

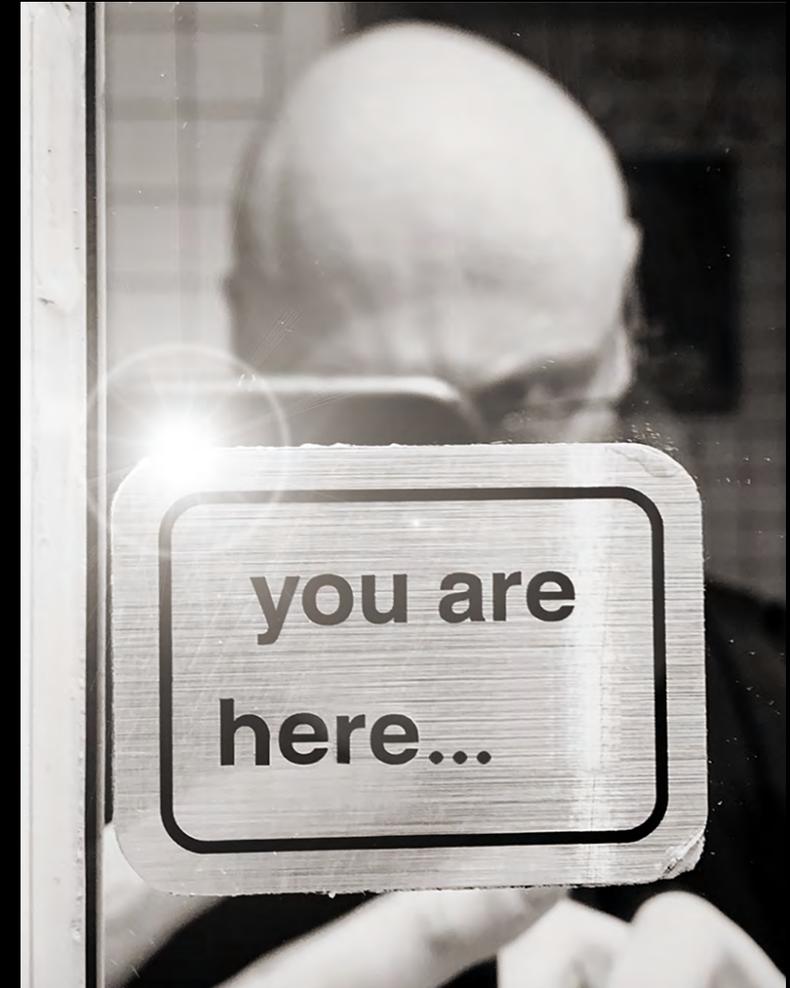


2020

## The Story: Hindsight is...

I have been fortunate to see much of the world, but always dreamt of having the luxury of time to explore it more fully on my own terms. So in November 2019, I embarked on a trip around the world. I had very little planned by way of an itinerary opting for a more general idea of simply stabbing westward. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't do my usual exhaustive research to ensure I saw everything possible; I simply just went. I wanted to lose myself in the world for a while on the promise of adventure. All in all I visited 15 countries which included Amsterdam, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, Nepal, Israel, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Sicily, and Greece. The images from my trip are featured under the Portfolio + Travel tab above which also includes images from my previous trips to various other countries in South East Asia and Central Europe.

For the majority of my career, my creative endeavors have been for commercial purposes and simply to make money. Although I love the process and the validation it brings, I can't say I ever really loved the disposable result. I found that teaching allowed me to connect to others in a very personal way, which I never counted on, and is something I still enjoy all these years later. But I needed something more.



## The Story: Hindsight is...

I believe my trip has reconnected me with my creativity in a new and purposeful way. I have come to the realization that, without the willingness to purposefully share our talents, gifts and indeed our authentic selves with others, connection has no real meaning. Up until now, I never had the confidence to share my attempts at more inspired personal works - fearing it wasn't good or worthy enough of being called art, but now armed with my new found sense of purpose, fueled by my passion for creativity and travel, I am eager to share this extended body of work with you. It includes additional images that didn't make the cut for the site but help bring context to my journey

It is my sincere hope that, by sharing my work, you are inspired to see yourself and others in a different light. Challenge yourself by giving something back to the world through your own brand of creativity and self-expression, consider changing your attitude when faced with a difficult situation or circumstance that can only be changed by working together.

*"To me, photography is an art of observation. It's about finding something interesting in an ordinary place... I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them." — Elliott Erwitt*



2020

A WORLD TRAVEL PORTFOLIO BY KIRK WIDRA



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2020



Dedicated to Neil who was “...*only immortal for a limited time...*”



Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka



## Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka

My first stop, Japan, has interested me ever since I was a child. Tokyo, Japan's busy capital, mixes the ultramodern and the traditional, from modern skyscrapers to historic temples. The culture is also a mix of the modern and traditional, from the Harajuku district's colorful street art and youth fashion, with quirky vintage clothing stores and cosplay shops along Takeshita Street, to the traditional, upmarket boutiques featuring traditional kimonos. Japan has it all. As for my images here, I tried to capture the middle ground in between the old and the new.



## Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka

Kyoto is considered the cultural capital of Japan and a major tourist destination. It is home to numerous Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, palaces and gardens, many of which are listed collectively by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Many tourists and locals alike dress in traditional costumes to add to their Kyoto experience. I was struck by that juxtaposed by the use of modern technology i.e. cell phones.



## Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka

The first two images are from Nara Park which is a public park located in the city of Nara, Japan, at the foot of Mount Wakakusa. Established in 1880 Nara Park is one of the oldest parks in Japan. The park is one of the "Places of Scenic Beauty" and features over 1,200 wild sika deer freely roaming around in the park. The image on the end (right) is from Fushimi Inari Shrine which is an important Shinto shrine in southern Kyoto. It is famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates, which straddle a network of trails behind its main buildings.



## Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka

Motohakone is a rural area famed for its views of Mount Fuji. Volcano spotters ride the cable car to the summit of Mount Komagatake, home to a Shinto shrine and this little rustic house in the middle. The black and white photo on the right is part of a series of industrial buildings I saw in Tokyo from the bus on the way to Motohakone. I was struck by the contrast and similarities of these structures. Japan's architecture has so much attention to detail whether it is in a rural or industrial setting.





**Australia:** Sydney, Bondi Beach, Blue Mountain and The Great Barrier Reef



## Australia: Sydney, Bondi Beach, Blue Mountain and The Great Barrier Reef

I was surprised to learn that Sydney Opera house was designed by a Danish architect Jørn Utzon, but completed by an Australian architectural team headed up by Peter Hall due to cost overruns and no doubt to political issues. Nonetheless, it is an amazing iconic structure which I was eager to see up close. It didn't disappoint! There is so much detail in every facet of design. It was here that I was first struck with the idea of taking pictures of seemingly unimportant objects in interesting ways. Case in point the first image is one of the many light posts that line the pier that faces the Sydney Bridge.



## Australia: Sydney, Bondi Beach, Blue Mountain and The Great Barrier Reef

Australia is also the first place I visited with epic landscapes. Nature is always something that impresses me and aided by my trusted iPhone I set out to do my best homage to Ansel Adams. Here at Cape Tribulation the massive primordial stone mantel creates a moon-like landscape. There is a certain calm here in this dwindling nature preserve that is hard to describe. I spent the day simply just wandering through the landscape, playing in the tidal pools while soaking up the tranquil vibes of this epic landscape. Curious how a landscape that is so vibrant looks so great in black and white.



## Australia: Sydney, Bondi Beach, Blue Mountain and The Great Barrier Reef

Bondi Beach is known as a surfer's paradise and for good reason. Great waves and congenial locals make this a must see spot for surfer and non-surfers alike. On the day I was there, unfortunately, they were starting to feel the effects of the historical forest fires surrounding much of eastern Australia, and there was a distinct burning smell in the air. Here again I was treated to awe inspiring natural landscapes which were only rivaled by the Great Barrier Reef featured in the last pic on the right. I am not big into snorkeling, but getting my diver's license is on my bucket list. Just bobbing around in the water at the Great Barrier Reef was awesome!





