

12 Travel Destinations for Photographers that Live Up to the Hype - Presentation Notes

By Erik Kuna

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New York City, NY - The Big Apple

1. **Fly into JFK, Newark, or LGA** — optimize arrival times to golden hour
2. **Skip rental cars**—Master the subway, bikes, and foot exploration
3. **Stay centrally (Midtown)** to reduce travel fatigue
4. **Best seasons:** spring/fall light & color
5. **Sunrise at Brooklyn Bridge Park**—arches, layers, skyline glow
6. **Blue hour from DUMBO**—Manhattan Bridge framing the Empire State
7. **Summit One (Vanderbilt)** for mirror-room abstracts & ceilings, just bring a Plastic Lens Hood for Skyline Views
8. **Top of the Rock pre-sunset**—360° cityscape including ESB
9. **Manhattanhenge twice a year**—plan for May/July alignment
10. **Central Park:** Bethesda Terrace, Bow & Gapstow Bridges, Castle
11. **Grand Central** for symmetry, motion blur & chandelier drama
12. **Street focus:** Chinatown, Bushwick murals, Coney Island boardwalk
13. **Architecturals:** Beekman Hotel's atrium, Chrysler Building lobby
14. **Staple Street Skybridge** — low-crowd symmetry
15. **Hamilton Park Observation Deck in New Jersey** - Sunset reflection in Midtown
16. **Gear bag essentials:** extra batteries, ND/HDR, travel tripod/platypodwith mini ballhead
17. **Street workflow:** zone focus, high shutter burst, wide apertures

Southern Utah – Red Rocks & Dark Skies

1. **Drive a 4WD** — access dirt roads to Moab, Grand Staircase & remote trailheads.
2. **Fly into SLC or Las Vegas**, then road-trip. I even would suggest one way.
3. **Base camp in Moab and Kanab**, minimizing pre-dawn travel time.
4. **Timing:** Fall–Spring light; late March–June ideal for Milky Way alignment
5. **Arrive 60–90min before golden hour**— exact Mesa Arch plan 120 minutes minimum.
6. **Scout at blue hour** for evolving foreground shadows and textures V

7. **Sunset/Dusk astro setup:** use PhotoPills/Sky Guide to chart Milky Way window through arches
8. **Shoot during new moon** and avoid light pollution in Dark Sky Parks.
9. **Critical Milky Way camera settings** — manual mode, wide-angle f/2.8, ISO 6400, 20 s exposure
10. **Tripod + red headlamp** essential tools .
11. **Manual focus on bright star** then tape ring; turn off stabilization for sharpness.
12. **Use extra batteries & layers** — desert nights dip sharply, even in summer
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13. **Blend daytime HDR light with long-exposure astro composites** for surreal southwestern panoramas.
14. **Iconic frames:** Mesa Arch sunrise in Canyonlands, Watchman & Virgin River in Zion, hoodoos in Bryce, Balanced Rock in Arches, White Pocket and The Wave, North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Slot Canyons in Page
15. **Escape crowds** — photograph Checkerboard Mesa, Kodachrome Basin, Capitol Reef Cathedral Valley after hours
16. **Mindful shooting** — stay on trails, preserve cryptobiotic soils, pack out everything
17. **Midday tricks** — shoot shadow-packed canyons, test -1 EV to tame highlights
18. **Creative workflow** — scout by day, shoot at sunrise/sunset and night, adapt if light or sky shift; intuition often trumps itinerary.

Chicago, IL – Grit, Glass & Reflections

1. **Fly into ORD or MDW**, then hop the 'L' —no need for a car downtown.
2. **Timing Tip:** golden hour and blue hour optimize reflections; rainy days add moodc
3. **Stay near Loop or River North** – walkable to skyline, riverwalk, nightlife.
4. **Sunrise skyline** from northern steps of Art Institute/Grant Park
5. **Blue hour from Dusable Bridge** – capture warm city lights mirrored over the Chicago River.
6. **Cloud Gate ('The Bean')** at sunrise for symmetrical clean reflections at Millennium Park
7. **Jay Pritzker Pavilion/ BP Bridge** – sweeping Gehry forms at dawn and dusk
8. Clark & Lake Parking Garage - L overhead
9. **Chinatown neon** – red lanterns, food carts, Ping Tom Memorial Park skyline foreground

