

WORLDS APART

It started out as a mere business trip. Just do a couple of seminars in Australia then fly home. Maybe one and a half weeks, tops.

"But you can't fly all the way to Australia and not take time to tour!"

Fair enough. Now it's a three-week trip.

"But I hear New Zealand is absolutely beautiful! We can't go all the way there and not see New Zealand as well!"

So now it's a four-week trip and a third seminar was added on the North island.

Of course, you know what happened next. Those countries are huge, and with three anchor weekends and time needed to travel from one event to the next, the trip became filled with too much to see, too much distance between places, a ton of driving, articles to write and not enough time to make the visit meaningful.

This is my world. I've always grown up believing that when you visit a place, you should spend some quality time there and not concentrate on doing touristy things. You should research places, famous photos, etc. and make a plan on how you plan to do better. Not this time. We only had a rough itinerary – all we had were airline tickets and hotels for the anchor weekends, and everything else was up in the air. We'd decide on what to do each day and each night we find a hotel when we're tired. This trip will either be wonderful or be a disaster.

My equipment

I was expecting a ton of landscape opportunities, and so I packed accordingly. In my bag I brought a Sony A7r II (with A7 as a backup), the Zeiss 16-35mm f4, and the hugely underrated 24-240mm f3.5-6.3 superzoom from Sony. This lens is awesome for travel, especially if you have no idea what you're going to see next. To cover its mild deficiencies at the long end, whenever I'd shoot highly detailed subjects at long distances (like Koalas and Wallabies) I'd switch to the 70-200 f4 lens from Sony. Add to that a Samyang 14mm ultrawide lens (which never got used), a Nissin Di700a wireless flash and radio trigger, tripod, laptop and backup drives and you end up with a camera bag weighing 20 pounds! I also had my trusty RX-100 IV. I never go anywhere without that.

One of the eternal challenges



Gary Friedman took his seminars to New Zealand and Australia – and fitted in a true grand tour. But, he advises... 'don't travel like me!'



Here's the billboard in El Paso which Roger Spencer-Jones writes about in the previous article, sent to me on the road. Your editor can be excused for thinking California was any closer to Texas than New Zealand – these days, it's as easy to get the interview, story and images from the other side of the world as not.



'Environmental portraits... can be a good seller' – just like the cool drinks in the New Zealand ICEBAR. Assisted by wireless flash.

of being a travel stock shooter is the need to get something different from what everyone else has. And so while we did visit some popular tourist places (Sydney Opera House, the Great Barrier Reef, the Great Ocean Road), we also tried to spend most of our time in the out-of-the-way places that most travelers would never find. What follows are some of the highlights of the trip.

Borders and Barriers

New Zealand is a beautiful country! Good light and little haze. Sheep everywhere... seven days driving both islands and two days semining (if that's a word!). The only reason people don't flock there for the beauty and quality of life is because their immigration department is very stringent on who they let in.

Didn't see a single Kiwi bird. We made careful notes of where we want to explore further when we return in a few years – this time we'll spend several weeks there instead of several days.

In Australia we hugged the East coast, between Sydney and Cairns (the most popular jump-off point for the Great Barrier Reef.) We also flew to Adelaide and drove the Great Ocean Road to Melbourne. That drive alone was worth the price of admission.

So what did I look for?

It's difficult to articulate what images I seek when I travel. Establishing shots are a given – these convey where you are in one picture, and are highly licensable, especially when you shoot at 42 megapixels as there's not as much out there at such high resolutions. Landscapes can be profitable too but it can be hard to establish a sense of place – a beautiful coastline could be anywhere. Am I getting a unique shot that (probably) nobody else has taken?