**New Zealand:** Auckland, Hobbiton, Waitomo Caves and Rotorua



2020

## New Zealand: Auckland, Hobbiton, Waitomo Caves and Rotorua

New Zealand, like Australia is truly a natural wonder! It is important to note that none of these images have been alerted, the colors are really that vibrant! You can't help but be affected by the outdoor splendor of everywhere in New Zealand. Being an aspiring outdoorsman I made an effort to see as much of the natural wonders of New Zealand as I could. My favorite was the renowned "glow worm" caves at Waitomo. *\*(Sadly you are not allowed to take any pics inside the cave so the image featured here is from Shaun Jeffers at Shutterstock)*



## New Zealand: Auckland, Hobbiton, Waitomo Caves and Rotorua

No trip to New Zealand would be complete without a visit to Hobbiton, better known as the set of the Shire from “Lord of The Rings”. It is hard to relay the sense of sheer geek giddiness you feel walking through the land of the hobbits. The surrounding landscape is equally as impressive, rolling green hills, babbling brooks, wild life - it’s all here. As we made our way around the grounds with our tour guide, you couldn’t help but feel part of the scenery, half expecting Bilbo Baggins himself to emerge from one of the houses.



## New Zealand: Auckland, Hobbiton, Waitomo Caves and Rotorua

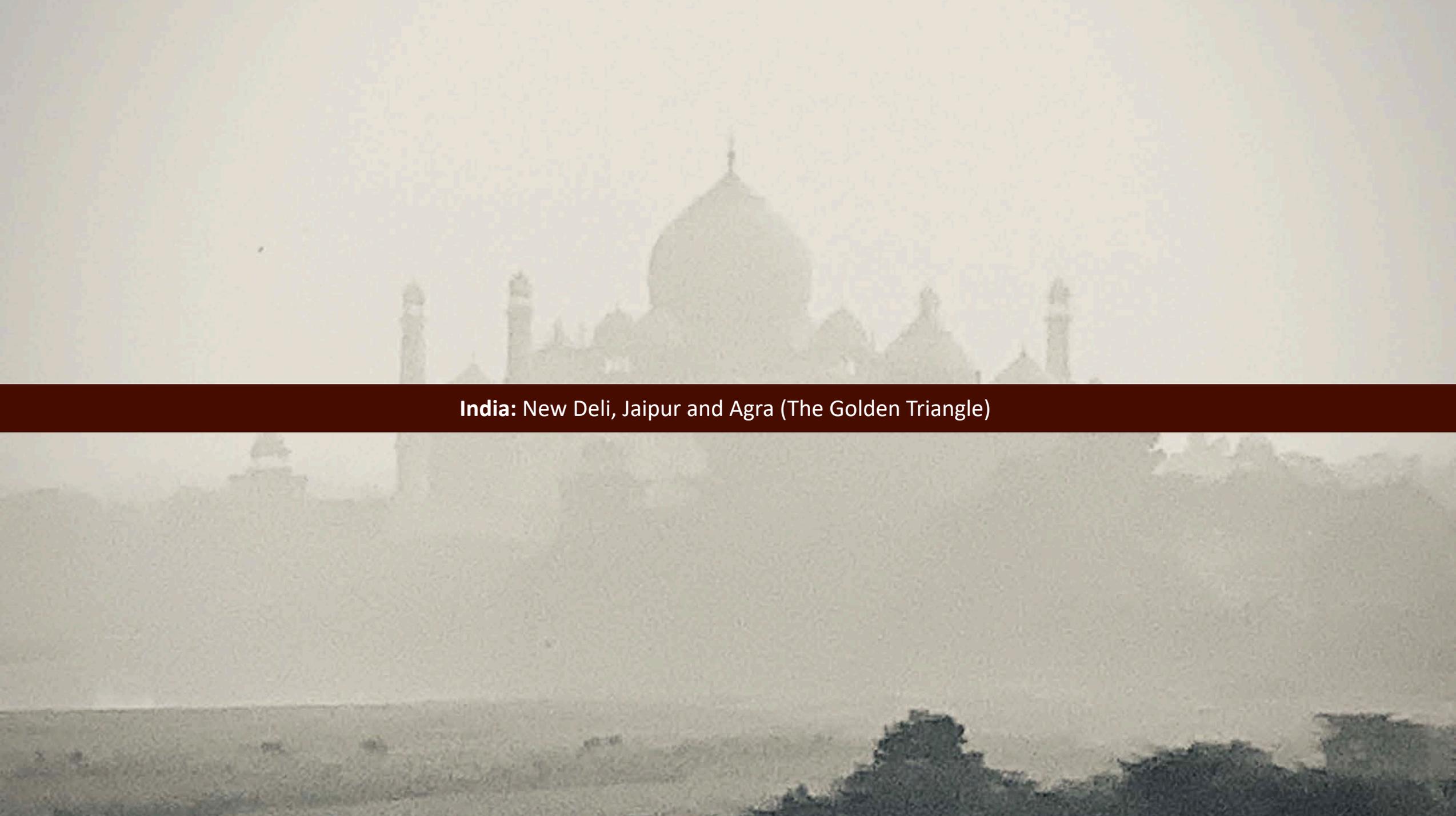
I was so struck by all of the attention to detail, the clothes left hanging in the wind, the little architectural details on the houses and supporting structures - it was truly amazing. While here, I also started to experiment with the myriad of filter options on my i-Phone. Note how the house on the left has a matte like quality to it and how the details are very sharp and how all are framed by a warm tint. I also forced the perspective a bit by tilting the phone camera up at an exaggerated angle to add to the fantasy-like effect befitting the land of the hobbits.



## New Zealand: Auckland, Hobbiton, Waitomo Caves and Rotorua

Featured here are carvings of the Māori tribe. The Māori originated with settlers from eastern Polynesia, who arrived in New Zealand in several waves of waka (canoe) voyages roughly between 1320 and 1350. Over several centuries in isolation, these settlers developed their own distinctive culture, whose language, mythology, crafts and performing arts evolved independently from those of other eastern Polynesian cultures. Featured here are some examples of totem carvings. Like many of the decorative arts on my trip it is very hard to wrap your head around the precision and craftsmanship they possess without the aid of power tools.





**India:** New Deli, Jaipur and Agra (The Golden Triangle)

## India: New Delhi, Jaipur and Agra (The Golden Triangle)

Of all the places I have been, India was the most challenging. The contrast between the unbelievable beauty and the desperate crushing poverty is hard to reconcile. The focus of my shots (pun intended) was to try and capture that dichotomy. I was also struck by the important part spirituality seems to play in everyday life, I often saw people stealing a moment of prayer wherever they could amidst all of the urban congestion.



## India: New Delhi, Jaipur and Agra (The Golden Triangle)

Like with much of southeast Asia, the sheer population density of India is really hard to understand, it has to be experienced. As a person who enjoys his personal space and the outdoors this was a struggle. It's been said you don't visit India so much as survive India; for a small town kid like me I would have to agree with that. Nothing can prepare the uninitiated for the cacophony of noise and color wading through the teeming crowds of India. Even the birds have precious little room to move or a place to call their own.



## India: New Delhi, Jaipur and Agra (The Golden Triangle)

The Taj Mahal, I was surprised to find out, is actually a mausoleum. Located on the southern bank of the river Yamuna in Agra. It was commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal emperor Sha Jahan to house the tomb of his favorite wife; it also houses the tomb of Shah Jahan himself. The tomb is the centerpiece of a 42-acre complex, which includes a mosque and a guest house, and is set in formal gardens. I wanted to approach my photos with something unique befitting this amazing structure. Featured here are reflections in the pool leading up to the Taj Mahal itself.



