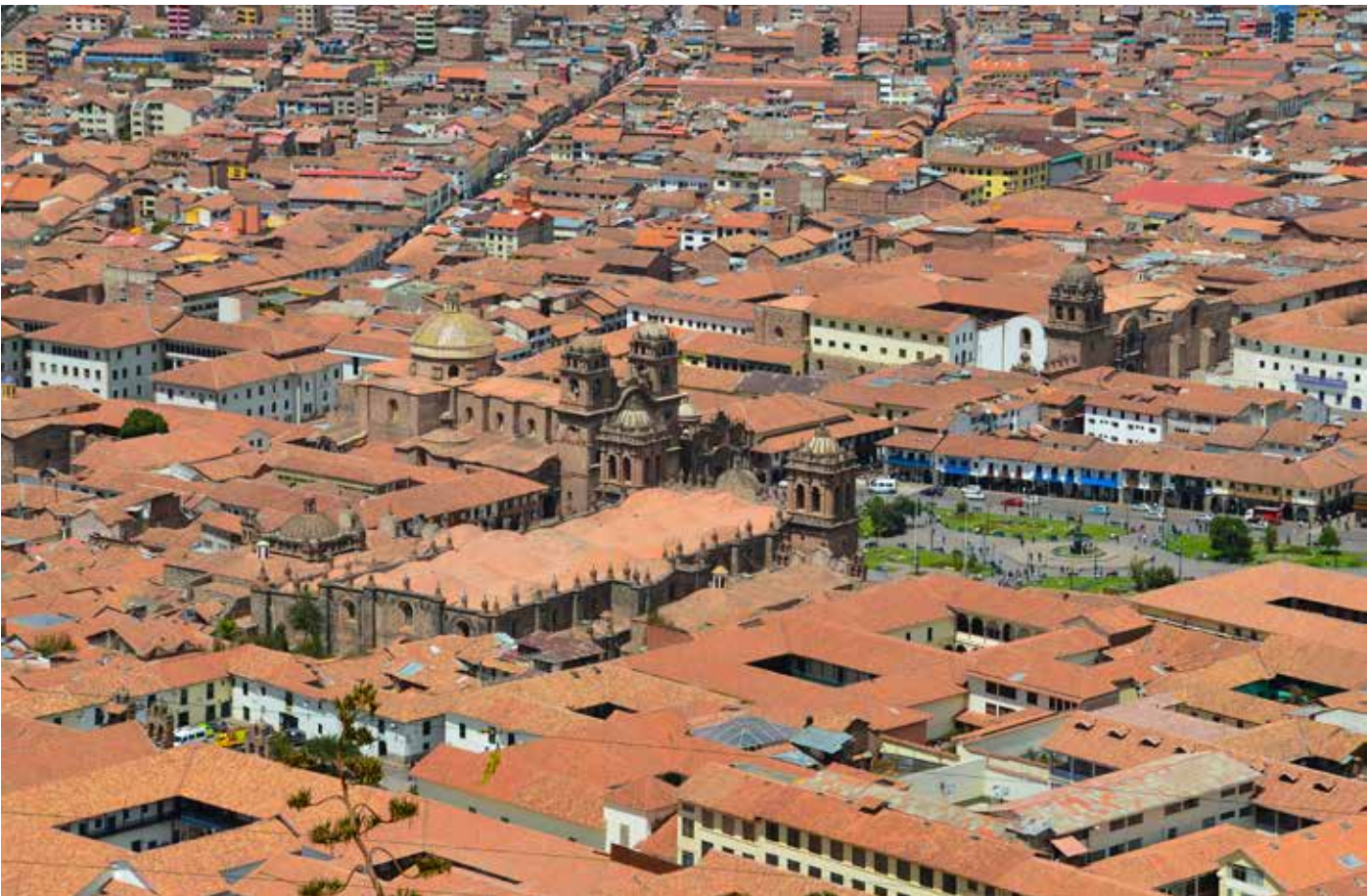
#### Costa Rica

A visit to Costa Rica is really about the natural world, lush vegetation, birds (especially humming birds), butterflies, mammals and reptiles. The itinerary mentioned that the plant life in one area is particularly rich due to the very high annual rainfall and that another of the places we were to stay was cloud forest. The weather fully lived up to those descriptions.

The day after arriving in San Jose was spent exploring the city and visiting the gold museum where there were many beautifully made and curated gold artefacts.



Peru - Colca Canyon



Peru - Cuzco





Costa Rica - Cloud forest

An early start the next day and a four-hour scenic drive took us to the pier where we boarded a boat for Tortuguero National Park on the Pacific coast. Whilst there we had a guided tour of the canals and trails of the Park seeing many species of birds, mammals and reptiles.

The itinerary continued by boat and road, including a visit to a biological station where we enjoyed a rainforest walk and learned about the scientific and conservation work of the scientists.

Sightings of the Arenal volcano eluded us but a boat trip to the border with Nicaragua and visit to the Monteverde biological reserve provided many more wildlife sightings. On visits to the Salvatura Walkways and Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve with their networks of walkways and trails we experienced flora and fauna from ground level up to the tree canopy.

The final visit was to a family-run farm where we learned about cultivating coffee, sugarcane, bananas and other fruits and vegetables, and took a ride in a traditionally decorated ox-drawn cart.

Looking back on these trips a decade and more later they were a wonderful experience of the culture, scenery, wildlife and built heritage of the countries involved, each distinctive in its own way but with some common elements.



Costa Rica - Toucan



Costa Rica - Humming bird





Laundry Day, Sa Dec, Vietnam



When will my turn come?  
Wedding photography at HCMC Museum, Saigon

# Travels Along the Mekong



WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Rob Morgan ARPS

In late November 2024, my wife Lucy and I went on a two-week trip to southern Vietnam and Cambodia. We flew into Ho Chi Minh City, which everyone except government officials still calls Saigon. Our APT tour organisers had booked us into the Park Hyatt and it was certainly a treat: a spacious, quiet room, great breakfasts and an easy walk to many attractions. The 'Square One' restaurant was world class, with French and Vietnamese dishes, but avoiding the fad of 'fusion'. Hotel service was exceptional. I visited the HCMC (Ho Chi Minh City) Museum on a Sunday, when not only could I learn about the city's history – including its part in the nation's struggles for independence – but I could talk with brides waiting for their pre-wedding photos to be taken in the grand 1885 building.

After a couple of days taking it easy in Saigon, we met other 'expeditioners' and headed off by coach to our river cruise up the Mekong. Some of them had started in northern Vietnam, while others joined when we did. It was nice to be on a coach, rather than be a pedestrian in Saigon and risk being run over by one.

Our vessel was the APT Mekong Serenity. Wouldn't you love to have the job of naming cruise vessels these days? Imagine naming a cruise ship that visits historic battlefields. Somme Serenity? (or perhaps Somme Enchanted Dreaming?) Gettysburg Gentility? Hastings Harmony? Anyway, once on board we could definitely feel the serenity. As there are no locks to go through, this vessel was wider than the European river cruise ships and felt very spacious.

Our first stop was Cai Be ("Guy Bay"), where we were entertained with some rice paper making. Then, as we transferred some of the ship's weight from the galley to our bellies, we headed up to Sa Dec. Out again on small boats, we landed at the street market. Local people definitely like their food fresh – they come to the market twice a day. The animals appeared to come only once. Nearby was an interesting and colourful Cao Dai ("Gow Die") temple. This religion is barely 100 years old and combines Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism and Confucianism.





By now we were getting close to the Cambodian border, but first there was a visit to Tan Chau where we went by cyclos/rickshaws to a silk weaving factory, before having a walk through a local village on Evergreen Island. Back on board we headed up to the border, where suddenly it looked quite industrial, with scores of boats and barges, mostly carrying river sand, sitting around in some kind of unhurried and disorganised order. Time for us to relax, mid-river as all the passports and visas were sorted out.

The next morning we made our grand entrance up the river into Phnom Penh at dawn, with the unexpectedly numerous modern office and apartment towers glistening in the early light. All that was missing was a statue of a woman holding a torch. There has been a lot of Chinese investment in Phnom Penh and it is an interesting mix of the traditional and modern. I was struck by how polite people were on the roads (here and elsewhere in Cambodia). 25 or 30 of us did a cyclo tour of the city, and car drivers simply gave way to our flotilla of cyclos as we passed through major intersections. That wouldn't happen in Vietnam, where 'might is right' – or in most Western countries for that matter.

