

Realize your vision with
an efficient workflow
in Lightroom!

Travel and Street Photography

From Snapshots to Great Shots

Learn the best ways
to compose your
pictures!

John Batdorff

**Travel and
Street Photography:
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To you, the reader

I want to sincerely thank you for giving me the chance to share my insights with you. I hope you enjoy the book, and as always, feel free to contact me at www.johnbatdorff.com if you have any questions.

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Introduction

I've been taking photographs for as long as I can remember. My passion began when my mother handed me my first Kodak Instamatic in 1977. What started out as a way to keep a young boy out of mischief blossomed into a lifelong pursuit of personal expression. I've always been fascinated by people and by their relationships with others and their environment. It's this natural curiosity that has fueled my addiction to travel and to observing through the lens.

The Goal of This Book

The number-one goal of this book is to help you take your street and travel photography to the next level, and help you get the images you envision. Photography can be confusing at times, but the technical aspects of exposure and composition should never hold you back from getting the photograph you want. I made many mistakes early on with my photography, but through them I have learned a lot, and I'm happy to say I discover something new every day.

This book isn't intended to be the gospel of travel and street photography. Rather it's a guide that jump-starts your creative photographic endeavors while helping you avoid a few bumps and bruises along the way.

What You Will Accomplish

We'll start off by discussing potential camera kits, tips for planning a journey, getting a good exposure, and creating better compositions. It's important to note that I can attest only to what I use and how I do things. I'm not a fan of speculation or recommending techniques that I don't use every day. If you ask a group of 20 photographers how they would approach a photograph, you'll get 20 different answers. Photography should challenge you, and it should also be something we can all enjoy regardless of skill level. It's my hope that I have distilled my experiences into an easy-to-understand methodology that you can duplicate—and improve upon.

Once you've completed Chapters 1 through 4, you should have a stronger foundation in photography and be prepared to begin your journey.

Starting with Chapter 5, we'll discuss the pros and cons of observing and engaging your subject. Next we'll travel to the urban environment, where I'll share insights into getting the shots you want and using best practices, and give you some creative tips. Then we're off to the countryside, where we'll shift our focus to capturing sweeping vistas, rural communities, and road trips. I'll provide detailed information on how to get a great landscape shot as well as interact with people in more rural settings. Finally, we'll wrap up by discussing the legalities of street and travel photography and how to organize your post-processing workflow.

Make sure to download bonus Chapter 10, "Sharing Your Work." First login or join Peachpit.com (it's free!), then enter the book isbn (032198823X) on this page: peachpit.com/store/register.asp. After you register the book, a link to access bonus content will appear on your Account page in the Registered Products tab. NOTE: if you purchased an ebook, you're covered—the chapter is already included.

This book is a journey we will make together, and I will be there along the way, giving guidance and tips. At any point if you get lost or stuck, you email and I'll answer. Feel free to contact me at www.johnbatdorff.com.

How Much Experience Do You Need?

I wrote this book with the beginner-to-intermediate photographer in mind. Regardless of your level, my hope is you'll find the book to be a resource loaded with useful information, personal experiences, valuable assignments, and helpful tips.

Whether your passion is for travel photography, street photography, or both, your top goal should be to enjoy yourself. It's a gift to be able to follow a passion and create art at the same time!

As you work through the book, I strongly encourage you to share your images with me at www.flickr.com/groups/street_fromsnapshotstogreatshots.

If you don't enjoy the process, you won't be happy with the outcome—so relax, have fun, and create some art!



MAKAA
25
KIBUI

KIMI

ISO 200 • 1/60 sec. •
f/3.2 • 27mm with a
24-70mm lens

1

Equipment

What's in my bag?

For even the savviest of photographers, packing your camera bag can feel a bit overwhelming. You try to pack light so you're not loaded down with too much gear, but you don't want to leave anything behind that would cause you to miss a great photo. Worse yet, the more equipment you own the more you want to bring! Even those weekend trips to NYC or San Francisco are tough as you try to decide what bag to use, which lens(es) to bring, or whether or not you'll need your tripod and external flash.

Poring Over the Picture

This image of Kilimanjaro was taken years after I hiked to the summit. I didn't get great photos of the mountain until this return trip to Amboseli National Park in Kenya, when the focus of the entire expedition was photography.



ISO 100 • 1/90 sec. •
f/8 • 80mm Prime lens



● — When I travel to remote locations, I always pack an extra camera body as a backup.