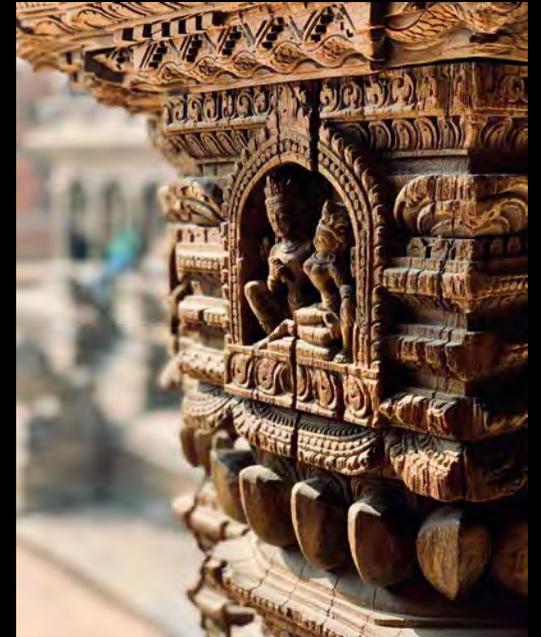
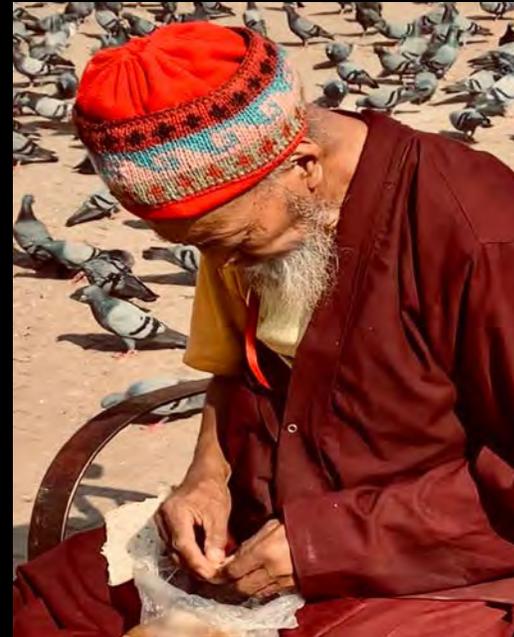
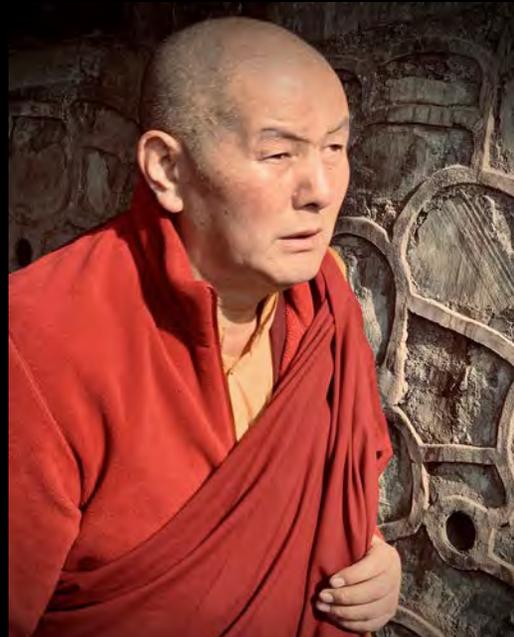


Nepal: Katmandu, Gokarneshwar Temple and Swayambhu (The Monkey Temple)



## Nepal: Katmandu, Gokarneshwar Temple and Swayambhu (The Monkey Temple)

I have had a long standing interest in Buddhism and monostatic life; as such I was really interested in visiting Nepal to experience it first-hand. I visited Gokarneshwar temple, it's one of the oldest Hindu and Buddhist temples in Kathmandu valley. Built in 1582, it sits on the banks of the Bagmati River and is both an active tourist site and functioning place of spiritual practice. I was struck by the contrasts here; much like India, the cities in Nepal are constantly in motion with monks, merchants and tourists.



## Nepal: Katmandu, Gokarneshwar Temple and Swayambhu (The Monkey Temple)

The Swayambhunath Temple complex is among the oldest religious sites in Nepal. It was founded at the beginning of the fifth century and although the site is considered Buddhist, it is revered by both Buddhists and Hindus. In this area of the world, animals roam freely everywhere and have become just another part of the landscape. The monkeys at the temples are considered sacred and are often tended to and looked after by the monks and laypeople alike, hence its nickname “The Monkey Temple”.



## Nepal: Katmandu, Gokarneshwar Temple and Swayambhu (The Monkey Temple)

One thing you quickly notice while traveling, like you everyone is trying to get that perfect shot. I worked hard to take shots that were of the moment and not staged in any way, no easy task I assure you. There is so much to look at, it is hard to focus (pun intended again) your efforts. I saw so many people staging their shots. Case in point the image of the girl on the steps was actually a staged photoshoot. I waited until the model was taking a break to get my shot.



## Nepal: Katmandu, Gokarneshwar Temple and Swayambhu (The Monkey Temple)

The colors of Nepal and its people are truly inspiring. I am really happy with this trilogy of portraits; it captured the nature of the people as well as the beautiful local fashion. Again the contrast of that against the beauty of the decaying ancient architecture made taking photos all the better. It was here in Nepal where I also noticed the light, it had a distinctive bright quality to it. I'm not sure why that might be, but it had a noticeable effect on my images.





Israel: Masada, Caesarea, Haifa, Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv



## Israel: Masada, Caesarea, Haifa, Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv

After India and Nepal I was really looking forward to Israel to compare and contrast their respective forms of spirituality. Given the history I was sure to see some interesting sites, which of course I did, but I was also treated to amazing beaches, wildlife and food - which after India and Nepal was a much needed treat! That aside I was also surprised to see the German influence on the architecture of many of the cities. There were so many original Bauhaus apartment complexes dotted all over Tel Aviv, it was a treat to see the real thing as I walked all over the city.



## Israel: Masada, Caesarea, Haifa, Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv

Of all the historic sites I saw, for some reason, I was most impressed with the Dead Sea. Perhaps for the epic quality of the landscapes or just the sheer uniqueness of it, it's hard to say, but despite the overly touristy vibe it was still really unique. Again of note here, I did very little to alter the color, it was in fact this vibrant. I did, however, move the plane a little up and to the right. The sky on the day I was there was so beautiful and the colors at sunset were really amazing. While taking the next to last picture on the right I thought of it as the burning bush.



## Israel: Masada, Caesarea, Haifa, Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv

The odd thing about the Dead Sea is that it really is like a resort meets night club. There is a bar and a bizarre you can stroll through to pick up your “authentic Dead Sea” cosmetics, camel rides and all types of culinary treats. The Dead Sea has attracted visitors from around the Mediterranean basin for thousands of years. It was one of the world's first health resorts for Herod the Great, and it has been the supplier of a wide variety of products, from asphalt for Egyptian mummification to potash for fertilizers.





Bulgaria: Sofia, Rila Monastery and Plovdiv



## Bulgaria: Sofia, Rila Monastery and Plovdiv

I've always been interested in the much maligned Balkans, in particular Bulgaria. With its rich Byzantine history and unique eclectic cuisine I was eager to experience modern day Bulgaria. I was made aware of Bulgaria by famed PBS tour guru Rick Steves' special on Rila monastery. Much of the capital city Sofia is an interesting mix of Soviet and Byzantine both in architecture and temperament.



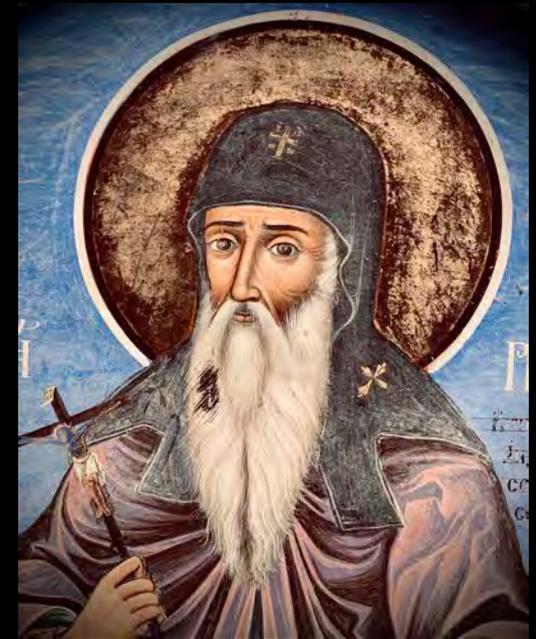
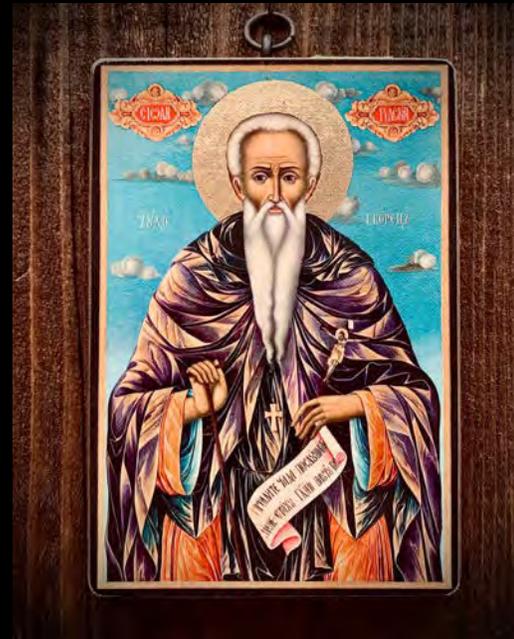
## Bulgaria: Sofia, Rila Monastery and Plovdiv

