

# 6 TIPS FOR BETTER BACKCOUNTRY PHOTOS

By JJ Yoshi

*Outdoor photography is all about capturing your own wilderness experience and sharing it with others.*

*These days anyone can press a button and take a photo, but to take a photo that will inspire the masses is all about capturing the right light. Light can make or break a photo. That is why typically, I choose to shoot most of my photos at sunrise or sunset.*

*There are some factors for any beginner photographer to consider when venturing out into the backcountry.*





**1) Determine the peak's direction**

One of the most obvious but often overlooked factors is figuring out where the sun rises and sets. Sure we all know that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, but this may not be so obvious if you're in the mountains. Some peaks face northeast, some southwest, and others slightly off in another direction. And to make matters even more complicated, the time of year can affect the position of the sun as well. The best thing to do is research your shooting location to determine what direction the peak is facing. Also, having a compass with you might be handy to find that exact direction.

**2) Research the weather**

As any adventurer knows, the weather in the mountains can be unpredictable even with the best weather forecasting tools.

Weather can make any easy journey transform into the most gruesome of experiences.

While I wouldn't advise shooting stills above the tree line during a thunderstorm, given the right preparation, weather can actually work in your favour for shooting. Clouds create the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets, and reduce the harsh lighting during the daytime. Clouds add beauty to pictures, and they provide a natural bounce-board for the sun rays. But rain and wet conditions can be detrimental if you do not have the right camera housing. The most ideal conditions for shooting would be partly cloudy skies to add some contrast in the sky, but not too much to make the lighting flat. Although this isn't to say shooting a lake on a misty day wouldn't produce some incredible photos as well. In general it's always good to research the weather ahead of time to set realistic adventure and shooting goals.

**3) Scale down your technical goals**

Remember: outdoor photography requires a compromise. Not only are you climbing that mountain, but you are now shooting as well. Doing two things well can be a challenge. It may not be wise to be soloing the side of a cliff while taking stills with your camera. Doing anything well requires keen attention and creative precision. One thing I've had to learn the hard way is knowing when an adventure is over my capabilities. Shooting can make the easiest of adventures that much more difficult. So set realistic goals and don't be hard on yourself if you have to do something slightly easier than what you're used to. Ask yourself if the purpose of this trip is to get amazing pictures or to set new climbing goals. It's not impossible to achieve both, but it may not be super-safe either.

**4) Set out before first light**

As any mountaineer or alpine climber knows, most adventures start when most people are still sleeping. And for capturing sunrises, this adage holds true. You are gonna have to wake up hours before the sun even rises. Some of the best photos are taken during first light, before the first rays of sun even hit the peaks. So, pack your gear the night before, so you can quickly get out of camp in the early hours. Get that stove hot to brew up that fresh cup of coffee or tea to wake up. Another reason for setting out early is to set extra time to reach your destination. Some of the best photos can happen along the way to your final location, so don't forget to stop to take photos.

**5) Charge up & clear space**

I cannot emphasize this enough: bring extra batteries. So many times I have run out of juice amidst a beautiful sunrise.

Also, batteries drain faster at colder temperatures. So, keep the batteries next to your skin while your hiking or in your sleeping bags at night.

**6) Timing is everything**

Getting a great photo takes time. Clouds move and light changes. This is why time-lapses are so beautiful.

As long as you have the memory space and battery life, it's okay to take hundreds of photos. You can always delete the ones you do not like. Most importantly, be patient when you're out there – especially when trying to capture that perfect lighting or that elusive wild animal. It may even be smart to allocate multiple days at a location. With the unpredictability of the weather, and unforeseen factors in the wild, it's always safe to cushion on more time if needed.

With the right light and finesse you can be on your way to capturing some stellar photos. Outdoor photography is more than just an art: it's the story behind each photo. Most importantly, remember to have fun and to stay safe on your next voyage into the outdoors.





# A JOURNEY TO NEPAL FOR A CUP OF TEA

By JJ Yosh







Nepal is a country that most people dream of visiting once in their lives. It was a place high on my bucket list! For years, images of the Himalayas hung about my walls. These images were so ingrained in my psyche that it seemed like a distant memory from a past life.

A couple months ago a good friend and social media influencer, Lauren Monitz, offered to bring me along as a guest if I could help her win a trip to Nepal through a contest Sherpa Adventure Gear was hosting. I jumped on the opportunity and began promoting the contest like wild via my social media channels.

