

Photographer, Oleh Slobodeneiuk

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[Jane Perovich]: We may as well start at the beginning of your photo career, Oleh, so can you tell us how this all began for you?

[Oleh Slobodeneiuk]: When I was a teenager my parents took our family on a beach vacation to the Sea of Azov in the Ukraine and it was there that I first knew what path I wanted to take. I took pictures with a point and shoot camera and just looked for stories around me, shooting everything I saw. After high school I wanted to study cinematography in university but unfortunately didn't have the financial resources for that so I decided to concentrate on growing as a still photographer instead.

[JP]: So did you want to be a travel lifestyle photographer when you first started out or did that specialty evolve over time?

[OS]: In all honesty, I never thought that I'd be shooting travel and lifestyle photography. I actually started out shooting portraits, weddings, and a variety of assignment work. It was a great learning experience and gave me a good income but in the autumn on my 20th birthday I decided to try something new. I was inspired by classic landscape photography captured 20-100 years ago and how those printed pictures are still of current interest. I'd also reached the decision to opt for more free time to see the world and capture whatever was interesting along the way, so I took off on a solo three week hitchhiking trip through the Bavarian Alps.

[JP]: That sounds like a pretty spontaneous trip so would it be fair to say that's how you still prefer to travel today?

[OS]: Yes and no. I spend about half the year traveling away from my home in Ukraine so sometimes I'll still spontaneously choose a specific country to go to if I'm inspired by stories I've heard from people who have been there or the photos I've seen from there. For those trips, I'll buy a ticket one month prior to my departure, and often without a return ticket. Other times I'll take six to twelve months to prepare for a journey, planning exactly what I want to see and capture. Sometimes it's more interesting for me now to create something and not to just roam the world as I did when I first started out.

There are always a few favorites from each journey that I especially like, and they're always the ones that depict atmosphere and emotions from that particular moment and place. Those photos won't lose their personal value to me because they are full of memories.

[JP]: Let's assume for a minute that money for travel was no object. What would be your dream trip?

[OS]: Believe it or not, I don't dream about huge budgets for my trips because I don't need expensive hotels and the best restaurants in the world. But if I DID have an unlimited budget, I would gather all my friends, rent a sailboat and go along the Indonesian islands, rest on wild beaches, surf, and enjoy untouched nature. The second version would be to go on an expedition to hard-to-reach tribes that live on our planet.

[JP]: Ok, so as long as we're talking about traveling companions, do you mostly travel alone or do you prefer to travel with other people?

[OS]: Traveling alone is very interesting and something that everyone should try at least once but I prefer to travel with my girlfriend, Anna. We've been traveling together already for 5 years, so we've experienced many things together and know each other very well. It's very comfortable for us to be together even when we're inseparable 24/7 for up to 2 months at a time. Also, she's my favorite model.

[JP]: When you're on really long trips, how do you stay motivated?

[OS]: It can be a bit of a challenge at times, especially if the weather turns completely miserable, or you experience other things like when my laptop died, I couldn't back up files, my shutter broke, and I crushed a lens. In times like that, I miss my home. My place where everything is the way you want; your atmosphere, your stuff, your sense of coziness; the simple things are important. Even with unforeseen changes in plans I do still get so inspired by different locations and the people I meet there. I love the feeling of not knowing exactly what tomorrow will bring. No matter how I plan my trips I can say that in the past 5 years of traveling, the world seems small but is still open. That feeling motivates me to go again and again - and is something I don't want to ever miss.

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[JP]: Can you give us any examples of language barrier moments that have stuck out for you in your travels?

[OS]: Sure. I often travel to places where local people don't speak any English but I've learned you can find understanding everywhere in the world. Basically, all you have to do is smile, don't be shy and gesticulate a lot. For example, a year ago Anna and I were in Vietnam and on the day of her birthday we were traveling on a winding, twisting, serpentine road. All was well until our motorcycle's engine suddenly, completely burnt out. Within minutes of us standing on the roadside, people stopped, a lot of mutual gesturing went on about the situation and before we knew it, they helped us out.

[JP]: In the relatively short number of years since becoming a travel lifestyle shooter, are there specific changes you've seen to our physical world since that first solo trip through the Bavarian Alps?

[OS]: Yes. Many. In Iceland, for example, the number of glaciers has dramatically reduced. In Asia I saw an increased quantity of garbage. That may seem pessimistic but when I go back to places I've already seen I never see where something has changed for the good. In general, it feels like people are making it even worse. Now is the time for big changes in peoples' attitude about global problems, and I hope that we will treat nature and our effect on it differently.

[JP]: Lastly, if you had to pick a favorite image of yours, what would it be?

[OS]: Believe it or not I don't really have a favorite picture. There are always a few favorites from each journey that I especially like, and they're always the ones that depict atmosphere and emotions from that particular moment and place. Those photos won't lose their personal value to me because they are full of memories.