While exploring Sofia, I was struck by the way many of the major religions exist here, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and more all have a presence here, and there seems to be a sort of underlying tension between them. Interestingly, I discovered the real source of the tension isn't religious differences but the remaining Soviet political influence. Like Israel there is a palpable tension here among the people. There is a general distrust of the government and Bulgaria is the only place I ran into trouble as I was "detained" for j-walking and asked to pay a fine.



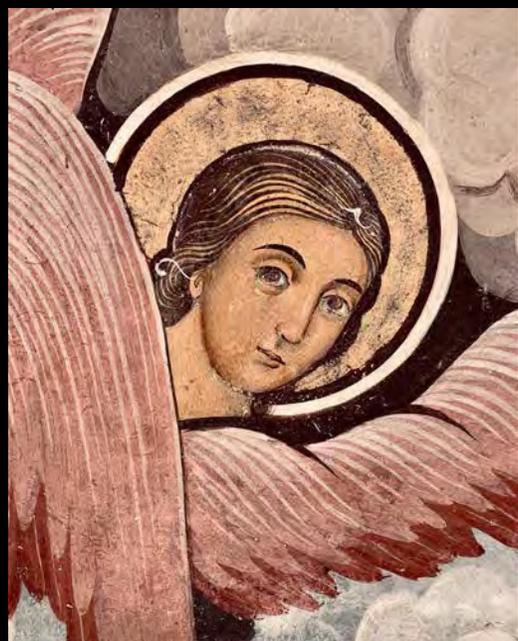
## Bulgaria: Sofia, Rila Monastery and Plovdiv

Despite the aforementioned tension, Bulgaria was still a great place to visit, again like Israel, great food! The monastery didn't disappoint either. Featured here are my pics from Rila Monastery. It is traditionally thought that the monastery was founded by the hermit St. Ivan of Rila, whose name it bears, during the rule of Tsar Peter (927-968). The hermit actually lived in a cave without any material possessions not far from the monastery's location, while the complex was built by his students, who came to the mountains to receive their education.



## Bulgaria: Sofia, Rila Monastery and Plovdiv

The frescoes featured here, finished in 1846, are the work of many masters of the time. The church is also home to many valuable icons, dating from the 14th to the 19th century. Porticos in the courtyard have Mamluk influence with the striped painting and the domes, which became more popular in the Ottoman Empire after the conquest of Egypt. Up close I was amazed by how well preserved the images are given the wet cold climate of the mountains.





Romania: Bucharest, Park King Michael I and Transylvania



## Romania: Bucharest, Park King Michael I and Transylvania

What trip to Romania would be complete without a trip to Dracula's castle right?! Well it's really more like a fort than a castle and its proper name is Bran Castle. The castle is now a museum dedicated to displaying art and furniture collected by Queen Marie, the last queen of Romania. Tourists can see the interior on their own or by a guided tour. At the bottom of the rather sizable hill is a small open air museum exhibiting traditional Romanian peasant structures (cottages, barns, water-driven machinery, etc.) from the Bran region. It is also of note that Transylvania is the only place I saw snow on my entire trip. ☹️



## Romania: Bucharest, Park King Michael I and Transylvania

While walking around Bucharest I stumbled upon Park King Michael and The Village Museum. The Village Museum is an open-air ethnographic museum located in the park itself as a showcase of traditional Romanian village life. The museum extends to over a quarter mile, and contains 272 authentic peasant farms and houses from all over Romania. On the day I was there I had the whole place to myself. It was fun seeing all of the unique architectural inventions and solutions across the span of time. For you design nerds, I think you would agree that the green and yellow facade looks a lot like something you would see in a Wes Anderson movie!



## Romania: Bucharest, Park King Michael I and Transylvania

Bucharest became the capital of Romania in 1862 and is the center of Romanian media, culture, and art. Its architecture is a mix of Neo-Classical, Art Nouveau and Bauhaus. In the period between the two World Wars, the city's elegant architecture and the sophistication of its elite earned Bucharest the nickname of 'Paris of the East'. Although buildings and districts in the historic city center were heavily damaged or destroyed by war and/or earthquakes, many survived and have been renovated. Some with a unique twist like the building featured in the last image to the right.



## Romania: Bucharest, Park King Michael I and Transylvania

Bucharest, like many European cities, has a serious graffiti problem. It is always jarring to see beautiful old neo-classical buildings dying in silence and covered by graffiti. Despite its being romanticized as a legitimate art form, I am hard pressed to consider graffiti much more than urban blight... It does nothing more than deface the landscape for its own sake. Still it made for some interesting shots so I guess I can't complain too much right?





Poland: Warsaw, Oświęcim and Borki



## Poland: Warsaw, Oświęcim and Borki

Warsaw was really a pleasant surprise and really very hipster in its own way. I had a great time strolling through the old town district, which seemed remarkably preserved. I later discovered that After World War II, many of the historic streets, buildings, and churches were restored to their original form. In 1980, Warsaw's historic Old Town was named a UNESCO World Heritage site. In 1995, the Warsaw Metro opened with a single line and has since grown to cover most of Poland. I loved the iconic plexiglass metro stop shelters and logos (on the right); they looked like the entrance to a super hero's headquarters!



## Poland: Warsaw, Oświęcim and Borki

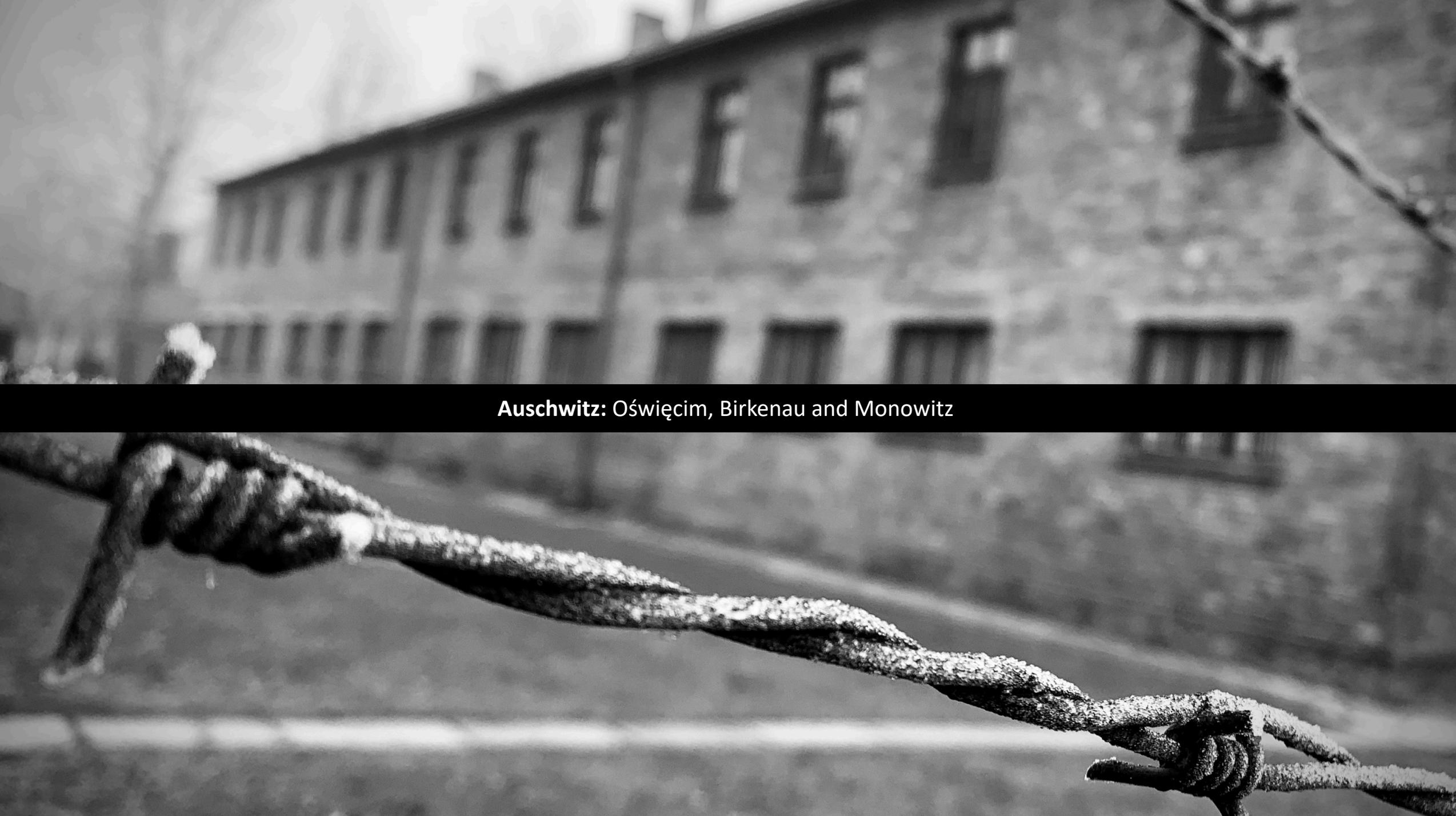
In Poland I started experimenting with more extreme angles and close-ups. I wanted to add an almost abstract quality to some of my images. I also wanted to try and capture what appeared to be objects and architecture from a different time. I saw this reflection in a Christmas ball of the statue and it started me thinking in that direction. I also have a long-standing love affair with old cars - in this case vans. Nonetheless I wanted to capture the old school “turystyczny” (tourist) vibe. I spotted the van as I was leaving the Warsaw Museum.