10. **Architecture gems:** Robie House (FLL Wright) in Hyde Park for low-angle drama
11. **LaSalle Street** – Bird’s-eye corridors & symmetry toward the Board of Trade.
12. **Shedd Aquarium** – classical forms at sunrise with mist & river light
13. **Rain-reflection hack** – shot wet street pavements on dreary days for noir-style city mood .
14. **Stay safe downtown**, especially after dark; use awareness tactics similar to NYC
15. **Hidden gem:** Elks National Memorial and Headquarters

Grand Teton & Yellowstone, WY – Peaks, Geysers & Starry Nights

1. **Fly into Jackson Hole Airport (JAC)** — inside the park, saves down-time travel or Bozeman since flights can be Expensive in JAC
2. **Rent a car or 4WD** — necessary for scenic drives between locations and Yellowstone access
3. **Base in Jackson and West Yellowstone** — wildlife and light-shooting within minutes
4. **Timing: May– First Half of June & Sept–Oct** — ideal for low crowds, avoid Late June to the Beginning of August
5. **Arrive pre-dawn** — Snake River Overlook, Oxbow Bend, Moulton Barn before first light
6. **Golden-hour lakes** — shoot reflections at Jenny, Leigh, Taggart, Bradley Lakes
7. **Wildlife windows** — Moose at Schwabacher Landing & Buffalo, Elk, Wolves in Lamar Valleys
8. **Blue hour in Jackson Hole** — light hits peaks, atmospheric tone on Tetons- Alpine Glow in the morning
9. **Thermals and steam** — Yellowstone’s Old Faithful framed with stars and no tourist
10. **Astro setup** — tripod,, headlamp; shoot 20s @ f/2.8, ISO 6400
11. **Milky Way timing window** — core visible Summer into September
12. **Light-paint steam** — use a small LED at geyser steam for foreground drama
13. **Get High** with Midday Light— Go to Grand Prismatic Springs overlook on a bright sunny day for colors
14. **Layer your shots** — gold hour landscapes, midday wildlife, nightscapes — seamless edits tell a story

15. **Snake River along Hwy 89** — multiple turnouts offer diverse peaks & reflection compositions
16. **Don't Pass on Winter** — Most of the park is closed but for the brave travelers, they are rewarded with unique views
17. **Seasoned-weather gear** — layers, gloves, waterproof jacket and boots for spring chills
18. **Wildlife caution** — long lenses, maintain distance (25 yds from elk, 100 yds from bear); tripod orientation for safe backups
19. **Crowd hacks** — pre-dawn frames in park, stay late at Artist Point in Yellowstone

Black Hills & Badlands, South Dakota – Textures, Wildlife & Dark Skies

1. **Fly into Rapid City (RAP)** — gateway to Black Hills & Badlands.
2. **Rent a vehicle** — a car works, but consider 4WD for forest trails if you want to adventure.
3. **Stay central (Custer)** — proximity to forest, lakes & hikes.
4. **Best time:** August–October for foliage, fall wildlife; Spring for blooms & pups.
5. **Sunrise at Pinnacles Overlook** — early color on jagged Badlands formations
6. **Move off main overlooks** — scout small pullouts (Yellow Mounds, Balancing Rock) for better light
7. **Midday wildlife run** — Sage Creek Road in Badlands for bison, prairie dogs, bighorn sheep
8. **Bring a tele** — for wildlife and compressed landscape shots
9. **Rain & clouds = drama** — use ND filter for long exposures; Don't sleep on Monsoon season
10. **Spearfish Canyon** — waterfalls, spruce ridges
11. **Sylvan Lake at dawn/dusk** — granite spires mirrored in glacial lake
12. **Needles Highway & Cathedral Spires** — tight granite pillars with telephoto compression
13. **Mount Rushmore at blue hour** — symmetry + soft light; try long exposures
14. **Iron Mountain Road pullouts** — profile views, tunnels frame history & nature
15. **Wildlife loop in Custer State Park** — early light on bison herds, mountain goats, burros
16. **Conservation mindset** — stay on trails, respect wildlife distances, pack out everything

