

Making a Difference in Your Photo Workshop

By Pam Murph

You have done it – finally booked that underwater photography workshop that has been on your to do list for some time. Now all you have to do is sit back, relax and count down the days until your trip. Or...if you want to get more out of your experience then consider a different approach. The way in which you go about getting prepared and the mindset you have about the workshop can make a world of difference. It did for me – on both workshops I have done since 2011. After finally scheduling that underwater workshop I had wanted to do for a number of years, I asked myself what to do to get ready. And after coming back from my second workshop earlier this year, I wanted to share what I have learned from my own experiences and from those I have met along the way.

First, get in the mindset of preparedness – in all aspects of the trip. Learn something about where you are going. Is there anything unique to the area - like Jellyfish Lake in Palau; or Sting Ray City in Grand Cayman. Knowing can enhance your experience. You are going to be busy and having time to experience the location to its fullest might mean adding on a few days to experience the destination more fully. Do you know what type of plugs they use for electricity, do you need adapters? Important information for charging all our camera related gear. What about currency, language, weather, water temp, up to date passport, visas? We



I had several components I wanted to pull together for a shot during my 2nd workshop – snell's window, blue sky, and a sting ray coming overhead. This is my end result after staying in one place taking shots as sting rays came near. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/9 @ 1/80, ISO 200, ambient light, magic filter.



This was the first time working with magic filters and I had only tried ambient light a few times before this. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/11 @ 1/100, ISO 200, ambient light, magic filter. Since this shot was close but not exactly what I thought it could be, I put this into a review session for feedback.



Sting Ray City at dawn to shoot strong light. Before my first workshop, I did not understand how use light to get a good B&W photo and was afraid of trying manual white balance. Now I do use these tools with ease. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/9 @ 1/80, ISO 200, ambient light.

know all of this, but just a reminder to get into the preparedness mode that sets you up for success.

Spend some time with your camera before the trip taking pictures and getting to know it better. I am not a full time photographer – so I can admit to not having the camera in my hands all of the time, forgetting certain settings and functions, and not always being up to speed. You might be laughing at me for adding this suggestion, but it is easy to think that we know our camera. Do not assume – get it out and play before you go. In addition, make sure you are covered - equipment insurance and DAN. Accidents do happen – to your gear and to divers.

Check, double check and then triple check your gear. If you think there are too many checks, consider a photographer I ran into last year in Bonaire. They planned for 3 weeks of diving and shooting to find out all of their o-rings were still at home. They admitted to not following their usual prep routine which included three checks and wished otherwise once there. Finding a store nearby with spare parts is hard to do in most of the locations we travel to for these types of trips. So make sure you have checked everything out before you go. And then start thinking about spares. Go prepared with spare parts, especially o-rings, batteries,



Adding another element, a model, to my previous shot. This was done in my second workshop – a year later. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/9 @ 1/100, ISO 200, DS 161 & 125 strobes. I had this shot in my head before I went on the trip – preparedness.

sync cords, and memory cards. Go prepared with what you cannot live without. I have found it helpful to make a checklist that I use when packing to make sure I all my gear – camera as well as scuba equipment.

The first workshop I went on focused on understanding and controlling light underwater and



Working on using ambient light from the inside out and model on a wreck. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 1mm, f/7.1 @ 1/100, ISO 200, ambient light, magic filter. Thanks to Nadya for swapping out with me so we both had models for the week.

I spent the majority of the week doing this through wide angle work. We were also able to get in some additional work along the way. I choose my focus on lighting because understanding light underwater is key to what we do as underwater photographers. Each workshop is different. What is the focus of



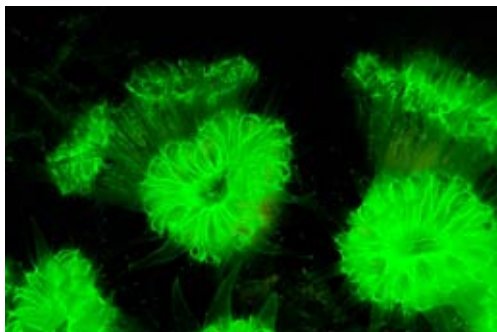
Trying out new 105 macro lens. Tons of shots to get used to a new lens and then added a snoot for some fun. Nikon D90, 105mm lens, f/20 @ 1/160, ISO 200, DS 161 strobe with homemade snoot.