● — Using a neutral density filter allowed me to darken the sky while properly exposing the foreground.

● — Some trips require a special packing list. This trip to Africa required a sandbag to assist in stabilizing my lens while in the vehicle.

Years ago, I summited Mount Kilimanjaro on a guided trip, and I remember our guide barking during the pre-packing check to “Pack only what you need and only what you can carry!” Then he continued with a small grin, “But don’t worry, I’ll tell you what you’ll need.” My goal in this chapter is to help you prepare your gear for your next trip. While I won’t be barking any orders, I will definitely be making a few suggestions. First I’ll go over many of the options for gear, including cameras, lenses, tripods, accessories, and bags. Then at the end of this chapter, I’ll show you how I go about selecting my kit based on different types of trips. Also, don’t worry about the brand of gear I use; instead focus on its purpose and functionality. Honestly, I don’t have strong feelings about the different brands, but when I find something that works for me, I typically stick with it.

What’s the Best Camera?

I tell people all the time that I don’t care what camera they use, whether it be a Nikon, Canon, Sony, Leica, etc. What I do care about is that you own a camera you’re comfortable using, because at the end of the day that’s going to be the best camera for you. All too often I hear of people buying cameras based strictly upon another person’s work. (“I like John Doe’s work, and he shoots with a Nikon full-frame, so I’m buying a Nikon full-frame.”) Or they read a review about a camera and some sort of new feature, like super-high ISO (“No light needed, just a match and a fast lens”), and the next thing you know UPS is delivering one to the door.

All joking aside, I love it when people are enthusiastic about gear! I’m not the guy to tell you to avoid new equipment, but I always recommend taking a pause, assessing your needs, doing your research, and, whenever possible, holding it in your hands to evaluate it before making a purchase. A camera’s ergonomics, shape, size, function buttons, menu operation, and weight should all be considerations. Some people don’t mind drilling through menus to make adjustments, but I’m old-fashioned and still prefer my camera settings in the form of a dial or button. Is it *better* to have buttons than a digital menu? No. But in order for *me* to operate a camera with speed, that’s the way it needs to be designed.

You need to know how *you* need a camera to be designed so that you’re comfortable with it. I’ve witnessed many photographers operate their Micro Four Thirds menu-driven, touch-screen cameras without missing a beat, while I would be fumbling and frustrated. Street and travel photographers need to be able to react quickly to their environment, so it’s imperative that a camera’s operation feels like second nature.

To help find what may be right for you, let’s review some camera choices as well as the pros and cons of each.

Phone and Tablet Cameras

Mobile phones with built-in cameras are compact in size and offer the convenience of always being handy, as very few people leave home without their phones. There's a lot of great work being created with camera phones—especially in tight public-transportation locations such as trains and buses—but for me they're my last resort due to low image quality and the risk of theft. There has been an increase worldwide in smartphone theft, and with all the concerns regarding identify theft, I think the risk outweighs the benefits in many situations. I will use my smartphone only when I'm familiar with my surroundings and have a strong sense of safety.

Tablets have become popular with travelers, especially for videotaping, but once again this is an instrument of last resort for anyone who is serious about street or travel photography. I would never say to forgo a shot if a tablet is all you have with you. But, much like a phone, a tablet is very easy to steal due to how we hold it, which is compounded by the lack of a strap. They also hold a high resale value, so are a desirable target for thieves.

Again, keep your surroundings in mind. It's one thing to be traveling through Yellowstone on a bus, getting out in a tourist-friendly environment, and using a tablet. It's yet another to be walking the streets of Nairobi at dusk photographing the city with one. You can find trouble anywhere in the world, but there's no need to wear your vulnerability so obviously, which is exactly how many people look when they're holding up tablets on a crowded street. Be smart with your gear, keep it close to you, avoid broadcasting your presence, and always remain aware of your surroundings.

Advantages of phone and tablet cameras:

- Readily available.
- Small size.
- People are desensitized to their presence.
- Work well in tight public quarters or in locations where larger cameras are not allowed.

Disadvantages:

- Expensive.
- Slow shutter reaction.
- Fixed focal range.
- Image distortion.
- Many are limited to only JPEG files.
- Cumbersome to operate with any speed.
- Easily stolen and often loaded with personal data—not a good combination. (This is my biggest hesitation with smartphones.)

