

PHOTOGRAPHER MATT LEEDHAM

Camera Travels the World

LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE IMAGES
BY JANET SHARP



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—Matt Leedham

A quick look at the website of Springfield fine-art photographer Matt Leedham reveals immediately that he has traveled far more than most people. The photographs on his blog start with Deir es-Sultan, the Ethiopian monastery on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and end with a view of Bangkok. In between, he shows scenes of South Tyrol in Italy, a camel herder in India, the Nauyaca Waterfalls in Costa Rica, the Temple Street Night Market of Hong Kong, and more.

Five years ago, a holiday sale prompted Matt to buy an entry-level Nikon camera kit. After he started playing with it, he became engrossed. He spent hours on Youtube learning basic photography skills. The next year he went out and took photos, returned home to critique them, and then watched more videos on editing and printing them. He made 45,000 images in that first year alone.

For the past 15 years, Matt has traveled extensively as a consultant with the Entrepreneurs' Organization, or EO, a nonprofit that has chapters in every major metropolitan city around the world. He supports entrepreneurs worldwide to help them grow both their businesses and themselves as entrepreneurs. He visits many EO cities to facilitate the way entrepreneurs learn and grow together.

When Matt became proficient with his camera, taking it along on business trips was a natural progression. "That just opened up a whole new world, literally, of opportunities to photograph," he recalls. If time allowed, he would add an extra personal day or weekend onto his trips to explore new areas. At first, he did street photography, but soon moved on to landscapes and cultures. Immersed in Korean culture through his wife, Yu Jin, and her family, he remains inspired to explore new places, peoples and cultures.

Originally from northeastern New Jersey, Matt says



Above: "Dragon's Ear II," Drangarnir, Tindhámur, Faroe Islands Photograph

he got the travel bug at age 16 when he went with his family to visit distant relatives in Ireland. A few years later, after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Maryland, he backpacked across Europe for four months. Upon his return, he left again for India to attend the wedding of college friends and stayed for several weeks, visiting Delhi, Jaipur, Hyderabad and the Taj Mahal in Agra. "I racked up some debt," he says, "but it was worth the money, risk and effort because it just changed my life."

Back home, he searched for a job that offered the potential for travel. At age 24, he joined an entre-

preneurial venture that provided test- and college-preparation services for youth in public schools in underserved communities. The investor in this business, a Turkish entrepreneur, gave Matt the opportunity to visit Istanbul several times and travel throughout Turkey, spending weeks at a time.

When that job became unreliable, Matt found an opening at the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) and thought he would stay for only a year. After 15 years, he still enjoys his job: "It has sent me around the world to support entrepreneurship, introduced me to inspiring people and innumerable countries and cultures. It's

been a wonderful journey."

Matt is adamant about avoiding any special-occasion photography. He explains that he is driven by exploration: "to find, observe, look, explore.... The photography is the expression of my interest."

Two years after Matt bought that first Nikon, he was accepted as a resident exhibiting artist in the Torpedo Factory's Multiple Exposures Gallery, a fine-art photography gallery shared by up to 15 photographers. That membership helped him hone his skills: "And that process of interacting with other fine-art photographers of all different kinds of genres really opened my eyes



to different ways to approach photography, how to back-up digital assets, how to print.... So, there is just an unbelievable amount of information and knowledge and experience that I have been able to glean from that group. I've just grown so much from that."

Matt displays his work in the gallery's juried exhibitions and in solo or group shows. Besides framing and matting traditional prints, which he creates in his home studio using archival inks and paper, he outsources some printing to obtain contemporary pictures on face-mounted acrylic or heat-pressed on aluminum. In addition, Matt posts his photos on Instagram and Facebook. He also has experimented with a DJI drone to create visual landscape experiences, which he shares on a large, wall-mounted TV screen in the gallery.

Recently, Matt has learned that some online auction houses are selling the "Non-Fungible Token," or NFT, of a digital image, equivalent to a painting's certificate of authenticity. In coming months, Matt plans to auction off the NFTs for several photographs and will include a printed copy of the image to the highest bidder.

During the pandemic, Matt's travel and photography came to an abrupt halt. "I had to find other ways to fill

Opposite top: "Sentinel," Kálfafell, Iceland; and "The Ideal Life," Bangkok, Thailand

Above top: "Peace Be With You," Deir es-Sultan, Jerusalem; and "Cross Every Bridge," Vágur, Faroe Islands
All are photographs.



that creative void," he declares. After a gallery colleague showed him a handmade photobook, Matt went back to YouTube to learn bookmaking and bookbinding techniques. "It's been a great experience for me; I need to keep creative," he says. He invested in a sewing frame to stitch traditional bindings and a finishing press to squeeze the book together for some final work. For the cover, he likes to identify unique types of paper, such as the rough, but super-strong mulberry paper from Korea. Because the books are most often used as journals, he chooses smooth, superfine writing paper for inside pages. He takes custom orders and makes each book to order for friends and colleagues.

Besides photography and bookmaking, Matt also has developed a passion for writing. Two years ago, he attended a weekend writing workshop in North Carolina sponsored by *The Sun* magazine. He subsequently submitted his own memoir to the magazine and had it published. His future goal, he says, is to "marry" his three passions. He would like to partner text and images related to his travels and put the result in a handmade, limited-edition book.

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