Savannah, GA – Spanish Moss, Squares & Soul

1. **Fly into SAV** and rent a car — essential for cemetery & Tybee access.
2. **Stay downtown (Historic District)** for walkable access to squares & early light.
3. **Best seasons:** late spring & early fall—soft light, fewer crowds, vibrant foliage.
4. **Golden hour in Forsyth Park** — moss-draped oaks framing the fountain
5. **Night tip at Forsyth** — dusk light on fountain + long exposure for smooth canalside ambiance
6. **Wormsloe Historic Site** — oak tunnel leading into misty, timeless morning compositions
7. **Squares & fountains** — Troupe, Lafayette, Chippewa & Orleans offer light, shade & symmetry
8. **Jones Street brick canopy** — dreamy street texture & pastel facades
9. **Scudder's Row / Monterey Square** — historic rowhouses, quiet light, minimal crowds
10. **St. John the Baptist Cathedral** — neo-Gothic exteriors & stained-glass interiors for dramatic light
11. **Bonaventure Cemetery** — haunting live-oak alleys, moss, moss-draped stones, ghostly mood
12. **Greenwich Cemetery** — quieter cemetery alternative with sculpture and bluff views
13. **Sorrel-Weed & Marshall Houses** — historic facades & eerie rooftop perspectives — cinematic heritage
14. **River Street at dawn** — cobbles, riverboats, fog/mist, reflective wet textures (
15. **Tybee Island lighthouse** — lighthouse + beach, sunsets
16. **Hidden: Red Gate Farms**
17. **Conservation & etiquette:** stay off lawn, respect memorials, ask before shooting private homes.

Tokyo, Japan – Neon Nights, Sacred Streets & Cinematic Cityscapes

1. **Fly into Haneda or Narita**, take the trains, easy to navigate with Google
2. **Get a Suica Card on Phone** - so easy to pay for Subway, Vending Machines, Etc.
3. **Stay in Shinjuku, Shibuya, or Asakusa**—balance between nightlife, lights, and temples.

4. **Visit any season**—cherry blossoms in spring (just expect crowds) neon drama year-round
5. **Shibuya Crossing** at Mag's Park Rooftop —blurred figures, neon chaos, close to action
6. **Shinjuku by night**—explore Golden Gai & Omoide Yokocho alleys, neon intimacy
7. **Kabukicho on rainy nights**—wet neon reflections, tight lens = cinematic grit
8. **Fast lenses help at Night (f/1.4–2.8)**—essential in neon-lit, low-light streets
9. **Lens hood and controlled ISO** for flare control and highlight retention
10. **Senso-ji at dawn**—temple majesty, market alleys & lantern-lit symmetry
11. **Tsukiji Outer Market mornings**—vibrant food stalls, motion, textures, sushi close-ups
12. **Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (Syabi)**—contemporary exhibitions & calm architectural frames
13. **Wide-angle + telephoto combo**—capture neon-scapes and subject isolation in tight alleys .
14. **Respect privacy & signage**—Golden Gai prohibits tripod/street photography-long ; private alleys need permission

Amalfi Coast, Italy – Cliffs, Villages & Mediterranean Light

1. **Fly into Naples (NAP)** — hire a car or take ferry access to Positano/Amalfi.
2. **Stay in Positano or Praiano** — cliffside charm with early access for photography.
3. **Best seasons:** late spring (May–June) or early fall (Sept), avoiding summer haze and crowd peaks.
4. **Golden hour above Positano** — capture cascading pastel buildings bathed in warm light.
5. **Amalfi sunrise from the waterfront** — colorful façades reflected on wet cobbles.
6. **Positano via ferry** — vivid colors, Mediterranean blues, relaxed textures.
7. **Ravello's terraced gardens (Villa Cimbrone/Caruso)** — panoramic cliffs and limoncello orchards.
8. **Midday telephoto compression** — isolate layers of pastel architecture and terrain.
9. **Drone altitudes (where allowed)** — stunning cliff-to-water viewpoint transitions.
10. **Slow-shutter seaside** — use ND filters & 1–2 s exposures to smooth waves.

11. **Nighttime village glow** — lantern-lit street scenes and long-exposure nitescapes.
12. **Hidden gem: Path of the Gods trail** — bird's-eye cliffs above sea with dramatic light glimpses.
13. **Hidden gem: Sea cave** — boat-accessed “emerald grotto” light play.
14. **Cultural tip:** ask permission before portrait photography — respect local vendors and residents.