## Poland: Warsaw, Oświęcim and Borki

The Old Town Market Place is the true heart of the Old Town, and has some amazing examples of period architecture. I was taken with the color schemes and reliefs of some of the buildings. They have a very graphic design feel to them. It was obvious that great care was taken to restore these buildings and there is great attention to detail in every facet of their design. On the day I discovered the Old Town Market Place, it was a picture perfect day for people watching. I sat and drank a local specialty, a Polish hot toddy of sorts called Krupnik. Krupnik is made with honey infused vodka, hot water, cloves and an orange slice. It was a nice way to warm myself watching the people go by.





**Auschwitz: Oświęcim, Birkenau and Monowitz**

## Auschwitz: Oświęcim, Birkenau and Monowitz

Auschwitz was a complex of over 40 concentration and extermination camps operated by Nazis in occupied Poland during World War II. It consisted of Auschwitz 1- the main camp (*Stammlager*) in Oświęcim; Auschwitz II - Birkenau, a concentration and extermination camp built with several gas chambers; Auschwitz III - Monowitz, a labor camp created to staff a factory for a chemical conglomerate - chief supplier of the gas used to exterminate prisoners. The reality of this place really hit me when I saw my friend Marsha's last name, Klein, on a briefcase. It is hard to visit this hallowed place and not be moved...



## Auschwitz: Oświęcim, Birkenau and Monowitz

As I moved through the tour, I felt more and more uneasy for obvious reasons... As I came into the room where children were sorted, it became a bit overwhelming to be frank. The day I was there was particularly cold and damp and I could only imagine how these children felt. I pulled my high-tech travel parka tighter in a vain attempt to get warmer - knowing of course this was a different kind of cold I was feeling...



## Auschwitz: Oświęcim, Birkenau and Monowitz

A historic train car has been placed at the unloading platform at Auschwitz II - Birkenau site. Beginning in the spring of 1944, Jews deported to Auschwitz by the Germans disembarked and underwent selection by SS doctors there. Freight cars such as the one featured in the photo to the right were used by the Nazis to deport people within occupied Europe to ghettos, killing centers, and concentration camps. According to my tour guide at the end of the war the tracks were bent to prevent trains from ever arriving again...





**Estonia:** Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park and Vihula

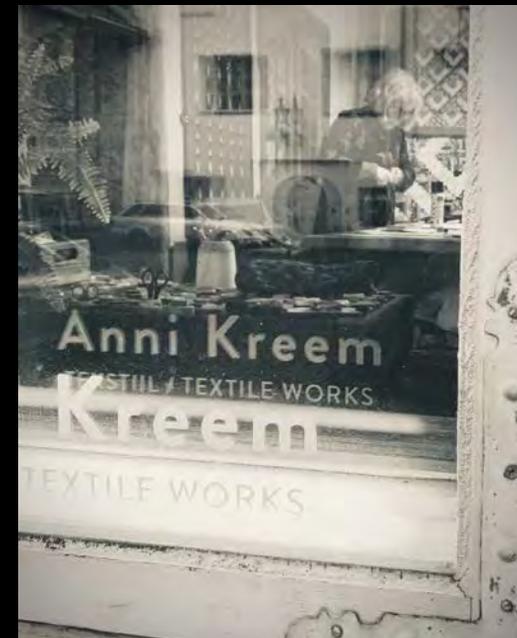
## Estonia: Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park and Vihula

Estonia was one of the places that I wasn't even sure I knew where it was - let alone what it had to offer. The only thing I knew was that it had one of the most complete medieval towns in all of Europe. Estonia also has a thriving art scene, and it was fun looking in the shops at the unique locals' art. My friend Rob dubbed my pic of the head and tea kettle lamp the "The Cenobite" which are the fictional race of beings from the Hellraiser movies with pins in their head and face. Good call dude! Also look closely at the last pic on the right, at the top of the steps you see a sign for Philly Joe's jazz bar!



## Estonia: Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park and Vihula

Estonia had so many quaint little houses and sections of town. I spent most of my days getting lost in the back streets and taking my pics. I was also struck by how well kept the houses were. Everyone seems to take great pride in maintaining their homes, and I was told the spring flowers displayed rival Amsterdam. Roaming around Estonia I was also feeling a bit better after my visit to Auschwitz which stayed with me for several days after I left Poland...



## Estonia: Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park and Vihula

On a whim I took a day trip to Lahemaa National Park. It was a cold bleak day but being the off season I didn't have many side tours to choose from, and besides I love the outdoors in any case really. Located in northern Estonia, 70 kilometers east from the capital Tallinn, it is the largest park in Estonia and one of Europe's biggest national parks. Lahemaa translates roughly as "Land of Bays"; to me it felt very much like the New Jersey Pine Lands. I think I got some really good nature shots here. Again I tried to channel my inner Ansel Adams or was it my inner Per Bak Jensen the Danish nature photographer?



## Estonia: Tallinn, Lahemaa National Park and Vihula

The national park, established in 1971, is one of the main tourism draws in Estonia. With forests covering more than 70 percent of Lahemaa, the area is rich in flora and fauna. The landscape has many raised bogs, including the 7,000-year-old Laukasoo Reserve. The park, marked by several trails, teems with wildlife, including a population of boar, red deer, wolves, bear and lynx. The coast is covered with rocks and boulders, used each year by cranes as a stopover on their way to the Bosphorus and Egypt.





Finland: Helsinki and Porvoo



## Finland: Helsinki and Porvoo

I like many of you no doubt think of IKEA when we think of Scandinavia. I wasn't quite sure what to expect really. What I found was a country where art and design are still held in high regard and where history is reflected in every building; hence why Helsinki is known as a 'city of architecture'. As one of Europe's youngest capitals, it was first shaped by Neoclassical architecture and later became the world's largest concentration of Jugendstil buildings and National Romanticism. *Jugendstil* ("Youth Style") was an artistic movement, particularly in the decorative arts. This movement was influential primarily in Germany and to a lesser extent elsewhere in Europe from 1895 until about 1910. It was the German version of Art Nouveau.