the workshop that you have just put a down payment on - lighting techniques, shooting macro, big animals, caverns, wrecks, creative techniques or something else? Have an understanding before you sign up and go. It helps in preparation for the trip and can enhance your enjoyment as well as your overall satisfaction. I

choose my second workshop for the focus on new, creative techniques that I had not had previous experience with. In addition, know whether this is a photography trip, where there is no formal teaching but a well known photographer may be along for the trip and it is tailored for photography, or a photo workshop where teaching occurs with things like lectures and photo reviews from a professional.

These are usually fairly intensive weeks: three to five dives per day, being up very early or late in order to get a particular shot, changing gear between dives, downloading and sifting through files, lectures, photo reviews, preparing gear for the next day, and somewhere in there finding time to eat before falling into bed. I was told that is was a busy week, but did not fully understand this until after the first day or two of the workshop. Get a sense of how intensive the week is going to be. For me, it has all been worth it – my first dawn Sting Ray City Snorkel to understand light in the early morning, use magic filters, and take black and white photos produced a part of my portfolio that I could not have gotten without doing a workshop. Photo workshops are also not very conducive to family vacations because of the intensity. Think before you sign your family up to join you on one of these trips.

What equipment do you need to



Trying fluorescence photography – using special filters at night to see how parts of the reef look when it fluoresces. Nikon D90, 60mm lens, f/18 @ 1/200, ISO 400, DS 161 & 125 strobes.

have for the workshop? This overlaps with your understanding of the focus and type of workshop you have signed up for. Know what lens, domes, ports, extensions, diopters, snoots, strobes, filters, scuba gear, or other equipment you need. This will make the trip a better experience for you. For example, if you are going to be doing photo reviews nightly, then having your laptop can be crucial. If I had not had mine on each of my trips, I would have missed out on what I consider one of the most important components of a photo workshop – photo review sessions. These are extremely helpful – everyone sharing a few of their shots from the day, good and not so good, to learn from each other, get feedback on how to improve your shot, and see how others



Working with off camera strobes inside the Kittiwake. We first worked on using off camera strobes in a pool before trying them on a wreck. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 12mm, f/11 @ 1/125, ISO 200, DS 161 strobe, off camera strobe attached to divers tank. Thanks to Tilley at Ocean Frontiers for patiently modeling for almost an hour so all the participants could try this technique.

interpret the underwater world. Go out on a limb during these and put up some that are not your best – ones you want to improve upon – challenge yourself and learn how to do it better. One night I did this and then when we went back to the same dive site later in the week, I was able to spend some more time with the subject and get a much better image because of the

interaction in the review session.

Doing a workshop leads to a few etiquette reminders. Do not leave your manners at home. In regards to the boat ...showing up on time and prepared each time the boat goes out or for each dive briefing on a live aboard will keep you on everyone's good side. There will be more camera gear than you can imagine on one

of these trips. Be mindful of sharing and not hogging all of the space. There are a lot of open housings and changing out lens and equipment between dives. Be careful on the boat and around the camera table. Also, don't use that onboard shower to rinse off after the dive without first looking around to make sure there are no open housings or water sensitive equipment in your line of fire. Spraying without looking just might get you thrown overboard! Underwater...Be mindful of where you are on the reef in relationship to other photographers. If everyone is shooting wide angle, then be aware that you could easily swim into someone's shot. Look around and down to see what is going on (there may be someone below you taking shots at an upward angle). If you would like to add a model to your shots, then consider trading out with another photographer. Talk about the shot and what you would like to achieve before the dive (prepare) and then both of you can have a go at taking the shot and modeling for each other.

