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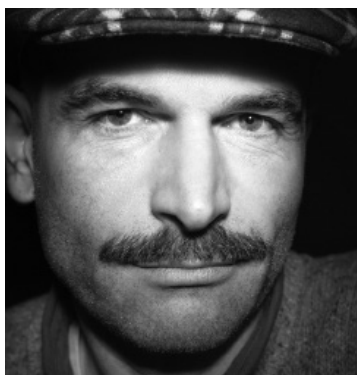
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Gianluca Giannone
Photographer
 Milan

Milan-born and -based photographer Gianluca Giannone (“**Francesco Maglia**,” page 86) began taking pictures with a Polaroid when he was 9 and hasn’t stopped since. After attending a professional school of photography, he developed his expertise while assisting international photographers in advertising, fashion, architecture, still life, portrait and reportage. Curiosity about the secret world of “made by hand” has pushed him to produce pictures and video about the lives of craftsmen and artists motivated by passion for their work. Giannone has shot editorials for magazines like *GQ* (Italy), *Vanity Fair* and *Condé Nast Traveller*, and advertising campaigns for Campagnolo, Fiat and the Ministry of Transport.



Lola Akinmade Åkerström
Writer
 Stockholm

Lola Akinmade Åkerström (“**The Shots That Got Away**,” page 132) is an award-winning writer and photographer based in Stockholm. She has written and photographed from six continents for *National Geographic Traveller*, the BBC, CNN, *The Guardian*, Lonely Planet, *Travel + Leisure* and Fodor’s. She has also volunteered as a photojournalist with the Swedish Red Cross and World Hope International, documenting their projects in countries such as Nicaragua, Cambodia and Sweden, and with CHIEF, a Nigeria-based NGO that promotes HIV/AIDS awareness and grass-roots health development. Her photography is represented by National Geographic Creative, and she is the editor-in-chief of Slow Travel Stockholm.



Yuval Hen
Photographer
 London

Tel Aviv native Yuval Hen (“**White Space**,” page 138) is a photographer and filmmaker specialising in fashion, portrait and advertising photography. He constantly seeks to develop new techniques and push boundaries. In addition to being commissioned by Madonna to recreate images of King Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson for her film *W.E.*, he has worked for numerous advertising clients, including Maria Grachvogel, Aveda, Bastyan and Anna Valentine. His images have appeared in *Financial Times: How to Spend It*, *Vogue* (Turkey), *The Sunday Times: Style, Schön! Magazine* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, and his work has been featured in an exhibit at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York.



Adam Baer
Writer
 Los Angeles

Originally a conservatory-trained professional musician, New York native Adam Baer (“**Leaving Home Base**,” page 134) has written essays for *The New York Times*, NPR, *Harper’s*, *The Atlantic* and *The New Republic*, among other publications. A former correspondent for *Travel + Leisure*, he currently logs as much time as he can in the Pacific Ocean, near his adopted home of Los Angeles. His essays have been anthologised in such popular books as *Before and After*, *Lost and Found: Stories From New York* and *A Leaky Tent Is a Piece of Paradise*. Baer is currently adapting and writing new work for the screen.



The Shots That Got Away

A professional travel photographer shares the lessons learned from images that didn't turn out as planned—and from the shots she didn't take.

By Lola Akinmade Åkerström Illustration by Patrick Leger

HYPNOTISING SWIRLS of green and red light danced across the crisp, clear skies over Reykjavík. Like curtains, they unfolded and wrapped themselves around us. Despite the bone-biting chill, we squealed with joy at the extraordinary light show—the aurora borealis. This was my first time seeing it, and I couldn't leave Iceland without commemorating this bucket-list experience. So I lifted my camera and used any available surface as a makeshift tripod, snapping away and losing myself behind the lens.

A week later, when the guy at the photo-developing studio told me I'd handed him seven blank rolls of film, I was confused. What? "I'm sorry, but it seems the airport security X-ray machine ruined your film," he said. I teetered on the verge of a hysterical breakdown. I felt as though I'd lost everything from my trip.

Back when we used film, we had only one chance. Today, with digital cameras and instant technology that allows on-the-spot editing and self-auditing, the common wisdom is that we get more chances to get it right, to capture that moment perfectly on camera.

Still, we all have them: those travel photos that got away. The ones we quickly but carefully composed while witnessing something memorable—only to find the result out of focus, or to have the shot deleted by mistake. Even as a professional, I have my fair share of photos gone awry, which leads me to question: In this digital age, do we really get more chances to get the moment right? In our photography, aren't we only capturing subsequent moments close to the ideal one we missed?

In my career, I've explored different cultures and scenarios where I've been forced to decide whether I should take the shot or let it go in favour of interacting with the people around me, choosing the moment over the photo. Not-quite-right travel photos have taught me that rather than settling for a faraway shot of some interesting person, I should try to strike up a conversation and ask if I can take a proper photo. Interacting, I've learned, requires giving full attention to someone or something.

To be a better photographer, you have to interact, as well as observe interactions around you, such as how light flows through a scene. Unless you're photographing dangerous

wildlife or sports in action, you should be getting closer to your subjects and making the best connection you can. Based on how those interactions play out, over time, you learn which shots to take and which to let go.

Maybe you noticed how the light fanned perfectly across a lush landscape, but by the time you reached for your camera, the light had shifted. You let out a sigh of frustration, thinking you'd missed the moment. But you didn't miss it. In fact, witnessing that moment apart from your camera sharpened your observational skills—what does it look like just before the light changes?—and prepared you for the next shift of light.

One of my favourite scenes in the recent movie *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* was an exchange between the characters of Mitty and *Life* magazine photojournalist Sean O'Connell. They were tracking a rare snow leopard, and when it finally appeared, O'Connell purposely didn't take the shot. When Mitty questions this decision, O'Connell responds, "Sometimes I don't. If I like a moment, for me, personally, I don't like to have the distraction of the camera. I just want to stay in it."

Like O'Connell, I carve out times in my travels to stay in the moment, such as putting away my camera to play pickup games with children and chat with market women while on assignment in South Africa. Observation—even of the most mundane of things—is what feeds my sense of awe and my desire to take photographs.

Since that experience in Iceland, I've witnessed the Northern Lights again, in Swedish Lapland, and I've made peace with losing those early photos. Even though I never saw the images, they taught me a valuable lesson. Professional aurora photographers, people who chase lights for a living, have since told me the same thing: There's something about watching the Northern Lights dance overhead that forces you to stop. You ignore your camera, you put away your smartphone, and just watch. Engrossed, bewitched, entranced. Acutely aware of your breathing and your pounding heart as you realise just how small you are in the grand scheme of life as its colours gyrate across the sky.

Sometimes they don't take a single photo. □

Lola Akinmade Åkerström, born in Nigeria and based in Stockholm, is a National Geographic Creative photographer and editor-in-chief of slowtravelstockholm.com.