CAMERA NOT INCLUDED

The Photography Zine by Ewen Bell



Edition #5
April 2026

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EWEN BELL

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SHIMIZU
Honshu / Japan

THE COVER

Ferris Wheel by the docks at Shimizu.

At the start of April I spent two weeks working on an expedition ship in Japan. It's a mixed offering for photography, because you're never able to be exactly where you want to be, at the time you want to be there.

For two weeks I just have to wait and see what happens. I need a different mindset to my usual photography. I'm being paid to do a specific job, and not my usual job. So I just go with the moments as they happen and try to enjoy the potential of every day.

On this occasion the sunset was going off. Mt Fuji was glowing pink to the north of us, which had distracted me a little. While shooting Fujisan from the starboard deck I got a call on the radio to head to the port side of the ship. That pink glow on Fuji was coming from a deep orange sunset in the west. As our ship slipped out of the port, I got one last chance to capture silhouettes with the telephoto.

[Images captured on the Lumix S1RII with 100-500mm telephoto]



THIS EDITION

Hanami

Things To Love

Treasures & Trams

Happy Rain

Harbour Lights

April 2026

Japan is one of my happy places. So different from my Himalayan journeys to touch the top of the world, or being nestled into the Arctic winter waiting for auroras. Japan is a confluence of humanity, nature and art with a side serve of delicious.

It's also one the places I feel truly at home, despite being a complete outsider.

This edition of zine is 100% Japan. I have a backlog of images from Bhutan, Nepal and Norway to share from recent travels, but this month it's just Japan filling these pages. I spent two weeks on a ship as a guide for Heritage Expeditions, with the luxury of just sharing my experience with the passengers and indulging in photography each and every day.

Voyages around Japan by ship are a mixed blessing. You can't nip out at night to shoot the streets, and you have no control over chasing the sunset on shore. The ship's schedule is the only schedule. Despite all this, it proves to be a rewarding adventure with the camera. Every morning we arrive in a new port and have the luxury of returning to the same cabin and editing photos late into the night.

This year I was lucky to visit during the cherry blossoms, which made this journey in Japan all the more sweeter.

A quick word of thanks to the sponsors who make this publication possible.

I have enjoyed the privilege of working with LUMIX and their cameras for the vast majority of my photography in recent years. In particular the little LUMIX S9 has proved an ideal fit for my style of travel and photography.

I also want to thank Peak Design who have been very generous with my projects. I've bought a fair number of their bags over the years, but Peak Design have reached out a few times to let me road test some of their new models. I love their 10L sling especially, as it fits a pair of S9 camera bodies and three lenses, while still leaving room for a water bottle and extras.

Also need to say a word of thankyou to Angelbird, who have been my go-to brand when buying SD cards for so many years now. I have more to say about that later in the zine!





LUMIX


SAKURA
HONSHU / JAPAN



HANAMI

Enjoyment of the blossoms

The annual wave of Sakura trees bursting into colour is hard ignore. It's not just the sakura blossoms that people enjoy, but they are the main event for sure.

I have been travelling to Japan for over 20 years now, but never during the cherry blossom season. I have often observed their dedication to Sakura in art, wrapping paper and even flavours of KitKat. Adoration of the Sakura hasn't escaped me totally. But this year I was present for the full experience of the blossoms... and now I understand. Now I get it.

The sudden change of the seasons is a big deal. The arrival of Sakura marks the end of winter, and within weeks the trees will start to turn green.

The Sakura are so short lived, yet so impressive. One rain storm can wipe out half of the petals on a tree. I often found myself standing under the branches when a wind gust would turn the sky into a rain shower of petals. The transient nature of the blossoms simply adds to their importance. I do love the way Japanese culture places extra value on things that are rare.