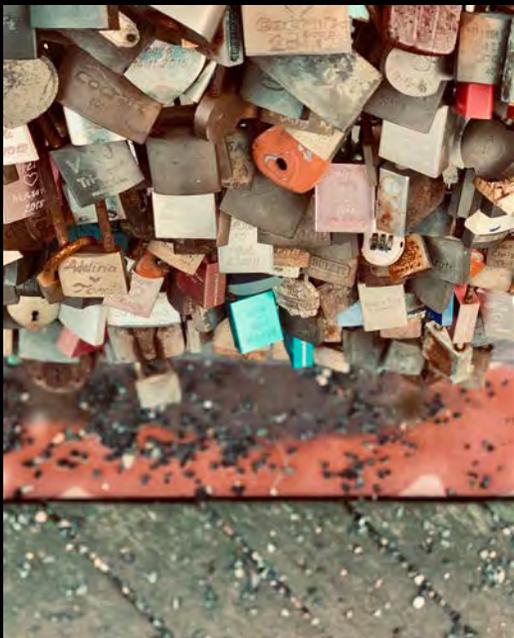
## Finland: Helsinki and Porvoo

When walking through Helsinki one of the things you notice is that there is no historic core, old town or remains of a fortress or even a medieval city center, like in other cities in Europe. Helsinki's story is based on its modern capital city status and on its location by the sea. Helsinki came about as the result of commerce and politics. The location on the sea, between East and West, has been the advantage. The Vantaa River, the waterfront, the bays, shores and coast lines, have shaped the development of the city, whose Golden Age was before the First World War.



## Finland: Helsinki and Porvoo

Helsinki gradually became the cultural, intellectual and political center of the country. In response to globalization and European integration, Finland took a decidedly modern approach to city planning. Helsinki repurposed its old factories and warehouses, ports and waterfronts into new housing areas long before that was in vogue. Helsinki continues to grow and lead the world in design and urban planning. It has one of the world's highest urban standards of living, and in 2012, it was awarded the title of World Design Capital. Today Helsinki is a wonderful *mélange* of styles both classical and modern. I have to say I loved this city!





Sweden: Stockholm



## Sweden: Stockholm

All I really knew of Sweden was what I saw in Stieg Larson's 'Girl With The Dragon Tattoo' trilogy. It seemed cool enough and somewhat historical. Well it was indeed that and so much more! I spent much of my time exploring this city on foot and visiting the places highlighted in the movie. Stockholm has so much to offer and in my opinion is the quintessential Scandinavian city. The city is home to some of Europe's top ranking universities. It hosts the annual Nobel Prize ceremonies and banquet and has one of the coolest museums on the planet in my humble opinion - the Vasa Museum. The Vasa Museum has the only fully intact 17th century ship that has ever been salvaged!



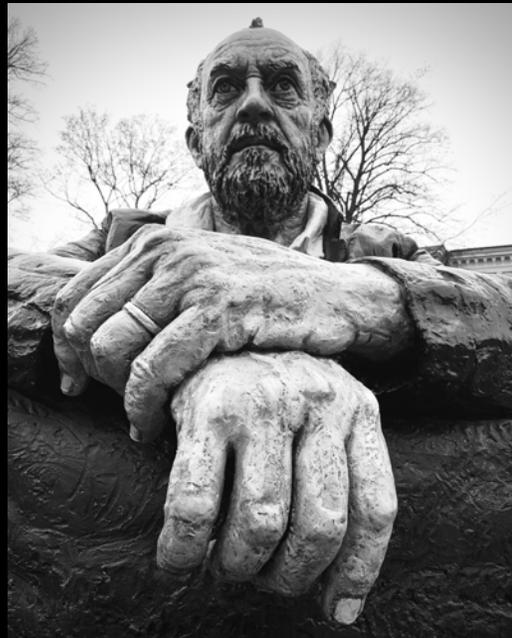
## Sweden: Stockholm

The city's oldest section is Gamla Stan (Old Town), located on the original small islands of the city's earliest settlements and still featuring the medieval street layout. Some notable buildings of Gamla Stan are the large German Church (*Tyska kyrkan*) and several mansions and palaces. Every morning I would walk down to the Gamla Stan for breakfast and imagine what it would have been like back in the day. As you can see in my photos, the light was rather dramatic in the morning with a distinctive orange hue. The first photo of the person obscured on the phone was my nod to favorite famed avant-garde photographer Guy Bourdin. Notice the word on the garage door handle?



## Sweden: Stockholm

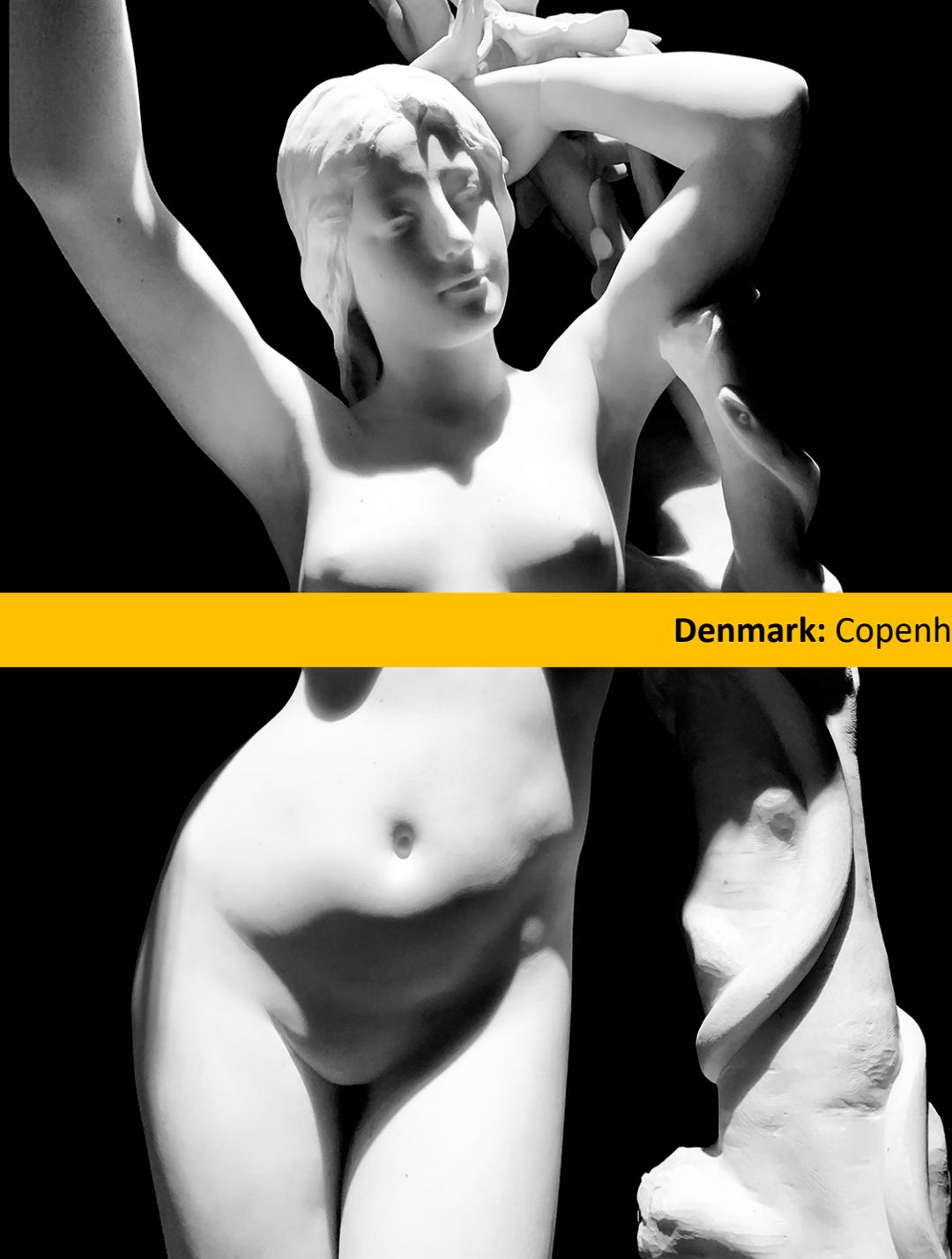
While walking around Old Town I would routinely see the changing of the guard at several government buildings. It felt very “Filleniesq” to me as many times they were out of step or seemingly misdirected in a somehow purposeful way. The other thing I noticed is the many little antique shops that specialize in Middle Eastern decorative arts. This lamp outside one of those shops, though lovely, seemed to be a modern knock-off. Before I could inquire as to its origin, I was politely shoed away for taking photos.



