

Travelling companion

Accustomed to seeing life from a slightly different perspective, Mark Davidson documented India's hippie trail with both film and digital EOS cameras.

» I've always had a wanderlust to visit different cultures. I feel words alone cannot capture the beauty of a country, so I've always taken a camera on my travels. I used to carry a compact camera as some of the destinations I've been to, such as Mount Kilimanjaro or the jungles of Borneo, meant that anything larger would be a little cumbersome. Over the last couple of years, however, I have taken an SLR.

I'd read about the infamous hippie trail of the Sixties, when thousands of people travelled through South East Asia, journeying through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, before reaching Nepal – and I wanted a similar experience. It was for that reason that I recently travelled from Delhi to Nepal, the final part of the trail. Starting in India's capital city, my 18-day journey took in the Taj Mahal in Agra, India's holiest city of Varanasi, as well as Kathmandu – a total of 1400km.

It is only recently that I have become involved in digital photography, when I bought the EOS 300D. I feel the main advantage of digital is that it allows me to take far more shots without the fear of wasting film, as is the case with a conventional camera. Having the ability to view images gives me an idea as to the sort of picture that I've captured, allowing me to delete any unwanted images. I find the main advantage of film is its quality, especially when it comes to enlargements.

I carried my camera equipment in two small Lowepro bags, in addition to my backpack. Since I visited many locations in a short space of time, I needed to travel light.

I have cerebral palsy which means that although I have a reasonable amount of movement in my right arm, I have to take pictures by using a shutter release cable attached to the camera. Without it I would not be able to hold the camera still enough.

It seems strange that in India, a country of over a billion people, and many millions with deformities, people should see my own cerebral palsy as something different. Consequently, I felt I could empathise with people better than I would have been able to without any impediment, thus allowing me to take photographs that others might not have achieved.

I felt I saw of this part of Asia as I'd intended to, and even though seeing people begging in the streets was depressing at times, I was also able to appreciate the full beauty of the countries I travelled through.

The best thing about taking pictures in India and Nepal was seeing the look on the faces of local people, especially the children. In Western society, where kids must have the latest gadgets, it was refreshing to see children in Asia deriving so much pleasure simply from having their photograph taken.

With regard to challenges other than photography, it has always appealed to me to find places that would tax most able-bodied people, let alone someone with a slight disability. I want to prove that my disability is not a barrier, but something that can be lived with easily. Spurred on by this, I have climbed some of the highest peaks in Africa and South East Asia.



Top Boatman on the Ganges, India. EOS 300D, 44mm. Exposure was 1/2500 second at f5, ISO 400.

Centre Varanasi, India. EOS 300D, 31mm. Exposure was 1/2000 second at f5, ISO 200.

Bottom Nepalese silk dyes. EOS 300D, 50mm. Exposure was 1/200 second at f5.6, ISO 100.

My kit bag | EOS 300D | EOS 300V | EF-S 18-55mm f3.5-5.6 | EF 28-80mm f3.5-5.6 | Monopod | Small tripod | Remote Switch