HANA
花の舞酒造

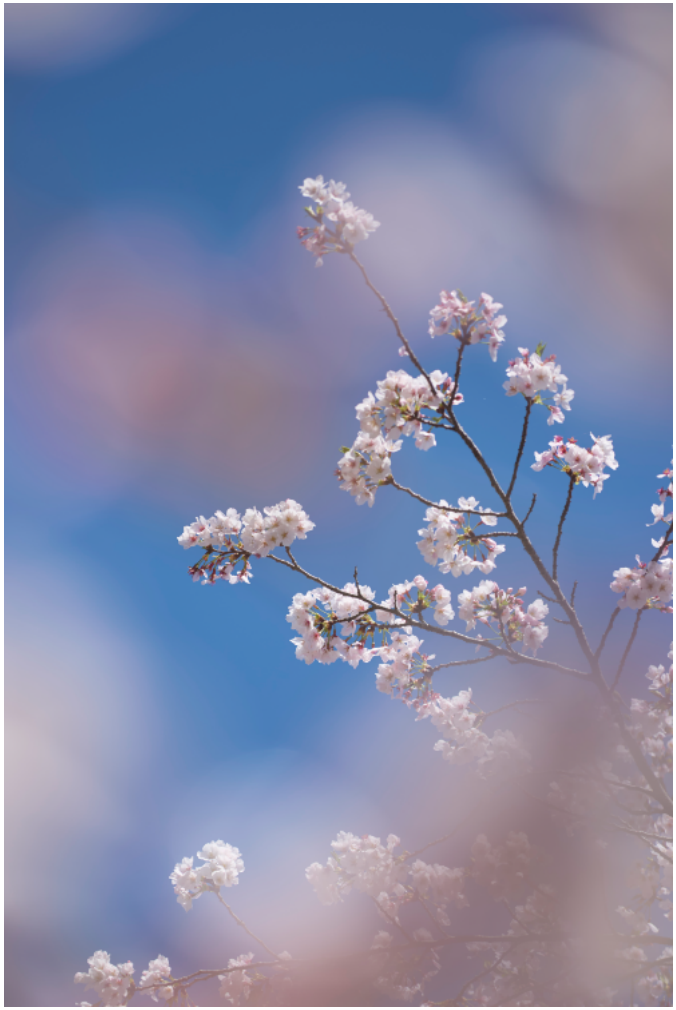


I have to check myself sometimes and switch off the part of my brain that wants to focus just on the flowers, and instead step back a little and look for how the flowers exist within their landscape.

I try to look for how the architecutre of temples are embraced by the cherry trees. Or a quiet little street in a village that has been puncuated by one intense pink variety. Or maybe the walking trails in parks where blossoms shower down from above.

This falls into my default principle of "bring more into the frame". The blossoms are the hero of my focus, but I still want more than just the petals. I want the blue sky, the red torii, and the green leaves of the garden. This is always my challenge, how to bring in more, not less.















Sakura present a unique challenge for photographers. They are immensely abundant, and yet how to capture compositions are that are not repetitive? How to take a photo of the blossoms that you didn't already take yesterday?

I found myself mainly shooting with the 100mm F2.8 Macro (on the Lumix S9). I wanted a little reach and compression of the scene. Most of the local photographers I encountered were shooting with 400mm telephotos or bigger. A lot of photographers end up buying a telephoto and then struggling to find their way with it. 100mm is usually "enough" telephoto for me. For flowers and butterflies it makes sense to have the macro and a bit of tele.

For all else I tend to retreat to the safety of my 35mm and 18mm :)



There are a lot of different kinds of Sakura.

Most of the cherry blossom flower variants you see today have been bred for purpose. They are ornamental, and hence generous with their volume of flowers.

Some are very very white, and some are very very pink. I came across some heritage species of sakura on my travels, that are very white but have a gentle hint of pink in their core.

I also came across pear flowers and apple flowers and apricot and lots of other flowering tress. I am not an expert on cherry blossoms, and hence cannot be sure if all my photos are indeed sakura and not some other fruit.









THINGS TO LOVE

Some of the things that make Japan so special.

My favourite thing about Japan is "scale".

I don't just mean the teeny little Kei cars, which admittedly are super cute and I would love to buy one. In Japan people can have a successful career as an artist, or a cafe, or grilling yakitori even though their shop is so very very small.

I love that so many people in Japan can enjoy a good life by doing things on a human scale. Every time I find a little sushi takeaway in the basement of a train station, or a tiny little coffee shop opposite a shrine, it fills me with joy.

