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# ESSENTIAL PHOTO ACCESSORIES

FOR THE BEST PHOTO EXPERIENCE AND ENHANCED CREATIVE OPTIONS,  
CONSIDER THESE MUST-HAVE ACCESSORIES

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN MATIASH

**Y**ou'd think that to practice and enjoy photography, all you'd need is a camera and a lens, right? In a basic sense, that's absolutely true.

Barring photographing in extreme conditions, like in low-light or high-wind environments, there'd be nothing to stop you from packing a camera and a lens as your only pieces of gear. With that said, the massive array of photo accessories available to photographers grows every year with new and innovative products built to make your photo adventures better, safer and more convenient. Some photo accessories, like tripods and filters, open up new creative routes for your photography that simply wouldn't be possible otherwise. So let's look at some photo accessory categories to see why you may want to consider adding them to your photo gear kit.

My tripod is the most important accessory in my kit. So much of how I create my photos relies heavily on keeping my camera perfectly still, even when I'm working in challenging environmental conditions.

# ESSENTIAL PHOTO ACCESSORIES

## TRIPODS AND MONOPODS

I wholeheartedly believe that the tripod is the most important accessory a photographer can have. If you're anything like me, with overly caffeinated and jittery hands, holding a camera perfectly still for longer than 1/60 sec. can be challenging. Imagine needing to handhold your camera for multiple seconds—or minutes. Having something that either totally stabilizes your camera (a tripod) or facilitates in stabilizing it (a monopod) is critical in low-light situations or for night photography when the exposure requires a long shutter speed or to help offset a heavy camera and lens.

Tripods and monopods come in a variety of material options, most commonly in aluminum and carbon fiber. While aluminum tripods tend to cost less than their carbon-fiber siblings, they can be much heavier, which should be a real consideration when making a decision.

Another option to consider is the type of head that you'll use with your tripod. One of the most common types is the ballhead, which allows you pivot,

tilt and angle your camera in a variety of ways. Some photographers and many videographers prefer a more binary pan-and-tilt head because of the additional fluidity and control offered while moving the camera.

Pricing of tripods is as varied as the actual options available. A good starter tripod can run around \$300 to \$500 and should provide splaying of each leg independently. Some may offer a rising center column that can provide additional height if you're in a pinch. Whatever your choice, I strongly recommend keeping a tripod as part of your camera accessory arsenal.

## FILTERS

Next to the tripod, filters would rank second in terms of must-have accessories. Whether you're shooting stills or filming video, it's a big creative advantage to be able to control the rate and characteristics of the light that hits your camera sensor. This isn't as big of a deal when it's night time or when you can control artificial lights, but filters instantly show their value when the sun is blazing down.

There are a variety of filter types and sizes to consider. If you could invest in only one filter, I'd recommend a circular polarizer. Hands down, this is the most important filter I own because it does wonders with removing surface reflections from water, glass and foliage while also adding a nice contrast punch to clouds, blue skies and green forests.

After that, you have your neutral-density (ND) filters. Think of ND filters as sunglasses for your lens. By placing these dark filters in front of the lens, your camera will require a longer shutter speed to expose the image. This helps greatly when having to mitigate for the bright sun and has a wonderful byproduct of permitting longer exposures in bright conditions for smoothing out moving water or ghosting rapid-walking pedestrians.

Most filters come in two primary types: drop-in and screw-on. Drop-in filters slide into a holder system that mounts to your camera lens via an adapter ring. Screw-on filters physically screw onto the front filter thread of lenses that support them. Regardless of



If you have any expectation of getting a beautiful long exposure photo or are photographing/filming in very bright conditions, you'll need some neutral-density and circular polarizer filters. I never leave home without my filter kit.

# GEAR

## TRIPODS AND MONOPODS

For those photographers looking for a good starter tripod, MeFOTO offers some fantastic options in both aluminum and carbon fiber. It also has an interesting leather option with its RoadTrip Classic line. The ballhead is very capable, and the tripod itself has a nifty trick of allowing you to remove one of the legs for use as a monopod.

I reached a point in my photography career when I outgrew the capabilities of my tripod and needed something that was engineered with exceptional precision and quality. That's when I moved exclusively to Really Right Stuff and have used these tripods for almost a decade. As far as tripods go, they're among the very best available. The TVC-34L carbon fiber tripod paired with the BH-55 ballhead is a seriously robust yet lightweight setup that will likely outlast you.



