



Drift ice walking, Sea of Okhotsk, Shiretoko Peninsula

BEHIND THE LENS



An interview with Yvonne Gordon, an adventure travel writer and photographer who has tried everything from desert trekking to igloo-building

Writer: Dani Redd
Photography: Yvonne Gordon

Yvonne Gordon is an award-winning travel writer and photographer based in Ireland. She regularly travels the world on assignments for publications such as The Irish Independent, The Sunday Times, The Telegraph, The Washington Post and AFAR.com.

Yvonne specialises in adventure travel and has been on trips the rest

of us can only dream of. She's gone packrafting in Italy, explored an ice cave in Alaska, tried drift ice walking in Japan and winter snorkelling in Iceland's Silfra fissure. She's recently returned from an assignment building and sleeping in an igloo in the High Tatras mountains in Slovakia.

She has also trekked in India's Thar desert, camped in a remote

Sami settlement in Swedish Lapland, stayed in a lighthouse on a rock in the Adriatic Sea and sailed to remote archipelagos in Norway and in Burma, where she met sea gypsies.

When not abroad, she likes to travel in Ireland, gathering stories and photos about her home country. She was recently awarded Adventure Travel Journalist of the Year for

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INTERVIEW



Fans arranged in a Spanish plaza



2019. Her travel photos regularly accompany her features and have been published everywhere from The Sunday Times and The Boston Globe to airline inflight magazines. We got in touch with Yvonne to find out more about her photography practice.

Outlook Travel (OT): What first attracted you to photography?

Yvonne Gordon (YG): I've always loved photography – the challenge and rewards of capturing beautiful places and moments. I also love the creativity of it and how every photographer records the same scene differently.

I got my first SLR camera as a



teenager and photography has nearly always been a part of my work in some way – in a previous job, my photos were used in everything from brochures to billboards.

For a while I was only focussing on writing, but I have started to include

more of my photography in my work again and more publications are commissioning my photos.

With travel photography, it's amazing to be able to tell stories with photos as well as words, and it's fun to explore somewhere new with a camera too and see what you can capture.

OT: Travel photography is a saturated market. How do you ensure your photos stand out from the crowd?

YG: Most of my focus is on telling stories about people and places that have not already been told. There is a lot of saturation in travel writing too, so I tend to go to places that are not

well known rather than produce more photos and stories about well-known places. Or if I do go to a familiar place, I will look for something unusual there and a new way of telling a story of the place. For example, I explored Tuscany by water and adventure sports, through its rivers, lakes and coastline rather than by road. That turned into a few different stories including an eight-page feature with my photos in Discovery, the Cathay Pacific inflight magazine.

OT: What's the most exciting thing about being a travel photographer?

YG: It is very rewarding – recording moments and scenes in the best

way possible is very satisfying, just getting a great image you are proud of. Sometimes you are capturing a fleeting moment for posterity.

If you're focusing on something technical – such as night shots with stars – it's rewarding when all the elements and settings come together to create the perfect image, even if it takes a lots of bad ones to get one good one.

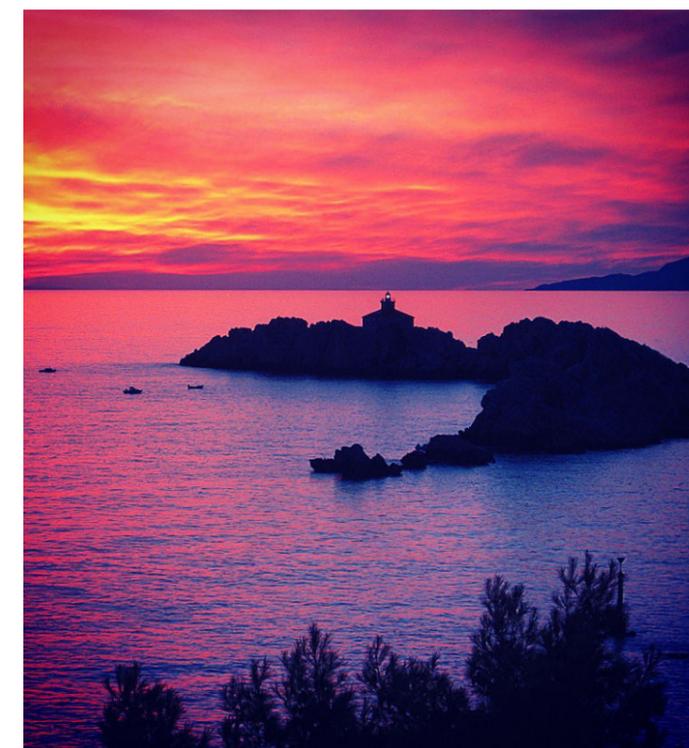
I love Instagram too for the great camaraderie with other photographers and writers. We follow each other's travels and support each other's work and it can be exciting and inspiring to see how other photographers capture places or work with

