

# GOING LOCAL

Good local knowledge and contacts can make photo experiences and tuition work smoothly with hassle-free access to the best locations and subjects.

Suzanne Porter's Clik-Trip venture offers experts 'on the ground' worldwide.

Suzanne Porter's stunning social documentary photography from Africa and other countries, has graced the pages of *Cameracraft* in the past. We have also chronicled her work for charitable organisations including Care International, Water Aid, Plan International, Christian Aid, Médecins Sans Frontières and other NGOs.

Suzanne – who describes herself as a “traveller who photographed, rather than a photographer who travelled” – visited Mexico and a number of other countries, including Canada and New Zealand, after completing her Sociology degree at Manchester Polytechnic. “Partly because of my sociological background, my passion has always been for exploring places that were different. I always wanted to go to the less-visited areas of the world and was very inspired by the hidden tribes of Africa as an example”, she says. “I found that, after travelling for some time, people weren't really listening to my stories and were not interested in what I was doing. However, when I started photographing these places, people stopped and looked and wanted to find out more.

“I was trying to do photography for a reason, in particular by raising awareness to the plight of those in need, such as refugees, by letting others see what was going on. I worked for the NGOs for ten years and then started offering travel stories to magazines such as *Wanderlust*, and working for travel guidebooks”.

Travel guidebook work took Suzanne to Morocco, at a time when she had not enjoyed a permanent base for many years. “I had been going from one job to job; photographing situations of poverty and suffering and then moving on to the next for a long



Above: barriers to photography removed for clients of Suzanne's photo ventures. Below: Suzanne engages with local women in Morocco.



time. It started to get too much. I was looking for a place where I could put down my cameras and just have a bit of a break. I just wanted to have a little home, where I could relax and clear my head between the jobs. I thought that Morocco might be a handy place for that, as it's halfway between Africa – which is my passion and my love – and Europe. Marrakesh ticked all the boxes, and I bought a crumbling little Riad in the heart of the Old Medina in 2008. The idea was to base myself there, to continue doing jobs around Africa. Actually, I ended up getting a lot of local travel work”, say Suzanne.

Having established her base in Marrakesh, Suzanne then found another market for her photography work, opening up to her, in the form of photography tours. “I also came across a lot of tourists who were having difficulties photographing in Marrakesh. It is a notoriously difficult place to photograph, as Moroccans don't like being photographed, as it's not part of their culture”, she explains. “Tourists were going home disappointed because they didn't have any nice photos. Because I was living and photographing within the Medina and Morocco generally, I had learned ways of getting the photos I needed, while respecting the locals. That's how my photography tours started, with me passing on the information, tips and experiences I had gained, on to the tourists, so that they would go home with a good impression of Marrakesh and Morocco and with great photos”, she says.

Suzanne moved to France in 2011, where she now lives with her husband and daughter and has now been travelling back to Morocco to run photography tours and workshops for over 12

Fisherman in Essouira photographed by Suzanne





The desert scenes of Morocco – above, the Sahara; below, Merzouga. Knowing where to find locations counts!



years. During that time, after many discussions with her own clients and other photographers, she had become increasingly aware of the difficulty some people had in finding a photography workshop that would meet their personal needs. She also became conscious of frustrations felt by those looking for a photography tour or workshop experience. These included the regret felt when even after exhaustive planning and searching for a photography workshop or tour, in the country being visited, the reality of the experience was disappointing.

“I discovered that everyone has different photographic interests and needs; whether it’s the photographic genre, their personal level of photographic skill or the location of the workshop. But, they all had one common aim which was to be able to book an experience simply and securely, with a photographer that they could trust to provide a memorable and enjoyable experience” she says. “A lot of my clients were women travelling on their own, and that’s probably why they booked me, as they especially

wanted to be accompanied by a woman to help them feel safe and secure. One of the big issues that kept arising, was that there was no central research point, for people to look up photography tours around the world.”

After long discussions with her husband, an expert in business development, Suzanne created

Clik-Trip. It is an online resource for anyone seeking a photography workshop or tour, run by experienced photographers across the globe. “I had accrued many contacts with photographers throughout the world, and I invited a number of them who had also been recommended to me by their clients, onto the website.

My intention was to provide an easily searchable marketplace, for clients to find their perfect photo experience, tour or workshop. There always has to be a direct recommendation to me, about the photographers I invite to join. Either, someone has had a tour or workshop with them, or knows them personally, and offers a



character reference. It’s important that the photographer is trusted.

“Each photographer is contracted to Clik-Trip and also completes a description of themselves and their tours online. We ask them to write as much as they can, so that clients can get a sense of them as a person. They can be the best photographer in the world, but they might not fit with a particular customer. Photographers can also be contacted directly by the customer, should more information be required. We encourage direct communication, to ensure that people get what they are expecting”, she explains.

Suzanne is acutely aware that it is her own, hard-won and excellent, reputation that is open to any potential criticism as much as the photographer being booked by the customer. “I’m sure it’s going to happen that someone has an experience that they are not 100% happy with, but it could just be a personality issue, or whatever. That’s why we are trying to get the photographers to give as much information about themselves as possible. It shouldn’t really come back on me, but, of course, I’m behind the scenes and making sure especially at the beginning,

It can be difficult to photograph children without a known guide and introduction to the community. Above, South Africa; below, Morocco.



that everything works as well as possible”.

Suzanne has currently recruited 70 photographers across 40 countries and is expanding the Clik-Trip photographer contingent with about five new photographers every month. Her plans for expansion are, in her words, “strategic” in that she will not accept every photographer who applies. Suzanne is careful to avoid an “over-saturation” of photographers and what they can offer, in any specific location. “The world is big, and even if we have five photographers in one city, as we do in Marrakesh, they will all be doing something different.

They all have different styles and different customer appeal – they all speak different languages, for example and they are all getting equal bookings, which tells me that the strategy is working well and we are not over-saturated, but it might be, if we went over five photographers. In London, we have photographers doing different types of tours, including Pin-hole photography and someone doing studio work, so again, there is a lot of variety and no over-saturation.”

An important feature of Clik-Trip that Suzanne feels is different from competitor sites, is that all the photographers are local to

the area in which they provide workshops and tours. “Our photographers will take you into areas that you may not otherwise be aware of. They live there and will be aware of the cultural experiences and will know the people in the pub, maybe. They have this local knowledge, which is different from a photographer based in another town and coming out to the location for a day”.

Future plans for Suzanne include expanding into more countries and having a map on the website, showing the location of all the photographers. Suzanne will also be representing Clik-Trip at a number of photography shows, including The Photography Show in Birmingham in March.

Suzanne says what really made her tick was getting access to inaccessible places. It’s easy to see that she wants the same for her photography tour customers and that this laudable motivation is firmly at the forefront of her new enterprise.

– Stephen Power

See: <https://www.clik-trip.com>  
Photo examples by Suzanne Porter