**MeFOTO RoadTrip Classic AL Leather Edition** | \$199 | mefoto.com



**Really Right Stuff TVC-34L with BH-55 LR Ballhead** | \$1,587 | reallyrightstuff.com

## FILTERS

When choosing filters, it's important that they are made of durable materials and minimize (or eliminate) any trace of color cast. To that end, Wine Country Camera's line of Circular Polarizer and Blackstone Neutral-Density filters do a fantastic job of controlling light and are constructed to stand up to the rigors of any photo shoot. The use of "filter vaults" add protection to the fragile glass filters and make it easy to slide them in and out of the holder. It's also worth noting that the Wine Country Camera holder is one of the most handsome I've ever seen.

Formatt-Hitech offers a variety of ND and Circular Polarizer filters in both resin and glass materials. Its Firecrest Ultra 10-Stop ND filter is ideal for photographing in extremely bright conditions while adding durability to the glass surface.

**Formatt Hitech Firecrest Ultra 10-Stop ND Filter (100mm x 100mm Drop-in)** | \$179 | formatt-hitechusa.com



**Wine Country Camera 100mm Starter Filter & Holder Kit** | \$779 | winecountry.camera

# ESSENTIAL PHOTO ACCESSORIES

filter type, it's critical that you obtain the proper thread size, otherwise you won't be able to mount them.

## CAMERA BAGS

I could fill an entire issue solely talking about camera bags. For many photographers, the quest for finding the "perfect" bag is as elusive as finding the holy grail. So, let's start with one premise: there's no single perfect bag. Rather, you should find the bag that works for you based on the circumstances.

For example, I wouldn't expect to use the same camera bag that I'd take on a multiday hike in the mountains as I would on a day-long stroll in New York City. First, identify the type of shoots you typically go on and narrow your bag selection from there.

For landscape and extensive outdoor shooting, I prefer to use a robust backpack. While your first inclination may be to see how much gear you can pack, you should pay greater attention to how the pack fits your frame. Good adventure

bags have strong shoulder straps and provide good back support. Additionally, you want to make sure that the bag material is built to withstand the elements and the rigors of hiking through nature. Finally, I often end up having to change lenses while I'm standing in the middle of a stream or on the side of a steep path. In both cases, putting my camera bag down is out of the question, so being able to access my gear from the back is critical. With the aid of the bag's waist belt, I can droop the bag down like a tray and safely access my gear.

For urban shoots, I almost always go with a messenger-style bag. I tend to carry far less gear on these shoots, so I don't need massive capacity. Plus, the shoulder strain that comes with lugging around an over-packed bag gets old very quickly. A good messenger bag should be able to fit your camera and two to three lenses. There are times when I'll want to duck into a coffee shop to take a break, so being able to accommodate a laptop is also helpful. Just remember

that every item you put in your bag adds weight, which typically has an adverse effect on extended comfort.

## CAMERA STRAPS

Much like camera bags, the choice of straps can play an important role in terms of how comfortable you will be. While there's no shortage of strap options available, there are certain things you should look for before making a decision.

Most straps that I've seen hang around your neck. This is typically what camera manufacturers bundle with cameras. However, as you carry around bigger cameras and lenses, the stress that gets put on your neck can be painful. That's why I opt to use an over-the-shoulder strap similar to a messenger bag. I find them to be more comfortable, especially when handling heavier gear, and it doesn't add any stress to my neck.

Also, because I often switch between handholding my camera and placing it on a tripod, it's important to have a sturdy and easy-to-use release mechanism. Some of the more modern strap design companies make plates that are compatible with the common Arca Swiss quick release system, making it a breeze to mount your camera onto your tripod without having to fiddle with the strap.

## BATTERIES AND CHARGERS

You may have a top-of-the-line camera, but that won't matter if you don't have sufficient battery power. Most modern cameras come with one rechargeable lithium-ion battery but, like media cards, having just one probably won't suffice. When I'm on a shoot, I always have four fully charged batteries. That may be more than you'll typically use, but at least one backup battery is highly recommended.

In terms of the types of batteries that are worth purchasing, there are typically two schools of thought. You can either spend less money (sometimes significantly less) by purchasing third-party batteries that are compatible with your camera or you can invest in batteries made by your camera's manufacturer. I know many people who have had great luck with third-party batteries, but I haven't been so fortunate, which had led me to

invest in only original batteries by my camera manufacturer. One of the risks of using third-party batteries is that they may not hold a charge for as long as your camera manufacturer's battery would. Build quality is also an important factor, as you seriously don't want a faulty battery being used in your camera. It's always the safest bet to go with your camera maker's batteries.