different conditions or light. It always makes me want to try new things and to be a better photographer.

OT: On the flip side, what are the biggest challenges?

YG: Working with tricky or dull light or bad weather is a challenge. Or sometimes being the only person in a remote area or standing somewhere like a windy cliff. Carrying heavy and fragile equipment, especially on adventure trips, and keeping it charged can be a challenge too.

I recently snowshoed up a mountain in Slovakia to build and sleep in an igloo overnight, lugging my full-frame camera and tripod as well as



camping gear. There was no electricity or power, so I had all my camera batteries in my sleeping bag to keep them warm so they'd last longer. I was also standing a good distance from the campfire to photograph it under the stars – that was quite chilly as the temp was -20°C.

OT: What qualities do you need to succeed as a travel photographer?

YG: Patience and flexibility. There's a lot of hanging around for the right lighting conditions; getting up at sunrise or spending longer at a location than planned. Sometimes it's a choice between having a fancy dinner somewhere or running outside with the tripod because it's 'blue hour' and perfect light. You need to be always ready to take a photo, as sometimes it's a just a passing moment. Avoid saying you'll return later to take it – the conditions can have totally changed when you get back.

OT: What's been the best place you've travelled to?

YG: That's hard to say as I love everywhere I go, so my favourite is nearly always the last place I have been to. For photos I love colourful places like Cuba, where there is so much going on everywhere you look. The nature and wildlife in Alaska and British Columbia in Canada are also incredible for photos. I might be biased but I always find Ireland full of fantastic photo opportunities too. If I'm doing a road trip, it takes hours to get anywhere as there is so much to photograph along the way.

OT: You're a writer as well as a photographer. How do you think these two different artforms relate to each other?

YG: I love how they go hand in hand – photography is an additional tool to tell a story and to bring a reader to

a place. As with writing, you can use photography to either provide the big picture or else just focus in on a small detail. A photo can capture how a place looks but then you can use writing to add in description of the other senses – the sounds, smells, tastes – how it feels to be somewhere or to relate a conversation you had there.

OT: Your photography focusses on landscapes more than people. Is this a conscious decision, and if so, why?

YG: I do sometimes photograph people but I don't post many of them on social media, partly for their privacy. Taking a photo of someone has a huge element of trust and if I photograph someone, I feel a responsibility over where that final image will end up. It can also be a lot of work to build that trust and connection before you even take the photo.

I love landscapes and I also love



From left to right: Antelope Canyon in Arizona, Croatia seascape, Mendenhall Glacier in Alaska and Hokkaido in Japan

photographing animals. It's fun to try to get their attention for a photo. I've developed a few 'animal whispering' secrets to get good poses. Some countries are full of comical

'characters' – in Ireland, it's sheep, donkeys, horses, especially when they are out wandering somewhere they shouldn't be. The best one so far was when I came across a turkey

and a llama just staring at each other on an Irish roadside. The trick was to get near enough to take the photo but stay far away enough to not scare them away.



Flamenco dancer, Seville



Irrawaddy River, Myanmar

< HOW I GOT THIS PHOTO

This is a photo of an Intha fisherman at dawn on Inle Lake in Myanmar. The fishermen use a special one-legged rowing technique and they fish with the baskets, using an oar for balance. I was backpacking in Burma for a couple of weeks and when we got to Inle, we hired a local boatman to take us out onto the lake.

We set out in the dark, just before sunrise, so the dawn light was perfect just as we passed the fisherman in the middle of the lake. It was one of those fleeting moments. The photo went on to win Photo of The Year at the Travel Media Awards, which was a nice bonus. 📸

Follow Yvonne on Instagram @yvonne.gordon