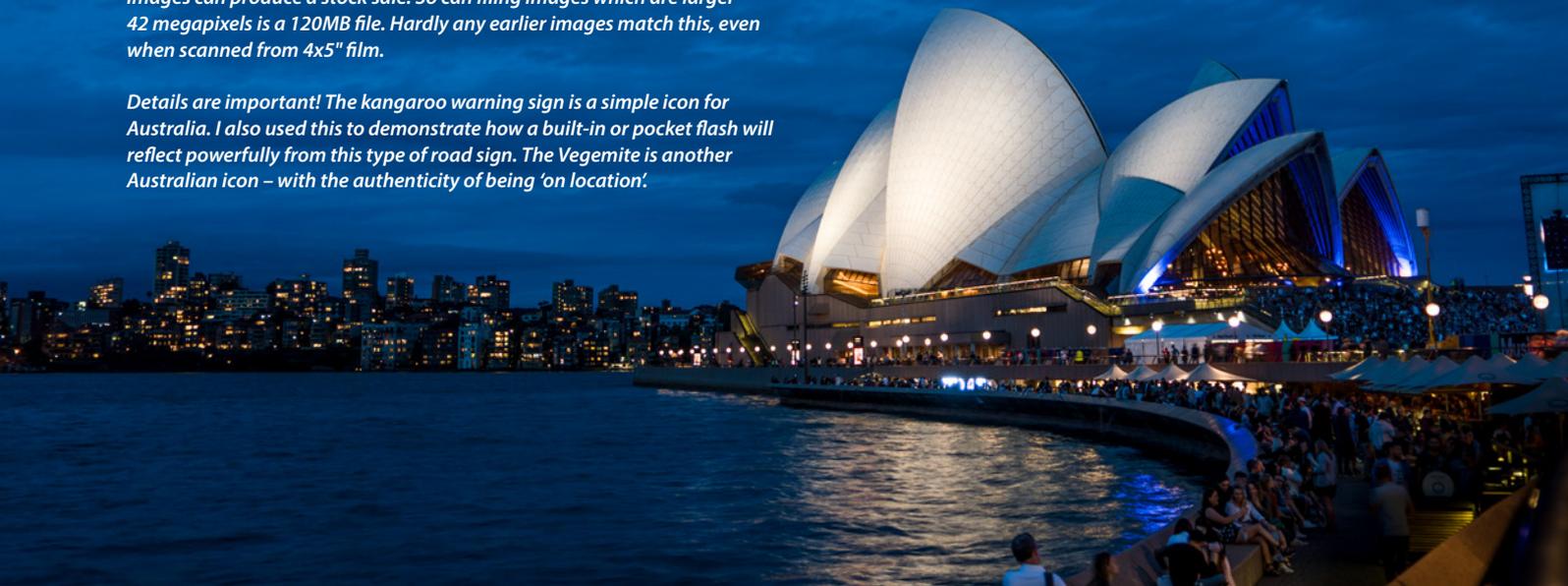
I also find environmental portraits – images that show the person in the environment in which they thrive – can be a good seller as well as long as you get model releases. This usually involves talking with people and getting permission to shoot first, but the shots are unique and they do tell a story and are popular on travel brochures.

Expectations often determine happiness and all of my life I heard the Great Barrier Reef was immense and beautiful and amazing. The reef itself had



Although hundreds of thousands of library images exist of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, a slight difference like the time blur of the boat (above) or the space offered in the sky for text and other images can produce a stock sale. So can filing images which are larger – 42 megapixels is a 120MB file. Hardly any earlier images match this, even when scanned from 4x5" film.

Details are important! The kangaroo warning sign is a simple icon for Australia. I also used this to demonstrate how a built-in or pocket flash will reflect powerfully from this type of road sign. The Vegemite is another Australian icon – with the authenticity of being 'on location'.



wonderful biodiversity but from a *photographic* point of view it was disappointing – poor light and poor visibility. Had I been serious I would have rented an underwater housing with a huge flash. Clearly I wasn't serious. Tried to process a raw file to show what it should have looked like but was reminded yet again that nothing can truly fix bad light.

While planning my shot of the Sydney Opera House, I learned of the theater's history, how it was a financial boondoggle from the beginning, how the architect had no idea how to build it nor how the performance space would be transformed to accommodate both opera and ballet (each has different requirements), how the architect was eventually fired and the project was finished using a government architect. Iconic as it may be, it has never paid for itself and in fact has been a large financial drain on the government.

Two days after this stock shot was taken, the terrorist attacks happened in Paris and the colors on the roof mirrored that of the French flag. Lebanon, who suffered a similar terrorist attack at about the same time, complained about being ignored.