Compact (Point-and-Shoot) Cameras

We're seeing great strides in compact (point-and-shoot) cameras with improvements in ISO, manual settings, raw file capture, GPS embedding, Wi-Fi capability, and the list goes on. This is the camera to own if you don't want to spend a lot of money but want better quality than most camera phones. I will use my point-and-shoot when I just want to slip a camera in my pocket for a casual stroll, when going to dinner, or when I need to leave things unattended (for instance, on the beach). It's also a great tool for scouting an area prior to breaking out your more expensive gear. I've been in situations where I've been unfamiliar with the surroundings and heard reports of theft, so I'll leave my larger kit behind and take just a small point-and-shoot to scout the area.

Advantages of compact cameras:

- Inexpensive.
- Small size.
- Often better quality files with RAW and JPEG options.
- Less distortion than from a camera phone.
- Variable lens.
- Fast.
- Easy to use and carry.

Disadvantages:

- Small image sensor is more susceptible to digital noise in low-light conditions.
- Built-in lens is limited.
- Often has a very menu-driven operation.

Mirrorless Cameras

This is probably one of the most interesting camera systems to enter the market in the last decade, and possibly the most influential since the single-lens reflex (SLR). In a nutshell, SLRs and digital SLRs (DSLRs) have a viewfinder that enables you to view your images through interchangeable lenses. The ability to compose an image through your lens was such a technological advance that it became mainstream, while the rangefinder became an outdated cult classic.

Now comes the *mirrorless* digital camera, which allows you to compose your image like you're using live view on a DSLR or via a digital viewfinder, which provides a more traditional feel, mimicking that of a mirrored system (**Figures 1.1 and 1.2**).



Figure 1.1 This Micro Four Thirds–style Pentax camera is an ultracompact mirrorless and extremely lightweight option. It has full manual capabilities and a good sensor, the lenses are interchangeable, and it makes quality images—but its greatest strength is its portability.



Figure 1.2 Although smaller than a DSLR, this large mirrorless Leica rangefinder has a more traditional size and look with a high-quality sensor. Its greatest strength is image quality.

You may be wondering what all the fuss is about with this mirrorless technology. The major benefit of a mirrorless camera is the ability to shorten the flange focal distance (**Figure 1.3**). And a major benefit of a shorter flange distance is the ability to use a host of different lens manufacturers, providing you can find the appropriate adapter. Also, by eliminating the mirror, manufacturers are able to shorten the lens to film (sensor) distance, which helps improve quality, and reduce the size of the lens, which results in a lighter-weight kit (an example of which also is shown in Figure 1.3).

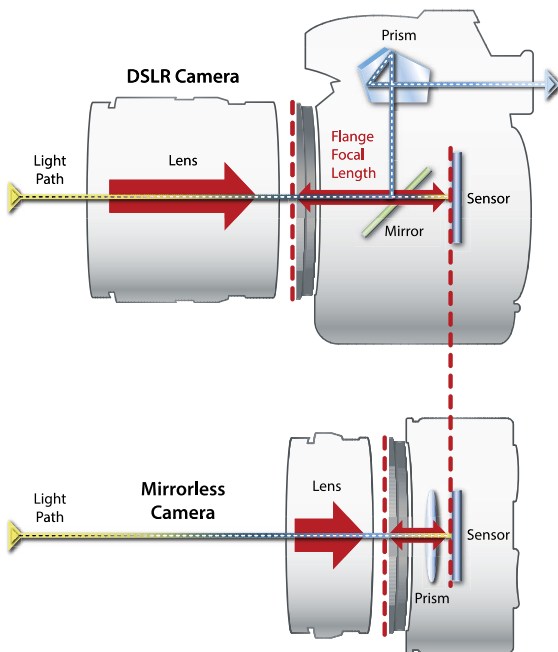


Figure 1.3 As you see from the graphic, the mirror requires quite a bit of space to allow us to see through the lens. Once you eliminate the mirror and reduce the prism (which reflects the image from the mirror to the viewfinder), your camera's footprint becomes much smaller.

Many would argue that Leica made the first mirrorless camera system with its rangefinder model. I suspect Cartier-Bresson had it right with his Leica M3 rangefinder, which allowed him to move around the streets photographing most everything with a 50mm lens. However, today there are many high-quality mirrorless systems, from those with a fixed lens (called digital single-lens mirrorless, or DSLM cameras) to those with interchangeable lenses (called mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras, or MILCs). Each system has a wide range of digital sensor sizes from which to choose, from the very popular Micro Four Thirds to the more traditional full-size sensor.