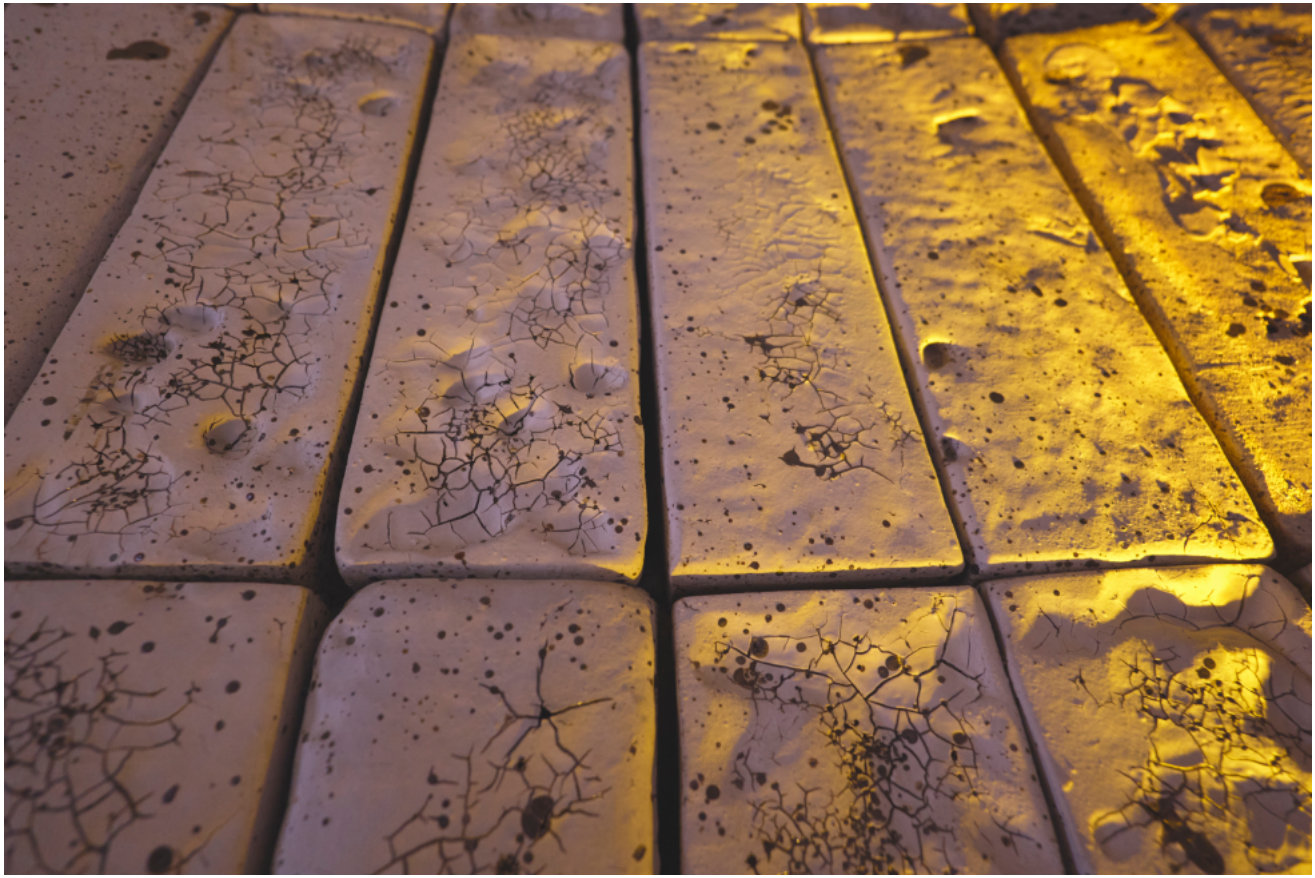
All over Japan you find people doing something very simple, but very well. They tend to focus on being excellent at one thing, instead of trying to be everything. As a photographer, I see the benefit of that approach. Too much of my career has been diluted by working broad instead of deep. It's not that you cannot be good at more than one thing, but how often do we allow ourselves the opportunity to be excellent at just those things we truly care about?

[Images at Hifumiyo Coffee in Naoshima / Lumix S9 and Lumix 35mm F1.8]