## Finland: Helsinki, Porvoo

One of the best ways to get the feel of the city is to take a canal tour. Many cities offer them for free or for very little cost. While on board I caught the image of the woman to the left, she seemed so lost in deep thought, I wondered what she was thinking about. The other image is of a woman I caught sun bathing in the door way to my hotel on my way home from the canal tour. It was in Stockholm where I started to unwind a bit, perhaps influenced by my photos of these women, I decided to slow down a bit and just kind of hang out rather than rushing around trying to see everything. For the remainder of my time in Sweden I simply lived in Stockholm...

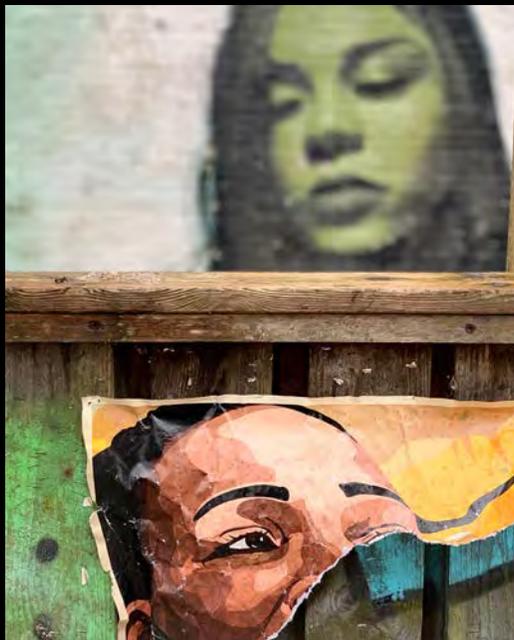




**Denmark: Copenhagen**

## Denmark: Copenhagen

My buddy Ronn lived in Copenhagen briefly for a time and always had good things to say about it. Like with most of this area of the world I knew precious little about it. Adopting a decidedly more chill pace, I took my time to explore Copenhagen. It is a quirky place in so many ways. My waitress at the first café I stopped at recommended I explore an area called Freetown but cautioned me to be careful. Freetown, also known as Christiania, is an art commune of sorts of about 1,000 residents. It is really interesting to see this place as it is so completely different from the rest of Copenhagen, with its graffiti and shanty town like aesthetic.



## Denmark: Copenhagen

Christiania has been a source of controversy since its creation in a squatted military area in 1971. Its cannabis trade was tolerated by authorities until 2004. Since then, relations between Christiania and Danish authorities have been strained. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the situation has been somewhat normalized and Danish law is now enforced in Christiania. It is a stark contrast between Christiania and the rest of the city as you can see here. It is quite beautiful actually and like Helsinki ranks high in terms of the world's most livable cities.



## Denmark: Copenhagen

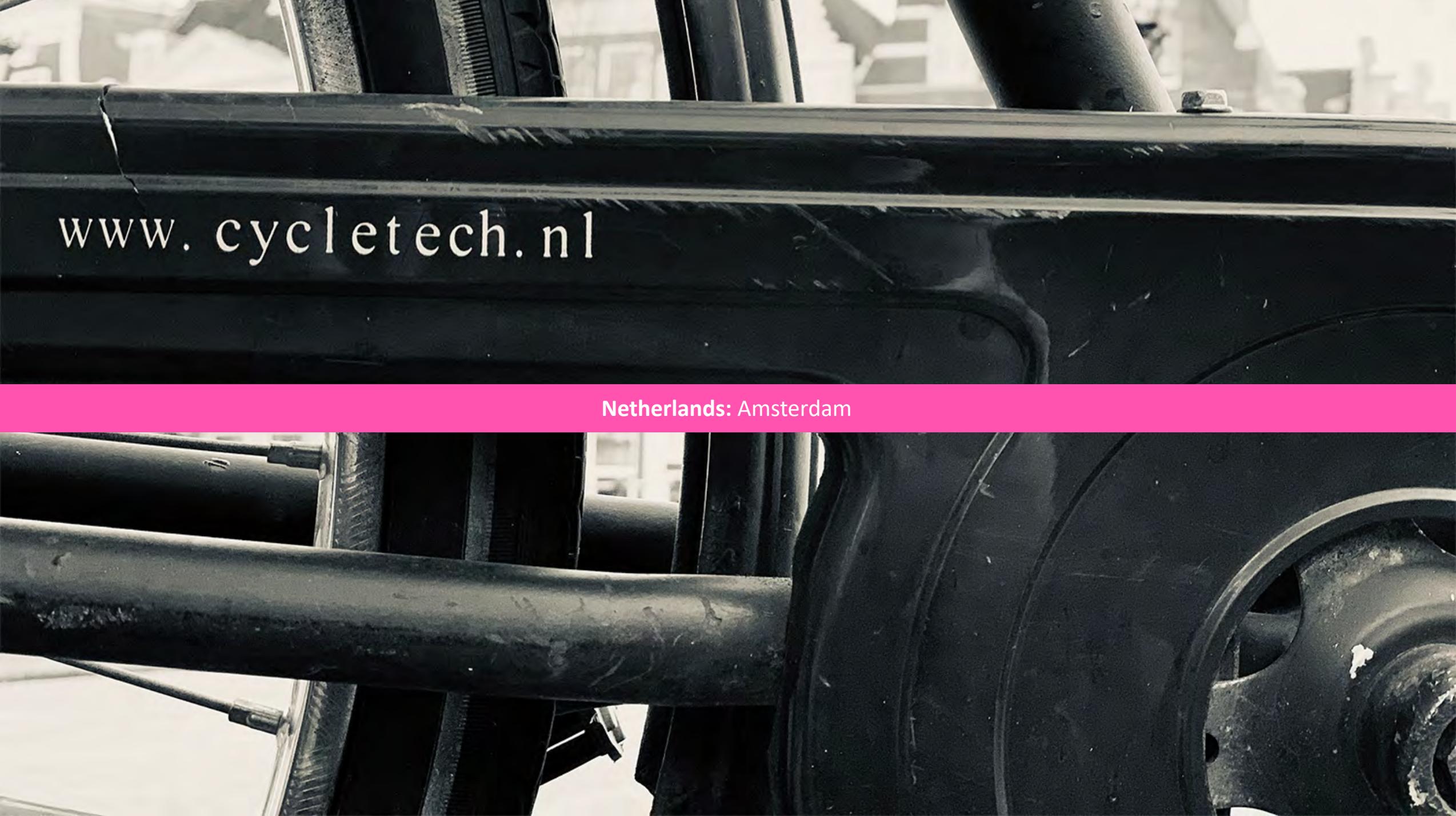
The real highlight of my exploration of Copenhagen was the The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Museum ("ny" means "new" in Danish; "Glyptotek" comes from the Greek root *glyphein*, to carve, and *theke*, storing place). The collection is built around the personal collection of Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914), the son of the founder of Carlsberg beer. Primarily a sculpture museum, as indicated by the name, the focal point of the museum is antique sculpture from the ancient cultures around the Mediterranean, including Egypt, Rome and Greece.



## Denmark: Copenhagen

To say this was a highlight of my entire trip would be an understatement. This is an old school salon style museum you simply can't see outside of Europe. Here you are treated to the most impressive collection of sculpture anywhere in the world in a setting that is an experience in and of itself. I spent all day here and could have spent much longer with no hesitation if I had the time. The sculptures are truly remarkable and, it is clear that the Danish believe art still matters!



A close-up photograph of a black bicycle frame. The frame is the central focus, with various tubes and joints visible. The website address 'www.cycletech.nl' is printed in white on the main frame tube. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a building or structure. A pink horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Netherlands: Amsterdam'.

