



# Photography: All about the people

ABR's photography expert shares his secrets for taking the perfect portrait photograph

Words and images: Simon Thomas Credit: Simon & Lisa Thomas, [www.2ridetheworld.com](http://www.2ridetheworld.com)



## WHO'S WRITING?

**Simon** and **Lisa Thomas** have ridden their way into a life that most of us can only imagine. This year is the start of their twelfth year on the road and in those years the duo has amassed an insane 420,000 miles on their ride through 78 countries and six continents. Along the way they've traversed 27 deserts, survived a broken neck in the Amazon Jungle, cheated death and become professional photographers, writers and public speakers. [www.2ridetheworld.com](http://www.2ridetheworld.com)

## IMAGE DETAILS:

**Cambodia, The Coke kid**  
**Exposure Mode:** Aperture  
**Aperture:** f5.6  
**White Balance:** Auto  
**Speed:** 1/500  
**ISO:** 200  
**Camera Body:** Nikon D300  
**Focal Length:** 170.0mm  
**Lens:** Nikkor 70-200mm Mark II VR  
**Flash:** Did not fire  
**Location:** Cambodia – Phnom Penh City

Let me tell you a secret. After your motorcycle trip has finished and long after your memories of sunsets, mountain passes and the great roads have faded, what you'll remember with real clarity will be the incredible people that you met along the way. You'll remember the friends you made, the people that seemingly had nothing but helped you out of a situation when you least expected it, or that you simply shared water with by the side of a jungle path. Now those moments and those people are the ones worth photographing.

## Camera set up

Portrait photography is a personal thing. For me it's less about getting an image to be technically perfect and more about capturing a moment, a mood and for just a split second, capturing a hint of a person's personality.

Portrait photography is not just about getting your subject's head and shoulders into the frame. Portrait photography is about capturing life, so go ahead and photograph from a distance, or maybe up close, where you're shooting a set of work worn hands, or maybe someone's incredibly piercing eyes. I love to photograph people when their minds are elsewhere and when they're not posing for the camera. Those candid shots are priceless. Make no mistake, absolutely everyone 'poses' for a camera if they know they are being photographed.



## “The eyes have it!”

A shallow depth of field can really make a portrait stand out: Where the subject is in sharp focus but the background has that great soft blurred effect. I typically shoot portraits with an aperture of f2.8 up to f8. This usually means that from the tip of the nose back to the subjects ears are in focus.

Set your kit up to shoot in 'aperture mode' – it's usually the 'A' button on your camera body. If the lighting conditions are dim, go ahead and crank your ISO settings up. I don't mind if the image becomes a little noisy or grainy as this can often add grit or drama to the final portrait. If the light is great then keep your ISO to around 200.

*Tip: My number one rule is that no matter what else is going on, the subject's eyes must be in focus.*

## Keep the camera with you

Most great portrait photos are spontaneous. You'll often snap outstanding 'life' photos when just out and about, so just be aware of your surroundings and don't be afraid to take a thousand images. Remember, 'deleting is free'.

*Golden Tip: For truly great portraits get close. Then get closer, then half that distance again and take the shot.*

## Ditch the tripod

Here's where travel portrait photography differs. In my other masterclasses I've been telling you to pull out the tripod whenever you're serious about an image, but portrait photography is more about seizing a moment. A look, a stare, a mood or a smile can be gone in an instant, so ditch the tripod and grab the moment.

## Fit to burst

People can be tough to photograph. Make sure your camera is on 'burst mode' so you can rattle multiple images whilst you press the shutter release button down. I normally rattle off 5-9 images each time I look through the lens. The first few images will be OK, the later images of the sequence are usually the best.

## Managing your subject

If you want to capture candid shots then use a long zoom lens and distance yourself from your subject. If your subject knows they are being photographed they will pose and you'll lose the moment.

Because everyone poses, try this great technique. Talk to your subject and get their permission to photograph them. Take a few images of your subject (they will pose), then while you hold the cam-

era still and in place, lift your head away from your camera and whilst talking with them press the shutter release and grab those candid shots. Often the uncertainty of what you've done will get you a laugh, a giggle or an interesting expression.

If you're shooting a group, chances are at least one person's got their eyes closed. So, tell the entire group to close their eyes and then to reopen them on the count of three. Voila, press the shutter release and grab the great group shot.

Photographing children can be tough. I've found it best to put away my big camera and pull out my small Nikon automatic. It's less intimidating. Kids love to see their photograph via the large screen on the back, so make sure you show them and their parents after you've taken it. **ABR**