After days of promotion, I popped online to see what the results were. We had won! What had we been the prize? An all-expenses paid trip to Nepal to trek the majestic Himalaya Mountains. WOW! The trip sounded too good to be true. Honestly, I didn't even believe it was happening until we finally had our plane tickets in hand.

In mid-October of last year, Lauren and I embarked on our long journey. We boarded our plane in Colorado, made a couple layovers, and landed in Kathmandu over 30 hours later. We still weren't done flying! We transferred onto a rickety plane to Lukla, a small village nestled in the Himalayas. All this to get to our starting point. The plan was to backpack north - From Lukla to Phakding to Namche to Kumbung to Thame and back south. It might not seem far (13 miles straight on google maps) but remember this is ever-changing terrain and increasing elevation.

As soon as we hit the road, we entered a whole new world. There were dzos (yak/cow hybrid) and Nepalese mule traffic jams, ancient bridges, and tourists trekking from all around the globe. It was a bizarre sight at first, adapting to this new style of trekking as we pushed on.

Our first destination was Phakding - a quaint homestead along the beautiful Dudh Kosi River. Our hosts greeted us with a collection of teas - milk tea, jasmine tea, mint tea, ginger tea, lemon honey tea. There was a plethora of teas before us! After a moment to mull, I chose ginger tea. Instantly it became my new obsession! After warming ourselves up with tea, we settled in for the night and mentally prepared ourselves for the days ahead.

Something I noticed on my trip - there are teahouses all along the roads! I learned rather quickly how important tea is to the Himalayan culture. In this region of the world, the weather changes on the fly, and sometimes the temperature can drop abruptly! You soon learn to find comfort in filling up with some hot tea as a pleasant reward for your travels. Not to mention, they provide food and lodging to incoming tourists such as Lauren and myself.

On day two, we were off to journey farther north to Namche Bazzar, a famous outpost for tourists to stock up on modern commodities. On the way, we witnessed our first glimpse of Mount Everest. It is one thing to see

photographs of it on your computer or phone, it's another to have the mountain towering off in the distance. It is a spectacle like no other!

We made our way into Namche shortly thereafter. It is out of a fairytale book! You see a town literally etched on the side of a mountain. Each street is a step higher in the hillside. I was amazed at the dzos and chickens roaming around care-free, the merchants strewn all along the streets selling their wares. After exploring the town, I found a spot not too far away with a great view to call home for the night. You can imagine what I did next - I prepared another cup of ginger tea.

By day three, I had developed a rhythm on some of the tallest mountain ranges in the world. Wake up to a beautiful sunrise, brew some ginger tea, eat breakfast, pack up, and journey on the trail. Each day the elevation increased, the weather temperature decreased, and my excitement soared higher!

Onward into day four, we climbed towards one of the peaks that looked over all of the Khumde Valley. The guide who accompanied me promised epic views of Everest, Lhotse, Ama Dablam, and other twenty thousand foot peaks. I kept trekking ahead with undying excitement. When we reached the saddle and the clouds cleared away, revealing massive peaks in the distance. I cannot reiterate, no matter how many pictures and videos of Everest I've seen, it pales in comparison to the real thing.

I was already at an elevation of over 14,000 feet, with a several thousand foot drop below me. In the distance were towering mountains twice as big. My mind still cannot comprehend this.

I felt this was a time to celebrate the view. You guessed it - tea time. I quickly set up my stove and brewed my trail staple, ginger tea. In the backdrop, you could see the giant Himalayan peaks erupting above the clouds. I felt elated to be so high up and so close to my childhood dream of climbing these colossal mountain beasts.

What I love about climbing mountains are the unrivaled views which make it a snap to find the best seat in the house.

Once the tea was ready, I found the perfect rock chair to cement my experience and gently warmed my body. This tea was an elixir for my body, soothing it from all the trekking done so far. I now understand why the Nepalese drink so much tea.

I must have spent hours on that rocky platform, soaking in the high mountain view. It was literally the "high point" of my trip. The rest of the journey was downhill from here. We gradually made our way back to the village of Lukla, where we'd reverse course from Kathmandu and then back home. While I left the country of Nepal behind, I would never forget my tea time in the Himalayas.

To see more from my Nepal adventure, visit [instagram.com/jyosh](https://www.instagram.com/jyosh)

