

PCQC Video Presentation

Fundamentals of Travel Photography by Bob Krist—National Geographic

Lesson 5: Natural Light on People

This lesson will demonstrate how to use natural light when taking photographs of people.

• Photo Examples

- **Soft Directional Light:** Ideal lighting for people photography is light coming towards the subject from about 45 degrees, as through windows or doorways. Avoid harsh direct sunlight. Example of the Fisherman in Ireland shot with the 24mm end of a zoom lens shows how positioning the subject can be the key to a good photograph. The subject turned his head into the light, avoiding hard shadows on his face.
- **Plantation:** The setting was an old sugar plantation house in Cuba, the many windows and hallways that provided beautiful light. The subject was framed on the left side by an immense hallway with multiple splashes of light.

• Different Lighting Tips

- **The Size of the Light Source:** The larger the light source in relation to the size of the subject, the softer the light. Think of shooting with a shoe mounted flash reflector. The source is tiny compared to the subject and the result is harsh. But if you bounce that light off the ceiling, rather than directly at the subject, it becomes a softer light.
- **Open Shade:** Open shade on a sunny day will give a soft light. You will sometimes need to brighten the subject with a reflector or flash. See video examples.
- **Backlight:** Backlighting often evokes feelings of nostalgia and well-being. Take care not to point the camera directly into the sun. A reflector, a wall, or sheet of paper can give the subject a boost. Rim light creates a special effect, beautifully illuminating the outline of the subject. One example of creative backlighting is the Malaysian woman cutting vegetables. She was backlit by a splash of light from above and below (her cutting board) separating her from the black wall. Another example is the Scottish man and his dog coming out of the Vet's office. The backlighting and rim light enhanced their soulful expressions.
- **Shooting in the Sun.** Shooting in the sun with the sunlight coming over your shoulder and directly lighting the subject can be done effectively. A low hanging sun, at sunrise or sunset, is ideal. A reflector can give the subject a boost.
- **Auto-white balance (AWB)** is not ideal. Bob keeps his white balance set on daylight. Other settings are also useful: cloudy and shade, giving a warmer hue.

• Exercises

- Find a portrait subject and shoot him/her in direct light, open shade, backlit, and on an overcast day. Which do you like the best? Try shooting the same subject with AWB, daylight, cloudy and shade to see the difference.
- Using a reflector, a piece of white foamboard, or a piece of newsprint, practice finding and re-directing available light back into your subject.