

Capture Postcard-Quality Photos

Jeremy Pollack
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Photographing New York City

Digital Field Guide



Photographing New York City Digital Field Guide®

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by Jeremy Pollack and Andy Williams

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About the Authors

Jeremy Pollack is a Connecticut-based photographer with a wide range of interests. As a result of growing up in the woods, his first love has always been nature photography which he started shooting with his father's Canon FT QL. As his passion grew over the years, so did the breadth of his interests. Today he shoots commercial and fine art photography, selling prints at art shows and online. To connect to his blog, portfolios, fine art storefront, and other online presences, please visit www.jeremypollack.net.

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Chance favors the prepared mind.

- Louis Pasteur

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—Jeremy Pollack

Introduction

This Digital Field Guide is designed to be a pocketable companion in your quest to create postcard-worthy photographs in New York City. Whether you are visiting for the first time or are a long-time resident, a beginner or seasoned shooter, this photo guide will offer tips and suggestions for 28 of the most photogenic spots in the city. Beyond simply telling you about a landmark, this book will guide you through learning and seeing examples of the best vantage points from which to take photographs at each location, what equipment to bring and why, suggested camera settings, and even how to plan for the seasons, weather, and photographing at night.

Who the Book Is For

This book is for anyone with a love of photography that will be shooting in New York City. While many of the discussions are around digital SLR cameras, point-and-shoot cameras can certainly be used for any of the shots in the book. A basic knowledge of your camera settings will be helpful, as will an understanding of the relationship of aperture, shutter speed, and ISO to create a proper exposure. However, these details are not central to the book. Instead, we focus on wonderful photographic opportunities in one of the greatest cities in the world, provide examples to inspire and follow, and explain how you can create beautiful images of your own.

One of the challenges in making great photographs of a location are the time and preparation it takes to scout, find the best angles, and learn the best times to visit. This book will help you in each of these areas. We have done the research and planning so you can enjoy your time making photographs.

A few other resources that might be helpful for your trip to New York City are:

Google Maps with Streetview. New York City is thoroughly covered by Google Streetview. This gives you a photographic look at every street in the city! Take a virtual look around your destinations and get a feel for the street layouts before setting foot in town.

MTA Trip Planner. Located at <http://tripplanner.mta.info>, this excellent resource will help you plot your way around the city using mass transit.

Destination Web sites. While we have endeavored to include the most up-to-date and pertinent information possible in this book, things do change. Web sites for major destinations such as the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty will provide up-to-the-minute details and contact information.

We want to see your photos! Join the Flickr group at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/dfgnyc/>

How To Use This Book

This book is organized alphabetically by location, starting with the Bronx Zoo all the way to Wall Street. You can go directly to any chapter rather than reading from start-to-finish. Some discussions will be cross-referenced to an earlier chapter, and there are useful tips and tricks spread throughout the entire text, so reading it from cover-to-cover will be beneficial, too.

A lot of travel photography is spent learning where to go, when to go, and why to go. The goal of this book is to free you from those tasks, allowing you to focus on your photography and finding beautiful light.

Lenses and Crop Factor

Images for this book were shot with a mixture of full-frame and crop-sensor cameras. A crop-sensor camera will offer a different angle of view with the same lens as a full frame camera. Generally these cause a 1.5x/1.6x magnification with some of the newer models giving a 2.0x magnification.

The photo captions in this book list the lenses which were used to create the photograph. These measurements have been normalized for a full-

frame camera. See the table below for a comparison of some of the common lenses used and their full-frame versus crop-sensor focal lengths.

Full-frame sensor

16-35mm zoom

24-70mm zoom

24-105mm zoom

70-200mm zoom

50mm prime

85mm prime

300mm prime

1.5x/1.6x crop sensor

25-60mm zoom

38-112mm zoom

38-170mm zoom

112-320mm zoom

80mm prime

128mm prime

480mm prime

2.0x crop sensor

32-70mm zoom

48-140mm zoom

48-210mm zoom

140-400mm zoom

100mm prime

170mm prime

600mm prime



A leopard eyes the camera in the JungleWorld exhibit. Taken at ISO 1000, f/4.5, 1/80 second with a 300mm lens.

