

Camera Hints

If you stay perfectly still for a long period of time, the wildlife will come up to you. King Penguins, in particular, are very curious animals. If you stay still long enough, they will come right up to you – I even had a pair of them jump into my lap. Another time, an elephant seal pup (also known as a “wiener”) decided I was his mother and followed me everywhere until I let it sit on my lap (aside – letting a 100 kg seal pup sit on you is not a good idea). You will be amazed with what you will experience if you stay still.

Keep a spare battery in your inside coat pocket. Extreme cold temperatures help deplete batteries much faster than usual. I always kept a spare camera battery in an inside coat pocket. My body heat would help the spare battery retain its power and if my main battery was depleted, I could replace it with the “warm” one. Also, placing the depleted “cold” battery back into your inside pocket will warm it up, thus recovering any remaining power not zapped by the cold. You can keep swapping batteries back and forth like this – you will be able to shoot a lot longer outside by doing so.

Beware of condensation. We only experienced extreme cold temperatures a few times but when we did, I made sure that I let my camera gear warm up in an airtight dry bag before taking it out into a warmer environment. **It doesn't hurt to keep a couple of silica gel packs in your camera bag to absorb excess moisture.**

Watch an animal's behaviour first, then pick up your camera. With a little practice, just about anyone can get a “nice” photograph of an animal. But if you want something truly special, try and photograph an animal's behaviour. If you watch them long enough, they repeat certain behaviours and in time, you can click your shutter at that “**perfect moment**“. That is when you will get that special, even award winning photograph.

Backup your critical gear. It would have sucked big time if my main camera or lens failed on this trip and I was not able to take any more photographs. For the time and expense it takes to go to Antarctica, make sure you have backups for your critical items. Chances are you will not need it, however, if you do, you will be glad you planned ahead. There was one person on our voyage who damaged their DSLR early in the trip. Another person broke their main zoom lens. They had no backup gear. Needless to say they were disappointed at the prospect of not being able to take any more photographs. A trip to Antarctica is usually a once in a lifetime opportunity for most people, so prepare accordingly

Camera Bags and Salt Water

Salt water and cameras do not mix and you need to avoid it at all costs. You will ruin your camera gear if you don't. Since we traveled ashore in zodiacs, we would often get sea spray on us (and the occasional wave will come into the zodiac as well). Some people just put rain covers on their photo backpacks ... that is not a good idea as the salt water can still get into your bag through the zipper and other openings. You need to have a bag that is airtight. A couple photographers I know who traveled to Antarctica used the [LowePro DryZone Camera Backpack](#) as their main camera bag (and carry on).



They discouraged me from getting one for the following reasons:

- it is really bulky, so it may not fit in the overhead compartment of small airplanes
- the bulk really adds to the weight (it weights 3.4kg empty)
- the outer shell is waterproof... but the zipper is a bit finicky. LowePro apparently supplies a special "grease" that you must use to easily open/close this zipper and to keep it airtight.

It did the job of keeping their gear protected from the salt water, but back on the ship, they would have to wipe it down carefully with fresh water to stop salt forming on it when it dried. It could be washed over with fresh water, but then all the padding and covering material would remain wet for hours.

I suspect though, it could be an ideal bag if you never went near salt water and just encountered fresh water rivers, lakes, rain or snow.

Other colleagues recommended that I purchase a lighter, more convenient photo backpack and put it into a airtight/waterproof case. I did this on both of my Antarctic voyages and it worked out really well for me – and I highly recommend Think Tank's Airport Series of photo backpacks which I used:



I own a number of Think Tank products and I believe they are some of the best camera bags on the market. They are extremely well made and designed by photographers for photographers. Depending on the camera/computer gear you want to take to Antarctica, there are three different backpacks you can choose from:

