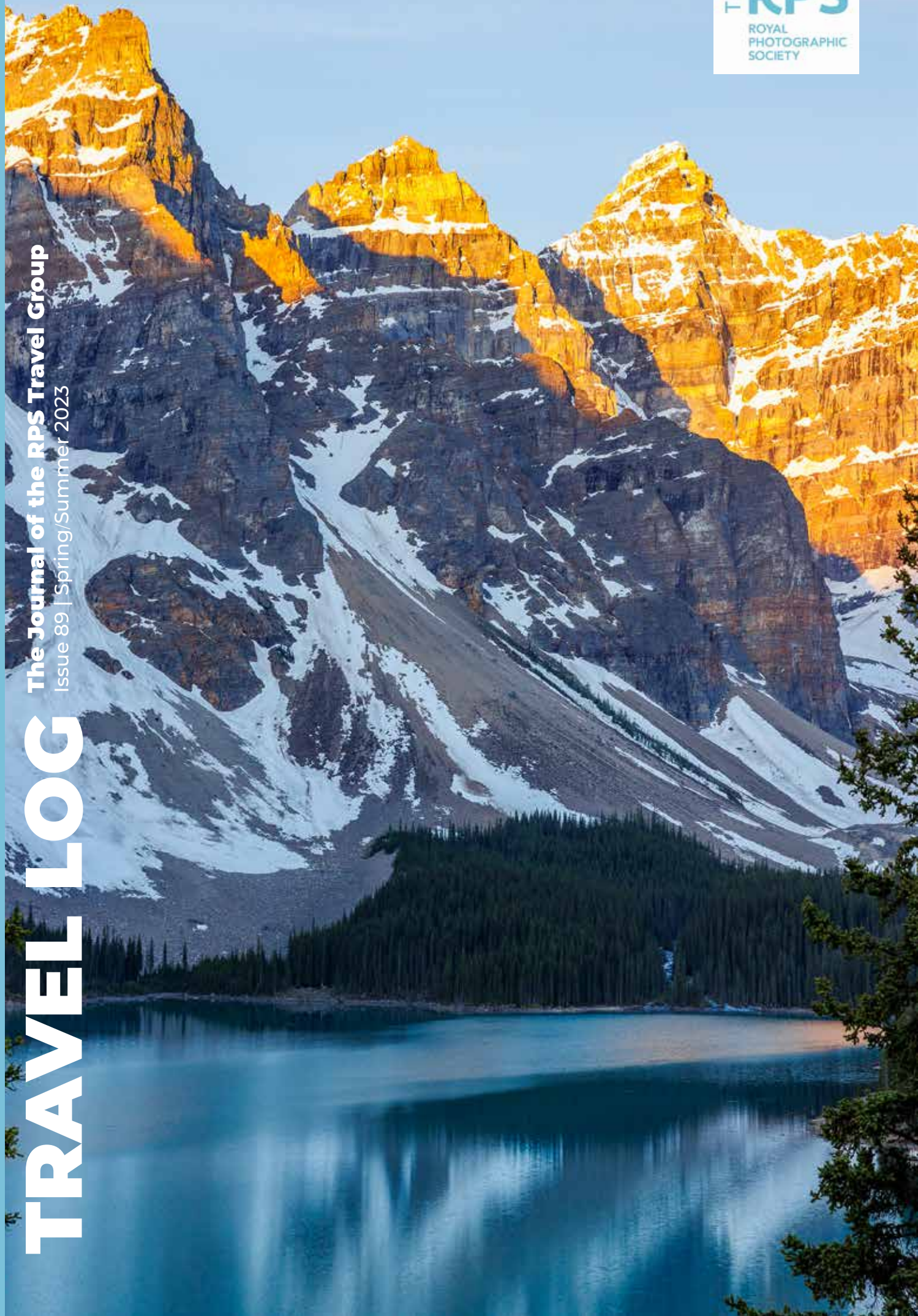


The Journal of the RPS Travel Group  
Issue 89 | Spring/Summer 2023

# TRAVEL LOG





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## Travel Log



### The Journal of the RPS Travel Group

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## A note from the Editorial Team

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2023 issue of Travel Log.

We were overwhelmed with the offers for articles that we received for this issue of Travel Log. We were able to accommodate most offers and are now in the really fortunate place of already having some content agreed for the next issue. You can contact the Editor at any time with article ideas and these can be designed for the next issue where there is space.

If you haven't previously submitted an article I am sure it can seem daunting. It really is not and we are keen to welcome submissions from Travel Group members who are new or have not previously submitted an article. I know our Group Members are always keen to read about experiences from a variety of contributors. That being said, we are also very grateful to our regular contributors.

As always ideas and images can be submitted to the Editor at any time. If you have an idea for a submission you can get in touch and one of the Editorial Team will be happy to discuss it and provide some advice.

This is the third issue the new Editorial Team has put together. I feel we are getting into our stride and the slightly tweaked style is hopefully easy for readers to navigate.

It has been lovely to hear your positive comments about Travel Log, but we are also willing to receive constructive feedback. For example the inclusion of the table of content was introduced into the last issue following a request from a member.

It has been a really enjoyable issue to put together and takes you across the globe and back again. It has definitely given us some ideas for future travel destinations. We just need to get saving!

Congratulations to all the placed images in the Image of the Year 2023 and the monthly competition Image of the year 2022 competitions.

Regards from the  
Travel Log Editorial Team  
Spring/Summer 2023



Cover photo by  
**ANDY MCLAUGHLIN**  
Moraine Lake, Canada  
At sunrise

*This is an image taken at Moraine Lake, Canada on 27th June 2022.*

*The view is well known and often referred to as the 'Twenty Dollar View' because it has been featured on the Canadian Twenty Dollar note for many years until recently.*



## A note from our Chair

The articles and images in this edition of Travel Log demonstrate just what a diverse group we are. And yet we have in common a fascination with countries, cultures and peoples that leads us to want to share those with others as they view images we have recorded. My first experience of that sharing was in the late 1970s: I had been awarded a Goldsmiths' Company Travelling Grant and was able to visit Bangladesh, India and Israel over a five month period. Those were the days of slide film for me and each time I met someone coming back to the UK I sent a few rolls of film back to be processed and sent to my mother so that she could share the experience. Maybe that's why the sharing of other cultures through photography is so important to me.

At our recent 'Sense of Place - Some Different Perspectives' event we were offered two different ways of immersing ourselves in an environment either before or as we photograph it. Paul Sanders emphasised the 'getting to know', wandering around perhaps without a camera, engaging all our senses before trying to capture anything and then experiencing the moment as we photograph so that we savour the memories. Stewart Wall reinforced the message he had given some in Aston - distil your image into a few words which explain why you took the image, using a very specific literary form - the haiku - to minimise the words, thus keeping the focus on the image.

In the Travel Advisory day we saw many images of Asia - mainly India - but also some very effective potential ARPS submissions based much nearer home, emphasising British culture and environments. I know some members of the Group will disagree, but as we move to being more cautious about resources and think more carefully before travelling abroad or as travelling becomes prohibitively expensive for many, we do need to think much more about our home countries as subjects for travel photography. An effective A or F panel will most likely need more than one visit to your chosen location: nearer will make that much easier. And, of course, for a number of our Group members, India IS home!

As a Group I hope that we will find more occasions to meet together and enjoy the company of people whose passion for Travel Photography we share. Let's use those times to move forward in defining what travel photography really is. Could it be 'an image of the place where I am, which conveys the spirit of the place, such that others who see it feel they are there'? Where's the emotion in our travel photography?

As ever, your thoughts are welcome - just email me on the address below!

Kathryn Phillips ARPS  
Chair RPS Travel Group  
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## In this issue ...

**4** Image of the Year 2023  
Judge: Janey Devine FRPS

**16** The Namib - A Photographic Journey  
Malcolm MacGregor FRPS

**24** Safari in Kenya  
Alison Mees ARPS

**34** Joining a group safari in Kenya  
led by Alison Mees  
Susan Newton ARPS

**45** Monthly Competition  
Image of the Year 2022  
Judge: Janey Devine FRPS

**48** The Hornbill Festival, India  
Ashok Viswanathan  
FFIP, EFIAP, PPSA

**54** Eight Days in Italy  
Justin Cliff ARPS

**62** Budapest to Bucharest  
Susan Stuart

**68** Away from Temples  
Paul Sansome

**74** Alfama Revisited  
Mike Longhurst FRPS

**84** Armenia - Then and Now  
Pia Thommes LRPS

**90** Passport Memories  
David Short ARPS

# Judge's Comments

**Judged by Janey Devine FRPS**

Having had a career in IT, Janey was an early convert to digital photography and bought one of the first digital cameras in 1998. A few years later she sold her business and was able to combine her love of the sea with her growing passion for photography.

Experimenting with a number of techniques she strived to produce an "impression" of the landscape, and was awarded her Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society in 2008 with a panel of images taken in East Anglia.

More recently she has become fascinated with documentary photography, and has worked on a number of Social Documentary projects, and started up the RPS South East Documentary Group.

Janey became a member of the Focus Group in 2008 and regularly exhibits in their annual exhibition in Chichester. She was invited to join the Arena group of photographers in 2016.

She is also involved with the RPS Distinctions and currently sits on the Documentary, Travel and Licentiate panels.



PHOTO CREDIT: JEFF OWEN ARPS

## Introducing her decisions, Janey said:

I felt very honoured to be asked to judge this year's Travel Group Image of the Year. Had I realised what a difficult job it was going to be I might well have declined!

We had 190 images from 49 photographers and I believe this was an increase on last year. Hopefully, now that travel restrictions have been lifted, there will be even more entries next year.

I have thoroughly enjoyed looking and re-looking at the images to select the winners. I have been transported across the world, to exotic places but also to locations in the UK which I have really appreciated.

In choosing the winning images I have considered several aspects. Does the image convey a "sense of place", and does it communicate something special about the place? Does it entice me to visit, or does it intrigue me? Communication in an image is also very important. Some images told me a story, others made me laugh, and some were rich in atmosphere or emotion. Many of the images forced me to linger and some made me stop to think and challenged my understanding.

The images that for me stood out were the ones "taken from the heart". These were ones where the photographer had their own vision and maybe saw the world in a different way. Images from unusual viewpoints or of subject matter that a casual observer would pass by. Or that elusive "decisive moment", pressing the shutter at exactly the right moment.

In entering a competition of this quality, the photographer must be careful to look at their images with a critical eye. Are they sharp where they should be, have sensor spots been removed and are horizons straight? Also, a careful look around the edges of the image to avoid distractions is important. Sadly a number of images that caught my eye were let down on the technical side.

It was a very difficult but hugely enjoyable task to select the three winning and fifteen highly commended images - I would have loved to have included more but I was told 15 was the limit!

# Gold

## Judge's feedback

A very powerful image that really shouts "sense of place". The solitude and lack of anything man-made gives a wonderful sense of isolation and of being alone in this amazing landscape. But the photographer is definitely not alone. He is in the presence of hundreds if not thousands of penguins.

For me the image gives me a sense of peace and tranquillity, but at the same time a certain tension. Man is not meant to be here - we are invading this space.

The foreground is devoid of snow and ice and makes me think about climate change and the broken clouds in the background help emphasise the uncertainty of the future. What will this environment be like in ten or twenty years?

The wide-angle view really draws me into the picture, and the colour palette is very subtle and gentle. The composition looks so simple, but is masterful. There is good separation of the penguins, an almost impossible feat!

An image that one can look at and ponder forever.

## Salisbury Plain, South Georgia

Ray Hems ARPS





# Silver

## Judge's feedback

This image gave me a wonderful sense of place. It is intriguing and stopped me in my tracks.

You see the two sides of life - children at prayer and performing their devotions inside, but at the same time there is time for play outside. Two different worlds brought together into one image. There is so much detail in the image and I wanted to come back to it several times and each time noticed something new.

It was an image where I could hear the Photographer talking to me, telling me a story and I hope it is maybe part of a larger body of work.

Life in Verdic School, India

Ngar Shun Victor Wong FRPS



# Bronze

## Judge's feedback

A photographer not averse to going out in the night and this image really shouts AMERICA at me.

Route 66 type images have been done many times, but this image has been so carefully composed, with all the elements in just the right place, and the lighting has been well handled.

The old car outside adds to the atmosphere and I really feel I want to enter the kiosk and find some old timer leaning on the counter.

This is an image that draws me in and makes me want to be part of it.

Midnight, USA

Lynda Golightly LRPS





# Highly Commended



**Rural Charm, Castle Bolton, Yorkshire Dales**  
Allan Hartley ARPS

**Rainy Day in Tokyo**  
Rob Kershaw ARPS



# Highly Commended



**View from the Boat, Norway**  
Liz Bugg ARPS

**Derelict Cottage, Isle of Harris**  
Keith Pointon LRPS





# Highly Commended



**Uluru, Australia**  
Rob Morgan ARPS



**Yamuna Ghat**  
Peter Walmsley LRPS

**Ice Cave, Iceland**  
Ray Hems ARPS



**In the Face of the Storm, Raudisander, Iceland**  
Kathryn Phillips ARPS





# Highly Commended



**Festival Mood, Andhra Pradesh**  
Sunil Gutta ARPS

# Highly Commended



**Theyyam Tribal Dance, Kunnur, Kerala, India**  
Tamma Srinivasa Reddy FRPS

**We are Continuity, Trinidad, Cuba**  
Brian Houghton ARPS



**Passenger, Bangladesh**  
Dennis Anguige FRPS





# Highly Commended



**Making a Living, Kolkata, India**  
Ian O'Neill



**Sweat Shop, Delhi**  
Ian O'Neill

# Highly Commended



**Sewing Lady, Indonesia**  
Ngar Shun Victor Wong FRPS





Hartmann Valley



Kunene River



Skeleton Coast



# The Namib

## A photographic journey

PHOTOGRAPHS & WORDS BY  
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The idea of a photographic project based on the Namib Desert originated in the Empty Quarter of Oman, where I have spent time amongst its dominating quartzite orange dunes. These ventures culminated in a book entitled 'Wilderness Oman', published in 2003. Four years ago I felt a longing to photograph another desert. The Namib beckoned mainly because it was accessible and in Africa.

There was another quality to it that few deserts have; its dunes drop straight into the sea, in some places, on the Skeleton Coast. This geographical fact was very attractive from a photographic perspective. The Skeleton Coast too, with all its lore and history was also an alluring proposition.



A slender wilderness, some 2000 kilometres long, the Namib hugs the south-west coast of Africa, from Angola in the north to the Orange River in the south. With vast active dune fields, extensive gravel plains, scorched salt pans and rocky outcrops, there is always something to draw the eye.

I completed a two-week photographic trip in 2019 to ascertain the potential for a book project. My original idea was to photograph the whole country of Namibia. But I feared that this idea would lead to a never-ending project. I read, and re-read, Amy Schoeman's 'The Skeleton Coast', a beautiful and inspiring book of photographs and decided that something regionally specific was the answer. The key areas of the Namib for me were Kaokoland in the far north - bordering Angola, the Skeleton Coast, the Namib-Naukluft National Park and Sossusvlei, and the ghost-town of Kolmanskop. Deciding on that concept I embarked on a second journey in 2021.

