TAKE BETTER PHOTOS IN NAMIBIA

Claudia & Wynand du Plessis

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

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- Other photo accessories you MUST bring to Namibia
- Crucial equipment mistakes to avoid

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

Detailed tech info on equipment in PDF:

>> The essential requirements & specifications that camera equipment should have for wildlife & landscape photography in Namibia

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Simple & clear explanation on basic tech stuff:

>> http://www.exposureguide.com/photography-basics.htm

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

1. Essential camera requirements

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>> You will find detailed technical specifications of your camera and lenses in their manuals, or on the website of the manufacturer

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A: Reaction time: Shutter lag & autofocus lag

>> The delay in capturing a shot when the shutter is pressed is called shutter lag, and the delay of the lens to focus when the shutter is pressed is called focussing lag

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  >> You want perfect & precise control over the exact moment you'll want to capture in your images; especially in wildlife photography (WP), but also for landscape photography (LP)

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  - Near instant shutter release: NO camera shutter lag

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  >> Miss images because of delays will drive you crazy

  >> NO simple compact cameras + NO Cell phones as your main camera system

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Recommended:

- An acceptable shutter lag should be < 0,5 seconds for start up to first shot, and < 0,08 sec when the camera is ready and pre-focussed.

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- The autofocus lag should ideally be less than 0,15 sec during full and continuous focusing modes

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- for LP a high frame rate is in most cases of little importance

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- RAW files need +/- two to three times more space on your memory stick than full-size JPG files

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Recommended:

- Shoot in raw format as it gives you the best options for post processing (optimizing your digital images later in a program e.g. Photoshop/Lightroom/Topaz Clarity for correct exposure, colour, brightness, contrast, etc, which is nearly always necessary for serious photography)

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>> If your camera does not capture RAW but only JPEGs be aware that it limits your post-processing options considerably

>> If you intend to buy a new camera, buy a camera that does support RAW mode: allows you best options for post-processing

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- Most cameras that offer RAW mode also offer the option to capture JPG files at the same time
- This is helpful to use JPEGs (that are optimized in-camera already and need little work in the computer) for less serious uses, and only post-process the RAW files that will be needed for more serious/professional uses e.g. large poster prints, calendar prints, etc

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>> ISO 6400: very light sensitive setting with much more noise (depending on camera)

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>> ISO, shutter speed & f-stop are correlated; more later on correct exposure in Module 6

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Recommended ISO setting for very low light situations:

>> use ISO 1600 to 6400 during very early morning / very late afternoon in Namibia:
best light but NOT strong light

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>> rather get noisier & sharp shots in nice light or with more dramatic action happening than a fine quality images in boring light and with nothing interesting happening

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Recommended sensor resolution:

- buy camera with very high sensor resolution: great for capturing fine detail (even when zooming into the image)

  >> at least 16 Megapixels

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Pros & cons of full-frame vs. cropped frame sensors:

- Full-frame sensors usually produce better image quality with less noise and more sensitivity to details in darker areas than cropped frame sensors, especially during low light and high ISO:
  >> best for LP

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- Cropped frame sensors have narrower field of view for the same lens when used on a camera with full-frame sensor, therefore you get more telephoto effect for the same lens
  >> a 400mm lens on a full-frame camera stays a 400mm lens
  >> a 400mm lens on a cropped frame camera becomes a 600mm lens or similar
  >> best for WP

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- camera sensor-shift stabilization: most compact cameras, but even some full format cameras (Sony, Olympus, Pentax, Panasonic)

>> camera system & lenses lighter, smaller and usually cheaper

>> but less effective when using long telephoto lenses

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Advantages of Image Stabilization:

>> image stabilization now allows 2 to 5 stops slower shutter speeds with handheld photography: it is now possible to get sharp shots with a 400mm lens at a 1/30 sec

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RULE OF THUMB for capturing sharp, handheld images without image stabilization:

>> use a shutter speed equal or faster than the equivalent focal length of the lens:
e.g. for a 400mm lens use 1/400-second or faster; 200mm lens use 1/200-second, etc.

