



CROSSING BORDERS

A Journey to "the Roof of the World"

Daniel J. Cox



Tanya Cox

When the Chinese Photographers Association invited me to be one of a hundred photographers from around the world to visit Tibet on a ten-day excursion in late June, my first response was to think, I'm not a travel photographer; nature and wildlife is my field. But I quickly accepted for two reasons: I live photography in general, and there are a lot of cool things to take pictures of in the world.





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above left to right

Prayer flags fly over one of the entrances to Samye monastery. Local children came out to welcome our group at the start of our tour. Local Tibetans look on as Tanya uses the Photosmart printer to make prints for one of the ladies I'd photographed.

opposite page, bottom left

A monk pauses for a portrait in the Mindroling monastery.

opposite page, bottom right

A local Tibetan leads his pony down from the Samye monastery.

The theme of the trip was Tibet in the Eyes of One Hundred Photographers, and the CPA wanted to give photographers a glimpse of the country in order to promote interest and tourism. The photographers were split into four groups to photographically cover as much of the country as possible. For the first part of the trip we were based in the capital city of Lhasa, but our group spent a great deal of time at over 16,000 feet. Tibet is known as "the Roof of the World" for its high altitudes, which average over 13,000 feet.

The altitude was hard on some of the tour members: out of the hundred, 17 experienced altitude sickness.

Our perspective was both historical and cultural, and we toured several monasteries—there are over 17,000 in Tibet—and visited local households.

We came well prepared: a couple of D2x bodies, two SB-800 Speedlights and three Zoom-Nikkors (12–24mm f/4G ED-IF AF-S DX, 17–55mm f/2.8G ED-IF AF-S DX and 70–200mm f/2.8G ED-IF AF-S VR) in the Lowepro camera pack, plus my sturdy Gitzo tripod.

We also came prepared to share. My wife, Tanya, carried an HP Photosmart battery-powered printer along with a Coolpix 8400 and a D2h. The printer turned into the hit of the trip. We'd often shoot quick JPEGs with the 8400 of people we met, pull the card out of the camera and put it into the printer. In about two minutes we'd have a 4x6 print to give to our new friends.

Some of the most memorable photos we took were of people reacting to seeing the printer and the results it produced. I sometimes printed pictures I'd taken with the D2x using the NEF plus JPEG setting,

which let me print out a JPEG from the D2x very quickly.

The trip was an opportunity to learn a little about the country, its history and people, and photographs from the hundred photographers will be used in a traveling exhibition so others can see what we saw.

I learned something about myself, too. While there were a few wildlife situations, almost all of my photography consisted of travel images. But I wasn't out of place as much as I might have thought. I started out working for a small newspaper, worked for a commercial studio and have taken a lot of pictures of people I've met on my nature and wildlife travels. Nature photography is certainly still my main goal, but I realized that seeing other countries and meeting people is a big attraction. I'm going to see where that interest might lead me.