Iceland – Glaciers, Waterfalls & Northern Lights

1. **Fly into Keflavík (KEF)** — rent a 4x4 to tackle back country roads F-roads and variable weather, or stick to the roads in a 2WD.
2. **Move around each night**, with ring-road loop (5–7 days) to pace, scout, shoot
3. **Best seasons:** summer for midnight sun, fall shoulder for aurora & color, winter for ice caves & dark sky
4. **Golden-hour glacier lagoons** – Diamond Beach & Jökulsárlón reflections with drifting icebergs
5. **Vestrahorn at Stokksnes** – snow-dune foregrounds + mountains mirroring in tidal pools
6. **Skógafoss frontal mist shots** – shoot from beneath, test waterproof housing at dawn, symmetrical in pastel fog
7. **Seljalandsfoss & Gljúfrabúi** – walk-behind falls; use 10-stop ND for ghost-water silky textures
8. **Reynisfjara beach** – shoot basalt stacks & sea-arches with wide angle; beware sneaker waves
9. **Dyrhólaey viewpoint** – capture arches + puffins (summer), side-lit in sunrise drama
10. **Highlands & Landmannalaugar** – martian color contrasts; telephoto for layered lava formations
11. **Háifoss waterfall** – epic vantage in the interior F-roads; small groups, postcard panoramas
12. **Aurora nights** – shoot slow 10–20 s, f/2.8, ISO 1600+, WB 3200K; Aurora apps + moonless clear nights
13. **Use sturdy tripod** – Iceland's wind can destroy lightweight legs; carbon-fiber or sturdier recommended
14. **Filters** – 3–10-stop ND for waterfalls
15. **Hidden gem: Westman Islands** – volcanic terrain, puffins, sunset cliffs far from tourists.

Hallstatt, Austria – Alpine Reflections & Old-World Charm

1. **Get there via train (Salzburg/Vienna → Hallstatt Bahn)**—avoid crowds, and take the scenic route.
2. **Stay overnight**—sleep after crowds depart, shoot sunrise in solitude.
3. **Best seasons:** late spring & fall for color; winter for quiet, moody snow scenes.
4. **Blue hour at postcard viewpoint**—shoot from road above town before sunrise crowds arrive.
5. **Golden hour lakeside**—reflect the church spire and Alps in still water.
6. **Marketplace alleys**—colorful façades, cobblestones, small-store textures.
7. **Pier "Am Hof"**—shoot swans with alpine village backdrop during low light.
8. **Upper church staircase & cemetery**—stone steps frame views back to town and lake.
9. **Skywalk via Salzbergbahn**—panoramic ridgeline views above town and lake.
10. **Hidden gem: secret waterfall near town**—ancient forest textures, intimate framing.
11. **Crowd hack:** shoot before 8 AM, bolt out by 9; after that hit nearby hikes
12. **Etiquette:** respect private property, no drones downtown, avoid stepping on lawns or staircases.

Banff & Lake Louise, Canada – Turquoise Lakes, Rocky Peaks & Alpine Spirits

1. **Fly into Calgary (YYC)** — rent a car or shuttle to Banff/Lake Louise.
2. **Base in Banff or Lake Louise village** — minimize travel time for dawn/evening shots.
3. **Best seasons:** mid-June to mid-September for lake color; winter for frozen lakes & snow peaks; spring/fall for aurora.
4. **Sunrise at Lake Louise** — Moraine and Victoria glacial lake reflections with pastel peaks.
5. **Lake Minnewanka at blue hour** — moraine silhouettes and ethereal light.
6. **Peyto Lake via Bow Summit** — telephoto compression on bright turquoise peaks.
7. **Icefields Parkway stops** — Mistaya, Bow Lake early light along glacier road.
8. **Winter magic at Lake Louise** — frozen lake ice formations, Castle Mountain silhouette, steam lines.
9. **Wildlife portrait tips** — elk, bighorn telephoto (200–400 mm), patience, BE NICE distance.
10. **Astro & aurora** — Golden Bighorn Dark Sky Preserve (seasonal aurora).

11. **Gear:** fast wide (14–24 mm f/2.8), telephoto 70–200 mm, tripod with spikes for ice, ND filters.
12. **Winter care** — insulated gloves, boot traction, manual lens warming to avoid fog.
13. **Protection:** Altitude-aware shooting, weather-check apps, respect bear closures.
14. **Crowd hack:** hit canoe docks & trails before 7 AM, mid-week & shoulder season.
15. **Ethics:** stay on boardwalks, distance from wildlife, bear-aware while hiking.