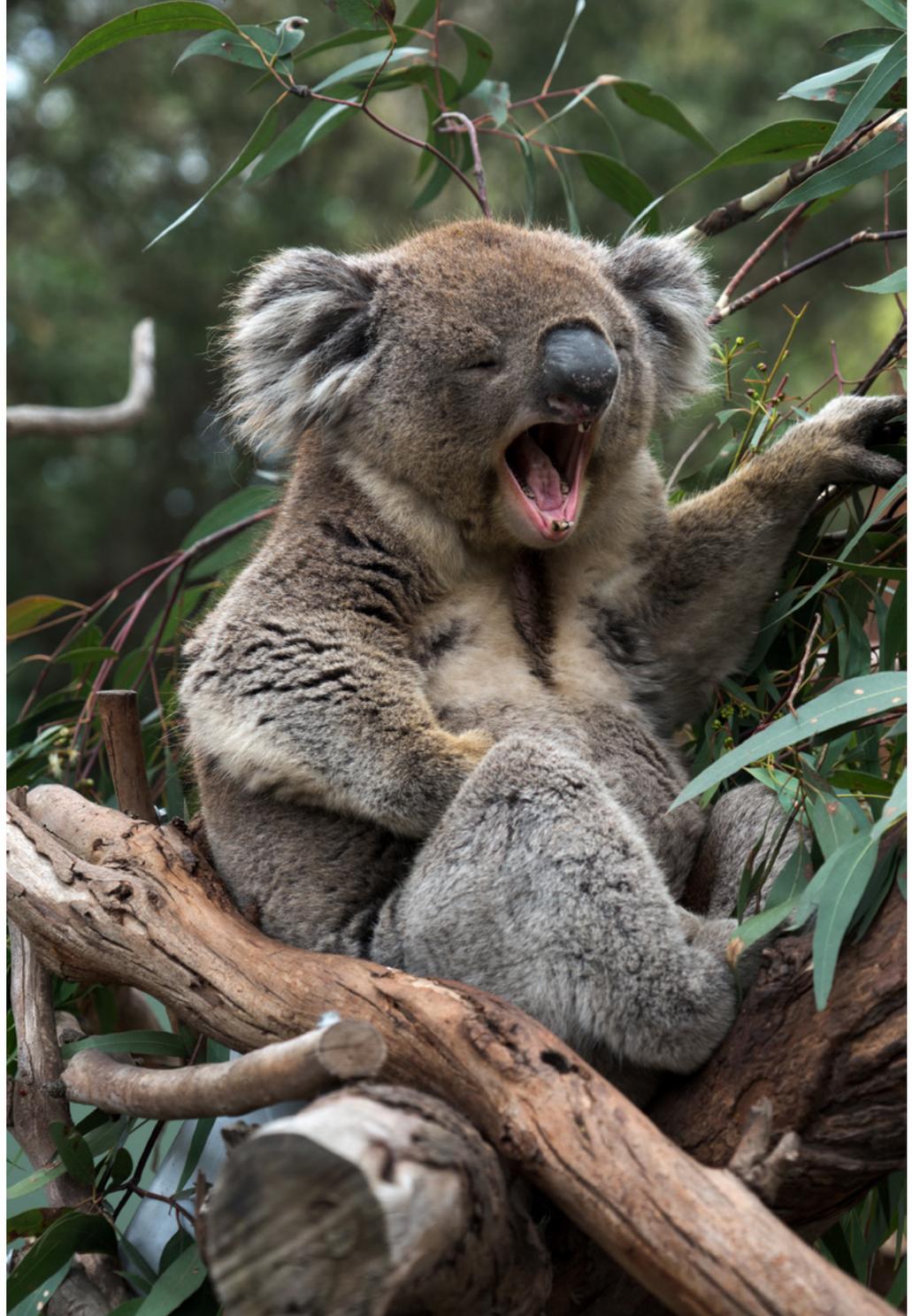
I also heard from an Aussie that the whole reason the British infested the continent was that after the American colonies had revolted, they needed someplace new to send their prisoners. If this is true, I now feel guilty.