Square




ホンムラゲストハウス
路地と灯り

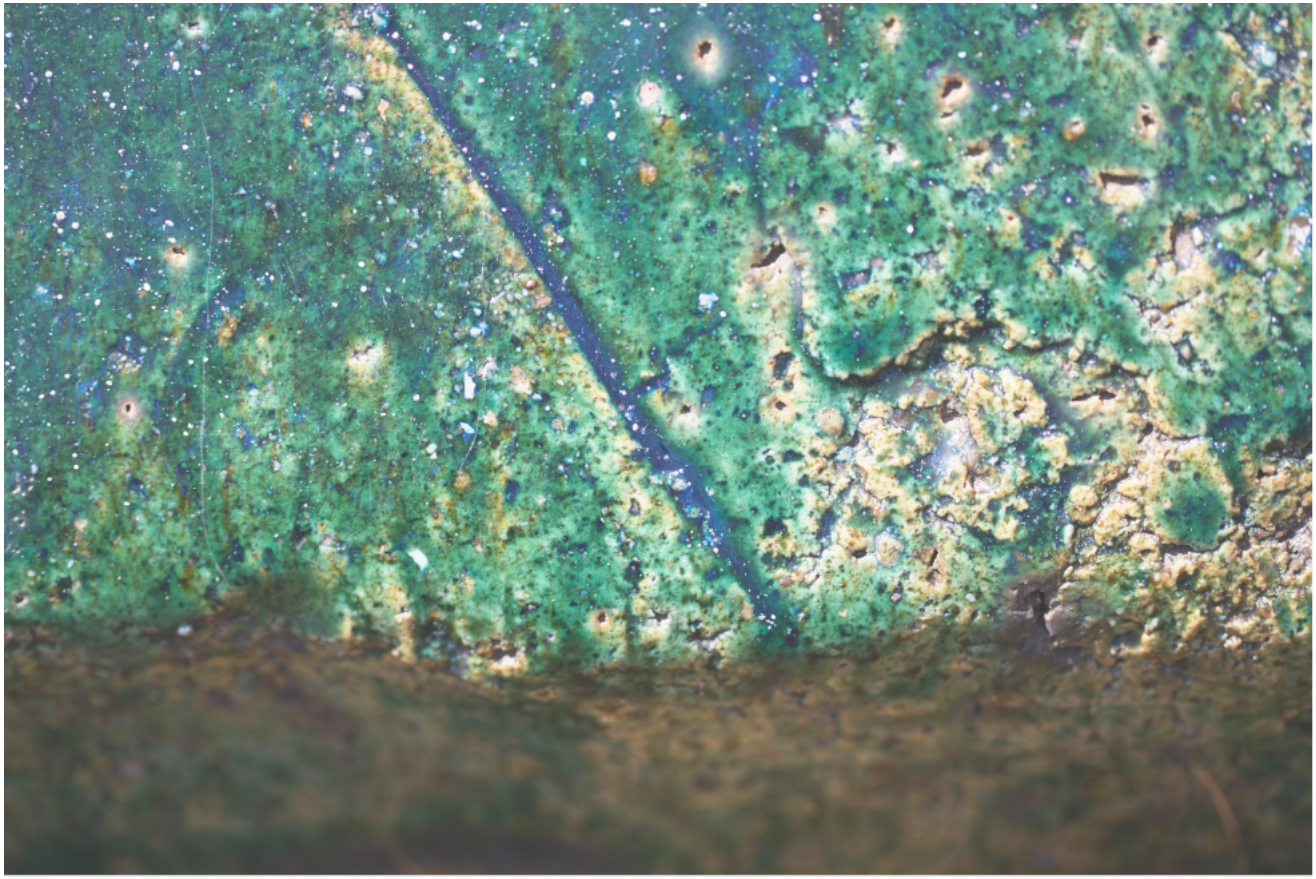


Pottery is not just a form of art in Japan, it's a part of everyday life for everyday people. It's like having pot planets on your balcony. It's just something Japanese people engage in and contemplate to enrich their quality of life. No special skills required.

How pottery is formed is central to the identity of the pieces. There are villages in Japan that are famous for making pottery in a certain way, or how they glaze the finished pots, or what they use the pots for. The final finish is an expression of the region, not just the artist.

[Image at Tokoname Pottery Village
Lumix S9 and Lumix 35mm F1.8]






HUSTLER
京都58
と79-43

Kei-class cars are built to meet specific regulations. They are focused on efficiency, and cars that meet the criteria get special tax benefits.

The size of the car and engine are the main constraints, which is why so many Kei cars share a similar form factor. They are maximising the practical space within the regulations.

I think the end result is very cute as well. They are modest and sensible and have a much smaller carbon footprint. SUV designs in most countries represent the exact opposite, the kind of cars you get when you avoid regulations and build for the human ego.



For me the heart of Japanese culture is "refinement".

They take an idea and they keep working to make it better and better. They keep refining and honing until they reach something that is perfect.

The definition of perfect will vary of course. So much so that they have a special word for the importance and appreciation of the imperfect (Wabi Sabi).

It is in the pursuit of better that I see so much of Japan endeavour. Gardens. Art. Gourmet. Curation. It's in their nature to keep moving towards something a little bit better.









In Japan the garden is not merely a place to visit, but in many ways they represent the ideal home. The garden does more than surround a home... it is the home.

Drawing from Shinto principles there is no wonder that Japanese people express such reverence for the nature found in a well curated garden. These are places where art meets nature and the two combine.

For me, formal gardens in Japan reflect both the need of humans to be connected to nature, but also the tendency for humans to control it.








縁が
2026.3.23
2026.5.30
縁が



願いごと
縁
2026.4.3
LOVE
好きな人と
結婚して
幸せになれます
ように
香奈
三光稲荷神社
神稲荷社
三光
願いごと
好きな人と
付き合う事が
出来ますように
COLON
STPR
2026.4.3
全国
制覇
Jeremy
Tsang
兄妹





[Previous images from Inuyama Castle in Nagoya]

There is a joy in the expression of tradition in Japan. It's so often full of playfulness and colour. There is art to how they express their respect and care.

Sometimes that's in the little details, like writing prayers and wishes on wind catchers. Sometimes it's the carvings of dogs that protect a small shrine, or just planting a patch of flowers to bloom in spring. The people of Japan go to great efforts to bring beauty into every moment.

