



Capturing *Sweet* Memories

Sugar Land Photographers Offer Tips for Taking Great Photos

WRITTEN BY TONYA ELLIS

Most amateur photographers know the feeling. You shoot pictures during a once-in-a-lifetime vacation activity, and then scan the digital images to see your headless husband, dimly lit daughter, or squinty-eyed son. Once again, you've botched what could have been great photos and lost tangible evidence of sweet memories.

Things can be different this vacation season, say Sugar Land photographers. Simply follow some of the tips listed below and take your best shot.

Keep it Simple

"Many times amateur photographers include too much of the landscape in pictures, making people appear too small," says Candace Byers of Candace Byers Photography. It's best to keep the background simple, so as not to detract from the main subject.

Before shooting a photo, it's also important to pay attention to how the landscape relates to the subject, adds Jeff Nesossi of Nesossi Photography. "That way you won't get the infamous pole growing out of the head shot," he says.

How close should you get to the subject? As near as possible without cutting them out of the picture, says Larry Pullen of Larry Pullen Photography. You should also keep people's heads near the top of your viewfinder in order to avoid wasted overhead space in the final picture, he adds.

Use Your Flash

There are very few times when you shouldn't use flash, says Pullen. "Inside, outside, day, or night, it gives the skin the right tones, and it lessens the shadows if there is sun."

The flash also prevents photos from appearing too dark, says Nesossi. "Flash fills the shadows," he explains. "I can add shadows, but I can't add detail."

To get the best natural lighting for your photos, take pictures before 9 a.m. or right after sunset, added Byers. "The sun's light is a lot less harsh at those times," she says.

Staging Your Photos

There may be times when you want to stage photos rather than take action shots. In those cases, the photographers recommend some rules of thumb.

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Clothing

It's best to stick with solids and medium-toned, muted colors, that way the focus will be on the subjects and not the clothing. Long sleeves are best, and avoid white colors, since they draw the eye away from faces, Pullen says.

Subjects and their Positioning

Placing subjects at different levels adds visual appeal, Pullen says. For example, you might have grandparents sitting, parents standing and children kneeling in a photo. Have people do something with their hands, rather than standing with their arms hanging straight down, Pullen adds. "That looks plain awful."

When working with children, try to stay relaxed. "Kids pick up on adult stress. It doesn't make for good picture-taking smiles," Byers says. It's best to take pictures of children first if possible to account for their shorter attention spans.

Pets

For added interest, Pullen suggests including well-behaved pets in family portraits.



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Practice Makes Perfect

The old adage “practice makes perfect” was never truer than in the photography realm, say the experts. The more pictures you take, the better you get at it. “You can’t pick the camera up every six months when you go on vacation and expect great pictures,” says Nesossi. “Before you go out on your next trip, get out in your backyard and try out some of these tips, start looking at your images and start experimenting with them.”



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-JEFF NESOSS, PHOTOGRAPHER

To ensure you get the perfect shot on your trip, take far more pictures than you think you need. Chances are you own a digital camera, so you can delete those you don’t like.

Enhance your Photos

Even if your vacation shots aren’t quite picture-perfect, all is not lost. Thanks to the rise of the digital camera, photo enhancement is just a click away. There are software programs on the market that allow amateurs to crop their pictures on their home computers. “In my entire photographic life, there have probably been ten pictures that did not require some degree of editing after the exposure was made,” says Pullen. “And we’re talking about millions of photographs. It’s the most valuable tool I have.”

In addition to the above tips, the experts recommend reading through the owner’s manual for your camera, if you haven’t already done so, to learn what features it includes. Experiment with your camera’s options. What do black and white shots look like? How about taking an off-center shot? Be creative with the pictures you take. And after this summer’s vacation trip, bring home photos your family can enjoy for years to come. **SLM**

TONYA ELLIS is a mother and writer who plans to use some of these tips to take better photos of her three children during their family vacation.