Advantages of mirrorless cameras:

- Small and discreet.
- Operation and feel are very similar to DSLRs.
- Quality sensors.
- Interchangeable lenses offer more creative options.

Disadvantages:

- More expensive than compact cameras, and in some cases as expensive as DSLRs—if not more!
- Most interchangeable lenses are not backward-compatible to nonmirrorless systems. A nontraditional viewfinder relying on back-of-camera LCD (liquid crystal display) for focus and composition may be a huge obstacle for some users.
- Putting a large telephoto lens on a small camera without a traditional optical viewfinder can make it very difficult to compose and hold the camera steady for a sharp image.

DSLRs

Chances are many of you who bought this book own a DSLR, and for good reason. These cameras are very reliable and offer the most lens choices of any of the previously discussed systems. Much like their film version (SLRs), DSLRs offer excellent-quality images with an easy operation that is familiar to most photographers. Plus there's a large array of new and used DSLR cameras on the market that meet any photographer's needs and budget (**Figure 1.4**). This has been my camera of choice for nearly 20 years because of its versatility and the speed at which I'm able to operate it.



Figure 1.4
To get a sense of size difference between various DSLRs, check out this full-frame DSLR Canon body next to a Micro Four Thirds Pentax body, both with lenses.

Advantages of DSLRs:

- Wide range of models and lenses available.
- Ease of operation.
- Greater creative control.
- Excellent low-light shooting.
- Fit any budget. You can buy a cropped-sensor Nikon or Canon with a lens for less than \$500 at nearly any camera store or outlet.

Disadvantages:

- Heavy.
- Not nearly as discreet as a compact or mirrorless system.

To Buy or Not to Buy?

Many photographers, including myself, have spent a lifetime building kits around our camera bodies. We've collected all the lenses, filters, tripods, and flash, and thus making a move to another camera system should be considered carefully. I always start by asking myself, "Is it a need or a want? And will I *really* use it?"

Years ago, when I tried to be a golfer, I remember convincing myself that I could probably play better with a new set of clubs, so I ran out and bought myself a brand-new set of beautiful Pings. Six months later my game didn't magically improve, and I never touched the bag again because I blamed the clubs. Now I don't golf at all!

My point: Realize your potential with your current gear. When you think that potential is truly limited, consider making equipment adjustments. You shouldn't buy new gear because you're frustrated; you should buy it because you've mastered what you've got.

Selecting Lenses

If you're shooting with a camera phone or a compact camera, your lens choices are already limited to the built-in lens. But for those of you who will be shooting with an interchangeable lens system, the sky's the limit (**Figure 1.5**).

Figure 1.5

While certainly not an exhaustive list of lens options, these are some of my favorites: a 15mm wide-angle, a 35mm street photography, a 50mm portrait, and my 70-200mm zoom.



A good lens can really improve the quality of your images, so long as you're working with a solid foundation. When I have students who are debating upgrading their camera body to the latest and greatest, I'll first assess their lenses—or, as we say in the industry, their "glass." In many cases, it's not the camera that's holding back the photographer from shooting in low-light conditions, it's the glass she's using. Making a good investment in, and taking good care of, quality glass will help with your future camera upgrades.

Let's outline some of the advantages and disadvantages of the different lens types.

Wide-Angle Lenses

Wide-angle lenses are an essential part of a photographer's kit, especially for those who enjoy shooting streetscapes, architecture, and landscapes. A 15mm will give you 110-degree views on a full-frame (35mm equivalent) sensor, which is more than enough to capture most vistas.

Another very common and excellent wide-angle zoom is the 16-35mm, or similar focal lengths. This is the go-to lens for sweeping landscapes or cityscapes when you want to create a large depth of field, which means both the foreground and background are in sharp focus.

Avoid a wide-angle lens when shooting portraits, as it can create distortion (think of a house of mirrors).

Mid-Range Zooms

A mid-range zoom lens will give you ample opportunities to frame a shot properly. As a matter of fact, my first real street/travel lens was a 24-70mm. (I loved it and used it exclusively for years until I added to the kit with a wide-angle 16-35mm and eventually a 70-200mm long zoom.) Other than being a tad bulky, a mid-range zoom serves as a great multipurpose lens that covers an excellent focal range. The biggest advantage, of course, is you don't need to invest in several lenses.