The 2019 expedition had given me a good idea of logistics and formed the basis of plans for 2021. Extremity of landscape has always appealed and one such area of the Namib was the Hartmann Valley in the far north, which drops into the Kunene River, bordering Angola. I like to travel alone but was advised that the Hartmann Valley was very remote and that I should travel in a party encompassing two vehicles. I compromised and found myself a guide. Step forward African explorer and journeyman, Pierre Jaunet, with 45 years' experience of Africa. Pierre and his assistant Eric Noir knew Kaokoland and the routes to the Kunene River. No need for two vehicles - we would travel in his 20-year-old, indestructible Landrover Defender, which was rigged for long safaris. We were completely self-contained with 7 days of food and water.

From Windhoek, it was a two-day drive north via Sesfontein and Puros. The Hartmann Valley is some 70 kilometres in length bordered by mountains in the east and a mix of desert and rock in west. At the entrance to the valley, a cloudless

sky stretched towards Angola; deep and dazzling with echoes of an untouched civilisation. Glad of the stillness, the three of us gazed into the distance of this mesmerising landscape. Not a word passed between us. The terrain narrowed the further north we progressed, with sand and stone merging to create harmonious images. From experience I prefer to get a feel for the world outside the camera frame before setting up. Best to absorb its magnificence first.

Unloading all the paraphernalia of an African safari, we established a campsite in a secluded gully. Once it was dark, there were no lights save for the flames of the campfire and the sparkling stars that seemed ridiculously close. Before dawn I set off for a confluence of sand dunes about a mile away. As I crunched my way across the cold sand, memories of time in the Empty Quarter came back. The same excitement welled up with a high degree of expectation which rose as silky dawn rays illuminated the barchan dunes. As this was my first foray, I was not too surprised to find myself in the wrong place. Nonetheless, I had seen how the dunes rolled in the shimmering light and the following morning I got to the right place, establishing my vantage point with the tripod for dawn photography. We had four days in the Hartmann Valley. It was not really dunes and rocks I was photographing but isolation, solitude, remoteness, and appreciation for this ancient landscape.

From the Hartmann Valley the route led to the Skeleton Coast at Mowe Bay. Here the dunes drop sharply into gravel plains bordering the Atlantic Ocean. These treacherous waters were the final resting ground for many a vessel. The primary cause for this is the Benguela current which flows north from Antarctica. When the moist air of its icy waters meets the warm air of the Namib, a grey veil of morning mist envelops the ocean, drifting inland on southerly winds. The resulting combination of fog and strong currents confused sailors and navigators. In addition to the bones of humans, whales, turtles and seals, the inevitable shipwrecks came to resemble skeletons.





Kolmanskop

Dune shadows



Whale bones Skeleton Coast



This cloak of sea mist makes for eerie photography at dawn along a coastline that remains sunless until late morning. There is a palpable feeling between the known and the unknown, the tame and the wild. The French call it 'entre chien et loup' meaning 'between the dog and the wolf'. Misshapen boulders appear to advance and recede. Darkening light creates ambiguity, which is accentuated by the sound of rolling breakers for mile after mile near Terrace Bay. Again, I am selective in where I photograph, searching out strange, shaped rocks that speak to me in their isolation. Ever present is the cacophony of stones being sucked out to sea by the retreating current. Photographs do not record noise, but they can perhaps intimate the sound of crashing waves and retreating waters.

400 kilometres further south is Sandwich Harbour. It is here that the dunes drop right into the ocean. These repetitive rolling shapes resemble breakers on a raging sea; peaks and troughs everywhere in a land of sand, where straight lines are non-existent. It is easy to be overwhelmed by such a landscape. The solution is, once again, to narrow my options to specific viewpoints and look intently at how the dunes interact with each other to create a harmony of shapes and forms.

From here I travelled south for 500 kilometres to the coast around Luderitz. Pierre and Eric had departed for their long journey back to Harare. Mine was to continue to the ghost-town of Kolmanskop. A former diamond mine established by the Germans in 1909, it is now an unnerving remnant of that era. Decayed houses with their glassless window frames swinging in the wind exude a certain presence and the senses are heightened. Kolmanskop was finally abandoned in 1956, when the diamonds ran out. Driving winds and sand backed by harsh light have frazzled a once prosperous town. Rusted baths, lavatories and sinks are proof of former

comfort. Archways and entrances act as photographic framing devices. Doorways lead to other doorways – and photographs. The exterior world of shifting sands versus the interior world of immovable buildings. Dust devils swirl through the remains of the town taking their ghosts with them.

The Namib is the oldest desert in the world dating back for an incomprehensible 55 million years. When thinking of the many hues of Africa, it is those of the Namib to which I return. The culmination of this journey was the big orange dunes around Sossusvlei and the camelthorn trees of Deadvlei. A landscape within a landscape. Graceful orange dunes morph into displays of red and magenta. It is easy to become overwhelmed, so I concentrate specifically on Dune 45, one of the highest dunes near Sossusvlei and make for its summit. Working my way up the dune, I am alone with my thoughts in the utter quietness of the pre-dawn fog. I can barely see five metres in front of me, but the dune ridgeline snakes its way ever higher.

Being surrounded by swirling mist is mesmerising as you are never quite sure what will be revealed if it lifts. The sun can break through suddenly and with great intensity, with only a few minutes for any meaningful photographs. I decided to stay on the summit of Dune 45 where I remained for two hours until the fog thinned out. The intensity of light was reduced by the dissipating fog so that the dunes resembled pale gold sculptures.

To be in the Namib desert is to enter an alternative realm, one of wide-open spaces of desert and sea, of soaring skies, magnificent mountains and towering dunes. Here is colour and character, splendour and solitude, aspects of our world that a landscape photographer dreams about.

**Photography in the Namib desert is where that dream becomes reality.**

**SPECIAL OFFER for RPS Members**  
**The Namib** can be purchased here:  
<https://www.malcolmmacgregor.photo/books/view/the-namib>  
The discount code for RPS members is RPS05 which means you get £5 off the price so that it is £35 incl. p&p



# Safari in Kenya

PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS BY  
Alison Mees ARPS



**Before the pandemic I had been living and working in Africa for just over 16 years and my work took me to some amazing wildlife locations – South Luangwa in Zambia, Selous & Serengeti in Tanzania and Masai Mara in Kenya.**

With the pandemic no one was able to travel, the safari camps closed and I had to return to the UK. But for communities in Africa they relied on tourism for income, for a job, selling items or revenue from leasing their land in Conservancies. Whilst the pandemic was on it was tough for them and they were very grateful when travel started to resume.

During the pandemic I set up my own small company and I now lead small groups on safari to some of the best wildlife destinations.

Early last year I decided to revisit some of the wonderful National Parks of Kenya – a couple I last visited over 20 years ago.

I want to share my experiences with you; some of you may be thinking about booking a safari and are not sure where to go. I hope this helps.



*Alison Mees*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

*Masai Giraffe*





Nairobi National park



Yellow Billed Stork

**Nairobi National Park**, the oldest National Park in Kenya. To start with it feels strange driving around a wildlife area with the skyline of Nairobi in the distance. However, if you only have a couple of days to go on safari, this is a great place to go and a huge variety of wildlife awaits you. The only animals you will not find are elephants but you will come across buffalo, giraffe, lions, black & white rhino, antelopes, hippos, crocodiles, and an amazing selection of birds.



White Rhino

Two nights or three nights are perfect. I spent two nights and stayed in the only camp in the Park – Nairobi Tented Camp - in amongst the forest area, with very spacious tents. Early morning game drives and returning for a late breakfast around 10am, some relaxation time then you head out again in the afternoon and return to camp as it is getting dark. At camp the fire is lit and you can enjoy a drink under the stars before dinner. I was very impressed with the wildlife experience that Nairobi National Park had to offer.

Whilst there you also have the option to visit the **Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**, an elephant orphanage for baby elephants. You spend 1 hour watching the young elephants come down for their milk bottles, after which they take a mud bath. The elephants can get close to you and you can touch them. The head keeper tells you a little bit about each of the elephants and their personality. The Sheldrick Wildlife Trust does an amazing job looking after these tiny elephants, where they have lost their mother for various reasons.



Sheldrick Wildlife Trust





*Oi Pejeta Conservancy*

**Oi Pejeta Conservancy, Laikipia.** Previously it was a cattle ranch and is now a 360 square km wildlife haven. It has the largest number of black & white rhino in East Africa, which are guarded by a large team of rangers. The last two Northern White Rhino can be found here in a separate enclosure.

Also a great location to watch elephants and general game, you get the chance to see reticulated giraffe (these you will not see in the Mara). The numbers of Big Cats are not as huge as in the Mara, however they are increasing due to the protection of the rangers and because there are not the human/wildlife conflicts you may find in other areas.



*Black rhino, Oi Pejeta*



*Sweetwaters Chimp Sanctuary*

**Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary.** This is home to around 35 chimps that have been rescued from the illegal wildlife & pet trade. Most arrive in poor health and have been badly treated so they are given vet care and a safe home. You can visit the Sanctuary where a ranger will give you a detailed tour of the area and you can meet the chimps at a distance (due to covid as they share over 98 percent of our DNA). Most of these chimps will never return to the wild.



*Sunrise*



*Breakfast*

**Oi Pejeta** is a 45 minute flight from Nairobi. I would suggest spending 3 nights to get the most from the Conservancy. There is so much to see, and the landscape changes as you drive through the Conservancy. I visited in June for 3 nights and every day was packed with game viewing, early morning wake up and out before 6am. Each day we had a picnic breakfast in a different area of the Conservancy, by the river or open plains and only arriving back to camp for lunch. By 4pm we were out for the afternoon game drive, returning to camp after sunset.

**Amboseli National Park & Selenkay Conservancy.** It's a 30 minute flight from Nairobi and for the last 30 years Amboseli has suffered with a drought situation, so it can be dry and dusty there. It's the home of the big bull elephants (the tuskers) and Mount Kilimanjaro.



*Amboseli Waterhole Platform*

**Selenkay Conservancy** is Masai land which the community leases to the Conservancy, which has its own airstrip. Also something a little different, there are three waterholes spread around the Conservancy and at two of them there are viewing decks where you can get out of the vehicle and sit and watch the wildlife come to drink. I really enjoyed spending a couple of hours watching zebra, warthogs and elephants come to drink.



Another species of antelope that you only see in a few areas is the gerenuk – meaning 'giraffe neck'. This strange looking antelope stands on its back legs to feed from the bushes.

Whilst in the Conservancy you can visit a Masai Manyatta, learn about the Masai culture and traditions, how they build the houses, cook, look after the cattle. The Masai are very proud people so are very happy to explain about their culture.

**Amboseli National Park** is approximately 1 hour drive from the Conservancy. On a clear day you will be blessed with the sight of Mount Kilimanjaro. Nowadays only a little snow on the cap due to global warming. but due to the snow melt more marsh areas have formed, so there are chances of elephants, zebra or wildebeest walking through the water with lovely reflections. It's also a birders' paradise. The National Park is home to some of the biggest bull elephants in Africa and to sit in a vehicle and watch one walking across the open plains towards you takes your breath away.

**Masai Mara Conservancies**, I prefer to spend time in a Conservancy rather than a Game Reserve. With any of the Mara Conservancies you have fewer vehicles, normally only 5 at a wildlife sighting and there is more flexibility with your game drives, including the option of a night drive. The Mara Conservancies are community land that the Masai lease to the conservancy management. I believe this is the future with wildlife, communities and tourism benefiting from working together.



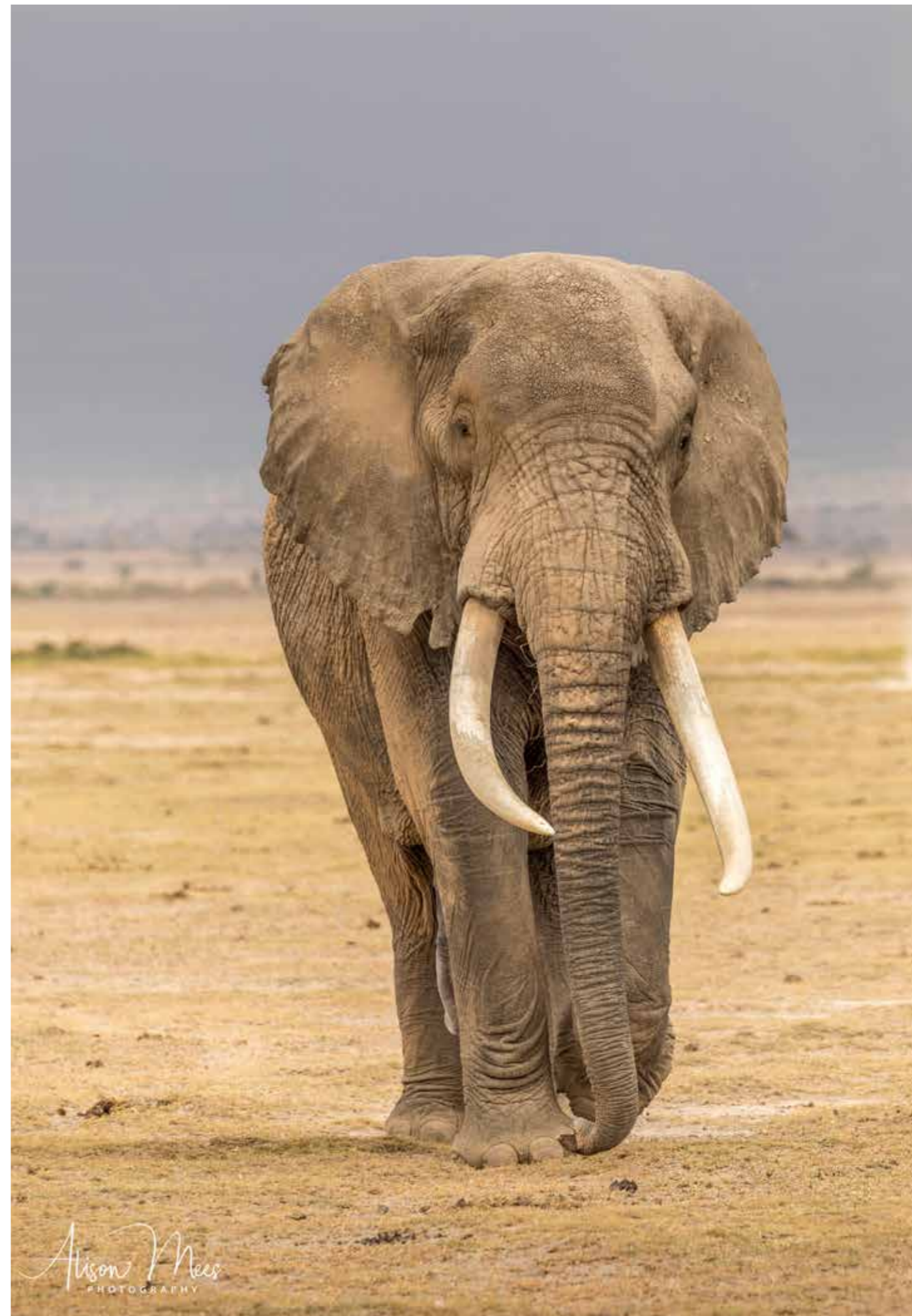
Gerenuk



Masai Village



Amboseli National Park



Amboseli Bull Elephant





Early morning with Lioness

**The Mara** is the land of the Big Cats. In November when I was there I was amazed at the size of some of the lion prides, 30 plus in number. The Mara is also great for leopard and cheetah, and since the pandemic I think the hyena numbers have increased, with plenty of dens around and a good number of hyena in each clan. Early morning start to your game drive, starting with sunrise across the plains. Then looking for the cats as this is the time when they are more active. By 7/8am the lions are already under the bushes asleep for the next 14 plus hours!