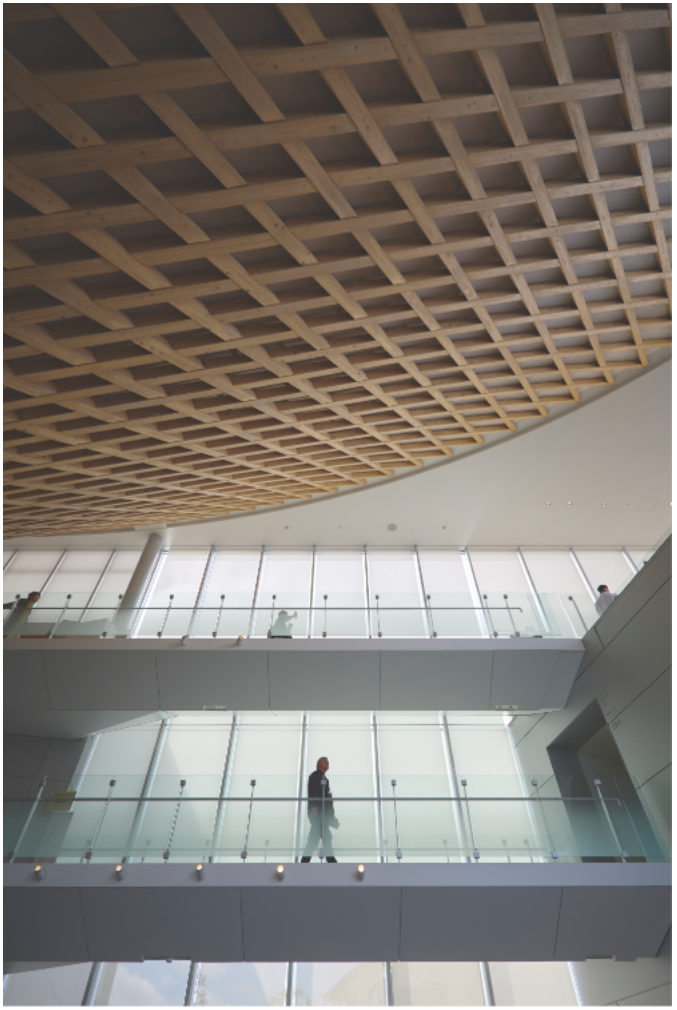
In the district of Shizuoka we explored the Mt Fuji World Heritage Center, which offers a viewing platform that frames a view of Fujisan like a fine art gallery.

At the time, our view was mostly clouds. Nearby we visited the Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha Shrine, and caught tantalising glimpses of the mountain beyond this ancient shrine. Fujisan can be shy at times.

On return to the ship that afternoon, there was a break in the clouds. Warm light flooded across the landscape towards the end of the day, and painted pink and orange hues across the mountain slopes.

Mount Fuji is worth the wait.








FUJISAN
From Shimizu Port

EWEN'S WORKSHOPS

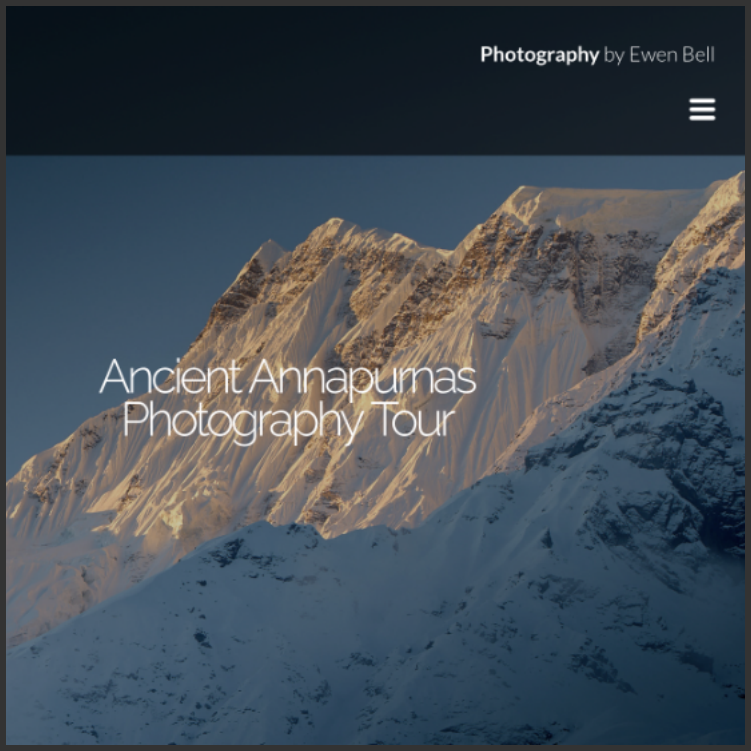
Intimate photographic experiences with Ewen Bell