The trade-off with zooms is they're not always very fast, and those that are tend to be very expensive. Moreover, regardless of size, a mid-range zoom lens usually has what is referred to as the "sweet spot" or "ideal focal distance" for that particular lens. It's at that focusing distance that the lens will perform the best and provide the best-quality image; more often than not, the sweet spot is in the middle of the focal range.

Long Zooms

I call street photographers with long zoom lenses “snipers.” I know this probably isn’t a politically correct term, but long-lens shooters generally set themselves up in a stationary location near bustling public havens and take photos from a distance without interacting at all with their subjects. There’s nothing wrong with this approach, as it provides a different perspective all together, and in many cases, will yield a higher number of candid shots. The downside is that a long zoom lens can be very heavy to carry and draws a lot of attention. It can also create the assumption that you’re a “professional,” which in street photography can backfire on you very quickly. Being labeled a professional at a wedding opens doors, yet on the street being labeled a professional will close them! I rarely use my 70-200mm on the street, and when I do it’s almost entirely to photograph festivals, parades, rodeos, or political events when I need the additional reach.

I also take my long zoom lenses if I’m traveling to a rural area or national park, as I would need that extra reach to get up-close photos of wildlife. If you need even more reach but don’t want to invest in a 300-400mm lens, check out an extender, an inexpensive and lightweight travel option to boost your zoom.

Fixed-Focal-Length Lenses

Over the years, I’ve slowly adjusted my kit to mostly fixed lenses due to their higher quality, smaller size, and faster speed. Keep in mind that “fast” means the lens has a wider minimum aperture, such as $f/1.2$ or $f/2$, which allows for faster shutter-speed performance in low-light situations (**Figure 1.6**).

The 50mm fixed lens on a full-frame camera is considered the hallmark lens of a street photographer. I take nearly 80 percent of my images using a fixed 35mm, which generally is considered more of a photojournalist lens, as the wider view better accommodates environmental portraits. Both focal ranges have their strengths, but I find the 35mm serves my purposes better, and if I need to get tighter, I simply zoom in with my feet. (Note that these focal lengths are on a full-frame camera, so if your camera has a cropped sensor, a 35mm cropped = 50mm and a 24mm cropped = 35mm, approximately, based on an APS-C cropped sensor.)

The benefit of working with fixed lenses, especially if you’re a street photographer, is the ability to minimize the size of your kit. Another big benefit is when you’re working with only one or two lenses, you become very proficient in their use, so operation becomes second to composition. Cartier-Bresson photographed almost exclusively with a Leica rangefinder and a 50mm lens. That doesn’t mean you need to follow in his footsteps, but it does beg the question, “How much gear do we really need?”



Figure 1.6
Throughout the years, I've moved to fixed focal lenses for my DSLR, working primarily with a 50mm and 35mm for most of my street photography.

Hot Tip: Moving to a Fixed-Lens Kit

If you're considering moving to a fixed-lens kit, I suggest sorting your images using the metadata to determine what focal range you use most frequently. Sorting your images can be done very easily using digital photography software like Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. The benefit of this is being able to determine what fixed lens would work best for you based on which focal length you are drawn to the most.

For example, for years I used a 24-70mm lens, but I had grown tired of carrying around such a large lens. I wanted to make a move to a fixed lens but didn't want to limit myself, so I reviewed my images and sorted them by focal range. After discovering that I took most of my favorite images between 30mm and 40mm, I made the move to a fixed 35mm—and I've never looked back.

Sturdy Foundations

I have a love-hate relationship with tripods: I hate using them, but I love my images when I do. Tripods are an essential part of any photographer's camera bag, especially if you intend on doing high dynamic range (HDR) work, which requires several exposures, or shooting video. I know a lot of people who never use their tripods because they're too heavy or too inconvenient to carry around. But if you're serious about photography, you'll get a tripod that you'll use. I own two tripods: one for landscape photography and one for street photography (**Figure 1.7**).

Photography isn't an inexpensive hobby, and it's a horribly expensive business, so invest in the things that make sense. I always suggest buying a tripod that is light yet very sturdy and rated for the weight of your camera and lens. Tripods manufactured using carbon-fiber materials will provide maximum strength with the least amount of weight. Moreover, having a solid tripod head with a quick-release plate is a must for those of us who want the flexibility of quickly removing our cameras from the tripod. If you're interested in shooting video, you'll want to research fluid head mounts that provide smooth panning motions.



