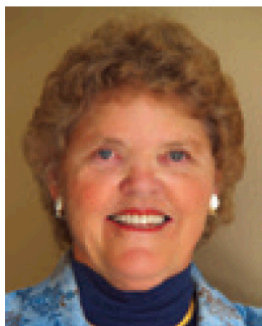


Cruising and Photographing in Harsh Environments

Dramatic Rock



By Donna Judd

Charles Keaton Memorial
Award Winner

Cruising evokes images of fancy ships slipping through tropical waters while passengers sip cool beverages around the pool, right? Not necessarily. My adventures in Antarctica in 2006 and in the North Atlantic, from Norway, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland to Newfoundland, Canada, in 2017 were vastly different from the stereotype. And the differences have important implications for photographers.

Popularity

There is currently a boom in tourism in harsh environments. A prime example is Iceland, which had 2.2 million visitors in 2017, six times more than they welcomed in 2010.

Many remote, rough landscapes have little infrastructure and can only be visited comfortably by ship. Cruise lines have eagerly responded. Reasons for this growth in what is sometimes called “expedition cruising” include the ever-increasing popularity of cruising in general, plus technological advances in new ships and those retrofitted to sail in icy waters. My favorite is better ship-wide stabilization.

In addition, global warming is opening up

more and more routes for exploration in Siberia, Northern Canada, Greenland and other Arctic areas. For example, in August, 2016, the *Crystal Serenity* and its 1,700 passengers/crew left Seward, Alaska, and became the largest ship ever to transition the Northwest passage, a feat that explorers could not achieve for centuries.

Travel photography shared via social media is generating huge increases in tourism to destinations that are popular for photos or selfies. Visits to Trolltunga, Norway, a cliff that juts out of the mountain high above a stunning fjord, jumped from 500 tourists in 2009 to over 40,000 in 2014. Googling stats for Instagram showed that this “take a picture, toss a filter on it, share it with the world” app had more than 800 million active users by September, 2017, sharing a mind-boggling average of 95 million photos a day!

Expedition cruising

Fortunately, cruising extreme distances in harsh environments and unpredictable weather does a great job of getting you away from the masses. And it can bring great rewards: awe-inspiring beauty, tremendous varieties of wildlife, and

resilient people in remote communities eager to interact with you. To be among animals that have no fear of humans, is a moving experience. At Antarctica's Half Moon Island, we were told to remain at least 10 feet away from the thousands of nesting Chinstrap Penguins, and I did. However, one curious fellow waddled over and began pecking at my boot laces.

Expedition cruising is less about life on the ship and more about the destination. Choose carefully from many destinations: Antarctic peninsula or mainland, Falkland Islands, to the North Pole and back, circumnavigating Iceland, Northern Lights trips, Norwegian or Chilean Fjords, polar bears of Spitsbergen, Canadian Arctic, Northwest Passage.... Check online for items such as "expedition cruising" or "adventure cruising."

Within this cruising subcategory, variations in physical demands range from extremely physical to basically lifting your fork to your mouth. A friend who had knee replacements recently went to Antarctica on a 1,500-passenger ship. Since the Antarctic treaty allows only 100 persons on land at a time, the ship did not debark, but my friend loved her experience anyway, with no worries about climbing in and out of zodiacs, slipping on rocks, etc. Read tour details very carefully, and if worried about your ability to handle a trip, call the cruise company and ask to talk with someone



Friendly Chinstrap



Antartic Light



Colorful Greenland



Blue Berg



Volcanic Beach

who has been on that specific trip rather than just any agent.

Due to Parkinson's disease and back issues, I took both a walker and a light, foldable electric travel scooter on my North Atlantic cruise. (Recommended: *travelscoot* or *iLIVINGUSA*.) At Qaqortup, crew members carried the scooter from the ship to the tender, then onto the dock, enabling me to explore and photograph Greenland. Be sure to check with the cruise line and airlines regarding their requirements so you may bring the scooter with no hassle. Some companies do not allow scooters aboard.

Once you choose your cruise, if possible, get a room where you can photograph directly out of a balcony or a window that can be opened. I could not photograph through my thick glass porthole in Antarctica and was frustrated by missed opportunities. In the North Atlantic, it was a joy to wake up to a beautiful sunrise and be able to pop out of bed, wrestle the heavy glass door open, and photograph in my pajamas, plus heavy coat and gloves.