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Recommended:

>> If you do buy a new camera/lens: choose a system that offers stabilization, and the latest generation is often better

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

2. The right lenses to bring to Namibia:

>> Landscape Photography (LP) & Wildlife Photography (WP) often require different lenses to get the best results

2. The right lenses to bring to Namibia

A: Focal length of your lens (related to full-frame digital cameras):

>> For cameras with cropped frame sensors the same lens will result in an image magnification of at least 1,5 times larger than when using a full-frame camera

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Recommended:

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>> at waterholes with a large herd of elephants a standard telephoto and even a wide angle lens should also be kept ready

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>> 24mm or wider lens often better for most grand landscapes

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>> macro lens: for close-ups

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>> macro lens: for close-ups

>> medium & long telephoto lenses: for tighter landscape shots & abstracts

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>> e.g. f/1.4 for wide angle or standard lens

>> f/2 .8 for long telephoto lens (300 mm)

>> f/4.0 to f/5.6 for very long telephoto lens (600 mm)

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

2. The right lenses to bring to Namibia

C: Telephoto lens with fixed focal length vs. telephoto zoom lens:
>> e.g. 80 mm or 200mm fix focal length lens vs. 80 to 200 mm zoom lens

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- for WP: with zoom lenses you don't need to change lenses thus avoiding danger of missing out on a shot or getting dust inside camera; no need for two camera bodies & fewer lenses needed: save money

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Recommended:
>> buy the best lens and good camera rather than the best camera and a poor lens

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

3. Important photo accessories & tools:

3. Important photo assessories & tools

A: Memory Card:

>> internal storage card for images and videos taken with your camera, available as SD cards (secure digital) or CF cards (compact flash)

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- download & format every night to be ready for the next day

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

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>> to download & view the photos you've taken

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- bring a USB cable to connect your camera to your laptop

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Recommended:

- pack 3 rechargeable camera batteries per camera

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- recharge every night!

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

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>> Namibia is a dusty country & you'll need to protect your equipment and keep it together

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>> for even quicker access (for example during WP) leave your camera with lens on the car seat next to you just covered by a soft cloth or scarf

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

3. Important photo assessories & tools

E: Camera Cleaning Stuff:

>> Namibia is a dusty country & dust on your equipment may cause a lens to be scratched or a sensor to fail

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Recommended:

- cleaning brush to blow off dust

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- use lens cleaning wipes only for sticky dirt on lens: be careful to first remove all dust with a brush before using wipes

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- brush/clean when necessary in closed area (room/tent/car)

3. Important photo assessories & tools

F: Camera Bean Bag Support:

>> Small cotton bag (small pillow case) filled with small kernels (rice, lentils, beans); you rest your camera and lens on it for support and it adapts to the camera shape & the underground shape

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>> if you want to make a simple bean-bag yourself, take an empty pillow case from home with and buy the filling in Namibia

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G: Camera Tripod:

>> Support for steady camera during shooting (i.e. in low light & at slow shutter speeds)

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Recommended:

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>> but a window clamp with tripod head (and quick release plate) that is permanently kept on open window is often used by serious photographers using very long telephoto lenses

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>> not all tripods are made equal, and for international travel a professionally made light carbon-fibre tripod and tripod head with quick release plate are recommended

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>> To search for wildlife and birds, and identify situations where it may be worth the while waiting longer for interesting things to happen

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>> it is very important to bring a good quality binoculars as poor quality devices will strain and weaken your eyes

>> 10x50 binoculars are very well suited for spotting and identifying wildlife and birds, 10x indicates the magnification and 50 indicates the front element diameter in mm (the wider the better as more light enters and the viewed image is brighter)

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

4. Crucial equipment mistakes to avoid:

>> Photography on location can be very demanding when you aim at capturing professional quality images

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>> Photography on location can be very demanding when you aim at capturing professional quality images

>> By avoiding the following mistakes you can make your life easier and focus on getting the best shots

4. Crucial equipment mistakes to avoid

- Slow camera focus (will drive you crazy & you'll miss half the shots)

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

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- Not enough rechargeable camera batteries:
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- No power adapter for charger:
  >> buy in Windhoek or Swakopmund

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

4. Crucial equipment mistakes to avoid

- Too few or damaged memory cards
  >> impossible to buy on route in Namibia; only possibility in Windhoek, but DO NOT RELY on this

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GENERALLY:
>> on route through Namibia it is very unlikely you'll be able to buy any broken or forgotten camera accessories

MODULE 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

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- Make sure to avoid the crucial mistakes listed