Check the ego at the door. Everyone is on this trip to learn and grow in their underwater photography knowledge. Going in with the notion that this is about learning and not competing helps in the overall outcome. Just as in the review sessions I mentioned, do

not feel like you have to put up your best every time – be open, check your ego and put things in that you want to improve on. For me, I went in with the notion that in order to grow and take better pictures, I had to be willing to take some risks and leave my ego at the door. Do not be afraid to ask questions, ask for help, or acknowledge that you do not understand something that is being taught. I asked a lot of them (probably drove the leader crazy) and took lots of notes. You are paying for the experience and knowledge of the professional leading the workshop. They have a lot to share as do the other participants. This is a learning experience. Get as much as you can out of it.

Challenge yourself. What are your goals for goals for this workshop? Is there a particular type of shot you want to polish? Is there a new technique you cannot wait to try out? Are you interested in adding a model to your photography for the first time or learning how to work with models better underwater? Do you have that new snoot with you or want to have a go with new equipment? Go with the mindset of getting outside your comfort zone, learning new skills, acquiring new knowledge and improving your photography overall. I went on my first workshop trying to really hone my close focus wide angle



After the feedback and with practice in the first workshop, this is the shot I was able to achieve. I can now achieve consistent CFWA work that I like. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 12mm, f/11 @ 1/125, ISO 200, DS 161 & 125 strobes.

skills. I was having a lot of trouble with lighting the reef and dealing with ambient light in the background. By the end of the workshop, I understood how to take this shot and get the picture that I wanted. When I was getting ready for my second workshop, I read up on homemade snoots and made one to take with me.



Adding another element, a model, to my previous shot. This was done in my second workshop – a year later. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/9 @ 1/100, ISO 200, DS 161 & 125 strobes. I had this shot in my head before I went on the trip – preparedness.

I worked in the pool the first afternoon with some weighted down toys, tried it in the ocean, and then I asked for feedback and suggestions on how to improve this technique with the leader. I also took my new 105 macro lens to try out. By the end of the week, I had some shots with my lens and snoot I am really proud to show



Adding fish life to a CFWA snooted shot is not easy. I only got off 3 shots before the angelfish was gone. Nikon D90, Tokina 10-17 at 10mm, f/10 @ 1/100, ISO 200, DS 161 strobe with homemade snoot

off. The end results you see with this article are the product of the learning process, taking shots over and over, and then trying again. I trashed a lot of photos along the way, but I came out with many keepers too.

Regardless of whether you are a beginner or an advanced underwater photographer, there is something to be found for everyone in a photo

www.uwpmag.com

workshop. This is one way to take your skills to the next level. I think that most of us would agree that we are interested in learning and growing in what we do as underwater photographers. There is so much to be learned while participating in a workshop. Just imagine how much better it could be by putting a little extra effort into the experience. I know when I came back, I was so excited about the quality of the pictures I got on my first trip and the improvements I could see in my work. The real test came when I shared with other underwater photographers, and they could see the difference in my work and that sealed it for me. When I was getting ready for my second workshop, I was able to prepare even more and knew some areas I wanted to concentrate on and new things I wanted to try. I have already put my down payment on my next workshop. Hope to see you there.

Pam Murph



C'MON THEN GUVNOR TAKE YER BEST SHOT!

**NEW PATIMA
HOUSINGS
NOW IN STOCK**

**NEED HELP WITH
DIFFICULT SUBJECTS?
CALL FOR BACKUP**



London's premier underwater camera store

Ocean Leisure Cameras is the one-stop central London underwater photography specialist store.

Address:
11-14 Northumberland Ave
London, WC2N 5AQ
Underground: Embankment

Contact:
Phone: 020 7930 5051
info@oceanleisurecameras.com
www.oceanleisurecameras.com

Open 7 days a week

CAMERAS

HOUSINGS

LIGHTS

LENSES

COURSES

Canon, Panasonic, Inon, Sea & Sea, Hugyfot, Nauticam, Light & Motion, Fisheye, Patima GoPro, etc...