Coping with stress

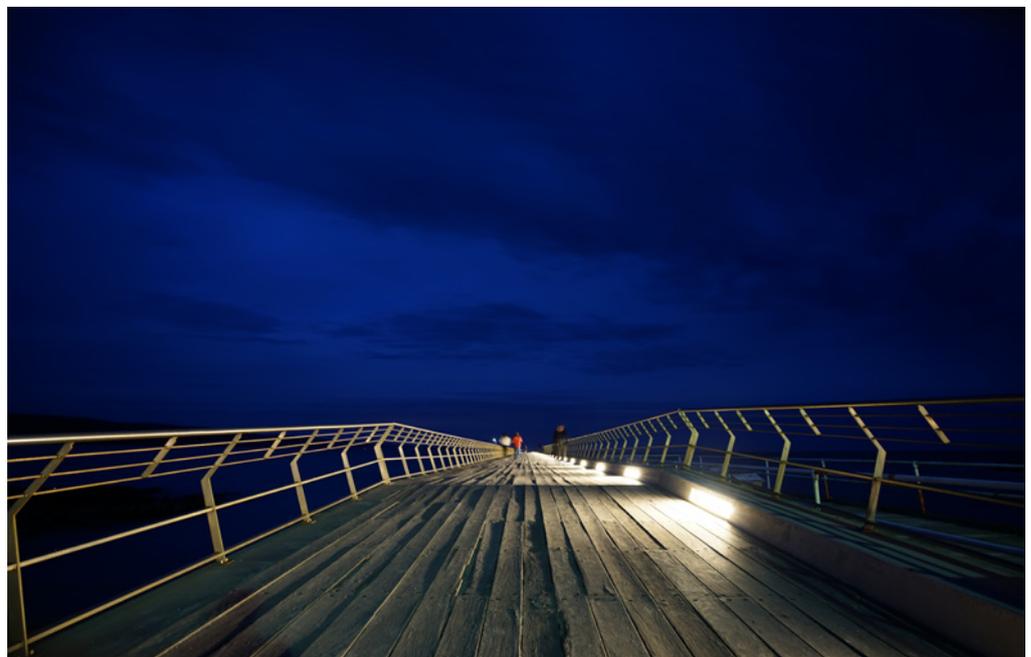
Recent scientific research suggested that when tourists hold koalas it kind of stresses them out, and based on this discovery tourists were no longer allowed to pay to do this.

Except... in the state of Queensland, where the tourism industry would have suffered. It is said that the koalas there are being raised specially for this purpose (implying they won't suffer the same kind of stress) but that's difficult to believe.

Every day was full and there was barely enough time to to sleep. But I had to post occasional shots on *Facebook* because my ego (well, my friends too) demands it. So rather than do *Lightroom* editing every night for hours to find my best images, I did what we used to do in the days of slides: view everything in thumbnail size, take off my glasses, and the images with the strongest composition and best light would be instantly recognizable. I'd then take these best images and post them to facebook, straight from the camera. See how many hours of life energy I just saved?



I did get to hold a koala, but they are said to be stressed by this human contact. We also encountered them more naturally, above – not at a zoo or animal sanctuary. This was in the wild! Once again the Sony 24-240mm proved its value, at 130mm and f6.3 (ISO 160). The pier below benefited from the 16-35mm f4, at 16mm, wide open for 2.2s at ISO 400.



Elusive penguins

After the third seminar in Melbourne, we had just one day leftover. My wife and I decided to head over to Philip Island specifically to see the blue “little penguins” (that’s actually the technical name!) in a wildlife sanctuary. At sunset they all come out of the ocean and head over to their boroughs after mating season. After paying all sorts of money to participate, and even paying extra to get a front-row seat for the “Penguin Parade” across the beach, we were told at the last minute that photos were not allowed.

“The flash bothers the animals” was the official reason.

“So why not just ban flash photography?”

“Because the [certain stereotyped Asian ethnicity deleted] will just ignore the rules and shoot anyway. It’s easier to just ban photography altogether.”

Oh, so many holes in that logic!

It’s times like these it pays to just let go of the outcome (and the associated anger and cost) and just enjoy the moment. I snuck in a couple of shots but the light was so low that they’re not really licensable. Still, that’s what sixty-four thousand ISO is for – and that’s what the A7RII offers along with its silent shutter.

Now what?

This plagues me after every trip. When I get home, I’ll feverishly go through my selection – editing, tweaking workflow, stepping back to look at what I ended up with... and be totally and completely dissatisfied with it.

“Not enough anchor images!”

“Not enough ‘Wow!’ shots.”

“I should have come back at a different time of day.”

“If only I had pulled off the road and took that picture at sunset as I had contemplated!”

You know... thoughts like that which waste the gift of consciousness. Then I’ll walk away from it for about three weeks and look at the work again with a fresh set of eyes.

“Not as bad as I thought.”

“Actually, there are some good ones in there.”

I’ve been going through this cycle since my early 20s. You’d figure I’d learn by now. But clearly it means I still care about my work – at least that’s what I tell myself.



See: www.friedmanarchives.com/blog



‘It’s easier just to ban photography altogether’ – except when there’s a completely silent A7RII capable of ISO 64,000 making a visit with a 24-240mm lens fitted. 1/250s, f6.3, at 240mm, reduced under to 5 megapixels. Below: the essential scene-setter, at the other end of both ranges – ISO 100 and 24mm, 1/250s at f8. Queenstown, New Zealand.