Taking a picnic hamper breakfast out with you in the vehicle gives you more flexibility with game drives. Not all the camps do this, so do check before booking a trip. You normally return back to camp late morning, ready for lunch and a rest. By 4pm you are back out for the afternoon game drive, which can continue to a night drive if you want to. Night drives focus on the nocturnal animals i.e. lions become active, hyena, white tailed mongoose, springhare and if you are lucky an armadillo or pangolin. Most of the night drives use a spotlight with a red filter, but by converting your photos to black and white in post processing you can sort the red cast from the filter.



Leopard in Mara



Hyena Den



Male Lion



Little Bee Eaters



Lappet Faced Vulture

With over 650 bird species, if you are a keen birder any of the National Parks or Conservancies are for you.

Most of the wildlife areas have the long rains during April & May, and some of the camps close then as it is difficult to view the wildlife and you can spend a few hours digging the vehicle out of the mud.

I love Kenya and the variety of the National Parks and Conservancies. The landscapes, people and wildlife are all very different wherever you travel to.

One thing I would say if you go on safari, don't rush around ticking a list, take your time to sit, watch and photograph what is before you. You gain so much from taking your time and seeing so much more.

Alison Mees ARPS  
[www.alisonmeesphotography.com](http://www.alisonmeesphotography.com)



Young Hippo



Alison in the mist



PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS  
BY Dr Sarah Newton ARPS



## Joining a photo safari in Kenya led by Alison Mees ARPS

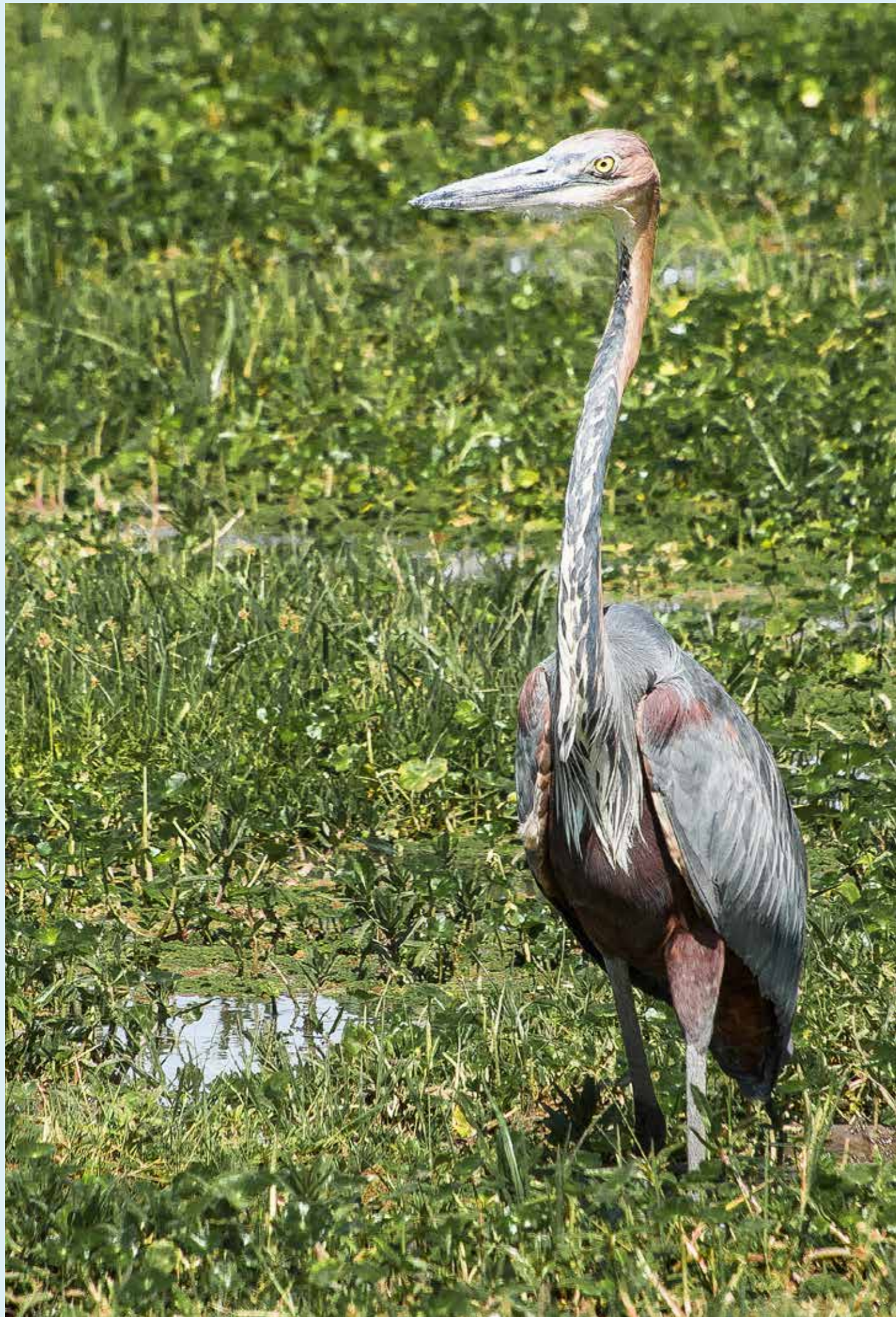
Earlier this year the RPS Nature group email noted spaces were available on safaris with Alison Mees.

Enticed by the prospect of visiting Kenya (for the first time) and learning more about wildlife photography I signed up after a couple of zoom calls to one she was running in conjunction with Walking Women.



Zebra visiting a waterhole





Opposite page: Goliath Heron

This page from top: African Rock Python and Lesser Flamingo;  
Lilac-breasted Roller;  
Gray-crowned Crane



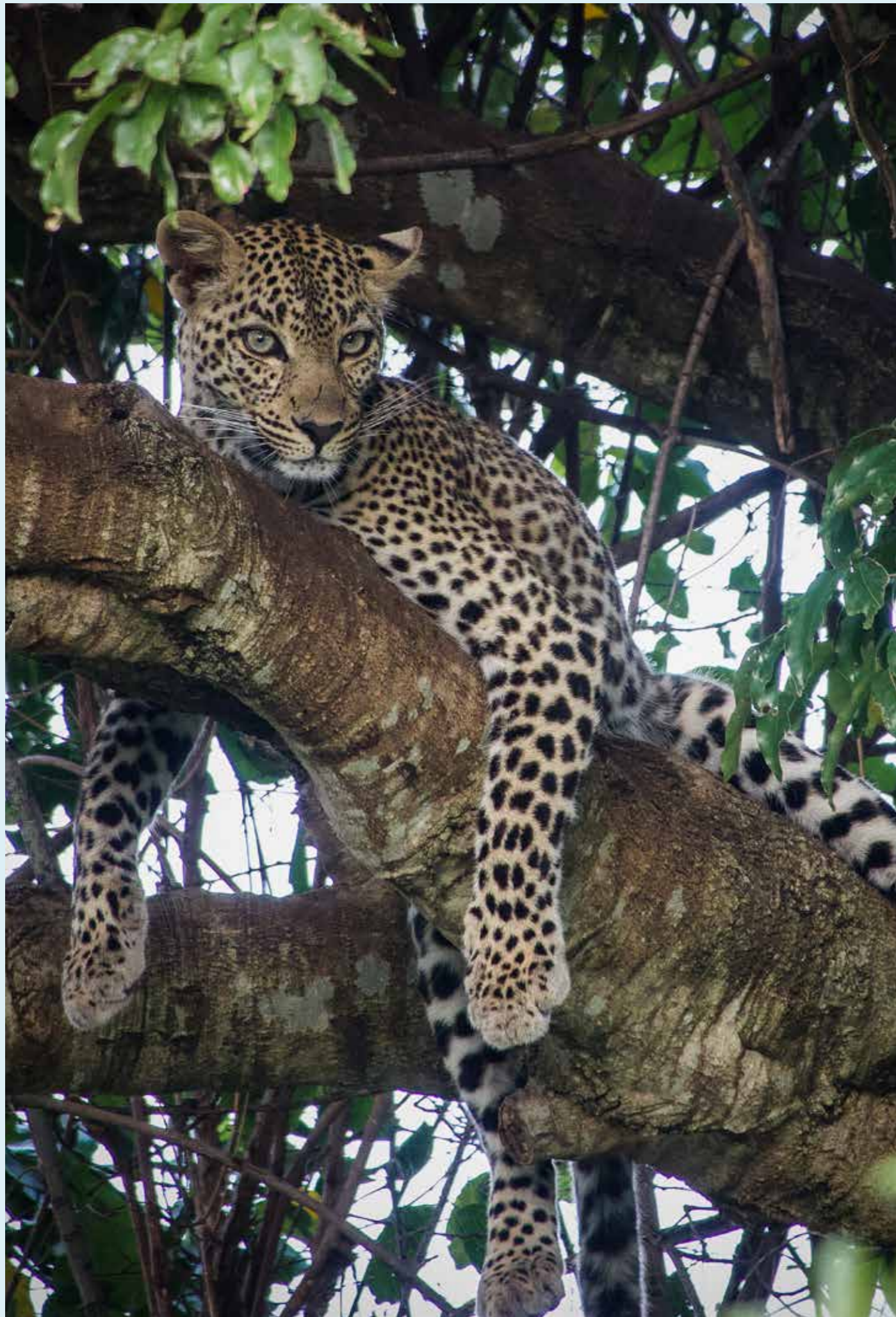
Flying to Nairobi on 26th January I was welcomed by Game Watchers staff and stayed in the Eka hotel. I was both surprised and reassured by the level of security at the airport, hotel and shopping centres. I learned about the investment the Chinese are putting into the country as evidenced by road and hotel developments. This was in stark contrast to the seemingly never-ending line of people risking walking in the middle verge of a main 6 lane highway carrying goods for sale and swarming around vehicles paused in the traffic to ply their goods. At one point I spotted a Maasai herdsman and his cows grazing on what little grass they could find on the roadside verges. I was informed this was illegal but drought outside Nairobi will have driven him to take the risk. Nick Brandt's 2015 photographic work came to mind with his powerful illustrations of man's encroachment on land previously roamed by animals and noted the continuing impact of politics and climate change.

On the first morning, meeting over breakfast, our party of five women (including Alison), flew from Wilson airport to Amboseli. This was the first of several flights in small aircraft during the trip and saved hours of travelling by land over vast distances. Luckily we had been warned that landings could be aborted at the last minute due to animals on the landing strips and it happened!

Landing at Amboseli in view of Mt Kilimanjaro on the first morning was spectacular. Greeted by our driver and guide Dennis, the first of three over the trip, with a camp table set out serving coffee and cakes was a great welcome, "Karibu" in Swahili. In no time we were off on a game drive in the National Park. Being among elephants, wildebeest, zebras, flamingos (including one caught in the water by an African Rock Python) and many other animals and birds, swiftly introduced us to their beauty and natures' cycle of life and death.

We all had more than one camera ranging from phones to bridge and full frame with two of the four having 600mm lenses. I took my Apple iPhone 13 Pro Max, a Nikon D750 with a 24-120 and 70-300mm lenses and a Sony RX10 IV with an integral 25-600mm lens. Having options proved useful in terms of responding to distance from the subjects and speed of capturing a passing moment. It was also reassuring to know if one failed (battery, memory card or simply broke) we had a backup. Alison was attentive to each of our needs and level of ability with our equipment. Histograms, ISOs, exposure adjustments, shutter speeds and aperture settings became common parlance, constantly readjusting to the rapidly changing light of dawns and dusks and on two occasions night drives. Alison and our guides shared their knowledge of bird and animal behaviours; information that proved invaluable in composing and timing the shutter release. Mindful moments, feeling at one with the landscape and wildlife, were in abundance.





Opposite page: Leopard  
This page from top: Lion cubs;  
Yawning Cheetah;  
Mount Kilimanjaro

We stayed at Porini camps at Amboseli, Selenkay Conservancy (3 nights), Mara, Ol Kinyei Conservancy with excursions to Naboisho Conservancy (4 nights) and four of us extended the trip (2 nights) at Lion Camp, Olare Motorogi Conservancy. All the camps were staffed by Maasai men who were very good hosts. The camps run on solar power. Buckets of very hot water were provided and fed into a shower head or used for hand washing items. I took the opportunity to visit 'backstage' and was impressed by the camp kitchens, charcoal fridges, kitchen gardens, met the chefs ( eg Wambua whose name means born in the rainy season) and complimented them on their substantial and delicious hot and cold breakfasts, two course lunches (1pm) and three course evening meals (8pm). My vegetarianism being well catered for.

Early starts at 5:30/6am game drives were kicked off with coffee/tea, biscuits and hot water for face/hands washing brought to your tent half an hour before departure. Breakfasts around 9am either back at camp or more often out in the field were followed by a second drive until late morning. Lunch, siestas and catching up on tasks followed (it was in the low 30s by then) until tea and cake at 3:45pm before a third game drive from 4-7pm including 'sundowners' in spectacular locations. Twice we went out red light searching for nocturnal animals from 9-10pm (and found Springhares and Bat-eared foxes).







Opposite page top: Young Maasai girls with their sanitary packs

This page from top: Maasai Village;  
Maasai wife at home;  
Young Maasai herding cows into enclosure for the night



Two visits, to a Maasai village and to a school were particularly poignant. The first was fascinating to see the mud and wooden circular homes and to learn how young children start herding with sheep or small calves and then progress to their own herds. Throughout the trip we witnessed huge herds being moved by Maasai men across vast distances when travelling. Maasai men, women and children showed us around their village and their way of life. Clearly this was an event that occurred regularly for visitors. There were no attempts to sell any of their beautiful beadwork made by the women on the visit as the little shop at the camp was the place to make purchases with money feeding back into the community. It was a special privilege to have been there and to be welcomed so graciously and I recognised the needs for the circular economy with conservation at its heart, but at the same time I wondered about the future of the Maasai people and their culture.

An afternoon visit to a school to distribute the packs of reusable sanitary wear felt very significant; for me a reminder of how my educational opportunities have been taken for granted as a right and how for the young Maasai girls, something so small and practical was hugely significant and might facilitate remaining in education beyond primary years. Greeted by the Senior Warden and researcher in Ol Kinyei conservancy we learned about the reasons why girls stop coming to school when menstruation starts. A lack of sanitary materials or the means to purchase them, inadequate or nonexistent single sex toilet facilities and other barriers have been identified as explained in this article <http://maasaigirlseducation.org/the-need/the-life-of-a-maasai-woman/>.