*Opposite: Our entry into Phnom Penh at Dawn; sunset on the Mekong, north of the border, Cambodia*

*Below: Off to school in Tan Chau, Vietnam*







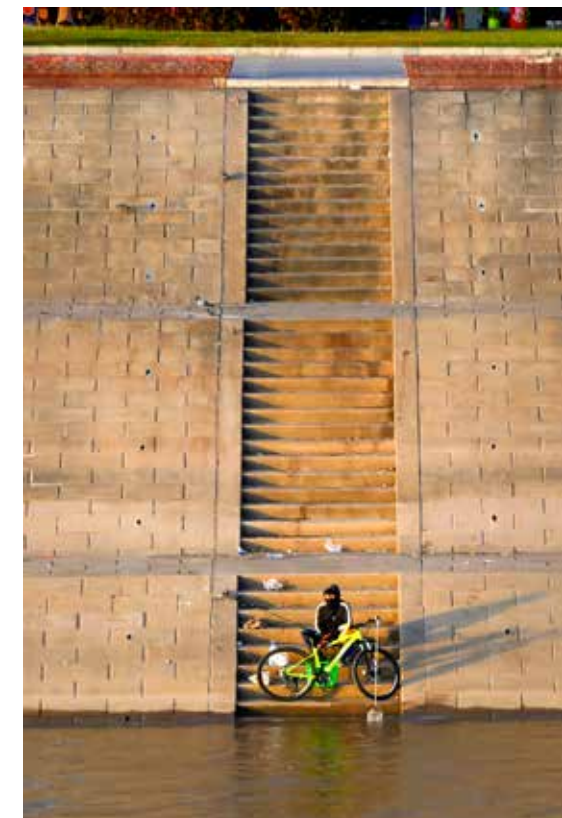
The next day Lucy took a 'tuk-tuk' to check out the shopping opportunities in downtown Phnom Penh, while most of us went by coach to the Vipassana Dhurak Buddhist Centre, out of town, where we got blessed (and where I was blessed by being able to photograph the line of novice monks as they left). I think they may have found the true way to heaven: in one corner of the main hall is a permanent steel ladder going up the beautifully painted wall to a manhole in the celestial ceiling. Perhaps this can only be seen if one is blessed.

North of Phnom Penh we parked at Okna Tey on Silk Island (where, you guessed it, they produce silk thread and silk garments), then on to Angkor Ban, a village so spread out along the Mekong that each section is numbered. We visited no. 6, a Buddhist village. Others we passed in this area were Muslim. Everywhere we passed, kids were out near the river, waving to us (It was the weekend). On our last day on the river we walked up to Wat Hanchey Buddhist centre on a nearby hill. There are not too many hills in this region, so it was here that we got our first elevated view of the river. Then it was back down the river to Kampong Chan and the end of cruising. The staff on our vessel (all Vietnamese or Cambodian) were incredible. Nothing was too much trouble and they were all so friendly. We were very sorry to say farewell. It was also interesting to observe how much more engaging and easy-going the majority of our fellow travellers were, compared with those on the Danube-Rhine cruise we did the previous Christmas/New Year. Back then, when things went wrong (as they inevitably do when rivers are running high) it seemed to bring out the very best in antipodean whingeing in a few too many of them. Perhaps the Danube-Rhine cruise was a 'trip of a lifetime' for many, with accompanying high expectations, whereas the Mekong wasn't. Or are we simply more polite in an openly polite culture we don't understand very well?



*Opposite: Floating buildings near Hoa Hung, Vietnam; The street market at Sa Dec, Vietnam*

*Below: Fishing on the Tonle Sap River in Phnom Penh; Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, Evergreen Island, Vietnam*





After philosophising on our northbound coach, and meeting a southbound tour group at a pit stop (who were heading to 'our' vessel), we reached Siem Reap (pronounced – as all Cambodian is – without any emphasis on any syllable: 'See 'em Ree-erp'), located close to Angkor Wat.

As well as going to the main event down the road, we were treated to one evening at the Phare Circus with its skillful and amusing acrobats, and another evening at the Ream art exhibition, with a dancing show and excellent dinner. Siem Reap is very laid back – which is amazing for such a 'tourist town' – and there is plenty to see.

But of course the main thing to see is Angkor Wat and other nearby temple ruins. So, up we got at 4 am to see the sunrise, which on this occasion was underwhelming. Usually everyone who's there at that time stands in front of the left lily pond for reflections and the sunrise, and the right lily pond is less crowded. But this time the left pond was being repaired, so no need to explain where the crowd was standing. Nonetheless, everyone was good natured and it was easy enough to invite yourself to the front, get some photos and then stand back. Meanwhile, the Angkor Wat building was virtually empty. The whole Angkor area is vast and there are very many other temple ruins to see; I visited just a fraction of them on a five-day trip in 2016 (see Travel Log no. 73). Since then there has been much work done to improve tourist facilities. If you want to see the most interesting temples, they have to be Bayon, with all its carved faces, and Ta Promh where trees and vines have been left intertwined in walls and buildings. And it was these two sites that our group tour visited.

Then, all too soon, our holiday was over. It really was one to remember.



Opposite: Novice monks at Vipassana Dhurak Buddhist Centre, Chey Odam, Cambodia

Top: Novice monks at Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Left: Grain (not rain) drops keep falling on my head, Phare Circus, Siem Reap

Above: One of the 216 stone faces at Bayon temple, Angkor



# ANTARCTICA

## A LAST WILDERNESS OR A LOST WILDERNESS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Andrew Gasson

WILDERNESS .....  
An area of natural land  
essentially undisturbed by  
human activity

To visit Antarctica used to be adventurous if not actually heroic: the days of the historic Heroic Era of Scott and Shackleton are long since passed. The continent used to be described as the last wilderness. Today, alas, that wilderness has now become the province of luxury ships, often seemingly misdirected Caribbean liners, meaning that even if the Antarctic wilderness remains, the former remoteness is disappearing.

I'd always wanted to go to Antarctica and having made several voyages over the last 30 plus years, I'm now what they call down there a 'repeat offender' – but every trip is different.

Preparing to leave for Antarctica from the tip of South America one used to feel the need to be self-sufficient with knee-high rubber boots, all the cold weather gear you could think of and waterproof outer clothing. There were no shops on board to supplement any last minute forgotten items. Nowadays, most cruise companies loan insulated boots which are a far cry from the bring-your-own humble wellingtons and provide a brightly-coloured logo-emblazoned parka.

As the ship sailed one immediately felt a small part of the isolation of the early explorers. There would now be no communication with the outside world for the duration of the voyage. No news, no politics, no wars, no domestic trivia to disturb the unique isolation of the expedition. Contrast today with ubiquitous internet and email. Travellers so inclined can send and receive messages from civilisation from remote regions of the polar landscape. For those not technologically dyslexic, even better – or worse – photos and even videos can be directed home at the touch of the 'send' key.

Photography has been similarly transformed. We no longer use Kodachrome 64 or the more forgiving 200, let alone suffer the grain of 400 ASA. With slide films, what-you-took-was-what-you-got and nothing to be done once that box of slides came back in the post. With modern digital cameras at the turn of a dial we can change the ISO from 100 to 1000 and if provoked by the gloom summon up auto-iso or 10,000 and sort out the noise in post-processing.



The last penguin



Antarctic Tourists





Deception Island

On my first trip I was privileged to hear talks by Lars Eric Linblad. Linblad was the man who virtually invented Antarctic tourism and his name lives on with one of the polar cruise companies. He raised the issue which still applies today, that there are double standards in Antarctica – we and they. We are tourists and may not approach closer than 5 meters to any wild animal and certainly not touch them; that is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or more recently an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) and we shall not pass; we may not leave anything behind but the proverbial footprints. They, on the other hand, are scientists and can not only touch the wildlife but secure a tracker on the back of a penguin or ring the leg of an unsuspecting albatross; they may go where they like; and they may despoil the landscape by leaving behind whatever scientific junk they like and when the junk becomes old enough, it becomes of historic interest and may not be moved. Take a look at the decaying remains on Deception Island.

One of the pleasures of being ashore in Antarctica used to be the proximity of the wildlife. There were always limits on how close one could approach the local residents but taking care to avoid penguin goo you could find a convenient, quiet spot to sit on the ice and wait. It wouldn't be long before an adventurous Adelie would come to investigate, introduce himself in a manner of speaking and nibble your boots. In other places, you might be rewarded by a curious juvenile fur seal coming rather too close for comfort. Now the 5 metre rule is strictly enforced. Because of the devastations of avian flu, we can no longer sit on the ground at any of the Antarctic landing sites and take an eye level view of a penguin or seal. We cannot even crouch down in case we touch the ground and are not permitted to put down a camera bag to change a lens. We are no longer participants in the wilderness, just privileged observers of the landscape.