Paris, France – City of Light, Streets & Iconic Elegance

1. **Fly into CDG or Orly, use RER/metro**—efficient and avoids traffic headaches
2. **Stay in Le Marais, Saint-Germain or near Trocadéro**—prime access to classic light scenes
3. **Best times:** dawn for soft light & empty streets; golden-blue hours for silhouettes & twilight scenes
4. **Trocadéro sunrise**—Eiffel Tower symmetry over fountains; best shot before crowds arrive
5. **Seine riverbank**—low-angle framing with water reflections
6. **Avenue de Camoens and Rue de l'Université**—tower peeks between Parisian façades
7. **Pont Alexandre III at golden hour**—ornate bridge + river reflections
8. **Louvre Pyramid at sunset**—glass geometry with deep classical contrast, use Stacked ND filters to remove crowds.
9. **Palais Royal Colonnades**—minimalist lines & shadows, high-contrast architecture
10. **Metro Art Nouveau entrances**—vintage Belle Époque details, around Saint-Michel & Porte Dauphine
11. **Île de la Cité & Notre Dame**—gothic silhouettes on Seine riverside mornings
12. **Montmartre & Sacré-Cœur**—steps, rooftops, sweeping views at weekday dawn
13. **Carousel bokeh at sunset**—e.g., near Eiffel or neighbourhood squares—mixes childhood and light
14. **Pont de Bir-Hakeim**—steel bridge with 2nd-floor perspective; ideal for cinematically framed shoots
15. **Rue Crémieux pastel street**—vibrant façade portraits with telephoto compression

16. **Street & etiquette tips:** respect privacy, avoid taking faces unasked, be discreet & friendly

Yosemite National Park, CA (Bonus) – Granite Giants & Seasonal Drama

1. **Fly into Fresno/Yosemite (FAT)** or drive from SF; consider the reservation system.
2. **Stay inside Yosemite Valley**—worst-case shot haul is 30 minutes from sunrise to site.
3. **Best times:** February firefall, late May for waterfalls, autumn color mid-Oct.
4. **Pre-dawn**—El Capitan from Valley View; glow begins before sun crests.
5. **Sentinel Meadow at sunrise**—Half Dome reflections in calm pools.
6. **Bridalveil & Yosemite Falls**—use 6–10 stop ND filters for silky smooth long exposures.
7. **Mist trail portraits**—rain jackets + plastic or grip-scale protection for cameras near spray.
8. **Tunnel View at gold hour**—lush granite valley panorama, pre-8 AM is best.
9. **Forests & light beams**—shoot shallow depth $< f/5.6$ for dreamy shafts in pine groves.
10. **Firefall technique**—February sunsets + wet snow slope; bracket to hold highlight in ice glow.
11. **Starlight panoramas**—drive to Tunnel or Glacier Point Road for dark skies
12. **Safety reminders**—beware ice, folded layers, traction devices on steep trails.
13. **Hidden gem:** Dewey Point at dusk—vantage above El Cap for soft pastel tones.
14. **Etiquette:** stay on trails, respect wildlife, carry out everything, and respect park rules.

Big Bend National Park, TX (Bonus) – Desert Wilderness & Galactic Views

1. **Fly into Midland or El Paso**, then rent a 4WD for remote washes.
2. **Stay in Chisos Basin or near Rio Grande Village** for sunrise access and star stability.
3. **Best seasons:** mid-Oct to early June—warm days, cold nights and superb visibility. Avoid Later June to October!
4. **Early dawn at Window View**—sunrise beams framed by mountain corridor.
5. **Hot Springs Trail mid-morning**—mix of river, canyon, palms, and ruins in golden sun.
6. **Santa Elena Canyon afternoon**—long exposures on water + cliff reflections.

7. **Sotol Vista sunset**—panorama over desert and distant Mexico peaks.
8. **Terlingua ghost town**—weathered buildings, dying sunsets, rustic textures.
9. **Aurora and Milky Way nights**—Super Dark Skies
10. **Grapevine Hills Balanced Rock**—golden gloss on sandstone arch at sunrise.
11. **Ross Maxwell Drive scenic**—stop at Mule Ears, Sam Nail Ranch for quiet desert shots.
12. **Chisos Basin** —mountain silhouette.
13. **Macro close-ups**—ocotillo bloom, mountain laurel, ant tracks in morning sand.
14. **Safety:** always carry water, break during midday, watch for rattlesnakes, and inform rangers if backcountry hiking
15. **Secret:** Rio Grande hot spring at dawn—river mist and glow.

If you have any questions or need more information, please feel free to contact me at erikkuna.com or in the KelbyOne community at community.kelbyone.com

If you want to learn more about night photography make sure to check out my book from Rocky Nook, The Night Photography Book and classes at KelbyOne.com and join me on Photography Workshop adventures at milkywayworkshops.com or scottkelbyworkshops.com