Chapter 1: The Bronx Zoo

Why It's Worth a Photograph

The Bronx Zoo, just a short trip north of Manhattan, is a great place to take photos. Over 4,000 animals — including many endangered and threatened species — live on its 265 acres. The zoo has a focus on naturalistic habitats both indoors and out, so you can photograph animals including tigers, rare snow leopards, and bears in such a way that people viewing your photo won't be able to tell that it was taken at a zoo. Whether you just plan a day trip or combine it with a visit to the neighboring New York Botanical Garden, the Bronx Zoo is an enjoyable and exciting photographic opportunity.

Where Can I Get the Best Shot?

The Bronx Zoo has many photo opportunities. The best locations to visit first are the Zoo Center, Big Bears, Congo Gorilla Forest, JungleWorld, Tiger Mountain, and the Sea Bird Aviary.



The best vantage points from which to photograph the Bronx Zoo: (A) Zoo Center, (B) Big Bears, (C) Congo Gorilla Forest, (D) JungleWorld, (E) Tiger Mountain, and (F) Sea Bird Aviary. Other photo ops: (17) New York Botanical Gardens.

Zoo Center

Originally known as the Elephant House when it opened in 1908, the Zoo Center is one of the original six Beaux-Arts style buildings designed for the zoo. This large, heavily ornamented building is the gateway to other original zoo buildings of Astor Court.

The Zoo Center hosts small exhibits and only a few animals, but the outside is a beautiful sight. It is flanked on the south by two large rhinoceros statues and often some roaming peacocks. A telephoto zoom lens lets you capture the entire building from a distance or isolate some of the intricate details (see Figure 1.1).

Big Bears

Polar and grizzly bears live next door to each other in the Big Bears exhibits. The grizzlies' enclosure includes swimming holes and a high ridge where the bears can play and patrol. The naturally aquatic polar bears spend a lot of time in their pool. Both bear exhibits offer excellent photo opportunities whether the bears are lounging, playing, or waving to the crowds.

Although you can get closer to these animals than you ever might in nature, a telephoto zoom or super-telephoto lens is still going to be your best bet to get a close-up shot of these creatures (see Figure 1.2).



Consider renting gear if you want to try new equipment, such as a super-telephoto lens. Whether you want to try something before buying or only have an occasional use for an expensive piece of gear, local or online rentals are a great option. Make sure to give yourself enough time to practice with the rental gear if you have never used it before.



1.1 A large stone elephant head adorns the Zoo Center (see A on the map). Taken on a wet, winter afternoon at ISO 1000, f/5.6, 1/80 second with a 70-200mm lens.



1.2 A polar bear relaxes by his swimming hole on a late winter afternoon. Taken at ISO 400, f/6.3, 1/400 second with a 300mm lens and 1.4x teleconverter.

Congo Gorilla Forest

This 6.5 acre rainforest is home to more than 20 western lowland gorillas. The outdoor exhibit takes you through a range of views, from the forest floor to treetop lookouts. During colder months you can still photograph the gorillas in their indoor habitat, but the warmer months bring them back out to the forest environment.

Bring your telephoto to super-telephoto lenses to capture the gorillas up close (see Figure 1.3). A standard zoom lens lets you create images of them amongst their families.

JungleWorld

The indoor JungleWorld exhibit re-creates an Asian jungle with over 800 animals on display. This warm and humid environment is home to an army of assorted apes, tapirs, and a variety of jungle insects.

A telephoto zoom lens is a great choice here, because you can get close-up images when fully zoomed in or include a few animals in the frame at the short telephoto end (see Figure 1.4).