Opposite page: Warthog

This page from top:  
Elephant mudbath;  
Chef Wamba and staff at Porini Mara Camp;  
Sunset



Turning to the environment and wildlife it is very difficult to explain the impact both have had for me. Kenya is 2.4 times the size of the UK, its vastness well illustrated from the air and by looking towards the seemingly never-ending views towards the horizon on the ground. Amboseli was drier than the Mara and we found several intact bodies of zebra and gazelle which told of death from, according to our guide, starvation due to drought which is becoming more common due to climate change. These remains were in contrast to cleaned scattered bones that had clearly derived from death by predation. The Maasai Mara was green and appeared less affected by drought.

The high temperatures and need for vigilance precluded walks in areas where we might meet wildlife face to face. Our observations of bushes among which unseen lions slept then suddenly emerged confirmed travel in the land cruisers was the safest place to be. Getting down to basics our guides vetted the safest locations to use for open air bathroom stops! An accompanied walk around the Mara camp introduced us to native trees (e.g. Croton and Acacia) and we found leopard tortoises and a tiny waterbuck left in a safe area while its mother was out hunting.

Lions, heard as we lay in our tents at night were accompanied by nearby sounds of grazing hippos, buffalo and the patter of warthog's trotters. By day we saw families of lions, cheetahs and leopards, wallowing hippos, giraffes, buffalo, warthogs wildebeest, eland, Grant's and Thomson's gazelle, kudu, dik-dik, dwarf, slender and banded mongoose, vervet monkeys, yellow and olive baboons, bushbaby, honey badger, springhare, squirrel, African hare, bat-eared fox, leopard tortoises, red-headed agama lizards and many others spotted by my companions with binoculars and almost missed by me! I learned a lot about birds from the group; eagles, vultures, giant eagle owl, hornbill, guinea fowl, storks, cranes, egrets, heron, flamingo, kori bustard and secretary birds with lilac-breasted roller and superb starling among my favourites with their beautiful iridescent colours.

Would I do it all again? Yes, in a flash; to learn more about African countries and culture and of course, to improve my landscape and wildlife photography.

#### Reference

*The Life of a Maasai Woman* <http://maasaigirlseducation.org/the-need/the-life-of-a-maasai-woman/> © Copyright 2023 Maasai Girls Education Fund. All Rights Reserved.

Brandt, N., 2015, *Inherit the Dust*, Edwynn Houk Editions.

All images © Sarah Newton Photography 2023



# RPS Travel Group Trips 2023/24

PHOTO CREDIT: ALISON MEES

## Vietnam 'Terraces of Gold'

22 September - 5 October 2023

Organised for the RPS Travel Group by Paul Sansome Photography

A small group tour to maximise individual photographer's opportunities and support from Paul. The group is limited to just six people.

Paul says:  
*'In 2014, I discovered a fascinating, sometimes beautiful place. I spent four days seeing no English speaking tourists. I saw potentially one of the best landscapes for photography that I have ever seen and I saw shy, traditional people who can be so photogenic; I had discovered the mountains of Northern Vietnam. This itinerary builds on previous tours to this area.'*

The cost is £3050 depending on the number of travellers.

The cost includes a single room supplement of £390.

For more information  
Email Richard Lewis [traveltrips@rps.org](mailto:traveltrips@rps.org)

## Safari to Kenya

22 June 2024 - 9 nights

Organised for the RPS Travel Group by Alison Mees Photography

Join Alison in June 2024 to experience a Kenyan safari staying at small tented camps in the conservancies Alison knows well.

Starting in Nairobi for 1 night, heading to Ol Pejeta Conservancy for 4 nights where you will get the chance to see White & Black Rhino. This conservancy has the largest population of rhino in East Africa. Here you will also have the chance to see elephants, reticulated giraffe, zebras, lions and a variety of birds. After 4 nights you will fly down to the Mara - well known for the Big Cats. Each day will start early to get the most from the best light, the itinerary all depends on what the wildlife brings to us!

The safari is a small / personal group led by Alison, using an open vehicle for the best game viewing opportunities.

More detailed information on this trip can be found on the RPS Website [rps.org/groups/travel](https://rps.org/groups/travel)

Cost  
\$5935 pp sharing a tent (single supplement available upon request otherwise single travellers will be paired with another single traveller of the same gender)

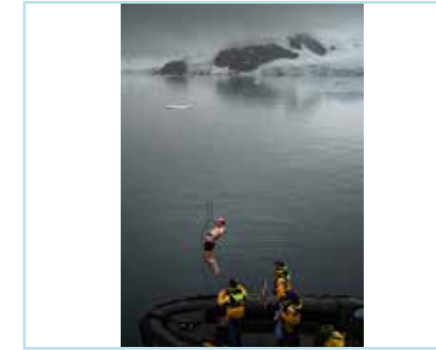
To reserve your spot in this amazing safari please email  
Richard Lewis [traveltrips@rps.org](mailto:traveltrips@rps.org)

PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL SANSOME

## Travel Group Monthly Competition 2022 - Winners



**JANUARY**  
Monastir, Tunisia  
Carl Mason



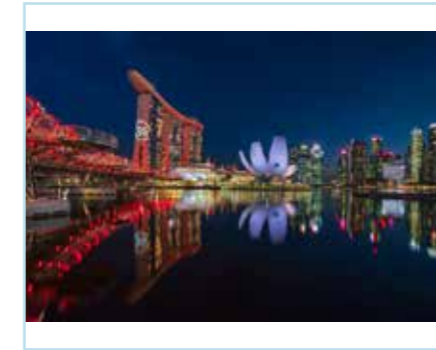
**FEBRUARY**  
Winter Game, Antarctica  
Victor Wong



**MARCH**  
Mighty Matterhorn and Skiers at Gornergrat - Zermatt - Switzerland, Martin Reece



**APRIL**  
Havana Cuba  
Jo Kearney



**MAY**  
Marina Bay, Singapore  
Richard Coulstock



**JUNE**  
Morning Entertainment Shegerini, Eritrea  
Ian Sylvester



**JULY**  
Climbing in the Alps, Chamonix, France  
Sue Hutton



**AUGUST**  
Kalsoy, Faroe Islands,  
David Cummings



**SEPTEMBER**  
Misty Mekong Morning  
Tony Beane



**OCTOBER**  
Sweet Seller, Jma El Fna, Marrakech  
Tony Beane



**NOVEMBER**  
Joy at the field, Indonesia  
Victor Wong



**DECEMBER**  
St Olaf's Church, Luther, Montana  
John Clare



# Monthly Competition Best of the Best 2022

**Judged by Janey Devine FRPS**

Janey joined the RPS in 2006 and after gaining her Licentiate and Associate, she was awarded her Fellowship in 2008. She currently sits on the Travel, Documentary and Licentiate Distinctions panels. She regularly gives talks to camera clubs, and her work can be seen in a number of exhibitions. She is also a member of the Focus Group, and was invited to join the Arena Group of Photographers in 2016.

## Highly Commended - special request!!

This is an image full of energy and hope for the future. There is a story behind it - a new generation that has pride in its country and hope for the future.

The composition is strong and conveys a definite "sense of place" with the jungle behind. There is a simplicity in the image which strengthens the message of hope for the future - not just of Indonesia but of other countries around the world.

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**  
**Joy in the field, Indonesia,**  
**Victor Wong FRPS**



**OVERALL WINNER**  
**Climbing in the Alps, Chamonix, France,**  
**Sue Hutton ARPS**

A really arresting viewpoint - 3 climbers and their shadows perfectly placed, and the path snaking its way across the pass.

The clouds are thin enough in places to give you tantalising views of the mountains behind.

Technically this is not an easy image, taken on a sunny day, but there is good detail in the snow, and the portrait format works well to emphasise the height of the mountains.

I commend the photographer for getting that high. Was it from a drone/plane or was the photographer a keen mountaineer too? It doesn't matter - the mystery just adds strength to the image.





# The Hornbill Festival, India

## A sampling of Naga tribal culture and life

PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS:  
Ashok Viswanathan FFIP, EFIAP, PPSA



**K**ohima, a small town in the hills of Nagaland in north-east India is not a name familiar to those in the western world and few have been there. The Indian state of Nagaland borders Assam on the west and Myanmar in the south with a population of 1.9 million. Kohima the capital and largest town is 4738 ft above sea level. It was founded by the British Empire in 1878 and was famous for one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. Today the War Cemetery is a lasting memorial to those who lost their lives in the Battle of Kohima.

It contains the graves of several unknown soldiers buried there. The official language is Nagamese, with each tribe having its own dialect. Nagamese is a mixture of different Naga and Assamese languages using English script. It has also been enriched with some contributions from Bengali and Hindi languages. There are 18 major Naga tribes namely: - Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Kuhi, Kachari, Sumi, Garo, Tikhirs, Yimhhiung, and Zeliang. The population is almost 100% Christian.



Top: Tikhirs tribals Top Left: Ao lady



Kuhi Tribe

Every December for 10 days, Kohima celebrates the Hornbill Festival held at "Kisama Heritage Village" about 12 km from the city centre. The festival is named after the colourful forest bird – the Hornbill. It is an event that brings together the 18 major tribes of Nagaland with displays of traditional cultural events, dress, food and sport. This year 7 tribes did not attend as a protest for the unfortunate events of last year that led to cancellation of the festival. The event itself is held on a terraced hillside with different levels, each level dedicated to one tribe. Each tribe also has its own "Morung" where they display their crafts, offer local food etc. In the village the "Morung" is a community hut where elders educate the youngsters on the customs and history of the tribe. The inscriptions on the huts signify unity, wealth, prosperity and stories of bravery.

The exhibition highlights the Naga arts and crafts, with food stalls, herbal medicine, flower displays, songs, cooking demos, dances and fashion shows. Also, Miss Nagaland beauty contest, traditional archery, tug of war and Naga wrestling. The event is also a place for people of one tribe to meet other tribes. For the travel photographer it's an opportunity to shoot people who are generally not accessible, dressed in tribal costumes and to sample the local food, mainly vegetables, meat, chicken and pork. Nagaland is a "dry" state – one of the few in India. So, no "pints" or

liquor of any sort are available. On the brighter side, for centuries from the days of head hunting, the tribes make a white alcoholic concoction of "rice beer". Definitely worth trying with caution as too much rice beer can get you rapidly drunk. Home-made fruit wine is also available.

Dishes like Zutho, Bamboo shoot, Bushmeat, Hincejvu, Samathu, Fish in Bamboo, Akini, Aikibeye, Black Sticky rice pudding and Axone are the most popular foods of Nagaland. Black Sticky Rice pudding is the dessert of Nagaland. Popular street food like the Naga pork curry is totally different from any other meat-based curries served in the rest of India. It's cooked with unusual ingredients like fermented soybean and fermented bamboo shoots. A flavoursome delicacy, it's scrumptious and filling when served with steamed rice and fish paste.

The tribes in their costumes are camera friendly and only too happy to pose. Winter light is ideal for available light photography and the use of flash is best avoided. Among the many different folk dances, the most popular ones are the War Dance and Zeliang Dance. This year the village of Mezoma hosted a stone pulling contest where the entire village participates. It's to remember 142 years of the Anglo-Naga Peace Treaty at Mezoma.





Top: Chahhesang tribe Bottom: Kachari tribe



Clockwise from top left: Lady from Sumi tribe; Traditional Naga music, flute and drums; Angami lady; Sumi tribe

A digital DSLR or mirrorless camera with a 18~55mm or 24~70mm lens is a good choice. The 70-210mm or 50~140mm f2.8 is needed for more distant shots, especially the sport events and parades. A monopod could be useful in low light situations with longer zoom lenses. Bring several extra batteries to avoid charging. The power supply is erratic and we experienced burnouts of chargers and laptops connected to power outlets. Shoot to make every picture count as this is not the venue for a "spray & pray" photo shoot.

The best way to get to Kohima is a flight to Dimapur from Kolkata, followed by an 82 km and 3-hour car journey. Trains and buses are also available to Kohima. You will need an inner line permit to enter Nagaland which your host or travel agent will obtain for a fee. Hotels are basic and there are no 4&5-star ones. Numerous home stays are available. Book months ahead as finding a room gets impossible by

November. Make sure you use a good local travel company as these are somewhat remote areas and get a guide to accompany you. I used a company called North East Trails. The Directors David Solo and Rohan Abraham operate a resort close to the Hornbill venue. It's called "Camp David" and offers log cabins and tents. The company is excellent and specialises in travel within Northeast India states.

While in Kohima, take the opportunity to drive to the nearby villages to shoot the village life. Make sure you are accompanied by a local guide who can show you around. The terraced rice fields at sunrise or late afternoon can give you some fine landscape images. If you are a bird photographer try your hand at tracking down the elusive "Hornbill bird" in the forest of Nagaland... The roads to villages can hardly be described as roads. They are more like mud roads with landslides, rocks, stones and craters combined with water from the hillside wherever there is a stream.





Clockwise from top left: Zeilang tribe; Sumi tribal with his rice beer; Aozon tribe war dance.



The ride can be extremely bumpy and progress is slow. Not recommended for those with back or neck problems.

Top: War games; Bottom: Sumi tribal watching the show.

Besides the Hornbill festival, Nagaland offers trekking options, valley visits, craft centres and traditional villages. Early morning and evening it can get very cold with temperatures down to 2 deg C. The evening is best spent round a wood fire with other visitors sharing some rice beer.

For a travel photographer, the Hornbill festival is a rare opportunity to capture tribes in their traditional dress and experience tribal culture as it has existed unchanged for hundreds of years.

**Photographer Bio**

Retired company executive with a passion for travel, landscape and portraits. A dedicated Nikon user from early 1970's. Now gone mirrorless with two Fuji XE3 bodies and four lenses. Still shoot film, mainly FP4 and HP5 on my Rolleiflex 3.5f and Hasselblad 500 CM systems. Long time exhibitor with several awards and considerable published work in print and the web. Also interested in Alternative techniques of Cyanotypes, Bromoil, Gum Bichromate, Gum oil etc using large format internegatives.

**Website:** [www.pbbase.com/chubbix](http://www.pbbase.com/chubbix)





# Eight Days in Italy from the Italian Riviera to Tuscany, via the Polizia Ferroviaria and the British Embassy

PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS:  
Justin Cliffe ARPS



This is an account of a trip to Italy in May 2022, which had all the makings of an enjoyable week - Italy, family and friends, Italian food and wine, beautiful towns and a little bit of culture - but which didn't quite go according to plan.

The intention was for my wife and I to travel to Sestri Levante, just north of the Cinque Terra, spend four days there taking in a family birthday party, and then travel down to Lucca in Tuscany for a further four days prior to flying home.

All went well with the flight from London's Gatwick airport across to, and through Pisa airport. There we joined the train bound for Genoa, stopping off at the five Cinque Terra villages and Sestri Levante, our destination for the next four days. As we passed through the Cinque Terra, the train became more & more crowded as day-trippers returned to Genoa, which created a challenge for us with our largish suitcases, there being no luggage facilities on the train.

When we arrived at Sestri Levante, there was a scramble to get our seats and in doing so, I managed to leave my rucksack on the overhead parcel shelf. We extricated ourselves and got through and outside the station and it was then that I realised that I didn't have my rucksack with me.