Figure 1.7 My larger tripod is much sturdier and a requirement when I need a tack-sharp landscape image. There's no use in using mirror lock-up (a feature on DSLRs that allows the mirror to be locked up to reduce vibration during exposure) and a shutter release if your tripod wiggles in the wind. On the other hand, if I need lightweight and small for foot travel, I use the travel tripod.

Street Tripods

A smaller tripod works well for street photography, providing you're not dealing with challenging winds or a long, heavy lens. I use a five-section carbon-fiber Gitzo Traveler for nearly all my street and international urban travel photography, as it's compact and very sturdy for its weight. But there are many tripods available for almost any budget.

I look for a tripod that, in addition to being light and sturdy, straps to the back of my bag so my hands remain free. When shooting on the street, it's a huge mistake to have your camera in one hand and a tripod in the other: If a photo opportunity presents itself, you're left fumbling around trying to find a location to place your tripod. The only time I have my tripod out is when I'm setting up for a shot; otherwise it's on my back, tied to my camera bag and out of the way.

Landscape Tripods

A few years ago, I realized that my Gitzo Traveler tripod just wasn't cutting it when I went to places like Death Valley, where the winds were very unpredictable. I would magnify my images in Lightroom to a 1:1 zoom and see a small blur from camera shake.

You can take all the necessary precautions to minimize camera shake by using a mirrorless camera or placing your mirror up and firing with a cable release. But the reality is that wind and unstable surfaces, such as loose soil and rocks, are image killers. Thus, for landscape shots, I suggest finding a tripod that is light but very sturdy. Here are some factors to consider:

- The fewer the leg extensions, the more stable a tripod is. These legs are designed to telescope out and lock in place at the joint. Some tripods also have a center section to allow for additional height. My lightweight travel tripod has five leg extensions with a center section.
- The more leg extensions, generally the more compact your tripod is—but also the less sturdy it becomes due to the increased number of joints and reduced diameter of tubing, allowing for the legs to collapse back into the previous sections. The sturdiest of tripods traditionally don't exceed three leg extensions.
- Try to find a tripod that comes close to your eye level when the head and camera are mounted.
- Last, and possibly most important, is transportation. If you're traveling via car, size may not be an issue, but if you're flying with a tripod, I suggest measuring your luggage to see what will fit. The TSA and airlines have been setting stricter guidelines for carry-ons, so many photographers check their tripods with their luggage. Knowing the dimensions of your luggage is a crucial factor when buying a tripod. (See "The Cargo Kit," below, for more on flying with your photo gear.)

Recently I've become a big fan of the Really Right Stuff TVC-33, which is a very sturdy and relatively lightweight tripod that comes in three sizes depending upon your height. I'm 5'8", so the TVC-33 (S) fits perfectly in my 22" carry-on travel bag and will easily fit into my 25" checked suitcase. That said, it's still a large tripod. I use it when I travel to places where I'm primarily traveling by car, like Death Valley, Montana, or Wyoming.

Stocking Up on Accessories

No kit is complete without a few accessories. From memory cards to filters to location reminders, don't forget all of the small things that are downright necessities, that can take your photos to the next creative level, and that are just plain helpful to have.

Memory Cards

It's essential to read your camera's manual and buy a memory (or flash) card that is rated for your camera. There's nothing worse than taking several photographs in rapid succession and then being unable to shoot because your camera buffer is maxed out. This can be critical when photographing sports or fast-moving subjects. Moreover, your cards are further taxed if you plan on shooting video, because of the fast write times needed by your flash card. So be sure to look for a camera-compatible and good-size card, and buy a couple—while card failures are less likely than they used to be, they happen, and having a backup card is critical (**Figure 1.8**).

Hot Tip: Back Up Your Cards

For big trips, I prefer buying several 16 or 32 GB cards, which I back up every night. This allows me to keep most of my trips on a couple of cards. If you're unable to perform backups nightly, I recommend splitting up your trip among several 8 or 16 GB cards, to minimize some of the risk of card failure.

Cable Releases and Remote Triggers

There are a lot of products that enable you to fire your camera remotely with a cable, wirelessly, or even with a smartphone app (**Figure 1.9**). The major benefit to using a cable release or remote trigger is to reduce camera shake, which can create blurry images. Avoiding camera shake is especially important for landscape and cityscape photography. A basic cable release shouldn't cost more than \$20, and it is worth the investment. In lieu of a cable release or other trigger, I always recommend using the camera's self-timer to avoid handling the camera during the shutter release.