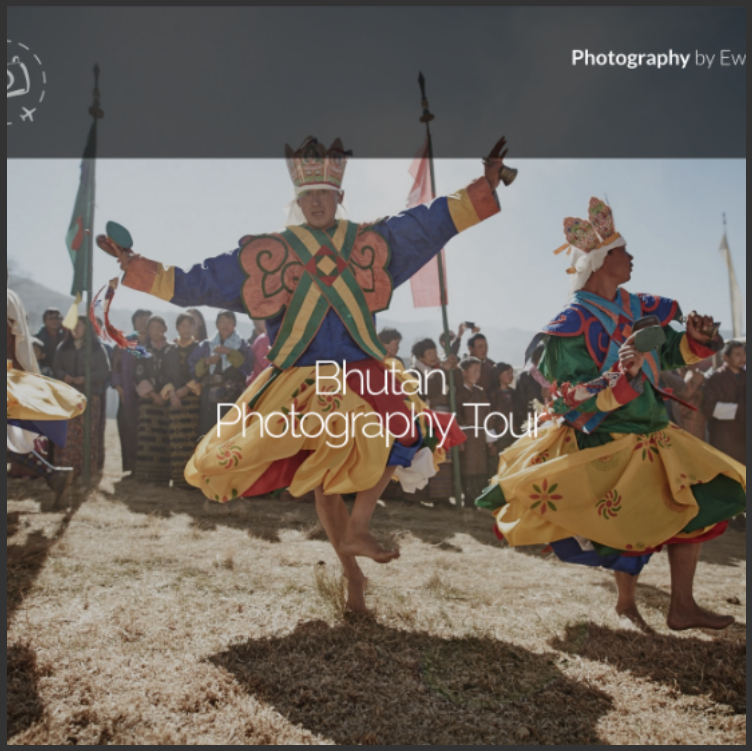
Every year I run a handful of workshops and photo tours in various parts of the world. I have been doing this for twenty years now, and every year I try to find ways to make each experience more rewarding. It's never the same workshop twice.

I run my tours in places I know very very well. I don't outsource my expertise. I care about these places and believe they offer something special to my companions. We learn about the cultures and landscapes, as much as we do photography.

Visit the website for more details.

ewenbell.com/tours


Photography by Ewen Bell
Ancient Annapurnas
Photography Tour


Photography by Ew
Bhutan
Photography Tour


Photography by Ew
Food Photography Workshop
Make Your Captures Delicious


Photograp
Aurora Residency
Photographic Workshop in Arctic Norway

THIS PAGE IS SPONSORED

Thankyou Angelbird

Angelbird make a bunch of high performance memory card, and now also some excellent USB/Thunderbolt cables. My journey with this brand began in 2020 when we started making recipe videos at home. Shellie did the recipe development and styling, and I did the video and editing. We quickly realised that “sustained data rate” was way more important than any maximum speed a card night claim to offer. The max speeds you see on the labels tend to drop off after a minute of shunting data onto the laptop.

Anyway, back then I scored a killer deal on some 256gb micro SD cards by Angelbird, and I've been buying their stuff ever since. My minimum spec for SD cards now is V60, which means 60MBytes/sec (480mbps). This gives me enough grunt for shooting 6K 10bit video, or for high speed continuous burst when shooting birds or festivals. And it's fast to download at the end of the day. That matters when you're on the road.

Angelbird also supported us on the Tashi documentary project, with their affordable yet impressive SE range of CFExpress cards. I'm still using these in my Lumix S1RII, and still using my Angelbird SD cards in my other cameras. So I'm super happy to have them as a sponsor of this publication.


AV PRO SE
CFexpress B
512GB
3700MB/s




KŌCHI
Shikoku / Japan

TREASURES & TRAMS

Kōchi / Japan

A handful of cities across Japan still have their post-war trams in operation. Newer models are gradually taking their place, to provide more capacity and comfort, but there is an appeal to these early designs that are simple to operate and manually driven.

Kōchi has the oldest running tram line in Japan, having been built in 1904. The trams running today are not quite that old of course :)

[Images captured on the Lumix S9 + 35mm F1.8 and 100mm F2.8 Macro]


専用
路線バス
7:30-8:30
17-18
ここまで
高松 はりまや橋
Takamatsu Harimayabashi
土佐山
Tosayama
32
55
オーテピア
大橋通

I came for the castle and stayed for the yuzu.

We see a lot of lovely castles when travelling Japan. Most have been rebuilt since the events of WWII, when incendiary bombs were used to burned down so much of Japan. Kōchi Castle is a little bit special, as most of the inner buildings and the Castle Keep are original from the Edo period.