'Health and safety' has come to Antarctica! Polar plunges might require an ECG first - except at Deception Island with its hot springs; fewer opportunities for the adventurous to sleep overnight under canvas; no parties on the ice at 10 o'clock at night; and no possibility to skip lunch and sit for an hour on the ice simply to absorb the atmosphere and observe the wildlife - penguins, seals, skuas and the rest - going about their daily time-honoured routines of feeding, breeding, fighting and just being Antarcticans.



Emperor Penguins



Adelie and Emperor Penguin



Distance Learning - A picture now not possible because of avian flu restrictions



Antarctic Seal





Interior of Scott's Hut at Cape Evans

Around the Antarctic Peninsula it was unusual to encounter another cruise or expedition ship. This year, 2025, at the height of the season, there were over 100 ships around the peninsula. In the 2022-2023 season there were 100,000 visitors and this is likely to be exceeded as the latest season has drawn to a close. Many companies just give tourists a 'tasting menu' of Antarctica with regulation stops on the peninsula at regularly visited places such as the British Port Lockroy, Paulet Island or Neko Harbour – tour operators, don't forget to book your landing slot! Ice permitting, the highlights are a cruise through the stunning Lemaire Channel and a landing on the actual Antarctic continent to say you've been there.

Ships still do not travel in any number to the 'far side' through the Ross Sea and visit the historic sites from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. There would be too many days at sea over the roaring forties of the Southern Ocean and are not for the faint-hearted. The area is largely under New Zealand control which ensures adherence to their regulations as well as compliance with all of the onerous requirements of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) and Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO).

There are three huts on Ross Island, that on Hut Point for Scott's Discovery Expedition in 1901-1904; the one on Cape Royds for Shackleton's Nimrod Expedition in 1907-1909; and Scott's Cape Evans hut which was used for his doomed Terra Nova expedition in 1910-1912. The huts since 1987 have been painstakingly and expertly restored. Visiting is carefully restricted with no more than eight people inside the buildings at any one time and no more than 40 people in the adjacent area. No flash photography is permitted and there are various other restrictions inside and out to ensure preservation of the site.

Scott's hut at Cape Evans is particularly nostalgic, very gloomy with light just from two windows and no artificial illumination. Most of the original artefacts have been restored and these have been replaced in their original position. Scott's bed is unmade and on his work table lie the penguin on which he had been working and a copy of the Illustrated London News. The place is atmospherically untidy and creates the illusion that somebody from the original expedition will return at any moment.



Captain Scott's work table



The Lemaire Channel



Hut Point, the 754ft Observation Hill in the background





Interior of Shackleton's hut

The earlier building at the southernmost part of the Ross Sea, Hut point, the 754ft Observation Hill in the background] contains the same sort of artefacts and has a similar aura. Close by is a commemorative cross to George Vince, the sailor who lost his life during the Discovery Expedition. It used to be possible to climb the nearby Observation Hill which Scott's men regularly used as a lookout post. The summit has its own memorial cross to Scott and his South Pole companions but the Americans at the adjacent McMurdo base no longer permit access - another loss for today's visitor.

It's good to see that Shackleton's Nimrod hut has also been restored and some of the exterior planking which had been almost wind-blasted away has been replaced. The picture of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra is no longer peeling off the wall and the massive stove looks ready to light again.

Two unusual itineraries from the early days of Antarctic tourism are now being revived. Semi-circumnavigation voyages, starting in Ushuaia and finishing in the Ross Sea, are beginning to be scheduled. This is partly a convenient and lucrative way for the companies at the end of the season to structure their repositioning cruises on their way to polar destinations in the north. The other route is the so-called Cape to Cape from Cape Horn via South Georgia and Tristan da Cunha to the Cape of Good Hope.

In the beginning, most of the ships were leased Russian ice breakers with accommodation for between 50 and 100 passengers. The most well-known were the Khlebnikov and the Dranitsyn, the latter having helicopters on board. These vessels were genuine ice breakers and could reach the parts others ships could not, literally breaking through both sea and fast ice. These are now back in Murmansk, banned from the area because of the 'dirty' fuel which they used and the thick black smoke polluting the pristine white landscape. There were other, smaller ice-strengthened ships which were otherwise used for scientific expeditions. Accommodation on all these ships was unsophisticated with bunks not beds. Landings with those smaller numbers were quicker and more efficient and in any case no more than 100 people are now allowed to land at an Antarctic site at any one time.



The Kapitan Dranitsyn - an old-style icebreaker



Antarctic busy with ships



Antarctic iceberg



Antarctic iceberg



There were no gyms or saunas on the older ships and certainly no smart televisions in the cabins. Nor were there stabilisers to help avoid sea sickness across the Drake Passage or Southern Ocean. Excursions weren't governed by meal times and there was no evening entertainment. At best they sometimes showed a film in the lecture theatre, occasionally with a remarkable lack of judgement when showing *The Titanic* in the middle of a force 9 gale! On the other hand, how good that with a modern ship a disabled passenger in a wheel chair is able to land on the Antarctic continent.

Now various companies have realised that plenty of people would like the experience of visiting remote places in general or more particularly Antarctica but would want to do it in comfort. Newly built ships to make them financially viable accommodate 200 plus rather than 100 passengers. Following sanctions against Russia, several of the ships which could be in the remote Russian Far East are now plying the potentially over-populated Antarctic waters.

But whatever we've lost, the wildlife is ever present and fascinating and the landscapes enduringly superb. At the right time of year and in the right area the sun never sets during the Antarctic summer. For the photographer, the greatest risk is sleep deprivation - something stunning like a whale may visit at any time of the day or night. If you have a cabin with balcony, you scarcely have to move to see wonderful sights floating past: a far cry from the previous generation of portholes which could never open.

So I say, still go to Antarctica. In fact, go now while the Antarctic Treaty endures and there is no appropriation of areas for mining or exploitation. Experience the terrors of the Drake Passage, the notional crossing of the Antarctic Convergence, enjoy the thrill of seeing the first iceberg, the excitement of stepping foot on the mainland continent and the pleasure of meeting in person your first penguin: but you can no longer expect the sense of adventure or the rugged remoteness and isolation of earlier years. We've exchanged bunks for beds, meals for haute cuisine, a sense of risk for safety, and isolation for the internet. The Antarctic wilderness is no longer undisturbed by human activity and could indeed be lost forever.