1. **Airport Essentials** ([Amazon](#) – [Adorama](#) – [B&H Photo](#)) – A high capacity, small-sized backpack which meets all domestic and international size carry-on requirements. It will fit up to a 13 inch laptop, a 10 inch tablet computer, 2-4 lenses and a 300mm f/2.8 lens attached to a camera body (**without a vertical grip**).
2. **Airport Commuter** ([Amazon](#) – [Adorama](#) – [B&H Photo](#)) – A high capacity, carry on size backpack which meets all domestic and international size requirements. Fits up to a 15 inch laptop, a 10 inch tablet computer, 2-4 lenses and a 400mm f/2.8 attached to a pro-sized body (i.e. **with a vertical grip**) or a 500mm f/4 unattached.
3. **Airport Accelerator** ([Amazon](#) – [Adorama](#) – [B&H Photo](#)) – A massive capacity, carry on size backpack which meets all domestic and international size requirements. Holds up to a 17 inch laptop, a 10 inch

tablet computer, 4-6 lenses and a 500 f/4 attached to a pro-sized body (i.e. **with a vertical grip**) or a 600 f/4 unattached.

These backpacks have minimal padding so they are light (1.3 kg or 3 lbs), not bulky and will fit in any storage space on all commercial aircraft. I have a full review of them on this website and you can read it by [clicking here](#).

Since these backpacks are not waterproof, so you will still need to get an airtight bag to put your backpack into when going ashore. Even though some photo backpacks come with a “rain cover”, they will offer little protection if a salt water wave enters your zodiac when going to/from the ship. I know several people who have destroyed their camera gear that way.

I ended up getting a [SealLine Boundary Pack](#) (the 70 litre version) “dry” bag (again, on the recommendation of colleagues):



Placing my photo backpack in this had these advantages:

- it keeps the photo backpack dry
- with a little practise, it is easy to open and close
- it will float if it ends up in the ocean
- you can wear it as a backpack which is important when you are getting in and out of the zodiacs (you need to keep your hands free for holding rails, etc)
- I purchased the 70L version which had lots of room for the photo backpack and other items

It was a bit cumbersome to sort out all of the straps, strings, etc., at first, however, this bag saved me from ruining thousands of dollars of expensive gear. There was plenty of room, so I could also keep an extra pair of socks, gloves, hats, fleece pants, etc., with me just in case I got wet and needed a dry item ashore.

If this bag got immersed in salt water, I could just put it in the shower, rinse it off with fresh water and let it dry. Since it is made mostly from rubber/plastic, it would dry very quickly. BTW, this case was placed in my checked-in bag (it is just over a kilo in weight and folds up nicely) from Toronto to Ushuaia, Argentina – and back.

For those of you who have smaller camera bags, you can also purchase smaller dry bags to protect them from the sea water.

Protect your camera from sea spray and Rain

I also used a Hydrophobia 70-200 Rain Cover (shown below) – a specialized, soft, water resistant outer shell made for digital SLRs which accommodates pro-zoom (f/2.8 typically) lenses up to 200mm plus a teleconverter. In case it rained or snowed a lot, I wanted my camera and lens to stay dry. I also used it briefly in the zodiac when photographing birds while cruising in a sheltered bay.



The Hydrophobia turned out to be fantastic, but not everyone wants to spend \$150+ for a rain cover, so a common trick is to use a clear plastic bag large enough to hold your camera and lens as a moisture guard. A large Ziploc bag works, but any clear plastic bag will do.

You cut two small holes in the end of the bag opposite the opening. Something like this:



You will then need to detach one end of your strap from the camera (you will re-attach it later). Place your camera in the bag, thread your camera strap through the holes you made in the bag and re-attach the strap to the camera. It should look something like this when you are finished.



It isn't fancy, but it works reasonably well and it is cheap to implement (i.e. the cost of a plastic bag and 5 minutes of your time). Since the bag is clear and flexible, you can still operate the controls, see the rear LCD and look through the viewfinder, although the view will be a bit distorted. If the conditions are dry and the bag is not needed for protection, you can slide it up and out of the way (perhaps, behind your neck). A number of people used this trick on our trip and I suspect it saved a lot of cameras from malfunctioning.