When it comes to battery chargers, I'm all about efficiency. When I'm on a multi-day shoot, one of the last things I do every night before going to sleep is set my batteries to charge. While most cameras allow you to charge the battery in-camera by connecting a USB cable to a wall adapter, this is typically a very slow process. Instead, I opted to buy a dual battery charger that allows me to charge two batteries simultaneously and at a much faster rate than via the camera. In fact, I bought a second charger so that I can have four batteries charging at once for those heavier shooting days. Some of the better-quality chargers will have built-in overcharge protection, which

is important for lithium-ion batteries. Also, if you're going to be driving a lot, it would be wise to make sure that your charger supports plugging into your car's cigarette lighter port. Again, sourcing these chargers from your camera maker is the safest decision.

## MEDIA CARDS AND READERS

Whenever a new camera is announced, one of the features that often takes center stage is its burst shooting rate, usually represented in frames per second (FPS). Sports, wildlife and action photographers often live or die by how fast and how long the camera can keep shooting before its internal buffer fills up. The camera has to write the image data to the media card you inserted, and depending on the type of card you're using, this task can take a lot more—or less—time. That's why it's important to know the read and write speeds for the cards you use and which cards your camera is capable of supporting. The SD cards I use, for example, are rated at a 94 MB/s, which becomes crucial as the RAW files

produced weigh in at almost 80 megabytes. If you're photographing a sporting event where every millisecond needs to be captured, it's critical to know what the capabilities of your media cards are. Fortunately, some of the newest cameras on the market are now taking advantage of supporting UHS-II SD cards, allowing for even faster write speeds.

Storage capacity of modern media cards varies from 16 gigabytes to upwards of 256 gigabytes. Historically, photographers were hesitant to use large-capacity media cards due to the rate of corruption that often plagued them. However, advancements in media card production have drastically cut down on these types of corruptions, making it totally viable to use 128 GB or 256 GB capacities. For videographers who often film in 4K, having this extra space is a must, as is having multiple cards to switch to when one gets full.

Your media card reader comes into play when it's time to offload your photos from the card to your computer (or tablet) and there's no shortage of options.

## GEAR

### CAMERA BAGS

For nature photographers looking for a capable backpack-style camera bag that holds a large amount of gear, has a secure rear-panel access and can scale its internal storage to accommodate any kit, check out the Shimoda Explore 40. This bag has traveled the world with me and is configured to hold all of my camera gear, plus a DJI Mavic Pro drone, as well as my laptop. It has a variety of tripod strap options and has very comfortable shoulder and waist straps.

As far as messenger bags go, the Peak Design Everyday Messenger is one of the most handsome and functional that I've ever used. Like the Shimoda Explore 40 backpack, the Everyday Messenger has traveled the world with me, and I've consistently been thrilled with how versatile it is. From the front magnetic clasp to the ingenious origami-style dividers, it allows me to store my camera, two to three lenses, my laptop and even my tripod without batting an eye. It's also made up of some of the finest materials I've seen. All in all, it's a superb messenger bag for photographers.



**Peak Design Everyday Messenger 15** | \$249 | [peakdesign.com](http://peakdesign.com)

**Shimoda Explore 40 Starter Kit** | \$379 | [shimodadesigns.com](http://shimodadesigns.com)

I have preferred camera bags based on the type of outing that I'm on. For the more rugged, outdoor shoots, I prefer using a larger adventure bag.

# ESSENTIAL PHOTO ACCESSORIES

All of my camera gear uses either SD or Micro SD cards, so I made sure to find a single reader that supports both. What's more important is the bus type that the reader uses. Much like the speed ratings of your SD cards, the bus type of your reader will determine how fast your computer can read the image data stored on them. Most modern media card readers support USB 3.0, a mature bus that offers decently fast read speeds. However, as is the case with my computers, newer USB-C buses offer even more data throughput, so it may be worthwhile to invest in those if your computer supports this standard. In either case, I recommend getting two, with one left at home and one kept with you when you travel. The last thing you want is to be caught on the road with no easy way to offload your photos.

## HARD DRIVES AND CABLES

It makes sense to move from media cards to hard drives, and a lot of the variables we just discussed are relevant here as well. For sports photographers, it isn't only critical for the camera to be able to write

photos very quickly. It's also very important to offload those photos onto a hard drive as quickly as possible so that they can be culled, rated, tagged and sent off to the wire for publishing or licensing. You may not be photographing under such time-sensitive demands, but faster transfers mean less time at the computer and more time shooting or processing.

Historically, the norm for hard drive design employed physical spinning

platters. On the plus side, massive drive capacities upwards of 4 terabytes or more can be purchased for cheaper than ever. On the down side, these drives tend to have slower read and write speeds, and can be more susceptible to corruption due to hardware failure.