©Andrew Gasson



Weddell Seal

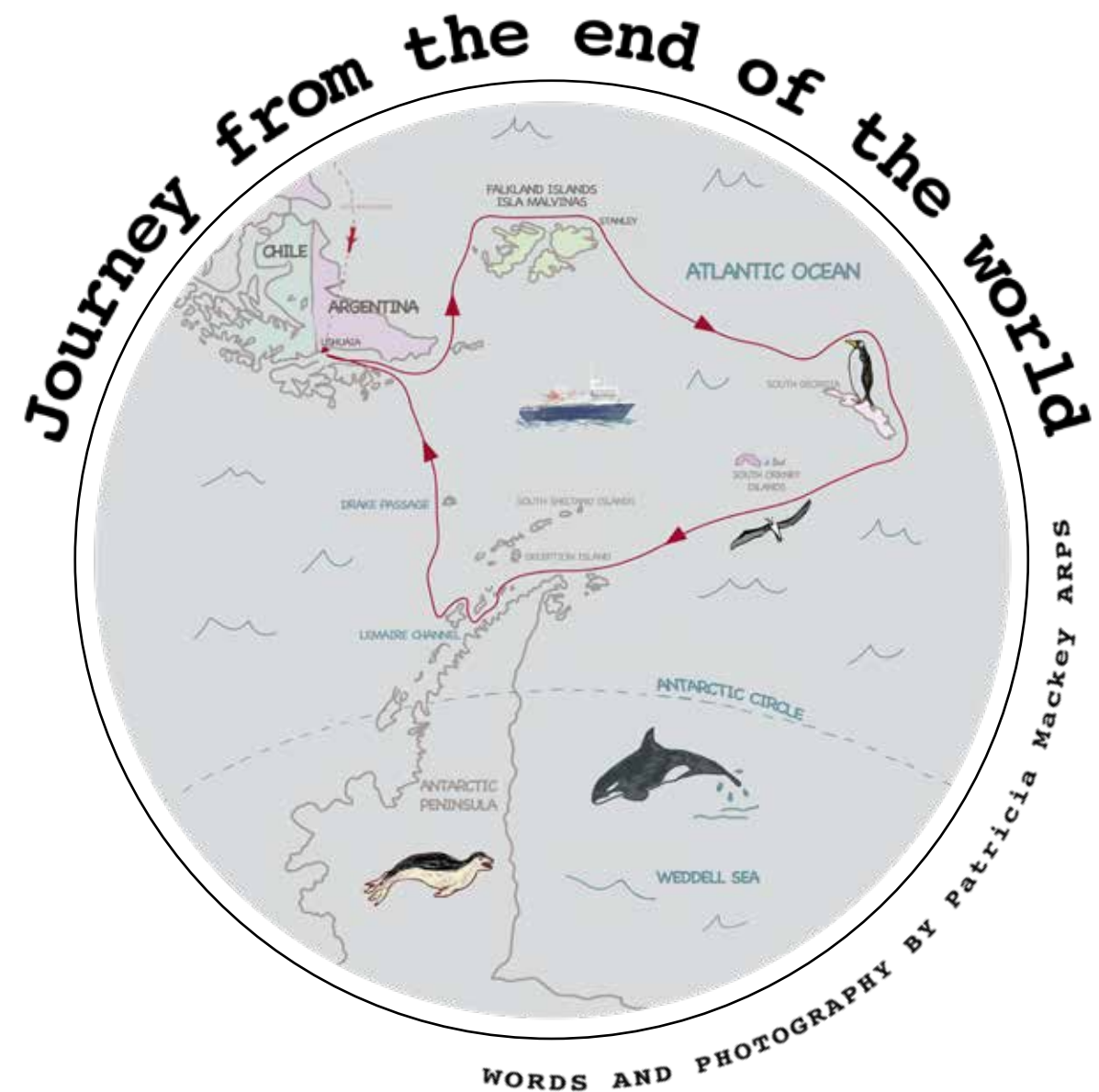


Gentoo Penguin



Orca Whale





On 6th December 2024 I departed Belfast to travel 8,337 miles to Ushuaia, Argentina. An overnight flight from London, via Rio de Janeiro, and a day in Buenos Aires meant I finally arrived in Ushuaia on the 8th and set out to explore.

## 8 - 10 December 2024 - Ushuaia

Ushuaia is the most southern city in the world. It is from here that most trips depart for Antarctica.

To someone who is not familiar with Ushuaia, a single image to try and convey its 'sense of place' has to be one of the corrugated iron buildings set against the background of the mountainous Andes. The population and business of Ushuaia tends to ebb and flow with the tourist boats. In the summer it is full of tourists heading to the great southern continent of Antarctica. While in the winter the city is full of people chasing winter sports opportunities.

Mountainous peaks surround the world's most southerly city. One minute it can be gloriously sunny while the next you are running to shelter from a sudden burst of rain.



The feelings of Argentina towards the Falkland Islands is strongly expressed throughout Ushuaia

## Argentina



Ushuaia, Terra del Fuego, Fin de Mundo



25<sup>th</sup> December 2024, Antarctic Peninsula

In December 2024 Travel Log's Editor, Patricia Mackey, had the opportunity to spend Christmas and New Year in the Southern Hemisphere. Her 19 night trip, on board MV Ortelius, included visits to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula.

While on the trip she took the opportunity of many 'sea days' to edit her images and to write this article.

She set herself a challenge to try and select a maximum of two images per location to try and convey its 'sense of place' - not an easy task!



# Falkland Islands

Dates: 12 and 13 December 2024

On 12<sup>th</sup> December we were the only ship that was able to land. Our ship’s captain and expedition leader wisely choose the more sheltered New Island to try to make a landing. New Island has Rockhopper Penguin, Black-browed Albatross, Magellanic Penguin and Gentoo Penguin. The Gentoo can be seen on the famous white sandy beaches playing in the surf and constantly squabbling with each other.

The capital city of Stanley is colourful due to the variety of corrugated iron roofs. While we landed on a sunny calm day, it is not hard to imagine the more challenging weather conditions islanders have to deal with. The manager of the gin distillery, who coincidentally was also from Northern Ireland, told me it had snowed heavily just a few days before.



City of Stanley



Squabbling Gentoo Penguins

# South Georgia

Dates: 16 – 20 December 2024

South Georgia is known for having numerous whaling stations and as the final resting place of legendary explorer Ernest Shackleton. Now, Grytviken is home to huge numbers of fur seals and wildlife is reclaiming this once notorious scene of mauch slaughter. Between 1904 and 1966 over 100,000 whales were killed in South Georgia.

The weather on one of the days we spent in South Georgia made it impossible to land. We sailed in and viewed sites from the safety of the boat. A quarter of a million king penguin, with steep snowy mountains as the backdrop, is a permanent memory for me and an accurate dipiction of this location. The next day, in full sunshine, we landed at Fortuna Bay for close encounters with King Penguin including numerous chicks.



Remnants of the whaling industry



A view of the King Penguin colony at St Andrew’s Bay



# Antarctic Peninsula

Dates: 22 – 27 December 2024

The imagery as we moved south towards Antarctica became gradually whiter as icebergs and snowy mountains started to appear.

A landing on the Antarctic Peninsula is not guaranteed; especially with many sites closed due to avian bird flu. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December we landed on Half Moon Island and had close encounters with a large colony of Chinstrap Penguins as well as lots of Weddell Seals. A very cold and snowy Christmas Eve was spent hiking up Palaver Point and whale spotting in Foyen Harbour.

Christmas Day was beautiful, sunny and truly magical as we spent the morning in Paradise Bay and managed our first landing on the Peninsula.



Chinstrap Penguin

# Days at Sea

When you undertake a voyage like this you inevitably have quite a few days spent at sea. Sea days tend to be spent listening to lectures or watching for whales on either the open bridge or from the bow of the ship with the dedicated ‘birders’.

One of the most memorable sea days was spent sailing past Iceberg A23a. This is the largest iceberg in the world with an area of 3900km<sup>2</sup>. It calved from the Fichner/Ronne Ice Shelf in 1986 and had been stuck on the seabed until 2020 when it started moving north. The iceberg is so large it took us 4 hours to sail past it which enabled us to witness small calvings of its 40m high walls. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025, once again A23a grounded itself, this time 50km off South Georgia where it is now expected to break up.



The base of Iceberg A23a



Christmas Day on the Antarctic Peninsula



Ice that has calved from Iceberg A23a

# Reflections

For years I have talked about Antarctica being my ‘retirement trip’. But, unless a lottery win happens, retirement is not likely to happen until about 2044. As Antarctica was the only continent I had yet to visit I decided to bite the bullet and now while I am still relatively young and fit to enjoy it. I am never going to regret this decision. At times it really did feel like I was at the end of the world.

The basic expedition ice breaking ship that I chose to facilitate me on this trip, added to the sense of adventure and exploration. The ship only carries 104 passengers making it one of the smaller vessels to transport people to Antarctica.

I am glad I decided to do the longer trip that also takes in Falkland Islands and South Georgia. Each location was unique and the wildlife (apart from gentoo penguin who were everywhere) different in each location. If you have the chance GO!

You can’t put a price on memories, and photos help keep these alive long after the trip has finished.





# BANGLADESH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY Valerie Mather ARPS



Bangladesh is a photographer's paradise. Tourism has not really taken off yet, and as such the locals pay no mind to being photographed. The Bangladeshi people are welcoming towards Westerners, and they are intrigued, often having not met anyone from the West before. In Dhaka, the capital city, where mobile phones are more common, our small group was the recipient of frequent requests for selfies when we were the only Westerners at the annual Spring Festival. Whilst fun it can make stealth street photography more challenging!

With a population of over 171 million within an area of only 57,320 square miles, manual labour, including child labour, with very little mechanisation, aims to keep this large population of people employed.

The focus of my trip was the working lives of the Bangladeshi people. I visited shipyards, brick

fields, aluminium and plastic recycling factories, and working villages where everyone was involved in either rice drying, red chili drying, leather and batik dyeing, fishing or fish drying. This involved a great deal of travelling around much of the country. Travel is slow and tedious, and frequently terrifying as lorries, buses, carts, tuk tuks and rickshaws seek to pass each other on overcrowded roads. In Dhaka simply crossing the road as a Western pedestrian required an act of faith, and often the helping hands of locals who strode confidently into the chaos.

Many Bangladeshi jobs involved whole families living and working on site, in hot, dusty and often dangerous or hazardous environments. Bangladesh is one of the most polluted countries in the world and a number of our group felt the ill-effects of the lack of breathable clean air, including myself. Still, I would consider returning for another opportunity to photograph a country still mainly unaffected by tourism.