[www.cycletech.nl](http://www.cycletech.nl)

Netherlands: Amsterdam

## The Netherlands: Amsterdam

I was really hopeful that Amsterdam was more than just drugs and sex. Fortunately I visited Amsterdam in the off season so there were fewer knuckleheads (aka English boys on a weekend bender with their “mates”). The canals, museums, and scenery, were so amazing you felt like you were walking through a movie set. Many a day I simply sat on the canals and ate my lunch watching the parade of people go by. Of course I also visited the many amazing museums including the Van Gogh Museum and the amazing Rijksmuseum. On the way to the Van Gogh Museum, I spotted this clever piece of graffiti, (third from the left) maybe it's not always so bad after all?



## The Netherlands: Amsterdam

The canal system in Amsterdam is truly an amazing feat of engineering. It really gives the city a unique charm as does bicycle culture. Bikes are used by most everyone of every age and station in life. I was so taken with them I have since decided to purchase one myself, though I am still deciding on which brand as there are so many beautiful models to choose from! The architecture as you would expect is also amazing. On one of my many people watching lunches I spotted a rather chic couple emerge from this vintage 80's Jag so of course I couldn't resist taking a photo of it!



## The Netherlands: Amsterdam

The image of the clogs featured below has a singular distinction as the only shot I staged on my entire trip, which is to say I actually posed them to meet the needs of my shot. I am glad I did as it helped me capture the warm grainy quality of the wood. They were sitting on the deck of the canal cruise ship, so while everyone was boarding, I quickly put them up on the bow and arranged them the way you see them and Viola! In Amsterdam I started working on the idea of taking pictures of people taking pictures.





Germany: Frankfurt and Laubach



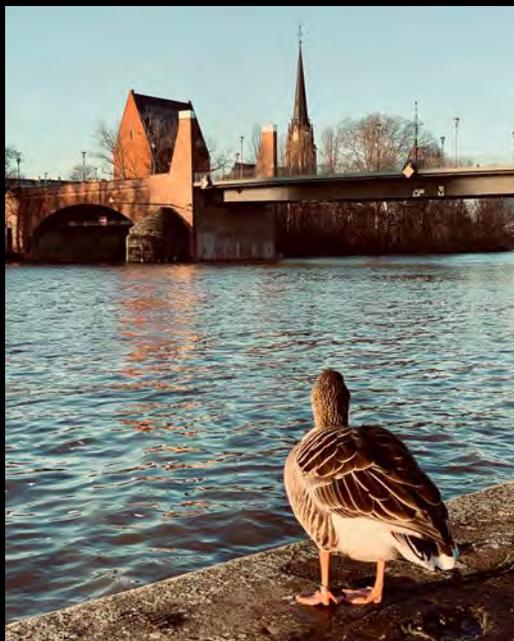
## Germany: Frankfurt and Laubach

I have been to Germany several times, but this was my first time in Frankfurt. Frankfurt is culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse, with half its population, and a majority of young people from various backgrounds. A quarter of the population consists of foreign nationals, including many expatriates from the states. From my perspective the Germans don't feel particularly good about the diversity of Frankfurt, and many areas around the train station are noticeably depressed. One of the things I love about the whole of Germany is that it is clock-work efficient, organized and clean, Frankfurt is...well...not...



## Germany: Frankfurt and Laubach

The medieval old town area of Frankfurt is really cute, albeit small compared to say Tallinn's featured earlier. Still it had its charms. As you wander long the tributary of the Rhine it gradually moves from quaint medieval town to industrial areas. Frankfurt, like many cities throughout Europe, works hard at balancing areas of commerce with public open spaces and parks. While in Frankfurt I would stroll along the waterfront and stumble upon another little park area with great views of the city - like the one the duck and I shared one Sunday morning.



## Germany: Frankfurt and Laubach

After having thoroughly explored the waterfront outside the old city area of Frankfurt, I turned my attention toward the interior of the city and its surrounding neighborhoods. I found this little Chinese arch leading into what seemed to be a small complex of sorts. It turned out to be a stunningly beautiful and peaceful Chinese garden with a temple, pagoda, bridge and waterfall. It felt like I was transported to China. This reminded me so much of the Japanese Tea House in Philadelphia. Who knew one of the most interesting things to see in Germany would be China?!





Italy: Palermo Sicily



## Italy: Palermo Sicily

I wasn't quite sure what to make of Sicily; it seemed like such a melting pot of color, culture, language and race. I spent most days, like before, roaming the city. I was really impressed with the opera houses where the final scene of the Godfather trilogy was shot (there I go again with those puns). The dog to the right is lying on the steps next to me as I enjoyed one of many gelatos I had for a mid-day snack. I was also interested to learn of the diverse cultures that played a part in the history of the area, but modern day Sicily is equally as diverse with people from all over the world now calling it home.



## Italy: Palermo Sicily

Sicily, the largest Mediterranean island, is just off the "toe" of Italy's "boot." Its rich history is reflected in sites like the Valley of the Temples, the well-preserved ruins of seven monumental, Doric-style Greek temples, and in the Byzantine mosaics at the Cappella Palatina, a former royal chapel in capital city Palermo. On Sicily's eastern edge is Mount Etna, one of Europe's highest active volcanoes. Palermo, where I stayed, was very much a touristy beach town complete with its historic center and bazaars.



## Italy: Palermo Sicily

No trip to any region of Italy would be complete without visiting one or two of the many amazing churches. Honestly, there were so many that I lost count, one more amazing than the last. I saw so many frescos and buildings that were true works of art, none of my pictures could do them justice. I was also seeing a lot of what could best be described as dioramas of scenes and characters from the bible, much like you see in northern Portugal. There were sort of eerie actually but made for good photos. The one featured here, third from the left, was actually right next to a telephone booth on a small back street near the opera house.



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## Italy: Palermo Sicily

The two featured here are in a church near the post office and are life size. I was really drawn to their expression, they looked so forlorn. Sicily is the kind of place where you can't help but slow down as the pace of life is very different than in the states. They say the Italians have made an art out of pursuing "La Dolce Vita" the sweet life and I can't disagree. I felt relaxed here wandering through the ancient streets of Palermo where nothing happens quickly and your only real concern is where you can find your next gelato or cup of espresso with friends before you go to mid-day mass at your family parish.





Greece: Athens



## Greece: Athens

I had mixed feelings about Athens; there is so much blight and poverty here, none of which I expected to see at such high levels. I originally was scheduled to stop in Greece only for a few days as part of a larger tour which included stops in Egypt, Cyprus and Turkey, but alas the world had other plans as the Covid pandemic was starting to sweep across the globe... Still before I left Athens I managed to see many of the famous historic sites all of which were impressive in their respective ways.



## Greece: Athens

But as I have mentioned several times in this presentation, graffiti is such a huge problem even here among these amazing structures. As you can see on the right near the mighty Acropolis there is an unfortunate amount of graffiti. The graffiti seen in the image below is on the train line that leads to the Acropolis historic area not on the Acropolis itself thankfully. The surrounding area is populated by merchants peddling their trinkets, street performs busking and of courses tourists taking in the sites. On my first day there I found an amazing little bistro at the foot of the Acropolis where I was treated to a house specialty sandwich with ricotta cheese, lemon zest, shaved prosciutto, radicchio, parsley, fig marmalade on thick Italian bread.



## Greece: Athens

What I am always surprised by when I see many of the great wonders of the world close up is the scale. How did man build these structures without technology or power tools? How ever it was actually done, is beside the point it's still just amazing! This ancient citadel is located on a rocky outcrop above the city and contains the remains of several ancient buildings of great architectural and historic significance, the most famous being the Parthenon. The word *acropolis* is from the Greek words ἄκρον (*akron*, "highest point, extremity") and πόλις (*polis*, "city"). It is currently undergoing a massive conservation effort; hence the scaffolding.



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## Epilogue: Going Viral

As armed soldiers began lining the streets of Athens, it became obvious the world was starting to take Covid-19 seriously. In the early days of the pandemic, fearing I would be stranded in a foreign country, I decided to return to the United States. With a heavy heart I boarded the plane for Philadelphia five months to the day after I left... And so ended my journey...

But the journey will continue! Despite what will surely be a new norm moving forward, I am filled with optimism and hope. I am looking forward to getting back out there and I look forward to sharing my adventures with you, stay tuned!!





**Thanks for watching!**

This has been a Studio Twenty Twenty production.

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**www. <https://kirkwidraphotography.weebly.com/shop.html>**

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