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Travel Adventures - Part 1:

Finland and Estonia

by Noella Ballenger

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HELSINKI, FINLAND

Lutheran Cathedral in Senate Square: I am layering dark over light for an interesting look at some beautiful statuary and architecture. I think layering in this way can take a routine image up a notch and make it more unusual.

In my [previous article](#) for Apogee Photo Magazine, I wrote about a travel adventure that my sister and I shared with some special friends last September. I hadn't taken a bus tour in a very long time, and in that article I told you about the frustration I had as the tour bus took us here-and-there. I never had enough time in the "good spots" to do the kind of photography I wanted to do-- where the bus could find parking and spent the longest time wasn't particularly photogenic. In the desperation that resulted from this photographic frustration, I decided to become the most opportunistic photographer I could become.

Now I want to continue our adventures and tell you about some of the wonderful places we visited and share some of the photography that came about as a result of those tour frustrations. So, travel with us for the first part of our adventures in Finland and Estonia.

Because my friends and my sister were all coming from different airports and at different times we joined forces in Helsinki, the capital of Finland. We were excited, but because of the time difference and jet lag, we walked the city to try to adjust. Finland is approximately a 9 hour time difference (14 hours travel time from our homes in California) and jet lag can be severe. My sister Sunny arrived in Helsinki first, so she walked around town near the hotel and found several interesting streets for us to wander and a couple of appealing ideas for future side trips.

And wander we did, because that first day bus tour provided us with some additional streets and attractions that we could easily go back to after the tour. And to fit it all in, we knew getting up early and staying out late was to become part of our trip plans.

Helsinki is a small city that seems to center around the train station. In many parts of the world, train stations are often the hub of the city. One of our favorite places to go was to an open-air market. It was near the old harbor and had lots of activity and interesting things to see. There was a wonderful restaurant where we had lunch and could enjoy the sun while watching the people walk by. It was a lovely way to spend an afternoon!

And while trying to see as much as possible, fatigue can set in and have a way of narrowing your vision. For my friend Anne and I that frequently translated into focusing on patterns and textures as well as flowers and little things. For Anne's husband, Stan, who is an architect, he became fascinated with the style and look of the old buildings. My sister Sunny, a casual photographer with a really keen eye, is great on finding things and pointing them out to all of us.

In addition to Helsinki, we decided to visit a small town that my sister had heard about--Porvoo. And what a wonderful decision that was! It is a very unique and lovely historic old town that painted all of its old buildings along side of the water a rich, deep red, so that when the King visited, he would be sure to remember the town. It's about an hour's drive outside of Helsinki, so we took the local bus for an interesting drive to the town. One of the very nice things about travel in many places is that the local people will hear you speaking English and decide that they want to practice their English as well. And our bus driver did just that, so we had the advantage of learning a lot about the country on the way to Porvoo.



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HELSINKI, FINLAND

Along the Esplanade:

In this image I tried to make the background as interesting as I could with old buildings while still keeping the "flavor" of the town. Combining objects in an image when well done won't detract from the overall image but will add to it.



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PORVOO, FINLAND

Photographing a single color is almost like being on a treasure hunt. You begin not to look at an object as a thing, but as a design element. This can add strength to the image as well as being an outstanding exercise in careful observation.



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PORVOO, FINLAND

Because the key to the town is the brilliantly painted red buildings, I began to seek out anything I could find that was in that same shade of red.



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PORVOO, FINLAND

Rather than photographing people, I feel more comfortable photographing the “sign of man”. This old bike was leaning against a building in Porvoo. I think it says a lot about the town and the people who live here.

And I was quite pleased that I reminded myself to photograph people and that I gathered the courage and asked permission to photograph our bus driver.



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PORVOO, FINLAND

He was the wonderful man who took us from Helsinki to Porvoo and was also kind enough to pose for me.

On another day, we decided to take the fast jet boat across the Baltic Strait to Estonia. It is one of the three tiny Baltic nations that regained their

independence when the Soviet Union broke apart. The old town of Tallinn is near the waterfront where the boat let us off. It is surrounded by an old wall and the tiny, narrow streets twist and turn in the city. Lunch in an open air restaurant was fun, but a little chilly since there was the real possibility of rain. And right after lunch, rain did come pouring down. Suddenly the cobblestone streets took on a shine and a life of their own. Standing under the protection of a doorway, I could enjoy the rain and the photography before we had to get out and walk in it.



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TALLINN, ESTONIA

Coming into the harbor area we could see the old town. It is now surrounded by commerce and new buildings, but the magic of the old walled city was still there.



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TALLINN, ESTONIA

The town square was always the gathering place of the residents and visitors alike. On this very rainy day, many of the outdoor restaurants were empty but it can be a bustling place when the weather is good.



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TALLINN, ESTONIA

Tiny, narrow and twisting streets wound past beautiful old buildings.



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HELSINKI, FINLAND

Be aware of the light and the pattern of cobble stones. And where the trolley cars turned the corner, the tracks created even more of a variety in the patterns, which made for a wonderful photo.

Here’s a helpful tip before planning your next trip:

Travel to new areas and seeing and experiencing new situations can overwhelm a person. Sometimes in these situations I need to remind myself of the kind of things I want to photograph, so I make a small card to carry with me that has notations, such as; light, shadows, shapes, lines, and one color. Sometimes my list is also a reminder to include things like; people, parts, behavior and story.

Let me go over these two lists with you to show you how making a list in advance can be very helpful when you travel. In the first list, I am going to concentrate not on the subject matter or object, but on the design elements that work to make a subject really stand out.

The second list also requires some explanation. I’m a nature photographer and I am used to sitting patiently in order to catch the behavior of an animal, but I rarely take the time to watch for human behavior. They just aren’t the “critters” I normally photograph. So for me a reminder to include people is a necessity. Your lists could be anything that will help you remember your goals. Whenever I get frustrated or run out of ideas, I just look at my goal cards and it’s my gentle reminder to try some new ideas.



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TALLINN, ESTONIA

It is always important to examine your subject from many different angles and in many different ways from close-up to distant; from a worm’s eye to a bird’s eye position, and through pieces and parts of the whole. One of the charms of the old



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HELSINKI, FINLAND

The story here is wondering if this waitress will manage to make it back to the kitchen with all of the glasses intact (she did). Just something to watch and wonder about as we

town was in the small details.

were enjoying a late lunch.

At the end of our stay in Helsinki, we took a train to St Petersburg, Russia. I'll tell you more about St. Petersburg, the cruise through some fantastic areas of Russia and finally our stay in Moscow in future articles, so be sure to be watching for them.

MORE PHOTOS.....

[Let's look at some additional images](#) to see how my lists helped me make more interesting photographs.

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Noella Ballenger leads photographic workshop/tours to special locations in the West. Visit her site in Apogee Photo Magazine at [www.noellaballenger.com](http://www.noellaballenger.com) or send her an e-mail at [Noella1B@aol.com](mailto:Noella1B@aol.com) Write to her at P.O. Box 457, La Canada, CA 91012, call: (818) 954-0933 or fax: (818) 954-0910 for more information on her workshop/tours.

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