*Opposite page and this page top right: Child labourers aluminium factory, Chittagong.*

*This page bottom: Drying fields, red pepper & chilli villages, North Bengal.*





*This page top and middle: Dyeing fabrics and Hand-painting fabrics  
Batik village,  
Northeast City.*

*This page bottom:  
Spring festival,  
Dhaka.*



*This page top: Batik village, Northeast City.*

*This page bottom left and right: Brick fields, Dhaka.*







Opposite page top and bottom and this page top and middle: Traditional Shutki palli (dry fish village), Cox's Bazar.

This page bottom: Moon boats' unique design allows them to handle rough seas off the coast of Cox's Bazar.







*Opposite page top: Early morning poultry market, Dhaka.*

*Opposite page bottom: Rice drying, Sylhet.*

*This page top, middle and bottom: Village life is modest and traditional compared to life in the capital city of Dhaka.*







The images chosen for this article reflect, I hope, the hard-working stoicism of the good-natured people that I was privileged to meet on my journey. I sensed from many of the local people an acceptance of their lives, some even bordering on contentment, despite the shockingly harsh working and living conditions. Even the children at work, with no prospects of an education in their future, were bright eyed, exuding a sense of optimism. Surprisingly so in a country with a young but violent history of unrest and corruption. The clear exception to this was from those unfortunates working at a garbage dump near Dhaka. If there is a hell on earth, for me, this was it. A timely reminder that if we ignore the impact of human activity on the environment then there will be no hope for the planet, or for the generations who will inherit it.

[www.valeriematherphotography.co.uk](http://www.valeriematherphotography.co.uk)  
Instagram/FB: valeriematherphotography



*Opposite page top: Curd & yogurt factory, North Bengal.*

*Opposite page bottom and this page bottom left: Shipyard, Old Dhaka.*

*This page top and bottom right: Garbage field, Dhaka.*





The Bogside, Derry/Londonderry

# Northern Ireland | Belfast and Beyond

**In mid-June, the RPS Travel Group embarked on a five-day photographic journey through Northern Ireland.**

Our Belfast base offered a perfect home for exploring iconic sites like the Titanic Quarter—with its striking museum recounting the creation and legacy of RMS Titanic.

Guided city explorations included an evocative Black Taxi mural tour—revealing the complex tapestry of community identities—and a dander through the Cathedral Quarter’s atmospheric alleyways, street art and numerous pubs.

Venturing beyond, our group headed south to the Kingdom of Down and the Mourne foothills, photographing landscapes where the Mountains of Mourne sweep to the sea—stopping at landmarks like Inch Abbey, Dundrum Bay, and Spelga Reservoir.

A rail trip to Derry the following day led us through the storied city walls and Bogside murals—particularly the iconic “You are now entering Free Derry” declaration.

Back in Belfast, we visited the maritime heart of the Titanic story: Harland & Wolff’s dry docks and the yellow gantry cranes that witnessed ship building’s golden era

Our final day found us at St George’s Market—a hive of stallholders, culinary delights, and candid local interactions to round off the journey

This trip wove together Belfast’s rich industrial heritage, urban renewal, cultural resilience, and Northern Ireland’s sublime coastal and rural scenery. The selection of images showcase personal highlights from the group.

*Images on this page by Patricia Mackey ARPS*



Writing on the ironically named ‘Peace Wall’, Belfast



Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea, Newcastle

## Images and words by Rosemary Wilman Hon.FRPS

The Duke of York Pub’s art installation has brought colour and life to Commercial Court—it was great to find it busy on a Sunday afternoon.

The Titanic Museum is a striking building, its height matching that of the original ship. Sadly, it’s now being overshadowed by new tower blocks along the riverside, obstructing views from the city. Inside, the exhibition is superbly presented, covering the ship’s construction and tragic end. It’s not an easy subject, but a very worthwhile visit. I was glad to see that lessons from the disaster helped shape modern marine law. I also spotted the reflection of the iconic Harland & Wolff gantry in the museum window.

The Derry Peace Bridge, opened in 2011, is a beautiful structure. Its two identical halves meet in the centre in a ‘structural handshake’ creating a powerful symbol of reconciliation.

Entering the Bogside and visiting the Museum of Free Derry was a powerful experience, though not a relaxing one. The 2023 mural Innocence shows the 14 people killed on Bloody Sunday, including a young Gerald Donaghey, with those injured listed beside. Around the murals, I kept noticing church spires—reminding me of my belief that faith should ease tensions, not create them.





Images by Judy Ford



*The Market Dog - A heart-stealing character in St. George's Market.*



*The Hulk - Rich textures and a sense of time.*



*Quirky Belfast - I love a playful abstract.*



*Self-portrait - just thinking about the Titanic!*

*Belfast Docks – Fascinating patterns.*



Images by Andy Beal FRPS



*Inch Abbey Grave Yard - Unhappy Phone Call*



*Clonard Remembers August 1969*



*Welcome to The Shankill Road*



*Peace Wall West Belfast*



*Annual Loyalist bonfire preparation commemorating the battle of the Boyne, July 1690*



## Images by Paul Reynolds

Outside Shankill Post Office, I was approached by a woman curious about why I was photographing the building—prompted, I suspect, by the owner inside. Once I explained I was on a photography holiday with the Royal Photographic Society, they seemed reassured. I was drawn to the scene: the woman standing casually in the doorway with her dog, tattoos on display, and what looked like a can of lager in hand. The Post Office sign anchored the image, giving it a strong sense of place and everyday life in the area.

The parade Patricia suggested turned out to be a fascinating experience. I felt slightly apprehensive at first, but it was fine once I got into it. As usual, I found myself just as interested in the spectators as in the parade itself. What stood out most was the way traditions are visibly passed down through generations—young and old participating, watching, and holding on to a shared cultural identity.



## Images by Liz Bugg ARPS



Shankill Road - I think this image showed a "sense of place"



Black cab tour - I chose this image as we went on a black cab tour, with our driver telling us about the "the troubles" in Belfast. This photo was taken of the Peace Wall.



Fountain St Londonderry - This photo shows the red, white and blue kerb stones in Londonderry. They are a visual expression of loyalists' identity.



Old and New - The image shows part of the SS Normadic against the modern Titanic building



Getting Ready for 12th July - On the 11th July bonfires are lit. This photo shows the collection of pallets in preparation for this event. In the background is a house with orange flowers, that are brought for the 12th.



Images and Words by Kath Phillips ARPS

These photographs reflect some of the powerful themes that emerged during our trip. Chains and Barriers, taken on the Marine Belfast day, took on deeper meaning as I recalled the strong sense of restriction and struggle described during the taxi tour and visit to the Free Derry Museum—stories that echoed wider global experiences of persecution.

The murals reinforce these connections, linking local history to global conflicts, past and present. Mural 1 was a stark reminder that for many, these memorials are not just history but part of everyday life—sometimes literally viewed from the living room window.



The Fish Seller, taken in St. George's Market, offered a more playful reflection on global and local interactions, as determined bargaining took place between cultures.

Despite the prominence of the high viz jacket, the Derry guide's passion is visible as he speaks to students, with the mural behind him underscoring his message.

The travellers really benefited from Patricia's local knowledge and her detailed planning. They greatly appreciated all the time and thought that had gone into giving them a real taste of Belfast and beyond.



Images by John Speller



Derry/Londonderry Day – Peeking over the wall Initially I has only seen and concentrated on the head on the left of the Derry Girls Mural bringing to mind the WW2 images of Chad. Once I got the image on the computer I noticed the family on the right.



Cultra, Hollywood – Ulster Folk Museum – Weaver at her Loom- A demonstration of weaving before the advent of power looms in large mills.



Belfast – Church Lane – Hen night on a Beermobile The dangers of getting run over while seeking a pint are clear as the area should be closed to powered vehicles.



Belfast – Kent Street – Taking a Break - Walking around Belfast I saw a number of walls with painted images which might be described as graffiti and ranging from the artistically executed to the more comic book style.

This image appealed being closer to the latter style. Strangely, however, most have avoided the attentions of rival graffiti "Tag" artists.



Mourne Day – Trassey Road area – Abandoned - A popularly visited spot in the Mourne Mountains. How long the farmstead has been roofless is not known to me.



# Through the Lens: A Journey Across South America

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Ari Sengupta

DRAFT - REPLACE WITH  
FINISHED VERSION



Argentina - Streetside Tango Buenos Aires



Argentina Nahuel Huapi

There's something magical about capturing a moment that will never exist again or a place that we may never revisit! My work and passion for travel has taken me across continents and countries where I have always tried to capture moments sometimes not with the best equipment! Going back to these images taken over the years, it is revisiting a collection of stories, emotions, and fragments of lives being lived in corners of the world far from my own. Of special interest are my travels in South America, and since 2005 I have visited Argentina, a little bit of Brazil, Chile, Peru, a glimpse into Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia. Here is an attempt to showcase a vibrant tapestry of humanity and landscapes that continue to haunt my viewfinder long after I have returned home.