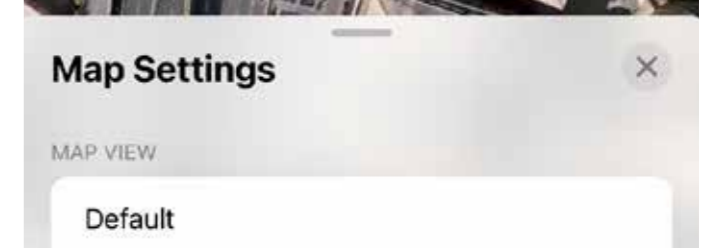
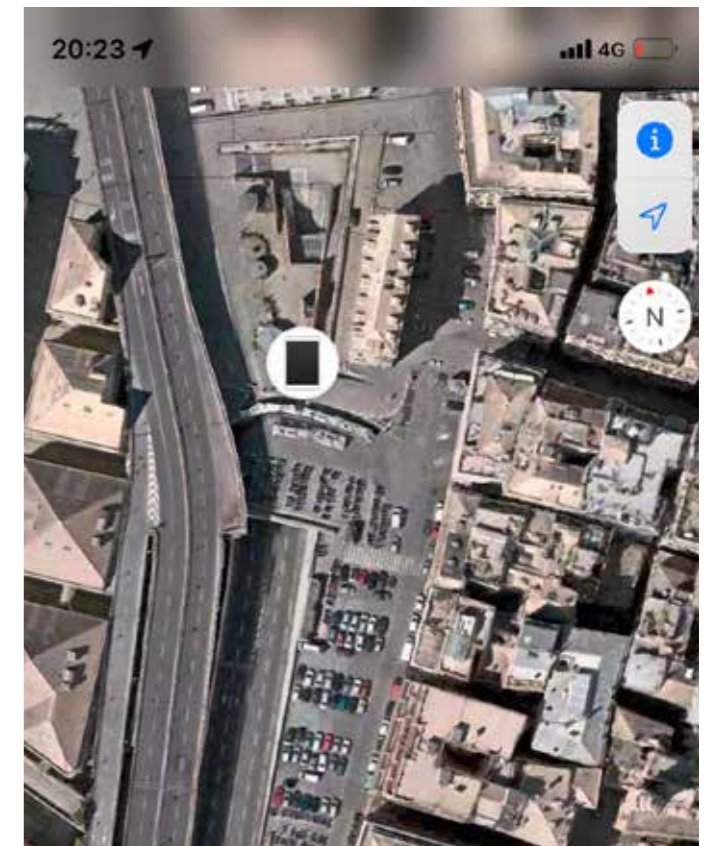
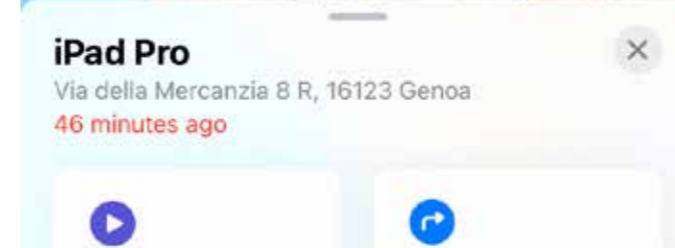
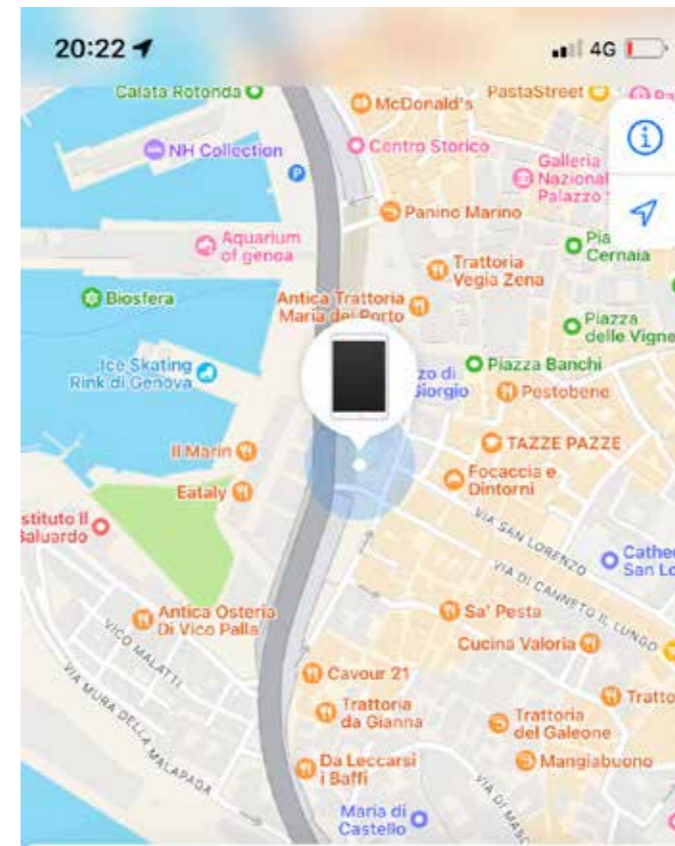
In it was my camera equipment, an iPad, other bits & pieces from the journey but worst of all... my passport, which I'd put in there earlier to avoid it getting bent or damaged.

I went back into the station and spoke with the one member of staff who was there in the ticket office. She contacted the guard on the train and asked him to walk through it and look for the rucksack. However, because it was so crowded, he was unable to do so - but promised to check the train upon its arrival in Genoa once everyone had disembarked. He did just this - and called back the ticket office clerk - but he had not been able to find the rucksack, which had clearly been removed from the train.

The next stage was to report the loss (which by then had become a theft) to the Polizia Ferroviaria (the Italian railway police) who, surprisingly, had a small office on the station. They were closing up for the day, said there was nothing that could be done at that time and told me to return the next morning.

Later that evening, having checked into our hotel and considered the implications of the loss, it occurred to me that my iPad, which was in the rucksack, was linked to my iPhone via Apple's 'Find My.' system. A quick check on the phone revealed that the iPad (and presumably / hopefully the rucksack and the rest of its contents) appeared in the docks area of Genoa, about 10 minutes away (by metro) from the station where our train had terminated its journey earlier that evening. This meant that if I got to Genoa, I could, hopefully, find and retrieve the rucksack. I put a 'Lost iPad' message on the lock screen, together with my contact details in the hope that someone would find it and let me know.

Opposite page -  
Top: Sestri Levante Station; Bottom: Find my phone screenshots







Sestri Levante

Very fortunately, my sister-in-law and her Italian husband Andrea were joining us for the weekend and so they made an early start the next morning from Milan, arriving in Sestri Levante at 8.30am. We drove back to the local station and went to see the railway police. After checking with their colleagues and the lost property office in Genoa as to whether anything had been handed in, they told us to go and see if we could, indeed, find the rucksack given we seemingly had its location.

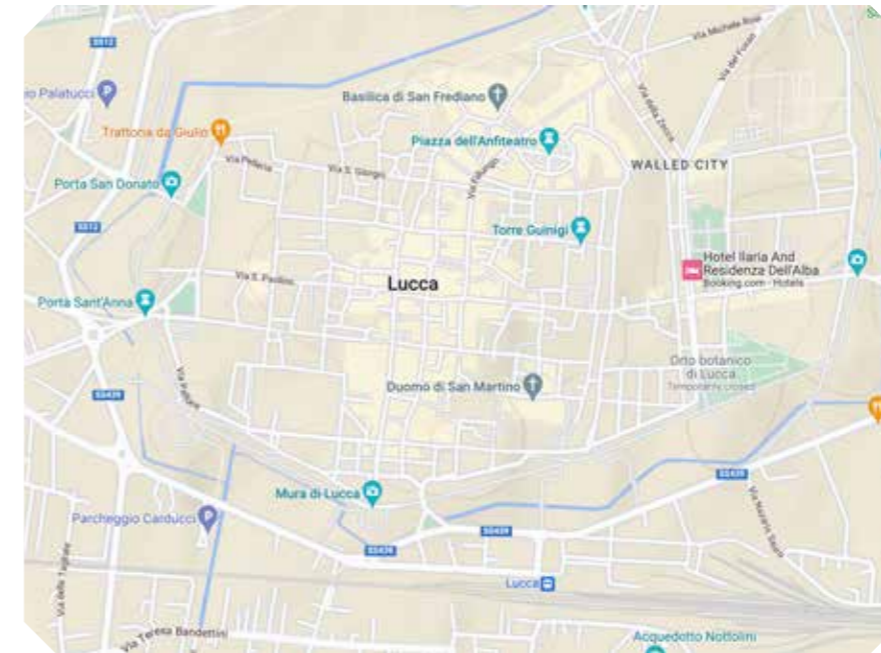
We jumped in the car and drove the 45 minutes it took to get to the centre of Genoa and park in the location where the iPad appeared to be. However, it transpired that the location being 'pinged' out by the iPad was above a metro station, rather more complicated than previously anticipated. Andrea and I therefore set about searching the area, going as far as checking the waste bins on the metro platform, without any success. We then had conversations with the official running the station security desk as well as a man in his news boutique on the piazza above, all to no avail.

We therefore headed to the terminus station - Genoa Bignole - for the Pisa line (there are a number of mainline stations in Genoa) where I completed a full loss / theft report, getting the vital police acknowledgement which would be required for the future insurance claim. We then returned to join the rest of the group in Sestri Levante, without the rucksack but with the all-important police report.

The next thing to consider was the fact that I no longer had a passport - and would clearly need one in order to be able to return to the UK. A check on the Gov.UK website took me to a 'lost passport' page, where I completed a form, and paid the £100 fee for an 'Emergency Travel Document' ('ETD') which, they noted, would be available for collection from the British Consulate in Rome or Milan within 3 business days. I specified Rome as that was going to be marginally closer to our next location, Lucca, than Milan.

Finally, as we'd not been able to find the iPad, I activated the 'remote-erase' function, meaning that anyone switching it on would automatically cause the iPad to do a complete erase and factory reset, thereby preventing any access to the data and information on it.

These formalities completed, there was little else to be done, other to enjoy the birthday weekend and Sestri Levante. It's a lovely coastal town, with some great walks in the hills above, including the Punta Manara, an excellent hiking path around a promontory, with good views back to Sestri Levante and round to the neighbouring town of Riva Trigoso. By now I was resigned to not having my Fuji camera and lenses and that I would therefore be taking all my photographs on my iPhone XR (which has a 12mp camera). This would produce OK images but I decided to use the Lightroom Mobile camera app, as that would provide higher quality DNG / Raw image files than the iPhone's standard JPEG (or HEIC) output.



Left: Map of Lucca - Google; Right: Emergency Travel Document

At 10.30am on the Monday morning, as we were preparing to leave Sestri Levante and get the train down to Lucca, I received an email to tell me that my ETD was ready for collection in Rome - super-efficiency from the British Consulate.

This time the rail journey was very straightforward - and we were able to enjoy the coastal scenery on one side of the train and the world-renowned marble quarries of Carrara, used by no less than Michelangelo, as we travelled down to Lucca.

After checking into our hotel, we went out to explore the delightful city. For those who've not been there before, it's known for the well-preserved Renaissance walls encircling its historic centre and its cobblestone streets. Broad, tree-lined pathways top these massive 16th- and 17th-century ramparts which, with a circumference of around 4kms, make it ideal for walking & cycling. Inside the walls, there are 100 churches, quirky little streets, wonderful old buildings and a piazza, formed on what was the Roman amphitheatre.

Lucca's old centre is the perfect walking city, with narrow streets that are pretty well entirely pedestrianised - it's possible to walk from one side to the other in less than 25 minutes. That said, this is rarely done given there's so much to see - and so many little cafes and tavernas to stop off at - that one should allow considerably longer to do the place justice.

However, before enjoying Lucca, I needed to collect my ETD and so took the decision to make an early start on the Tuesday morning to travel down to Rome. I was on the platform at 6.45am ready for the train to Florence, where I had to change for the Rome train. The journey was straightforward and, for the Florence to Rome leg on the Frecciarossa high-speed train, comfortable and rapid - reaching - according to the in-carriage information screen, 250kph / 150mph at times.

Arriving at Rome's main Termini railway station, it was then just a 10-minute walk over to the British Embassy. After extensive checks and scans, I was escorted through to the Consulate where my ETD was ready for collection.

Formalities completed and ETD safely in hand, it was then just a question of leaving the splendid Embassy grounds and returning to the station, where I grabbed some lunch and did the return journey back to Lucca, arriving at the hotel at about 2.00pm. A productive morning - at least I could now get back home to the UK at the end of our trip, in 3 days time.

HOWEVER, this was not the end of my challenges as, three weeks later, we were due to travel to the South of France for a big family reunion & belated birthday celebration which had been postponed twice due to Covid.

I therefore needed to obtain a new passport - as my ETD was valid for only one journey - and it would be taken from me upon arrival back at Heathrow. The problem was that there were, at the time, significant delays in getting replacement passports, with the average waiting time being around 10 - 12 weeks, far too long to enable me to make the family trip to France.

The only way I was therefore going to be able to get one within the next 3 weeks was via the Passport Office's '1 week Fast Track' service - which required booking an appointment with one of their offices for an interview and form check. All seemingly straightforward - until it came to getting the required appointment. Every time I went online to book one, the message came up 'No appointments available, please try later'.

Finally, 36 hours later, whilst sitting at a cafe in the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro, and randomly hitting the 'refresh' key on my phone, I was able to get an appointment in 10 days' time - with the choice of





Lucca street scenes

either London or Birmingham. The booking was quickly made, the Fast Track fee (£142) was paid and I had my appointment in London - which should, allowing for their 1-week delivery 'promise', get me my passport in time for our flight to Marseilles in three weeks' time.

Huge relief and, with everything now sorted, we were able to enjoy the delightful Lucca - walking & cycling around the 4km walls, wandering the streets - and, for me, doing some street photography. This was a great way to appreciate the old saying - that the best camera, for whatever you are photographing, is the one you have with you - in this instance, my iPhone.

The Adobe Lightroom app worked well - there's an Auto function but there's also the ability to set the camera to the 'Pro' function, giving complete control over the exposure and focus settings. Each image is created as a DNG file and then, once any editing has been done, uploaded, via Wi Fi back at the hotel, to the Adobe cloud and thence to Lightroom Classic on my desktop computer at home. A very simple, and effective, workflow.

There is also the added advantage, using a phone camera, that it is unobtrusive and no one takes any notice of you taking photographs on the street.

On one afternoon, we did a trip up to a local vineyard in the hills 30 minutes' drive above Lucca, just outside



a delightful village, Montecarlo. There we met the winemaker who gave us a tour of the vineyard followed by an excellent, and extensive, tasting of the different wines that they produced. Being only a small organisation, they only produce for the local market but did export small quantities around the world - so we took advantage and ordered a case of wine to be delivered to our home in the UK. After a walk around the hilltop village, we travelled back down the hill to our hotel.

On the Friday, we left Lucca and took the train back down to Pisa - and on to the airport via the Pisa Mover tram. The ETD worked going through passport control at the airport and upon arrival at Heathrow, where it was taken from me. A very straightforward journey back home, for which we were grateful.

A week later, I, along with many others who were also booked in at the same time as me, had my appointment at the Passport Office in London. The interview itself took just 5 minutes, standing at a booth, whilst my form was examined and everything checked. All approved, I returned home.

As promised, one week later, I received a message advising that my new passport had been despatched and would be arriving the next day. Eventually, 4 days later, TNT delivered it - and we were able to fly out to Marseille 4 days later.

