

The big picture in D.C.

Capital offers great practice for amateur photographers seeking alternative ways to look at famous landmarks

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
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WASHINGTON — “I want to make you the boss of your camera,” says E. David Luria to five budding photographers gathered around him in Lafayette Park across from the White House.

We look down at our cameras — DSLRs and point-and-shoots — and consider the number of settings we’ve yet to attempt. “You don’t want to spend \$900 for a camera and use only \$100 worth of its features,” he tells us.

A Paris-trained architectural photographer, Luria founded Washington Photo Safari to show amateur shutterbugs how to use their cameras and, in the process, teach them the elements of travel photography.

Washington makes an ideal classroom; its landmarks are great models for hands-on classes. And when the tour ends, students who visit the capital’s museums find inspiration in a variety of photography exhibits.

One of Washington Photo Safari’s most popular itineraries, the Monuments and Memorials tour, begins with orientation on composition, exposure and lighting, even how to stand and hold your camera to reduce shaking.

Don’t blame your camera for bad photos, Luria scolds. “It’s not the camera; it’s the photographer.”

Play around with shutter speed and aperture instead of relying on the “ugly green thing,” the icon for the automatic setting on many digital cameras. Luria tells us we should “know why you’re taking the photo and who it’s for.”

For example, if you are shooting a photo of a person with the Washington Monument in the background, consider a low f-stop so the face of the person is sharp, but the background has a soft focus. However, if the monument is the subject, narrow to a high f-stop so the monument and the foreground are both in focus.

Imagine a line of people, he tells us. An f-stop of 2 puts two people in focus, an f-stop of 22 puts 22 in focus.

Amateurs often don’t get close enough to their subjects. “They say, ‘I’ll just crop it later.’” Luria suggests an inexpensive cropping tool: “your feet.”

Schooled in the basics, our tour heads out to put what we’ve learned into practice. Luria sticks by our elbows to coach us.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial ranks among the most visited in the capital, particularly the Memorial Wall inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 service members who were killed during the war or remain missing. “There are a lot of vets who can’t bring themselves to visit it,” Luria says. Some who have taken his tours have stood out of earshot.

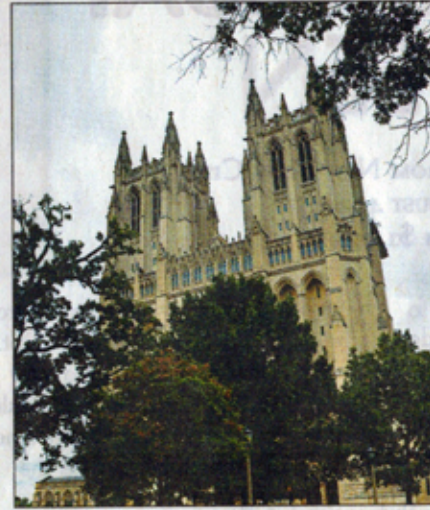
Our group gathers around the Three Servicemen statue overlooking the wall. Rather than



Getting close to a subject, such as the Three Servicemen statue at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, brings out details. Putting people in the photo adds perspective to an image of the Washington Monument



Trees around the Tidal Basin provide framing for a photo of the Jefferson Memorial, left. Placing a figure in the foreground adds depth to a photo of the Korean War Veterans Memorial.



Shooting a building like the Lincoln Memorial, left, from its corner often yields a more interesting photo than shooting it head-on. Framing an image, such as Washington National Cathedral, gives a 3-D effect.

settle for a wide shot of the entire sculpture, Luria urges us to get close, focus on the faces or small details, such as the hands of one of the soldiers.

At the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the faces of 19 soldiers are especially compelling. “These are scared young men,” Luria says. The stainless steel figures often appear best in black and white, so he shows us how to switch our cameras from color to monochrome. He also positions us so one of the soldiers stands in the foreground. Using a foreground element gives a photo a

three-dimensional effect.

Framing an image with trees or flowers has a similar effect, as do people in photos. Amateur photographers “often wait for people to get out of their shot,” Luria says, but putting a person in the foreground can add perspective.

Walking past the Lincoln Memorial, Luria demonstrates that shooting a building from its corner rather than its front makes for a more interesting shot. The tactic works for people, too, he says. Pose them sideways with their faces turned toward the camera.

At Union Station we learn how

to make people disappear. Inside, travelers move briskly as they head to their trains. Using a fast shutter speed stops them in their tracks, but reducing the speed causes their images to blur. Luria shows us how to use the manual setting to reach a shutter speed so slow the moving people aren’t just a blur, they vanish.

We move on to the world’s sixth-largest cathedral. Made of Indiana limestone in Gothic architecture, with flying buttresses, gargoyles and pointed arches, Washington National Cathedral is “like our West-

minster Abbey,” Luria says. Inside we gawk at the stained-glass windows, especially the Space Window containing a piece of moon rock brought back to Earth by the crew of Apollo 11. Luria shows us how to adjust camera exposure and white balance to make the colors in the glass pop.

Our last stop takes us across the Potomac River to the Iwo Jima statue at the Arlington National Cemetery. Officially the Marine Corps War Memorial, its 32-foot-tall figures of six servicemen raising the U.S. flag on the Japanese island during World War II conveys plenty of emotion. Luria encourages us to walk around the statue, note how the light falls on the figures and, once again, zoom in to capture details.

Lessons learned on a Washington Photo Safari are reinforced by looking at great photography hanging in several Washington museums.

The iconic Iwo Jima photograph used as a model for the memorial hangs in the Newseum (newseum.org) along with more than 1,000 Pulitzer Prize images dating to 1942. History unfolds in this permanent exhibit, which includes photos of the 9/11 attack in New York, the shooting of students at Kent State and Lee Harvey Oswald’s assassination at the hands of Jack Ruby.

A temporary exhibit, “The Boomer List,” with 19 photos of influential people born during the baby boom, will be displayed through July 5. A timeline of events and artifacts, such as a draft card and the original Barbie doll, accompany the images.

“Time Covers the 1960s” runs through Aug. 9 at the National Portrait Gallery (npg.si.edu). Original cover photos from the news magazine capture events of the decade, from the inauguration of President John Kennedy to the Apollo 11 moon landing.

At the Library of Congress (loc.gov), “The Civil Rights Act of 1964,” open through Sept. 12, contains photos of events that shaped the civil rights movement in the United States.

Through Sept. 13, the National Museum of African Art (africa.si.edu) exhibits “Chief S.O. Alonge: Photographer to the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria,” documenting more than 50 years of court life in West Africa.

Photography goes into the depths of the world’s oceans in “Portraits of Planet Ocean: The Photography of Brian Skerry” (tinyurl.com/oceanphotos). Twenty of the photojournalist’s underwater shots will be on display until fall at the National Museum of Natural History.

For good measure, don’t forget to stop and smell the cherry blossoms. And shoot them too.

Washington Photo Safari: 11 instructors lead more than 100 itineraries in and around Washington year-round, rain or shine; all skill levels, average of seven students per tour; \$89 to \$198; private tutoring available; 202-669-8468; washingtonphotosafari.com.