## Argentina: Passionate, diverse, breathtaking

Over the years Argentina has been a destination thrice, and every time the land greeted us with its distinctive European flair fused with Latin passion. In Buenos Aires, the cobblestone streets of San Telmo provided the perfect backdrop for capturing the raw emotion of tango dancers. I remember one couple in particular—an elderly couple who had clearly been dancing together for decades decided to pair with a younger performing couple. Their weathered faces told stories, and I thought I got a glimpse of a lifetime of history.

Beyond the capital, the stark beauty of Patagonia offered landscapes that seemed almost otherworldly. At the Los Glaciares National Park, home to the spectacular Perito Moreno Glacier, standing at the edge, we witnessed massive chunks of ice calving into the water below—a reminder of nature's constant state of transformation. The challenge was capturing scale; how does one convey the enormity of a glacier in a single frame? Sometimes, you need a human element to provide perspective. Further north in Bariloche, a completely different Patagonian experience unfolds, nestled along the shores of Lake Nahuel Huapi and surrounded by the Andes. The hub of the Patagonian Lake District, the journey continues across multiple lakes into Puerto Varas, Chile.





Chile - Patagonia Torres del Paine



Chile - Valpo Street

### Chile: From Arid Desert to Ice Fields

Chile struck us with its extraordinary geographic diversity. A sliver of land 2670 miles long with an average width of 110 miles offers the Atacama Desert—the driest non-polar desert on Earth—with an almost Lunar landscape, salt flats, the central plains with the vineyards, the exotic port city of Valparaíso (Valpo), Santiago - the vibrant capital and ofcourse the wilderness and the ice fields of Patagonia. In between all this is Chiloé, the largest island of South America off the coast of Chile, offering a unique pace and perspective of life.

Hiking various points of the Chilean Patagonia, often waiting hours for the notoriously fickle weather to clear, the towering peaks of Torres del Paine became an obsession. A 3-hour hike up rewarded me with an upfront view of the granite towers. These pictures are an attempt to present a flavour of the Patagonian splendour.



The journey to Chiloé Island revealed a Chile rarely seen in travel magazines. This archipelago off the mainland seems suspended in time, with its iconic wooden churches—UNESCO World Heritage site—standing as testament to the unique cultural fusion of indigenous and European influences. Magellanic Penguins and Sea Lions occupy islands further off the coast. The topography here has been shaped by severe earthquakes over the centuries. Valparaíso, Chile's vibrant port city, rises from the Pacific in a colourful cascade of hillside neighbourhoods. Known for its bohemian character, the city's distinctive funiculars connect the historic harbour to homes painted in every hue imaginable. UNESCO recognised Valparaíso's cultural significance by declaring it a World Heritage site in 2003. Its labyrinthine streets adorned with spectacular murals, its rich maritime history, and the poetic legacy of Pablo Neruda, whose hillside home "La Sebastiana" offers panoramic views of this chaotic, beautiful "Jewel of the Pacific."



Argentina - Bariloche







Ecuador: Galápagos Islands to the mainland backroads

Ecuador is primarily associated with the Galapagos Islands, until one explores its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and ecological wonders that make Ecuador a remarkable destination. In Quito's historic center, the colonial architecture is the perfect frame for capturing daily life. The dramatic Avenue of the Volcanoes features snow-capped peaks including Cotopaxi, one of the world's highest active volcanoes. Further south, Cuenca, is a city known for its thriving arts scene, traditional crafts including the misnamed "Panama hats" (which originate from Ecuador) and a high quality of life.

The Galápagos Islands presented a unique challenge: how to photograph wildlife that has no fear of humans? The answer was simple—patience and respect. A pair of marine iguanas basking on black volcanic rock, seemingly unbothered by my presence, allowed me to capture the perfect portrait. These ancient creatures, with their prehistoric appearance, reminded me of the privilege of witnessing evolution's masterpieces.

On the mainland through the back roads of Andean Ecuador we picked up the flavours of a country that has so much to offer.

Our last visit to Ecuador was time mostly spent in Cotacachhi, north of Quito, during the Inti Rymi (celebrations of the Sun) when the indigenous communities honour the Taita Inti or Father Sun and give thanks to the Pachamama (Mother Earth). Neighbouring villagers emerge in local cowboy gear, dancing their way in a stomping motion, blowing whistles and taking over the town centre.

Ecuador - Cotacachhi Inti Rymi



Ecuador - Galapagos - Top: Sunset; Bottom: Marine Iguanas







Peru - Top: Cuzco Faces - Bottom: Machu Picchu



Peru - Sacred Valley



#### Peru: Amazon to Machhu Pichhu and Lake Titicaca

Peru unfolds like a breathtaking tapestry, stretching from the emerald depths of the Amazon rainforest to the mist-shrouded peaks of the Andes, where the ancient Inca civilisation left its most profound mark. In the Sacred Valley, the stone terraces of Ollantaytambo rise dramatically from the landscape, a testament to Inca engineering and architectural brilliance, while nearby Cusco pulses with a harmonious blend of indigenous and colonial heritage, its narrow cobblestone streets whispering stories of empires past. The journey continues to the iconic Machu Picchu, that spectacular citadel perched impossibly high in the mountains, where stone walls seem to grow organically from the rocky terrain, defying both gravity and time. To the south, Lake Titicaca spreads its immense blue waters across the high plateau, the world's highest navigable lake, where traditional reed boats still glide between islands inhabited by indigenous communities who have preserved their ancestral ways of life for centuries, creating a living connection between the ancient and the present that defines the magical essence of Peru.

The four-day trek to Machu Picchu on the Inca Trail was a test of endurance. The treacherous Inca steps, altitude and continuously changing weather conditions added to the flavour! And finally at dawn on day four, after a brief treacherous climb up the steep 'Gringo stairs' we waited for the morning mist to gradually reveal the ancient city!

Lake Titicaca, offered a glimpse into traditions that have survived centuries of change. Our journey took us from Puno, on the shores of the Titicaca, briefly into Bolivia for visiting the Isla del Sol and Isla de la Luna, the mythical birthplaces of the sun and moon in Inca cosmology, where ancient agricultural terraces are still in use today. Bathed in the distinctive high-altitude light these islands on the lake are breathtaking.

The capital Lima, a bustling metropolis of circa 12 million, the city preserves colonial heritage and is Peru's cultural hub.



Bolivia - Isles del Sol & de la Luna - Titicaca





Colombia - Medellin Botero

### Colombia: Resilience and Renaissance

Colombia's narrative is one of transformation. We went without any expectations but came back with a lot of hope, impressed and excited. Contemporary Colombia stands as a dynamic tapestry of natural beauty, cultural richness, and reinvention, a country that has dramatically transformed over the past decades. From the colonial charm of Cartagena's colourful streets, where pastel-hued buildings and bougainvillea-draped balconies tell stories of centuries past, to the cosmopolitan energy of Bogotá's world-class restaurants, art galleries, and buzzing neighbourhoods, the country offers an intoxicating blend of tradition and modernity.

A few hours' drive from Bogota, Villa de Leyva emerges as a breathtaking colonial gem, its immense central plaza—one of the largest in Colombia—surrounded by pristine, white-washed buildings and cobblestone streets that seem frozen in time, is worth the night we spent there.

Cartagena, the walled port city unfolds like a living postcard of Caribbean romance—colonial mansions painted in vibrant yellows, blues, and pinks stand adorned with cascading bougainvillea, wooden balconies, and intricate architectural details that whisper stories of pirates, traders, and centuries of cultural fusion.

### The Unseen Portfolio

For every image that makes it into my portfolio, hundreds remain unseen.

As photography enthusiasts, we are witnesses, not just to the extraordinary but to the everyday moments that constitute real life across cultures. The greatest privilege of my travels is not capturing the perfect shot of a legendary landmark, but rather those fleeting instances of genuine human connection that transcend language and cultural differences.



Ecuador - Quito Shoeshine



Colombia - Cartagena Traffic



DOUBLE CHECK IF I CAN USE THIS ONE

## THE ROLE OF COMMUNIST ICONOGRAPHY IN VIETNAM TODAY

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Mike Longhurst FRPS

As someone who spent his whole career in the Advertising business, I tend to notice what is up on the hoardings wherever I visit and I can't help trying to get behind what it says, or shows, to why it does - what was the brief, who wrote it and why?