## Afterword

Fortunately, I had taken out specific camera insurance with Glover & Howe. They were excellent, confirming within 4 hours of my submitting a claim, that I should go ahead and replace the lost equipment. This I did, enabling me to travel to France with my 'proper' camera and lenses, as opposed to just my iPhone. They even sourced a Fuji X100V camera for me which was, seemingly, unavailable across Europe. Definitely recommended.

My travel insurance company, from who I was claiming the non-photographic equipment and lost passport costs, were significantly less efficient in that it took them 6 months to finally settle my claim, the delay being due to the fact that "We have been continuing to experience far higher levels of claims and enquiries than normal, and this has resulted in much longer settlement times". I certainly won't be using them again.

For quite some time afterwards, my iPad continued to 'ping' away from the same location near the Genoa docks until, presumably, the battery went flat and the signal ceased.

Lucca street scenes







Lucca street scenes

### Lessons learnt

- When travelling on buses or trains, keep your rucksack / bag & valuables at your feet - not up on the parcel shelf.
- Keep passport & valuables in a waist / 'bum' bag (which I now note are commonplace amongst European & US travellers). I bought an excellent one from Cotswold Outdoor.
- Keep scanned copies of passports and other key documents on your phone - this really helped when it came to applying for both the Emergency Travel Document as well as the Police Incident Report.
- Maintain decent photographic insurance as household or travel policies may not provide the level of cover that may, in the end, be required.
- Read the small print of what is actually insured. My travel insurance did not cover as much, in terms of value, as I had anticipated, e.g. single item limits as well as costs incurred in replacing the passport.
- The iPhone has an excellent camera, particularly so when making use of the Lightroom Mobile app and the discipline of just using this, without other, or zoom, lenses, was a good one. One can now also add the app to the 'lock' screen so that it can be used without having to unlock the phone, find the Lightroom Mobile app and then open the camera.
- Travel light – we bought smaller cases for subsequent trips and now, where possible, rely on carry-on bags for our European travels.

### Postscript

- Six weeks after returning from Italy, I received an email from the Polizia Ferroviaria in La Spezia, 100kms south of Genoa, to say that my passport, in its wallet with other documentation had been handed in. They were unable to say when or where it had been found. By then, I had replaced my passport and so I asked them just to securely destroy the passport and everything else that they'd received.
- 2 months later, in October, a message popped up on my iPhone to indicate that my iPad had been connected to a charger. I was surprised to see that it was now in the Dominican Republic - in a house near a small town in the centre of the country. Fortunately, it had not been switched on and it was still awaiting the remote-Erase to activate. This situation lasted for about a month, since when nothing has been seen or heard from it.

For more images of Lucca from this trip – go to <https://justincliffe.com/travel/lucca>.

If you have any queries or comments about what I've written, please email me at: [justin.cliffe@gmail.com](mailto:justin.cliffe@gmail.com)





# Budapest to Bucharest



PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS BY  
Susan Stuart



It was (probably) a cold February evening, when, fed up with commuting and darkness, we sat in front of the fire and got out the Atlas. As children, the Cold War inhibited excursions to Eastern Europe, that land behind the curtain, but it stirred in us an incipient fascination for our adventuring wanderlust and ability to see beyond the single land to the multitude of nation states and stories within. Having settled on Hungary and Romania (this often happens, the vote split between two adjoining destinations), we started planning. Our aim was to select a handful of destinations, no more, linked by car, train and our own two feet, that encapsulate the essence of these places: beautiful, historic centres, a way of life that is disappearing, stunning landscapes, crafts and contrasts between the old Eastern Europe and the emerging new path.

Budapest, arrived at in dead of night so that we could awake the next day alive to the mighty Danube, chiselled crenelations and central European s(t)olidity. Up, first, to the heights of the Pest side, to get our bearings, before relaxing upriver to Esterzgom. Having wandered (partly via Tuk-tuk) across the pockmarked capital city, studded with memories of pogrom and Art Deco, embracing a new vibrant pulse, fortified by cheese, salami and lemonade, we relaxed in deckchairs overlooking the river and the bath complex over a twilight beer.

Via train, through the sun-bleached plains to ancient Pecs, each station master sporting a red and blue cap, we were dazzled by sunflowers and heat haze. As befits the former Empire, expansive squares, ornate buildings and ladles of goulash wafted us towards the paprika museum, the tile making history museum and the telecom tower. A mega-organ greeted us in the Church/ Mosque: Christian, Muslim via Turkish occupation and back again. Baked, we braved the film-noir station ticket office and the rusty rail-replacement bus in search of Villany (really!) and wine. Cooled by the cellar museums and a game of guess the wine-making implement from the Hungarian description, we sampled. So rich, so smooth. No wonder it's not exported (much). It's probably why the

local policeman and his side kick were sampling the red at 4 pm too. This is where our German started to be useful, as many of the elder generation had it as their second language. It's also how we learned that the vines were all on the other side of the hill from the village, as we'd been mystified why there were none!

Having exchanged views on pretty much everything with the local car hire team, and having finally managed to cross the Danube, we arrived in Gyula. In this heat a bath was required. Water slides, pummelling water spouts and glumphs of mud later, we emerged sulphurous, and, appropriately primed to repel any border crossing issues, awoke at the crack of dawn to cross the border by train. A little shunting 2 car number sidled us up to the border and an open platform of a provincial station at Salonta. 7 minutes to connect with the onward intercity. Our passports disappeared into the border guard's office. The guard stopped us hopping onto the platform from our no-mans-land. 5 minutes later, our passports were returned and we sprinted over to the connecting service. Sinously, it sidled its way from one riverbank to the other, weaving between the hills, small villages, church spires, hayricks, Romanian production plants and uniformed red-capped rail staff until, dark long since having enveloped us, we arrived at Braşov.

A gem of a Saxon three-walled city, with towers having been requested of the guilds (including the feltmakers) to repel Ottoman attacks, it was compact, ancient, yet lively. Communist chimneys and tower blocks appeared like moraine at the foot of the valley. We scampered up the ramparts, round the cathedral and through the alleys of ancient houses. Then we set off for rural Romania. Our route would take us northwards, through ancient villages and rural hills, before ending up at the amazing Carpathian monasteries. Firstly, bears. Low light and rain (and no flash) made capturing these amazing creatures difficult but we watched, entranced, as the singletons and mothers with cubs came out into the clearing. A solitary fox also came to investigate, wary of the bears.



IMAGES  
OPPOSITE PAGE: A bloody history, Not my day THIS PAGE : The never ending organ; Sunflowers





IMAGES (clockwise from top)  
THIS PAGE: Romanian Hillside; Bear with cubs; Charcoal; Eating Mamaliga; Making Mamaliga; Charcoal  
OPPOSITE PAGE: Viscri; Brasov; Romanian village life

Onwards, to rainclouds, shafts of sunlight over ridges and a woodland. The wisp of smoke hinted at a bonfire, but instead we found some proponents of the dying art of charcoal-making. Raking over their embers as if coaxing the wisps, they glid across the embers and climbed down from one platform to another as practised soothsayers of this mystic art.

Next, shepherds. The flocks of sheep are half owned by the village and the shepherds look after them year-round, selling wool, wool products, cheese and milk. We lunched with them on mamaliga, a delicious molten cheesy-polenta encased concoction that put my husband sufficiently off-guard that he was unwittingly (and to the amusement of all) reincarnated as a shepherd...

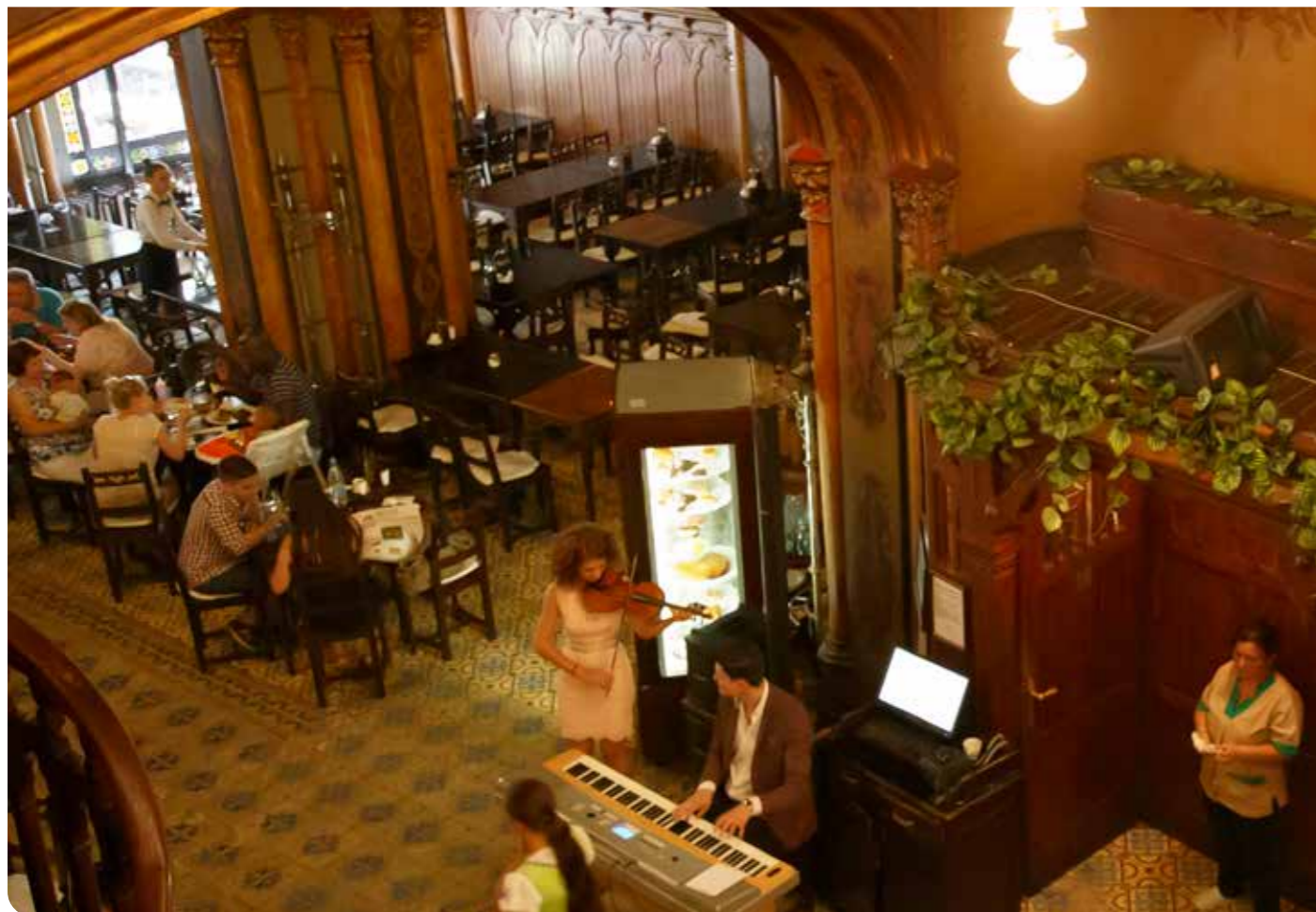
We were travelling north, and backwards in time. Towards traditional Saxon and Székely villages, with family homesteads, often deserted, where the horse and cart were as current as motorised equipment. Lovingly maintained churches, Germanic, with no-one to tend them aside from the older generation. A victim of depopulation, and particularly the German law that allowed all who could claim ancestry to take up residence there following reunification, a

generation has left these hinterlands. The elderly don't understand the draw of modern life and the rejection of the old ways. At Viscri, we met Alice, who together with her daughter Catherine, had fought to restore the village and to protect it as a Unesco site. With her old German, and our stuttering attempts, her love for her church and village shone through, together with her recollection of old beekeeping methods!

Stunning towns, with a few globules of tourists stuck to the main sites, we often sought out the local eyrie for an overview and, as always, local food and lodging wherever possible. Gabor gypsy families have taken to a more settled way of life, with their blood becoming intermingled with local families, and their mesmerising tales passed on to us outsiders by strong women, who'd stayed on at school in defiance of fathers' wishes, now living multi-generationally with daybeds for grandma and wedding crockery and finery on display. Those who are sliding beneath the radar following dissent in former communist times can make a living off-grid, still wary of too many ears and eyes. Factories and industrial complexes may sometimes crank on, but modern manufacturers set up replacement European sites within the plains.







IMAGES (clockwise from top):  
 THIS PAGE: Monastery; Bucharest coffee shop  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: Steps to Ceaușescu's Palace in Bucharest;; Ceaușescu's Dream; Ceaușescu's balcony



Beyond them, the stunning Bucovina monasteries, frescoed to within an inch of their lives, telling the biblical tales through images alone. Hiding from the elements under their slate skirts, each focused on graphic depictions of scenes from the bible – sometimes very graphic.

Finally, the night train down to Bucharest. A city that is emerging from its past, with the contrast of an egotistical extravagance of a 1000-room palace designed to show off Romania's industries. Empty

squares, marbled staircases and yet a city that is forging a new future. Courtyards, cosy cafés, bustling pedestrian streets, and a younger generation that is multi-lingual, outward looking and entrepreneurial.

Heading off the beaten track presented us with a much deeper understanding of the region, its dynamics and the sense of a set of resilient, enduring places that managed to straddle a timeless, natural world with unique cities, preserving historic buildings, communist edifices and modern outlooks.



# Away from the Temples

PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS:  
Paul Sansome  
Website: [www.paulsansome.com](http://www.paulsansome.com)



In January, I managed to lead my first tour to the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia. There is no doubt that we benefitted from there being low visitor numbers. Tourism was apparently at only 30% of pre-Covid levels. I enjoyed those temples that had the element of being enveloped by the jungle, particularly, Ta Prohm and Preah Khan. However, I wanted to concentrate in this article on another option for visitors to the Siem Reap area; seeing the villages on the giant lake of Tonlé Sap.

Those with only a limited amount of time in the area may have to make a choice between the stilted village of Kampong Khleang and the floating village of Chong Kneas so I hope my observation can help. One confusion is that I have seen both described as floating villages but this description is only applicable to Chong Kneas.



Girl in the land-based village near Chong Kneas.



Kampong Khleang from the boat.





A boatman in Kampong Khleang.



The fishing activity is much more evident in Kampong Khleang.



Being in the village allows more time for composition in Kampong Khleang.

Chong Kneas is truly a floating village such that it even moves location through the seasons as the water level of the lake rises in the wet season and recedes in the dry season. A 20-minute boat journey along the Tonlé Sap river brings you to the massive lake – big enough to only have a watery horizon. The first thing that is going to appeal to a photographer in the village is colour. The floating homes are small and cheaply constructed, yet their owners certainly take pride in presenting them to the thousands of tourists visiting through the year. I do not know to what extent the presentation is caused by the tourism. Indeed, in several ways this visit was a little unsettling. Firstly, it does not feel right driving past people's homes pointing the camera at them. Now this is something that I do walking through villages around the world but the difference here is that there is no interaction with the people, no asking for consent, just a long lens picking out elements of their lives. I can never bring myself to photograph people from a car for the same reason. Secondly, it was not clear how the people were benefitting from our visit. I expected some element of the fees paid for our boat trip to go to some useful purpose in the community. Apparently, this does not happen. The largest group in the village are Vietnamese, stateless and with no rights. However, there was a lot of friendly waving from the children and, generally, most adults were carrying on with their lives without paying any attention to the tourist boats.