More recently, solid state drives (SSD) have become much more widely available and affordable. The greatest advantage of SSDs is that there are no moving parts,

which allows for significantly faster read and write speeds along with drastically reducing corruption due to hardware failure. SSDs are typically much smaller than their hard drive siblings, so they can travel with you much more easily, too.

While there are some portable drives that support Wi-Fi connectivity to a computer or smart device, transfer speeds tend

to be slow, which means you'll likely still use USB cables. Regardless of the type of USB cable your drive and computer use, it's important that it's sturdy, won't fray at the ends, and has high-quality connectors. I'm a huge fan of nylon-braided cables because they're built to stand the rigors of travel and—if I'm being honest—they look super cool. DP

*Brian Matiash is a professional landscape and travel photographer, published author and podcaster. He specializes in fusing photography with experiential storytelling and practical instruction to help others grow their creativity. He also co-hosts the No Name Photo Show, one of the most popular photography podcasts in iTunes.*



However, if I'm roaming around a crowded city, I'll opt for a slimmer, more inconspicuous messenger bag.

## GEAR

### CAMERA STRAPS

I'm a big fan of the Peak Design Slide and use it exclusively for my camera strap. Aside from the fantastic build quality, it takes no time at all to remove from your camera thanks to its Anchor Link quick-connectors. Another bonus is that its Capture Camera Clip is compatible with Arca Swiss quick release systems, so if your tripod supports that, you don't need to remove anything when mounting your camera to it.

CustomSLR offers the Glide One Strap System with a very comfortable split neoprene shoulder pad that distributes the weight of your gear across a wider surface area. The rotating C-Loop also spins, thereby reducing instances where your camera could get bunched or wound up while hanging at your side.

**Custom SLR Glide One with C-Loop** | \$65 | customslr.com



**Peak Design Slide** | \$64 | peakdesign.com



### BATTERIES AND CHARGERS

I've had a lot of success using the dual-battery charger by RAVPower. While I'm a Sony user, RAVPower does offer similar dual-battery chargers for a variety of popular Canon and Nikon models. A bonus is that these dual-battery chargers also come with two spare batteries, but remember to test their charge capabilities before going into the field with them.

As stated above, the safest choice is to purchase original batteries and chargers made by your camera manufacturer. While these tend to be more expensive, you have peace of mind that they have been built and rated for use in your specific camera and won't void warranties if there's a problem.

**RAVPower Battery and Charger Set** | \$28 | ravpower.com



### HARD DRIVES AND CABLES

Just because you're traveling doesn't excuse you from following proper backup procedures with your photos. Fortunately, WD has got you covered with its My Passport Wireless SSD. With an integrated SD card slot, all you need to do is pop your SD card in and the drive will automatically copy over every file onto its SSD drive. What's even cooler is that you can connect your phone, tablet or computer to the drive wirelessly and browse all of your photos at full resolution.

For those who prefer travel hard drives with faster read and write performance along with no moving parts, G-Technology's G-Drive ev R4W SSD is not only lightning fast, it also comes with a rubberized bumper to provide additional protection.

You're going to need cables to connect either of these drives to your computer, and while they're usually included in the package, Anker's PowerLine+ double-braided nylon cables bring a completely different level of durability. They also come in a variety of port types, including Micro USB, USB-C and more.

**WD My Passport Wireless SSD (1TB)** | \$499 | wdc.com

**G-Technology G-Drive ev R4W SSD (500GB)** | \$300 | g-technology.com

**Anker PowerLine+ Double-Braided Nylon USB Cable** | \$14 | anker.com

### MEDIA CARDS AND READERS

I've been a longtime user of SanDisk media cards because of their fast write speeds and high quality. In all the years that I've used them, I've never had a SanDisk card get corrupted (and I just jinxed myself). But in all seriousness, I've always been very pleased with the performance of their Extreme PRO line of SD and MicroSD cards. I've recently upgraded my SD cards to the new UHS-II standard, which supports read and write speeds of up to 300 MB/s. That becomes very important when your camera is saving 40+ megapixel photos with each click.

As far as media card readers, I've been impressed with Anker's 4-Port USB 3.0 Portable Card Reader, mostly because it not only has the expected support for SD and MicroSD cards but also for the aging CF card type. The USB 3.0 bus ensures a respectable transfer rate of up to 5 GB/s and is compatible with any computer that has either a USB 3.0 or 2.0 port (as well as USB-C with the appropriate adapter).

**SanDisk Extreme Pro 64 GB SDXC UHS-II Card** | \$149 | sandisk.com

**Anker 4-Port USB 3.0 Portable Card Reader** | \$16 | anker.com