I can usually tell a lot about the people, their lifestyles and their media literacy - their ability to interpret, analyse and respond to media messages - from the way they are advertised to....that is if the people creating the advertising have any idea what they are doing, which is not always the case.

So, travelling from North to South in Vietnam recently, I was intrigued to see so much Communist party propaganda. I have seen it in China of course and in Vietnam many years ago, but to see the sheer volume of it in Vietnam in 2024 surprised me. Not only the volume, which I think I can rationalise in a world where twice as many countries have abandoned Communism than have continued to live under it but surprisingly to me, the continued use of very stereotypical, one might say naïve art, illustration style. In an age when reality tends in most countries to demand photography to be convincing, the Communist party of Vietnam continues to use a style that I think we would associate with a much simpler age, of uneducated and uncritical consumers. Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the degree of state control, exactly that imagery is also reflected by state companies like Vinaphone and by local authorities like those in Ho Chi Minh City (or Saigon as the local people still insist on calling it).







Just watching people and seeing their modern lifestyles, in the cities at least, I found it hard to reconcile that kind of overtly propagandist messaging, but coupled with the almost childish illustration style, I wondered just how effective it could possibly be. There seemed to be a complete disconnect between the unsophisticated style of the message and the target audience. And yet it seems to be, but I wondered whether the commitment to Communism is because of, or despite, that advertising?

I could understand when our guide in Hanoi, the original hotbed of Communism in the country, told me proudly that they were one of the only five remaining Communist countries and if it suits the people, who after all, are very collectivist by nature, then good luck to them. When I pointed to one of the posters, he said “Oh that propaganda, we ignore it”, which squared with what I had heard from university students down in Saigon fifteen years ago when I did some lecturing there. He did add that the propaganda van that toured the city blaring out messages irritated them, but only if it woke them up at 5.30am.

I could also understand the reverence for “Uncle” Ho Chi Minh and continued use of his image as a founding icon. Every nationality has its father-figure, who is generally protected from revisionist historians and represents all that is good.

But I was surprised to see the same messaging in the same style in the south when we reached there. Fifteen years ago there was far less social media and no-one had smart phones. How could messages that were appropriate then be still effective to a modern target audience now? Our guide in the south confided that his father had fought for the South Vietnam army against the Communists and had spent ten years in gaol before exiling himself to California. When I asked him if people in the South had wanted to turn Communist, he replied “Not really”. They wanted to get rid of the Diem regime and had no idea what the North’s Communism really entailed. However, it seemed to the outside observer at least that they have come to terms with it, although with a lot of differences, like being able to own land in the South.







The Propaganda Van Hanoi



When I pointed out that in the Saigon War Remnants Museum, they portrayed the war as the “American” war, in which the Vietnamese people were united as one against the imperialist invader, he was well aware of the falseness of that. Also that at least two of the types of aircraft shown with US Air Force decals never served with the Americans, but were flown by South Vietnamese, in their colours. But to him, I think that was just the Communist Party doing what you know Communist parties do and he expressed no disapproval. Thinking it all out as well as I was able to from day to day, I ended up with the impression that although people said they ignored the propaganda, their understanding of how advertising works was probably no better than people in any society who say they ignore advertising and it doesn’t work on them.

Of course, the people running the propaganda might simply be stuck in the kind of founding era time warp we see from zealots of all political colours and do it because they have always done it. But if so, that doesn’t necessarily make them wrong to keep doing it. Changing a winning formula in any kind of marketing is a dangerous thing and many brands with a deep history “modernise” to their

cost and are quickly forced back to their roots. Abandoning the platform on which anything is built leaves it vulnerable to newer alternatives that might have a strong and more fashionable appeal. Socialism and Communism generally benefited from being the new “isms” on the block many years ago and gained believers through that. I think George Orwell pointed that out very well.

Of course, the rival belief systems for Vietnamese are there and very visible, both traditional and modern. A large percentage of people are Buddhist or Catholic, both with far deeper roots, dogmas and codes of life and with the added promise of redemption and possibly reward at the end, either in a heaven, or in rebirth with a better status – surely, they have enough mythologies to believe in without needing the dubious promises of a better life while you live it under Communism? There is an inevitable tension between religions and Communism, which is essentially atheistic, because the one imposes a top-down code from a superior being and the other bottom-up dogmas from the general masses. The collectivist bottom-up requires everyone to do it, but the top-down will reward the individual, irrespective of what others choose to do. Is it a safer bet in an uncertain world?

There are of course, inevitable parallels between how the Communists create a visual iconography to stand as a more tangible reference point than the somewhat intangible philosophies on which they are based, be they Marxist, Leninist, Maoist or other and the way religions do the same thing. To attract converts and maintain the faith, religions employ a wide range of visual symbolism: the awe and wonder of vast and richly decorated cathedrals, ritual and costuming, the sheer sumptuousness of pagodas and temples, the scale of statues of the deities that rival each-other in impressiveness, communicating strength, permanence and all defying scepticism. These icons also have traditional appearances that don’t move with the times. You rarely see a Jesus in modern dress, a fit, slimline Buddha, a Vishnu in an avatar that looks like he might really exist.

Also, the Vietnamese do not need to look for examples from the dozen or so very different societies in central and eastern Europe who shed Communism and believe they benefited; right next door in Cambodia they have an example of a people who shrugged off Communism thirty years ago and re-installed a constitutional monarchy. The Cambodians talk about the stagnation of their Communist era and appear to have surged ahead in standards since 1993, although they do like to cross the border for their healthcare! They might also be forgetting the economic destruction of the Pol Pot era which preceded the imposition of communism from Vietnam itself.

However, the long-established religious mythologies are not the only challenge to Communist orthodoxies in Vietnam; the advance of education and the new world of social media has created choices which encourage existential individualism, or at least offer other collectivist

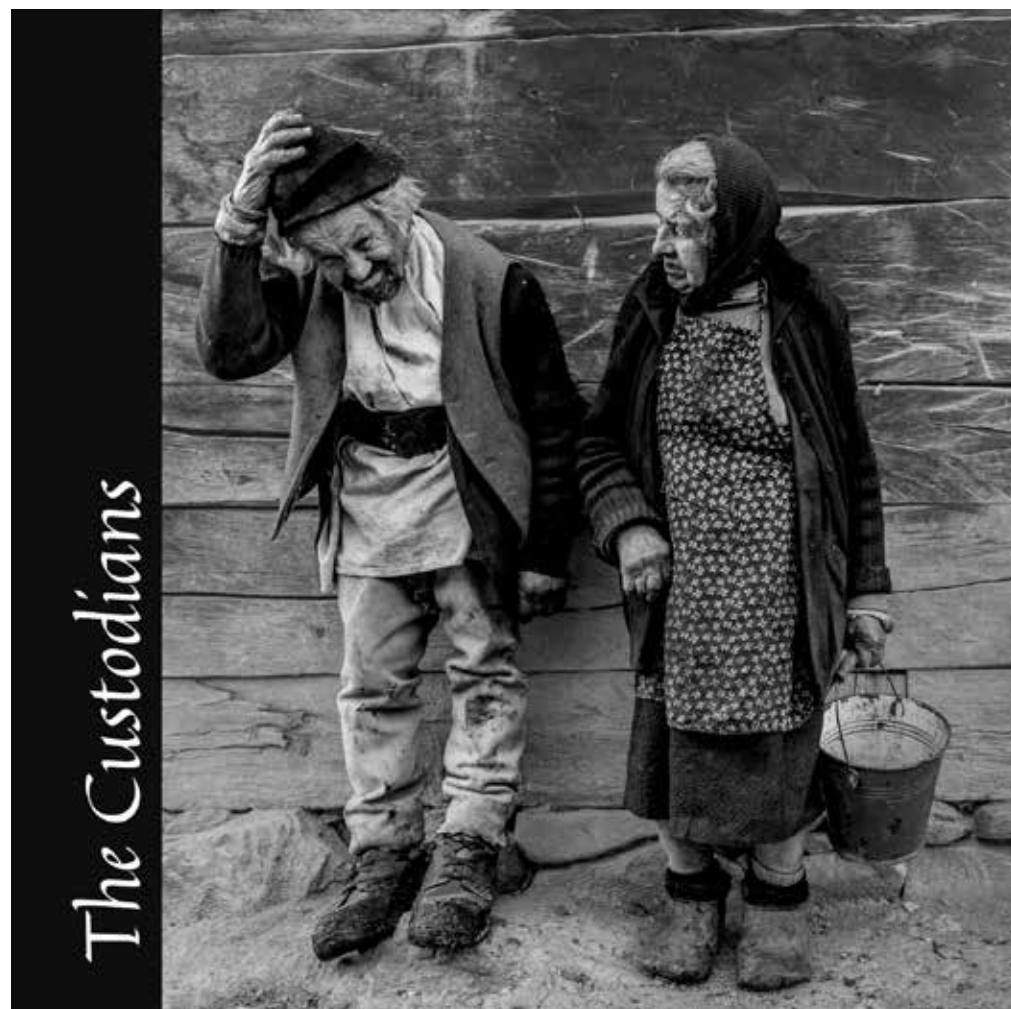
groups if one wants to follow herds. Tik Tok, Instagram, You Tube and others are meeting points for like-minded people of every shade of interest and opinion. No surprise then that they have become very persuasive outlets for those who wish to manage and control opinion. Whatever we in the West might think of accusations of meddling in elections and issues by Russia, China, etc. it was Barack Obama who first demonstrated the potential political impact of social media in his presidential campaign. Any Trump or Brexit voter who believes they were not influenced by highly managed and targeted social media messaging is either naïve, or ignorant of how communications through diverse media channels actually work.