Instead of returning to the boat port I asked that the driver let us ashore in a community based along the bank that we had passed on the way out. This was far more rewarding as we were able to interact with the people and have a bit of fun with the kids. Every step of the walk back through this busy village added value to this excursion and I thoroughly recommend that any photographer visiting the floating village also do this.

The alternative village to visit is Kampong Khleang, which is accessed via a long dusty track, seeming endless in a motorbike tuktuk! You actually need to buy an entrance ticket to this place which covered a motor boat trip and a canoe experience in a mangrove forest but also suggested more of a community enterprise. I was told that this village of stilted homes is prettier in the wet season, with reflections and with you being closer to the living floors. However, seeing these towering wooden constructions from down below seemed to make it a more unique place to visit and photograph. You can, again, ask that the boat stop to let you walk through the village, meeting some of the people. Had I not done this I feel that it would have been more of a superficial visit.





Both locations offer a terrible tourist activity of visiting a floating crocodile farm. Fundamentally, no thank you! I also didn't feel that the canoe in the mangroves offered much interest.

Since childhood holidays on the UK's inland waterways, I have always enjoyed small boat trips so, even with some reservations, I enjoyed both these visits. They are unusual communities offering a valuable travel experience and provide a welcome break from the temples! If I could only return to one of them then it would certainly be Kampong Khleang. I think that with more time, more compelling photographs would emerge there and, importantly, I just felt more comfortable photographing the people there.

Top: There are many opportunities to photograph the boat activity in Chong Kneas. Bottom Left: A girl making food deliveries to the floating homes of Chong Kneas. Bottom Right: A typical home in Chong Kneas.





# Alfama Revisited

PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS BY  
Mike Longhurst, FRPS

Sometime in early 2000, a set of coincidences came together to forever connect me with the old Moorish quarter of Lisbon: Alfama. With some hours to spare before a business meeting in the city, I did what I often did: asked at the hotel reception for a city map, looked for where the streets were tightest and wiggliest, hailed a cab and said "Take me there".

The driver said best he could do was to drop me at the Sé, Lisbon Cathedral, which sits at what is effectively a gateway to Alfama and I started my wandering from there. An uphill climb towards St George's Castle and then steeply downwards into the winding depths of the district that had been spared destruction by the earthquake of 1755 that had flattened most of the city. It was the earthquake, I later learned, that accounted for the beauty and modernity of areas like nearby Baixa and Chiado, but the destruction the quake failed to achieve, time and neglect was now achieving in Alfama.

What I saw was decay on a scale rarely seen in a European city, but also a kind of authenticity, even faded beauty there and perhaps a lifestyle that is also not often seen. Tile-clad buildings that evoked a grander age, arches, steep little staircases everywhere and all punctuated with magnificent churches, convents and basilicas that stood out in stark contrast to the rotting fabric of the ordinary houses that surrounded them. I shot a couple of rolls and went off to my meeting, at the end of which my local company manager, a rather creative soul, said "Get in the car, I want to take you somewhere".

In no time we were back in Alfama. He waved a hand around and said, "I love this place, but EU money is going to destroy it. Could you photograph it before it is gone?" Indeed, one could see scaffolding going up in a few places and work starting on renovating

what could be saved and pulling down what could not. I confessed that I had already had a stab at it, but agreed to return to take a closer look.

I did a check online on what photography might have been done there and searched the photo libraries, but found only some simple record shots by a German photographer.

Encouraged by one of my first shots winning a competition a week or two later, I booked myself into a tiny lodging behind the castle and went back down for what I assumed would be a final visit. It was not to be anything like the last, the fates soon saw to that in the shape of Rodger Reynolds FRPS, who, while leafing through some of my work, picked out a couple of the shots and said "Here, this is what you do. You could make that an F project".

I hesitated to ask the great man what it was about the work that made it uniquely mine, or where it might fit in to RPS genres, but simply pressed on visiting when I could and shooting what to me typified Alfama and set it apart from other old quarters; a mix of details, visual art images from the colours and dilapidation and some wider scenes.

It slowly dawned on me that most photographers from the more developed world visiting such a place would immediately switch into social conscience mode and want to show the horror and degradation of it to shock people and try to instigate change, but I was doing the opposite - eulogising what was there, exposing the beauty of it and preserving it from change. I'm sure nobody can claim to be the first at anything but, certainly to many, what I was doing was a very different take from what others might have done. I can only assume my upbringing in some rather dingy parts of the old Empire had conditioned me to not be revolted by what I found in Alfama.



ALFAMA THEN  
A scene of decay



ALFAMA THEN  
Endless Steps



ALFAMA THEN  
Too visual for travel category, but typical of the place



ALFAMA THEN  
Arches and steep staircase



The prospect of an F at the end of it and some helpful advice and guidance from Chris Palmer FRPS rather transformed what I was already doing for my local manager and added considerable time to it all, time which saw many of my locations gone, or greatly changed long before I had finished. But the project received a stronger focus when I had the benefit of some mentoring from Paul Foley FRPS, who explained how the RPS Travel category actually worked and that it required greater context and particularly the interaction of local people with the environment that I had been shooting until then more from a visual art point of view. It was a great intervention that I learned a lot from. Until then, my people and animals had been little more than visual punctuation in urban scenes, but now they became integral to the Alfama story, at least the RPS section of it. I had been too focused on the changing topography and ignored the effect on lifestyle and tended to regard "Travel" as no more than Street, Urban, Visual Art, or Landscape etc, that happened to be in someone else's back yard. At Paul's suggestion I put on a wide-angle lens and went back down to see a rather different place and to challenge all I had done so far.

Over the years following the award, I did drop in to Alfama for brief visits, but have to say, didn't really scratch the surface of what was happening there, but had it in mind that I really should go back and see how much had changed. Covid lockdown the day I was due to go in 2020 meant I couldn't do 20 years on from the start, but 2022 was the 20th anniversary of the conversion of my project into a more coherent sociological one, so in July I gave myself three days on the streets to re-assess what had taken me 30 days spread over three years, two decades before.

Of course, I wanted to re-visit as many as possible of my old locations, both the RPS panel ones and some of the details that meant so much to my wider project, but that did not fit RPS criteria, but I really didn't know if I would re-shoot any of them or not. Probably not, I thought, as at least most of the RPS ones relied on decisive moments that, almost by definition, could not be replicated even at the time, let alone now.

So, I gave myself a very open brief to take a few "after" shots to compare with the "before", but also to shoot with new eyes and reflect the present realities, whatever they might be. Superficially, what struck me was that the rebuilding and refurbishment was far from complete. Overall, living standards, at least externally, looked far better, but as some buildings had come up in appearance, others had gone down and now needed major attention. The beautifully tiled houses were mostly still there and nothing really jarred in what had been built to replace what had been torn down. In short, if the intention had ever been to create a picture-book reconstructed "old town", such as might be seen in, say, Duesseldorf or Warsaw, it had failed to a great extent. There was still a lot of decay and on hot days, you could still smell the inadequate sewerage system. It is all still on the side of many hills and takes great stamina to get up and down the dozens of tiny staircases. The alleys are still narrow and all sense of direction is easily lost in them.



ALFAMA THEN  
People become an integral part



ALFAMA THEN  
Using people to add context



ALFAMA THEN  
Wider angles to give greater context



ALFAMA NOW  
What was not decayed then, often is now



ALFAMA NOW  
Different lady, same arch, looking rather better



ALFAMA NOW  
The steps are as steep as ever



ALFAMA NOW  
Narrow alleys and plenty of cobbles



There were moments when I could have been back 20 years ago, like when I found a little alley called Beco de Laje that was still virtually as it had been. It was a spot I had made a point of shooting on every trip, drawn to it by the cobbles that seemed to spew down the hill. On about the sixth visit, I had been rewarded by a door opening and a lady sweeping her step, snap, thank you ma'am. This time, on only the second visit I caught her (or someone very like her) hanging out the washing. No time to get to the right spot, just grab it quick, it's there for a second.

On the other hand, places that had intrigued me were reduced to nothingness by rebuilding, like a block above the Lago do Salvador. I had loved the design made by crumbling plaster and had suddenly seen a young man hang out a towel with a similar colour palette to the walls, then perch himself in a window. I was too high up and to the left, so had had to rush down to an alley, all the while hoping the scene would hold for a few more seconds. Now, I found it plain white and nothing worth shooting at all.

As it was July, there were a lot of decorations left over from the June St Antonio Festival cluttering the view and I suspected they might remain until they fell down, but possibly the most immediate and striking visual change I found was the appearance of far more graffiti and street art, which now seems to adorn the walls of many of the more dilapidated quarters of European cities, especially those awaiting refurbishment. It is an open question whether this amounts in its own way to improvement, but I believe it can and does in Alfama.

However for the photographer, stealing someone else's art is probably far less honourable than creating one's own art out of their decay. Debate...

So, have my old friend's fears of the area being destroyed been realised? Well topographically, no, but in terms of lifestyle, possibly far more so. The first thing that struck me was that the volume of tourism had grown exponentially. There were always tourist destinations there of course, but mostly along the famous No 28 tram route from the Sé cathedral up to the Portas do Sol viewpoints. From there, tourists gazed over the roofs of the main parts of Alfama, rarely venturing down, or looked west through palm trees to the Sao Vicente monastery, Pantheon, or Santo Estevao church. Then they might have turned uphill the short distance to the castle and its viewpoints to the west.

But, where the tourism has brought greater prosperity, it also seems to have brought profound sociological change. I of course survey through a lens and only had time for brief conversations with residents and visitors, but it seemed clear that where there once were dozens of little vegetable or fish shops, serving the local population, there is now a plethora of souvenir shops, craft shops, cafés and restaurants. And, whilst the cafés and restaurants seem to be mostly locally owned, the majority of the souvenir shops are owned by Bangladeshi immigrants, one of whom told me he had only been open for 15 days, his friend a few doors along likewise.



ALFAMA THEN & NOW  
Surely not the same lady

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP  
ALFAMA THEN & NOW Scene that had excited me twenty years ago; NOW Trams thread their way through tight streets; NOW Another Bangladeshi owned souvenir shop; NOW Street art is everywhere.



Where indigenous Portuguese people would be fulfilling many of the tasks around the area, today there are noticeably more African faces, so the once distinct and homogeneous Alfama has become far more cosmopolitan and multiracial.

From the detachment of my lens, that all seemed quite amicable and if there are underlying tensions or resentments anywhere, I could not see them. The major difficulty for me was in spotting the indigenous people and even more in trying to portray their lifestyle, changed or not. Some told me the owners of the new cafés were not the original house owners who had simply gone into business, so the magnet of tourism might well have attracted an entrepreneurial class that was not there before. The Bangladeshis would certainly be obvious examples of that, but are not the whole story.

Inevitably, taking a reportage or documentary approach, one found oneself shooting more of the tourist experience of the place, rather than the local population's that featured in my original project. As time wore on and I had done all the obvious shots and my feet became more tired, I started to slow down, sit, watch and spot the original locals that remained. However, it was impossible to tie them to lifestyle as I had done before, when they owned the little shops and these became meeting places. Through the camera lens, they were in the scene, but not intimately joined to it in a way that describes lifestyle. They passed through, more than interacted. A door would open and whereas a fairly elderly local person might have emerged before, today it seemed it could be a tourist family who have rented the renovated apartment, an immigrant, a young trendy local person, or some of the remaining older generation. The person sipping coffee in a sidewalk café might be a tourist, or just as easily a local person, there seemed to be great crossover in lifestyle experience.

I was grateful for having taken so many of the "could be anywhere" detail shots in the original study that had not been deemed to be in line with RPS requirements. I knew they helped to define the area and its culture, even if RPS Travel criteria said they didn't and it was some of these that pointed to more subtle changes. I had noticed that many houses had a tile plaque of their patron saint Antonio on the wall and that custom was to hang a plastic bag full of water beside it on hot days to keep the flies off him. 20 years on, many of the tiles seemed to be still there, but on the hottest days of the year, I saw no protection for the saint.

Many of the front doors split half way up and there would be a ledge on the bottom half where the elderly, ladies mostly, but men too, would lean and watch the world go by, conversing with neighbours and friends as they passed. Often, all you'd see was an arm, saying "I'm here, stop and talk". Today, many of the doors still split, a few ledges are there, but with far fewer resting their elbows on them. There are still doorstep conversations, mostly in the cooler mornings and evenings, when Alfama still belongs to the local people until the tourists filter down around 10-12am, after which, the area goes through several stages. The tourists wander through singly, or zoom through on motorised scooters or unicycles, which then seem to be abandoned to clutter the streets.

Then the conducted tours arrive, large groups following the leader and pausing in shady spots for a lecture, or personalised tours for couples. It was by following one of these groups into a blind alley that I found the tiny Jewish quarter for the first time. As commemorated elsewhere, thousands of Jews of Lisbon were massacred by Christian zealots in 1506.



ALFAMA NOW  
A door opens and it is just as likely to be a young visitor who emerges



ALFAMA NOW  
It is clear that not all those enjoying an easier lifestyle are tourists



ALFAMA NOW  
A small Jewish quarter has survived



ALFAMA NOW  
Group leaders find a shady spot



ALFAMA NOW  
Fewer people ready to chat



ALFAMA NOW  
No water for the saint



ALFAMA NOW  
Tourist mobility



Then, as lunchtime approaches, the restaurants come to life, tables and chairs appear out front, and huge parasols go up. As evening approaches, the tiny streets and alleys fill with more tables and chairs, as the whole town becomes one big catering facility. Where once it might have taken a little courage to venture at night, now the sheer number of tourists heading down into the depths of Alfama provides security. The restaurants always offered Fado entertainment, the local blues singing, but now there are simply far more of them and they compete with the street restaurants to win tourists. One of the singers told me there are now far more performers and interest in Fado has expanded greatly, so one aspect of culture that has received a boost.

Elsewhere, some aspects of local lifestyle do seem to be dying and I can only guess it is due to a younger profile of inhabitants. I did spot one example of an elderly lady lowering a shopping bag down several storeys to her friend, which used to be a familiar sight, but today it was a plastic carrier bag, not wicker basket.

A sad consequence of Covid is not only that so many people still hide behind masks, but the area has been losing a battle against rubbish, which is piled everywhere. I did see gangs of workers with black sacks doing something about it, but I'm sure the nature of the place makes it difficult to keep up with. The washing still hangs outside in many places, but I suspect many more now have spin dryers. Cats still lounge in the sun and dogs get walked, rather than simply let out to wander, but pooper scoopers do not seem to have found their way into common use yet, which is a pity. But tourists seem to love the place and to see so many of the houses now let out as Airbnb holiday accommodation was a real surprise.

Would I be able to go down there now and do a successful F panel? I really don't think so. Certainly not by simply walking about and seeing it through a lens, at least. It seemed impossible to connect the people to the place and establish any coherent impression of lifestyle. The Asian and African immigrants are now an important element, as are the tourists. It is impossible to detach any of them, but together they portray a range of experiences that I don't think have great coherence to them. But of course, it is up to someone to prove me wrong and I'd love them to try. I'm sure things were always easier and better in the past, I have heard that everywhere I go.