You might suggest members of your group reserve rooms on opposite sides of the ship. Twice my brother-in-law texted me about whales and a killer sunset visible from his star-board side. I similarly sounded the alarm when the sunrise was outstanding from my port-side view.

Be Prepared

Weather is frequently a major factor in expedition cruising. I spent part of our night crossing the Drake Passage clinging desperately to my bed in order not to be bucked out of it by this wild convergence of Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. Prepare for the possibility of seasickness even if you are normally unaffected by it. An ear patch worked for me.

On the 2017 North Atlantic cruise, we missed the first of two Greenland stops due to wind and rough seas. With 30-foot waves and tossing deck, I resorted to one of the ship's wheelchairs, but most passengers maneuvered comfortably.

Of course, bring items such as rain protection for your cameras, layered clothes and non-bulky gloves, suitable for photographing. Ships often provide down jackets and/or boots so you don't have to pack such bulky items and the provided lists of what clothing to bring. I layer with undergarment, shirt, light, soft jacket with hood, sweater and waterproof jacket. I prefer this outfit to one thick jacket, as the weather can fluctuate 30 degrees in minutes if the wind picks up and the sun is blocked by clouds.

Tours

Sign up for your ship-sponsored tours the first day they are available online. If you take a cruise bus tour, position yourself near the door and hop



Unusual Glacier View

off immediately. As one tour leader at Europe's highest railroad said, "You have two to three seconds to get to the site, the waterfall or whatever, before fellow tourists will crowd into your view."

In a situation where you are given a set time period to photograph your destination, move rapidly to the furthest location and work your way back to the meeting point, or go directly to the area you are most interested in.

I strongly prefer making my own arrangements for photo touring rather than using the ship's bus tours. I love the freedom, the flexibility, and the sense of discover. Go online to cruise critic.com, and click on "roll call" to connect with fellow passengers on your upcoming cruise interested in sharing a cab/private tour.



Fareo Is Stream



Donna Judd Using Walker



Happy Inuit Baby

Photos © **Donna Judd**

For the Faroe Islands, I looked up our port, Travshan, online at Tripadvisor.com, then emailed from shipboard to the tourist office that was listed. They connected me with two taxi companies. One responded with a five-hour private tour with a guide/driver. We were taking a slight risk, but here and in Newfoundland our experiences were outstanding.

Photography

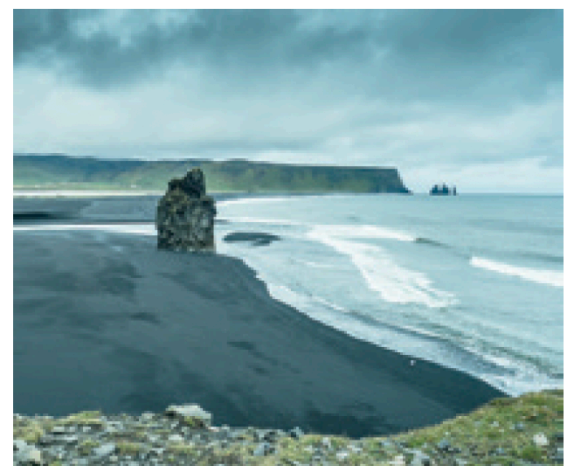
I prepared for rain during this September holiday, the North Atlantic cruise plus two weeks in Norway and Iceland. My gear included a new

water-proof camera which was fun in the Blue Lagoon but did not get enough use to justify buying it. I used a relatively light, mirrorless Olympus OMD 1 Mark 11, and a Mark 1 for backup. My most frequently used lenses were the Olympus f1-2.8, 24-80 equivalent and f4-5.6, 28-300 equivalent zooms. I also had inexpensive OP/Tech Rainsleeves, ND filters and tripod.

The light in the higher latitudes can be soft and wondrous, a golden hour that lasts many hours. The time just before or just after a rainstorm often brings great shot possibilities of dramatic clouds, magical light, rainbows, and reflections.



Remains of Bridge



Lone Rock



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Greenland Metropolis

For a southern Californian, this was an exciting opportunity.

That said, we did have some uninspiring grey skies. But you know the grey-sky drill: keep the sky out of the picture or shoot in RAW and work some post-production magic. You certainly don't want a light sky to draw your viewer's eyes away from the focus of your composition.

The typical cruise is not particularly conducive to dedicated photography, but expedition cruising can be. It gets you to landscapes and wildlife you've never before experienced, and the results can be magical memories and awe-inspiring photographs! Why not give it a try? ■



Largest in Iceland



Jokulsarlon Lagoon