The castle keep at Kōchi sits elegantly atop the hill in the centre of town, embraced by beautiful trees, gardens, and sakura. It shoots well from many angles.











At the very top of the castle gardens in Kōchi the photography was excellent, but so was the ice cream. A little old lady had a lineup of people queueing to buy her handmade frozen scoops.

A few of my buddies lined up and bought a round to share. It was one of my favourite yuzu ice cream experiences from all my travels across Japan. Not too sweet, not too intense. A delicate and understated joy. It was so good that we lined up for a second round... and it tasted even better than the first :)






くすり
堀内薬
天神橋通り


ひろめ市場以外で買った
飲食物はお子様でもダメです
持ち込みでの
飲食禁止
No outside food or drink allowed
ひろめ市場は『公共の場所』ではありません
0120-555-102
Cherish



The two really big challenges for photography in a place like Hirome indoor food market (Kōchi) are terrible light and an overwhelming chaos.

I rely on light to bring character into a frame, and guide my compositions. In this market the scenes were just too intense. I came back a few hours later, when the crowd had dropped off a little, and was able to get a smile from a few of the locals.

Even so, the light is diabolical inside this kind of food hall. Different temperatures. Lots of hot spots. Weird angles. Using an editing style that tones down the harshness and contrast really helps in this situation. And detuning the saturation. I find that cameras and software alike lean towards too much saturation anyway, as a general rule.

I want real colours, not silly colours.




はちきん
Hirome
Coca-Cola
600円
1,350円
1,000円
900円
くじら刺身
900円
4,500円
900円
各650円
注ぎたての、うまさ
酒とう
ありません
400円
1,400円
1,100円
二色丼
900円
うつぼたたき
1,200円
うな重
4,900円
土佐丼
1,000円
どろめ
500円
しらす
400円
お支払いは


KŌCHI
Botanical Gardens


CAMELLIA
Blossoms in the Spring



HAPPY RAIN

Forests and flowers in Spring.

Spring in Japan is sometimes cherry blossoms, but sometimes heavy cloud with persistent rain.

I went out every day regardless. I have a small 10L sling with room enough for two camera bodies, three lenses and my walkie-talkie. It fits under my raincoat when the rain gets too heavy.

I don't like getting my gear wet. But the hardest challenge for me on a rainy day is when the light falls flat. Things often get too gentle, too bland. In these moments I find myself drawn to little stories inside the forest, where the light is coming through the canopy and creating some sparkle.

[Images in this set are taken from Kochi, Shizuoka, and Naoshima. As you might expect having read this far, they are taken with the Lumix S9. I carry a pair of these every day as my standard kit.]


富士山登山
Mt.Fuji Profess





I started carrying a macro lens with me a few years ago. It takes the places of a telephoto, because it's 100mm. But mostly I use it for stepping closer into the world of flowers. As rain drips off the petals, an entire universe of drama is revealed through this lens.