ALFAMA NOW  
Above - Restaurants appear from nowhere; Right - Chic place to live

I am a great believer in time and place. Photography only remains relevant if the time and place are discernible, then it remains fixed in time. You can't relate the shots to another era, but can only evaluate them with full understanding of the time and place in which they were created. Take away that stamping and they become semi-abstract and of aesthetic value only. However, value itself is relative. Yes, I achieved a Fellowship twenty years ago, but did I succeed in preserving any of what Alfama was for the local people, which after all was the real task? Sadly not. By the time I had finished the project, my artistic friend had moved on and his replacements took one look and exclaimed "Oh it makes us feel ashamed! It is the old Portugal we are trying to forget."

There is in fact a society for historical photography in Lisbon, but they were similarly unimpressed. Far too recent, I'm guessing, come back in 100 years or so...

It is a conundrum that Rui Palha, Lisbon's great photographer knows only too well. Rui started work just as I was finishing in 2003, but I think with fairly abstract images until he too discovered the value of the visual history of his native city. In an exchange of emails a couple of years ago, he bemoaned the fact that his photography was of no interest locally. He has been celebrated all over the world, but can't get an exhibition in Lisbon, his book is out of print, with a few copies for collectors only. However, I think there is light at the end of the tunnel for us both - there are definite signs that what Alfama was and is, is coming to be of greater visual interest for the Portuguese, rather than simply historical notes for tourists.

In recent years picture plaques of notable as well as very ordinary people have been appearing all over as part of an apparent attempt to preserve what is or was. With the growth of middle-class artistic sensibilities, historical photos are being used for display on walls in the more Bohemian parts of the town.

Maybe it won't take 100 years after all and my photographic record will have some value.



ALFAMA NOW Clockwise from top left  
Rubbish can obstruct; The old way preserved and valued; The Steps of Santo Estevao are still an Alfama icon; Carla Linhares entertains diners with local Fado; A rare sight these days - an elderly lady hoists shopping her friends have bought her; and Plaques show traditional life and people



# Armenia - Then and Now



PHOTOGRAPHY & WORDS:  
Pia Thommes LRPS



Republic Square 1995



Republic Square 2023

When my sister Alice and I tried to think of destinations for another trip together we very quickly came to an agreement: visit our friend Heike, who is living in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Together we had been there 27 years previously, shortly after the country had become independent from the Soviet Union and now we wanted to see how things had changed. Alice travelled from Berlin, I came from Manchester, we met up in Istanbul and continued the flight to Yerevan, where we arrived at 3am.

In 1995 the country was in a pretty bad state. Large parts had been destroyed in a major earthquake just a few years previously, it had become independent from the USSR only in 1991, energy supplies were severely disrupted, as the only power station had been turned off in the aftermath of the earthquake, so there were long periods of power and water cuts. What a change had taken place over the last 27 years. We were encountering a modern city with all amenities, and an energetic spirit.

Heike lives in the centre of the city in a modern apartment block, the balcony of her flat overlooking Vernissage Park and its market, and just around the corner from Republic Square – a great base to spend

a few days. Yerevan has turned into a vibrant city with lots of open spaces and, during the summertime, many water features that allow for a cool rest. In the evenings these fountains were often illuminated, for example every evening there was a singing-dancing fountain show on Republic Square, for everybody to enjoy. Even late at night children were running through the arches of water with lots of squealing when they were hit. Restaurants were lively with good food and excellent local wine and brandy. They were well visited by tourists and locals alike, and it was lovely to sit on a roof terrace sipping a cocktail while the sun was setting.

Remarkable also were the art installations, often donated by expat Armenians, who wanted to benefit their city. The most eye-catching one was the cascade complex, a giant staircase, which contains the Cafesjian Museum of Art; in 1995 it existed, but was dilapidated and lifeless. The most convenient way to visit was taking the escalators in the inside to go upstairs and work your way downstairs to play with the changing art and water sculptures. Unfortunately, in the hazy summer's heat only the outline of Mount Ararat was visible from the top, but it was a great experience.



Making lavash



Light and water



Yerevan Restaurant





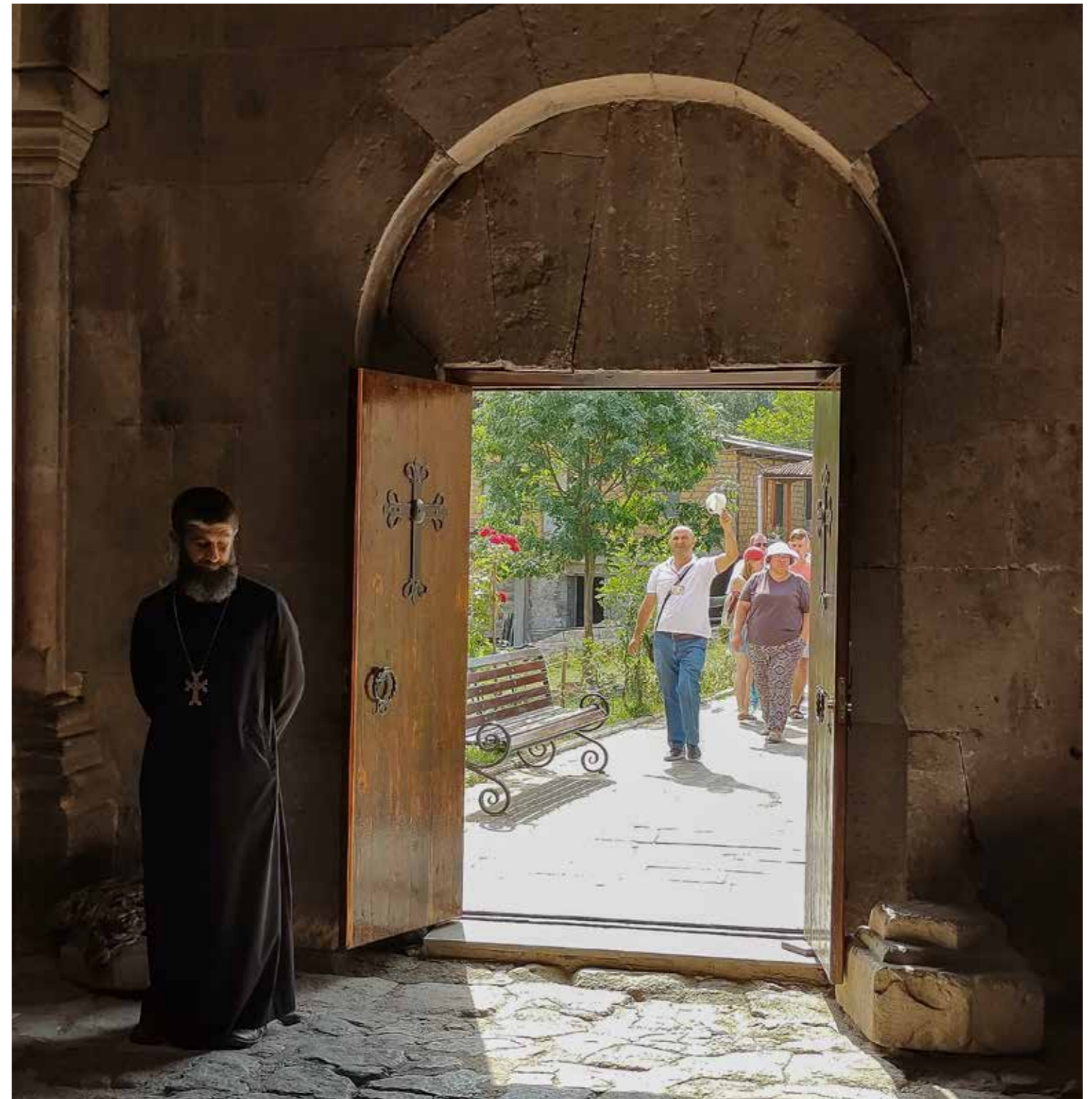
Noravank monastery 1995



Noravank monastery 2023



First communion 1995



The tourists are coming

As Heike couldn't take time off during the week, we joined a local company that offered day trips in the countryside. Armenia is not bigger than Wales, so this was a great way to get around and meet people. Groups tended to be small and were divided into Russian, Armenian and English speaking, and it was fascinating to meet travellers with different purpose and origin: from the gulf states to escape the summer heat, ex-pat Armenians from all regions of the world as well as the odd European, who wanted to get to know this fascinating country. Although there were some restrictions on where and how often we could stop it was a good way to move around the country. Guides were very knowledgeable, open and well trained. Importantly, the driver dealt with the

occasionally 'interesting' driving style of the local truck drivers.

The main focus of the trips was the many monasteries, temples and ancient monuments, witnesses of Armenia's rich heritage and lovingly maintained and reconstructed. It was particularly interesting to go back to some of the places we had visited previously: Amberd Fortress, Garni Temple, Sevanavank, Geghard and Noravank Monasteries. Where previously we had seen weeds growing from the structures of the monasteries and overgrowing the courtyards, these had largely been removed and the brick work renovated.





Ray of light



Murals in Akhta

Where the roof tiles had been damaged large glass domes protected the spires without taking away from the atmosphere. A big difference to our previous visit was the number of people visiting and the quality of the facilities, witness that this country has quickly evolved and is proud of its heritage. Most of the trips also showed some culinary aspects. We visited a winery, learned how to make Gata, the rich and sweet Armenian cake and the traditional thin bread called lavash.

Armenia is a high-altitude landlocked country in the Caucasus region, surrounded by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran, although only the borders to Iran and Georgia are open. Yerevan is at about 1000m altitude and beautiful Lake Sevan at 1900m. The landscape was very arid, particularly in the summer months, although on our first visit in May the mountains were awash with oxeye daisies, poppies and fennel. The mountains are shaped by volcanic activities, and at many places stunning hexagonal basalt columns were visible. Obsidian could be found in great abundance and was used for jewellery and craft ornaments. On one of our trips we went from the medieval fortress of Amberd up the side of Mount Aragats, the highest mountain in Armenia, to Lake Kari (translated as stone lake), which is at the height of 3250 m; it was a wonderful drive through high altitude steppe landscape with nomadic Yazidis driving their big

herd of sheep and cattle. In the northern regions the grass areas were replaced by forests which were also reflected in the wooden balconies of the houses, as we admired in Dilijan. Another striking feature was the steep sided gorges. While the roads usually were at the bottom of the gorge, the monasteries or castles were at the top and although you could see from one to the other, or throw cannon balls, as in the olden times, it could take a half hour drive to get there. On the other hand, caves were often carved into the sides of the valleys and some of these had been occupied since pre-historic times, as for example the remnants of one of the oldest vineries showed.

One thing that substantially had changed for me compared to the first visit was that I had swapped my trusted Minolta SLR with slide film for a mirrorless Lumix digital camera. In addition, my smartphone with its night view capability expanded the opportunities to take photos in the dark monasteries without having to set up a cumbersome tripod. What hadn't changed at all was that people had retained their welcoming attitude to visitors, whenever we happened to bump into a wedding congregation or a christening party we were greeted and given chocolate!

It was a wonderful visit to a warm and welcoming country.



Volcanic landscape



Delicious Gata





The recent pandemic and subsequent lockdowns were, of course, a disaster for the travel industry and for those of us who enjoy travelling the world.

My not being able to travel freely should, though, in no way be compared to the financial, emotional and medical tolls that were taken by so many people over the world. I was very lucky not to have had a family member or close friend badly affected.

Lockdown gave me time to reflect on my life of travelling and for a couple of months I posted a Facebook photo every day from each one of the countries that I had visited. I also had time to look through all my old passports. I always elect to have my expired passport returned, minus a corner or two, as it is useful to remind me of places and dates.

I thought about making a 'collage' image of some of the stamps and visas in my passports.

Some visas are quite elaborate and those with postal stamps can be very colourful.

I went through my old passports with my iPhone camera as the individual images would be quite small and then merged them into an A3-size canvas in Photoshop. I did it in layers and every so often would merge them down as the file size started becoming too large.

I discovered that one passport in particular had a stamp from every continent, with my Antarctica and Timbuktu stamps my proudest. Interesting to notice how many places in the passports are difficult or impossible to travel to now. I reminisced about Syria, Russia, Iran, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Mali, Libya, North Korea, Moldova and Ukraine.

I have started travelling again, of course, adding new stamps to my passport; hoping to make Pakistan in July my 100th.

I always tell friends to travel as soon as you can - you just never know.

Carpe diem!

## PASSPORT MEMORIES By David Short ARPS



# The RPS Travel Group and YOU

There are a number of ways you can contribute to the RPS Travel Group by understanding and participating in the diverse selection of communications and activities organised by the RPS Travel Group Committee.

The best place to find out what is happening is by visiting the Travel Group's section on the RPS website [rps.org/groups/travel/](https://rps.org/groups/travel/)

We also communicate with our members via e-news, Share and Chat, Facebook, Travel Log and by e-mail.

A highlight of the group is our in-person trips, photo walks and weekends.

## Connect Online

### e-news

e-news is e-mailed to members every other month to keep Travel Group members up-to-date with members' achievements and activities.



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

### 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 is also posted here.



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

### 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 2023 dates for Share and Chat. These are via Zoom and start at 14:30 (UK Time).

If you can offer an item, please contact Richard Lewis by e-mailing [traveltrips@rps.org](mailto:traveltrips@rps.org)

## Meet In-person

### Sense of Place - May 2023

Members met in Bristol for a really comprehensive weekend exploring the RPS travel genre.

In addition to an Advisory Day specific to the travel genre, members were also able to attend a talk and exhibition on Travel Photographer of the Year (TPOTY).

The event provided Travel Group members with the opportunity to meet fellow travel photographers as well as being informative and good fun. Roll on the next one!





# Inspire & Be Inspired



Photo credit SUE Hutton  
Monthly Winner July 2022  
OVERALL WINNER 2022

## 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 favourite 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 580px 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 [travelcompetitions@rps.org](mailto:travelcompetitions@rps.org)

## Forthcoming events

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

**TRIP 21-17 June 2023**- Lavender Fields of Provence

**Share and Chat 20 August 2023**

**TRIP 22 Sept 5 October 2023** - Vietnam

**PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP September 2023** - Dorset. Details currently being confirmed

**Share and Chat October 2023**

**TALK 19 November 2023** The Namib by Malcolm MacGregor FRPS

**Share and Chat January 2024**

**DISTINCTIONS ADVISORY DAY** - Bristol

**PHOTO WALK TBD 2024** - City of London

**EVENT 20 April 2024** - Spring Event and AGM

**TRIP June 2024** - African Safari with Alison Mees

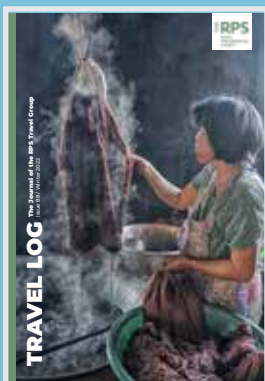
Find out about upcoming events [rps.org/groups/travel/future-travel-group-events/](https://rps.org/groups/travel/future-travel-group-events/)



## Recent events from the RPS Travel Group on YouTube

Past events 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/>



## Travel Log

Travel Log is a much valued publication of the Travel Group. The journal 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.**

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