Yes, like the people who told me they ignored the Communist posters and who saw them clearly as propaganda might feel they are not influenced, but those messages probably have a strong role in creating a perceived framework of opinion that can shift the centre one way or another. It might well be, additionally, that those almost childish and old-fashioned illustrations of workers, peasants, soldiers and businessmen gazing into the far distance and all pulling together into a brave new world are key to maintaining belief in the system. The fact that they are not modern and do not reflect life today might be exactly the elements which allow them to maintain a timeless vision, promise and identity for the Party.

Far from showing how out of touch with modern reality the Party is, or how lacking in media literacy their core target audience might be, those images that look anachronistic to us, might be playing a very strong role in defending an “ism” that otherwise might be ripe for change. If I were them, I’d think very hard about changing what might be a very powerful part of their visual identity.







**Judy Ford LRPS, who was awarded the Joan Wakelin Bursary in 2020, has long been inspiring RPS Travel Group members with photographic trips to Romania. She has now published her first book — a carefully curated selection of 51 of her images, beautifully presented in print.**

## The Custodians

**Regular price £25 special price of £20 for RPS Travel Group Members quote RPSTRAVEL**

The Custodians is an inspiration for living with a deeper connection to nature and tradition. In a world of noise and speed, this book offers quiet insight into the humble lives of those who work the land with wisdom, care and dignity.

With images gathered over several years, the book takes you to one of the last remaining peasant farms in Romania, revealing a fast-disappearing ancient way of life. Here, you meet Zaharia and his sister Saveta, an old peasant couple living a traditional farming lifestyle.

Judy's photography portrays their life as if no one else were present. The layout is deliberately traditional and straightforward, and she uses free verse to tell the story. There is no artifice; it's honest and raw.

The book shows the benefits of a long-term project. It was only possible to define the approach and message of the book after several years had passed. Once the purpose was clear, the process of creating the book became achievable.

Printed on premium 170g FSC-certified paper, the book has a thread-sewn binding and a matte laminated hardcover. 100 pages with 51 monochrome images.

Travel Group members can purchase the book for £20 (+ £3.95 postage) using the code RPSTRAVEL

**Order it from**  
**<https://bit.ly/TheCustodians>**

## Connect with Travel Group Members

### e-news

e-news is e-mailed to members to keep Travel Group members up-to-date with members' achievements and activities and is published on the website.

If you have information to be shared please e-mail [travel@rps.org](mailto:travel@rps.org)

### Share and Chat

These are live online informal gatherings to enable members to connect and share their experiences and inspire each other. Members sharing images of favourite locations, often off the beaten track, is a popular feature as well as updates on what's happening in the Travel Group and what members would like to happen. These sessions depend very much on Group member involvement.

Please keep an eye on your e-mail, Facebook and the RPS website for the 2024/25 dates for Share and Chat. These are via Zoom and start at 14:30 (UK Time).

If you can offer an item, please contact David Short by e-mailing [travelevents@rps.org](mailto:travelevents@rps.org)

### Follow our Instagram Page

The Royal Photographic Society Travel Group is on Instagram. Follow us to help us develop and share a sense of place.

Tag us [#travelgroupprps](#) [#rps](#)  
[#asenseofplace](#)



[www.instagram.com/travelgroupprps/](https://www.instagram.com/travelgroupprps/)

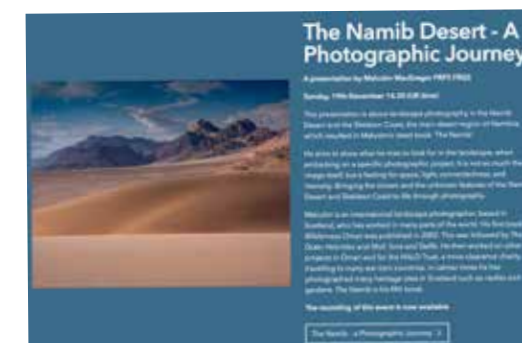
### Join our Facebook Community

All members have access to the Travel Group Facebook page and are encouraged to take part in lively discussions. Information on upcoming events and competition reminders are also posted here.



[www.facebook.com/groups/RPSTr](https://www.facebook.com/groups/RPSTr)

### RPS Travel Group on YouTube



Online events/talks/presentation run by the RPS Travel Group can be accessed via the Travel Group's section of the RPS website. Click on the link and access a variety of content that can be viewed on YouTube. This helps our members, who live across various timezones, benefit from these events at a time that suits them.

<https://rps.org/groups/travel/recent-travel-group-events/>

### Monthly Travel Image Competition

Travel Group members have the opportunity to enter their travel photography images into our monthly competition. Submissions are of a single photograph that you feel defines a sense of place.

There are no restrictions on the age of the photograph you submit, but it must not have previously been submitted into an RPS competition. The submitted JPEG image can be any height but it MUST be 1000px wide and 72dpi.

The closing date for submissions is the last day of each month before they are judged and a winner chosen. The winning shot will be added to the Travel Image of the Month page on the website, with the overall monthly winners competing to be the Group's annual 'Best of the Best' winner. All entries and the winning monthly image can be viewed on [rps.org/groups/travel/](https://rps.org/groups/travel/)

Submit your entries to Sue Hutton by e-mailing [travelcompetitions@rps.org](mailto:travelcompetitions@rps.org)



# The RPS Travel Group & You

## Forthcoming events

Events are advertised on the website, e-news, Facebook and via specific broadcasts from the Travel Group.

**TRIP 2025 - Granada (March 2025)  
SOLD OUT**

**Travel Group AGM - 17 May 2025**

**Day TRIP - Oxford (18 May)**

**TRIP 2025 - Northern Ireland (June 2025)  
LIMITED SPACE LEFT**

**Day TRIP - Liverpool (Date TBC)**

**Roads Less Travelled**  
11-12 October 2025  
Travel Group Autumn **EVENT**

Find out about upcoming events  
[rps.org/groups/travel/  
future-travel-group-events/](https://rps.org/groups/travel/future-travel-group-events/)

## Travel Log

Travel Log is a much valued publication of the Travel Group. It provides one way in which we are able to reflect our members' interests and showcase our travel photography and be inspired by other people's interpretation of the genre.

If you have a story to tell, images to share or the perfect cover photo please contact the Editor. There is no set format and we are happy to work with you to help tell your story or write about your images.

Our main requirements for images that we print is that their **resolution MUST be 300DPI** at the size we use them. **A cover image MUST be 300DPI plus slightly more than 3508px high x 2480px wide to ensure high quality printing.**

To tie in with our Roads Less Travelled event we would like to feature some 'off the beaten track' locations. Please get in touch if you have been somewhere that members of the Travel Group may not have been to.

*E-mail article suggestions and  
potential cover images to  
[editortravel@rps.org](mailto:editortravel@rps.org)*

## Roads Less Travelled

**11-12 October 2025**

**Woodland Grange Conference Centre  
Royal Leamington Spa**

A mix of inspiring speakers and activities has been brought together to mark the 55th anniversary of the formation of the RPS Travel Group. At a time when journeying to 'off the beaten track' places was much less easy than it is now, one of the Group's primary purposes was to enable travel to unusual destinations. We do that much more independently now and perhaps put more emphasis on sharing the stories of our travels.

This weekend brings together a range of speakers and skills that will help each of us move forward on our photographic journey and have fun following our chosen paths. The speakers are Ash Bhardwaj, Peter Brisley, Nat Coalson, Sue O'Connell, Leigh Preston, Chris Roche and Dr. Lindsay Stringer.

*Details of location, cost and booking deadlines are on the  
RPS Website (Travel Group).*

**Please note Early Booking discount!**

## Vietnam Trip?