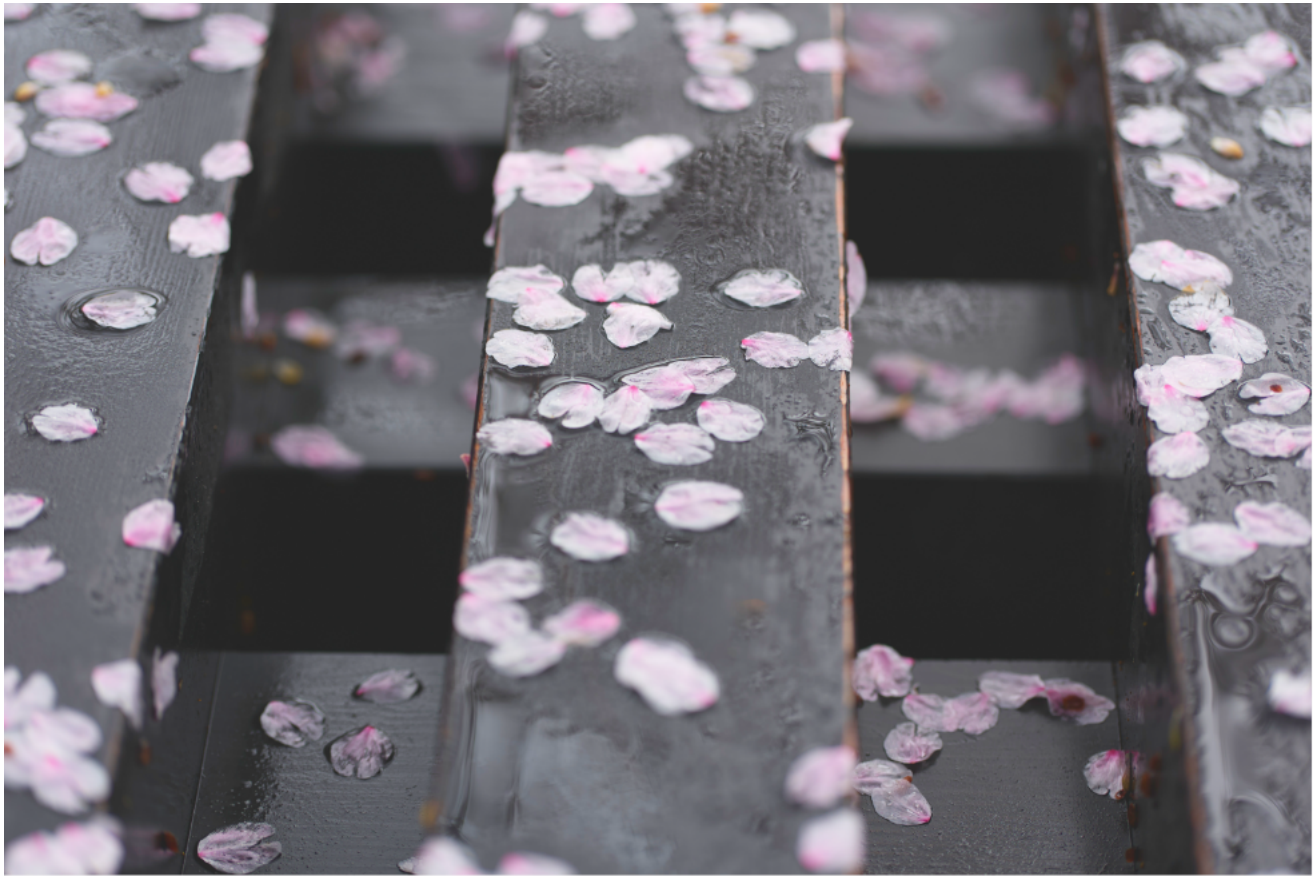




Light does amazing things inside the forest. On a sunny day it can be mottled and patchy, and difficult to compose. On a cloudy day the light is more even, but shaped by the forest itself. The tallest of trees decide what light will come through, and what light will not.










FUKUOKA
Kyushu / Japan



HARBOUR LIGHTS

Golden light on the coastlines of Japan

Mornings are not for me. My body clock is wired to keep ticking into the small hours of the evening, instead of waking up for the dawn. I am better at sunset than sunrise.

Working aboard the Heritage Adventurer necessitates early starts however. The ship usually gets into port between 6am and 7am, and we typically start heading out for day trips by 8am. If there's going to be clear skies at dawn, then my best chance to capture that golden light is to be on deck as the ship comes into port.

This usually means a very industrial vibe to the scenes. We're seeing the very edge of Japanese cities, places where Toyota ships their car parts or fishing fleets deliver their catch.

[Image at dawn arriving into Nagoya]





Most of my photography is shot on 18mm or 35mm lenses. But sunrise on the deck of an expedition ship often pushes me to employ the telephoto.

For this trip I packed a Lumix 100-500mm F5-7.1 and the S1RII. This rig stayed on the ship. I didn't take it ashore, but left it in my cabin. For sunrise I would take it up to the observation deck in the hope of some play between the sun and water.

I looked for kites, seagulls, fishing boats and the golden hues of morning light bouncing off the ocean.

[First light on the water arriving into Uwajima]







I need to say a special thankyou to my fellow expedition crew aboard the Heritage Adventurer.

I always get to work with great people aboard this ship, but this bunch of folks were just amazing. Every single one of them were great to work with and great to learn from. I love being part of a team, and indeed I regard it as a privilege to be part of this particular mob. It's not always an easy job working long hours on and off the ship, but we get to make a lot of people smile... including each other.

Thanks team!

[Image of the Heritage Adventurer headoing for Uwajima / Lumix S9 + Lumix 35mm F1.8]




PILOT
PILOT

WHO MADE THIS?

Meet The Author

My name is Ewen Bell and I'm a photographer based in Melbourne, Australia. I've been very lucky in life to had the opportunity to make a career from photography.

For over two decades I've been travelling and shooting, which is why I have this photo of me in Bhutan when I was MUCH younger and better looking than I am now :) You can tell it's an old photo because I'm holding a DSLR camera.

Photography has changed my world, so I want to help others find their voice with the camera as well. I love sharing my photos, but also love sharing my knowledge about taking photos. That's why I'm making a zine, in addition to my blog and my YouTube channel.

ewenbell.com


HERITAGE
EXPEDITIONS

#EWENTUBE

I share a bunch of photos and ideas on my YouTube channel. You can also watch them on the Fediverse via PeerTube for those who prefer ad-free viewing

ewenbell.com/ewentube


35MM
GOZAIMASU!


This Way Forward

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