

DOCUMENTING YOUR FAMILY HOLIDAYS

**How to take memorable family photos
while being present for the moments that
matter to you**



Put the camera away for the moments that matter and try this instead: introducing the 'dead moments' theory

A holiday with my family is also my holiday, and not a photoshoot. I hate the pressure of having to take all the photos, at the expense of my own enjoyment and experience. If we are out sightseeing or doing something fun together, the camera stays in my bag most of the time, as I want to be present. These big-ticket experiences are those I would naturally remember without necessarily needing to capture them.

Instead, I love taking photos of the in-between moments when not much is going on: in transit, waiting for a train, or cooling down in the hotel room. I call these 'dead moments'.

Most of the photographs in these pages show my children tired, asleep, bored, or even grumpy. In fact, none of these photos show my children smiling. However, this doesn't mean that they didn't have fun. It simply means that when they were enjoying themselves, I was likely engaged in the moment with them rather than taking photographs.



Why are dead moments worth capturing

As a documentary family photographer, I believe in the beauty of ordinary and mundane moments. When I refer to these situations as 'dead moments', what I truly mean is that they are extraordinary and absolutely worth capturing.

These are the situations that, without a photo, I wouldn't have remembered. These photos capture details I would have otherwise overlooked. They show the other side of family holidays: the boredom, the tiredness, the lazying around, the children watching TV on the other side of the world with their feet up, just as they do at home.

In the following pages, I share some simple tips on how to spot and photograph a good 'dead moment opportunity'. You won't need a professional camera to put these techniques into practice; all you need is the mindset of looking at ordinary situations with curiosity and the willingness to let go of perfection.



Have your camera handy at all times

Whether you have a fancy camera or you are using your mobile phone, keep your camera handy at all times. This is not contradictory to the previous pages; it's about being ready to capture a photo, even during the mundane parts of the holiday and not just during the major sightseeing experiences. You just never know what may come up.

The photo above was taken during a recent camping trip with my children's school. Was I standing there with a tripod, waiting for the perfect moment? No, I was taking my son to the bathroom to brush his teeth!

I spotted the green and orange tents and the silhouettes inside, illuminated by torches. I lucked out with the light shining on the little girl's face. It appeared to be a quiet and magical moment amidst the chaos of nearly a hundred children still running around the campsite. I quickly paused to take the photo, and then I proceeded to take my son to the bathroom. Priorities!



Step back to include the details

When we spot a moment worth capturing, we tend to get close—or zoom in—and fill the photo with the 'subjects' of that moment, because they are what drew our attention in the first place.

However, when you look back at that photo years later or show it to others, something is missing: the context. By stepping back and including more details, you provide the viewer, including yourself, with clues about the environment in which the photo was taken. This enhances the moment by transforming it into a story (rather than a snapshot). The photo will just age better.

Above, I was watching my kids at a water park in Dubai. By standing back to take this photo, I included the skyscrapers behind the water park and the hotel name on the left. This backdrop, together with the women's clothing, give out obvious clues of where we were in the world. It also shows the scale of the hotel, which came with a fully equipped water park!



Go for real and not for perfect

Despite what we see on social media, travelling with children is HARD and often stressful. Things go wrong, they get ill, you spend a lot of your hard-earned money on experiences you think they'll love, only for them not to notice or care or, even worse, they're ungrateful about it!

When documenting your holiday, I suggest you show the full picture: the good, the bad and the ugly. Approach these 'meh' situations respectfully, with compassion and also a bit of humour.

The photo above is from a trip of a lifetime in Tanzania, during a safari in the Nyerere National Park. We had been sitting in the jeep for a while, and my son was clearly bored after the initial excitement of seeing the lioness. I remember feeling frustrated, thinking he was being ungrateful, but this photo makes me smile now. I'm not sure what my little one is doing with the binoculars (looking for ticks?), but I loved the contrast in terms of enthusiasm.



Dead moments in hotel rooms

Hotel rooms, guesthouses, and holiday rentals are unique and often quirky places that may go unnoticed in our holiday albums. The voile privacy blinds often add a beautiful soft light, lending a timeless look to the photographs.

I try to capture my children in hotel rooms in a way that creates a contrast between the environment and what the child is doing within it (like watching cartoons in an old mountain lodge, in full football gear). Context and subject are the two elements I focus on, whilst keeping the overall composition as uncluttered as possible.





Dead moments in transit

I'm slightly obsessed with documenting situations when we are in transit. These are perfect dead moments when nothing in particular happens: someone sleeps, someone reads, someone just stares outside, or eats a sandwich.

When I take photographs in transit, I include clues in the frame to give context to the photo. Signs are perfect for this (like the writing at the back of the chairs in the photo above, taken on the river boat in Bangkok), as well as the view outside the window. The view changes quickly, so make sure you take multiple shots until you are happy!





Dead moments with groups of people

If you go on holiday with other families, it is quite hard to get nice group shots. Try herding small children and line them up for a photo! Or going for a walk only to end up with lots of pictures of curved backs.

Again, my secret is capturing seemingly unremarkable moments with my holiday companions: a pause to play and rest, or setting up for a beach day. I then stand back and position myself such that the people are as separated and distinguishable as possible from each other, and they are all doing something slightly different.





Dead moments in pretty light

When I see good light, I cannot resist taking a photograph. If a dead moment happens while the light is beautiful, I actually have time to play and experiment, regardless of where we are. It doesn't have to be somewhere spectacular like a deserted beach; light is light. So, if the pretty light happens in the M&M flagship store in Times Square while my son is browsing key rings, so be it.

More often than not, I may discard the results of my experiments. However, sometimes I end up with perfectly imperfect photographs that convey an emotion or evoke a memory, all thanks to that beautiful light. And then, I am happy.





But I'm never in the photos! I hear you: enter the vacation photographer

As the designated photographer, I never appear in our holiday photos. It's as if I might as well have not been there. Alternatively, I have to resort to handing over my expensive camera to a stranger, only to get a wonky family photo. Does this sound familiar?

That's why more families now choose to hire a vacation photographer to document a day or part of their trip. It's a unique storytelling experience, a one-of-a-kind photoshoot where you are guaranteed to be in the photographs, without missing out on the fun. To find out more about hiring me as your vacation photographer, please get in [touch](#).



About me



I am a documentary family and vacation photographer based in London. I have been documenting my life for as long as I can remember, through photographs, journals, lists, and objects. Discovering documentary family photography as a genre was a pivotal moment in my life, and I never looked back. Through my photos, I aim to show the beauty in the ordinary, particularly in a world obsessed with filtered perfection and fakery. I love to connect with my subjects and I approach each shoot with the mindset of a photojournalist, aiming to capture the story behind each individual photograph. My photos have won multiple international awards, including ones with This Is Reportage Family and the Family Photojournalist Association.

[My website](#)

[My Instagram](#)

