

# In Your Shoes

**By Danny Warren**

There is a secret in great story telling: anecdotes and personal experience have more impact than dull facts. Think of news coverage of a natural disaster. The stats on how many dollars of damage the storm cost or how many people it displaced will raise eyebrows, but they typically don't linger in your mind when the story switches to the next topic.

Then you hear one family's account about how the waters came up so fast they got stuck. A neighbor with a boat was able to help them evacuate just in the nick of time. They all were ok in the end, but the house was a total loss. Interviews like this stick with you because it makes a large abstract concept suddenly human and relatable. We can't help but imagine what it would be like to live through that.

Whether you are a journalist, a marketer, blogger, or a photographer, the goal is really the same. You are trying to convey a message—argue a point if you will—to the person consuming your story. Incorporating personal perspective is straightforward in journalism and other written media, but the same technique can also be applied in the art of photography.

This becomes especially important in stock photography when making an instant connection with the viewer is critical.

Using a first-person perspective and other point of view techniques, you as a photographer can generate the same visceral connection with the viewer. This in turn not only makes for a more powerful picture—it makes for a more saleable one!

Being able to transport a viewer into the scene is a simple task in concept, but not always an easy one to execute. This Roadmap will outline why first-person point of view images are important in stock photography, as well as the techniques and strategy to capture them.



# Why are first-person perspective images so important as stock?

Stock images sell first and foremost because they transmit an idea or concept. Images typically run in support of additional text in an advertisement, article, or website. Whether or not they are directly selling a product, they were picked to sell a specific idea the designer wants to convey to the viewer.

A broad trend across all media is personalization. News apps aggregate news that you are interested in, digital music feeds pick and predict playlists for you, and nearly everything seems like it can be

customized to your liking.

The usage of imagery depicting the first-person point of view is a logical fit with this new trend. Images using this technique aren't just attempting to show some random person engaged in an activity, they are trying to put you in their shoes.

Though it's just a still image, the goal is to transport the viewer into the scene—to smell it, hear it, and feel the cool water on your ankles as you wade up the stream with your partner.

In particular, this technique helps images sell because it:

## **1) Makes an instant connection**

First-person point of view images form an immediate bridge to engage the mind and transport the viewer into the scene. It builds on memories and experiences already held and encourages the viewer to imagine and explore the situation. The viewer's mind fills in emotions and memories from their own experiences—thus creating a far deeper connection.

## **2) Provides a fresh medium for classic concepts**

Images from a personal and human perspective can be applied to nearly any stock concept and provide an eye-catching method to explore timeless themes that have always performed well as stock. Classic themes like business, travel, and active



lifestyle are all ripe for opportunities to apply this technique. As buyers are skimming through pages of search results, images in this style can pop out as different and effective to the countless others that are surely captured using traditional means.

**Here are a few highly marketable stock images that use a first-person perspective:**

The first photo conveys an ideal situation many of us seek when traveling: interesting places, companionship,

and great coffee. The fact that the image is taken from the vantage point of one of the travelers puts the viewer right in the scene, as if they are the one on the trip. The location may be familiar to some, but is intentionally slightly out of focus to make an effective surrogate for any foreign city.



Small wearable cameras like GoPro have helped bring the thrill of action sports to the masses. They have also normalized the first-person perspective and created a large market for both video and stills from this point of view.



Photographers with a little ingenuity and creativity can also find ways to attach larger mirrorless and DSLR cameras to almost anything. Shots like this one on the left convey themes of action, adventure, active lifestyle and freedom—concepts that can be used in a wide array of settings.

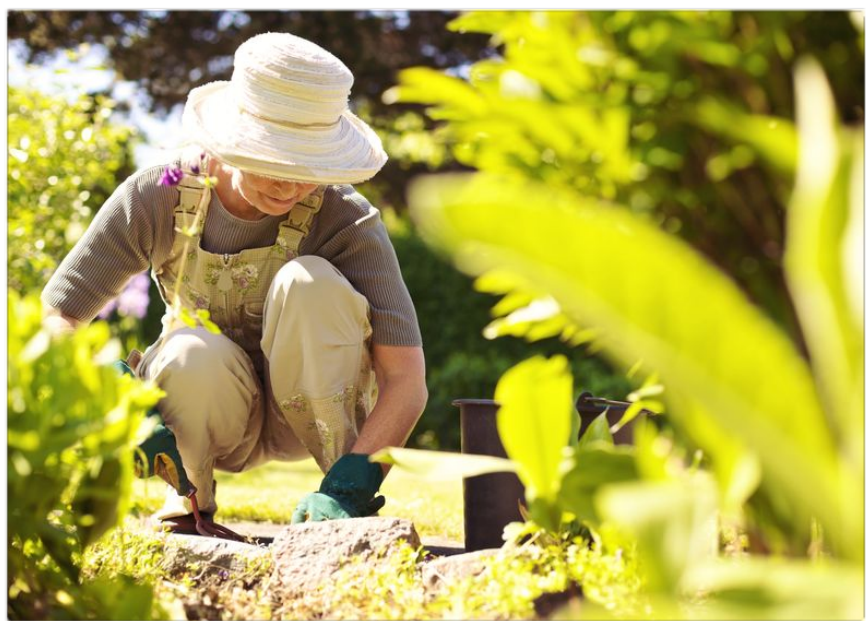


Shots don't have to be exactly from the perspective of the level of a human's head to achieve the same effect. Images that are captured at close proximity to the action make the viewer feel like they are part of the scene.

A low angle with effective props in the foreground can be particularly effective—as this photographer above found a way to make a college study group (an important, but boring topic!) into a visually interesting and engaging image.

Low angle views provide a novel perspective that catches the eye and naturally draws you in. They make you feel as if you are part of the scene. Classic stock photography advice was to frame the subject tightly.

This was good advice five years ago, but the goal posts are moving. Having the subject



occupy only a portion of the frame works well if the rest of the scene contributes to establishing the setting.

The image above effectively uses plants in

the foreground that let us know we're in the middle of the garden, but are blank enough that the right side of the image can be used for text or other overlaid elements a designer needs.



The classic image in this category is one that instills a sense of envy in the viewer. One that makes someone think: "Sure wish I was there right now!" Tropical vacations are logical subject matter, but many other possibilities exist. Think beyond your feet at the beach to find subject matter that is still largely untapped in stock photo libraries.

## Techniques for capturing great first-person perspective stock images:

The overarching goal of the photographer is to capture the image in a way that either mimics what a participant might see, or otherwise makes the viewer feel immersed in the scene. The following techniques are surefire methods to achieving this result.

### **Identify the concept you are trying to capture.**

Like any stock photo shoot, you need to have a clearly defined target of what concept(s) you are trying to capture.

Even though you are way before actually typing in keywords to submit the image, be thinking about what those words are going to be. How is using a first-person perspective going to contribute to your image?

### **Use a wide lens.**

This subject matter almost always necessitates a wide perspective. Lenses from a fisheye to 50mm all have a place, but the wider end of that range can be especially

effective. The wider you shoot the more careful you need to be with straight lines (like buildings, windows, and the horizon) and distortion on the corners. However, the tradeoff is you can include a lot of detail at close range, which can be a major advantage.

### **Put yourself in the middle of the action.**

More than almost any other subject, establishing a first-person perspective necessitates that you get very close to your

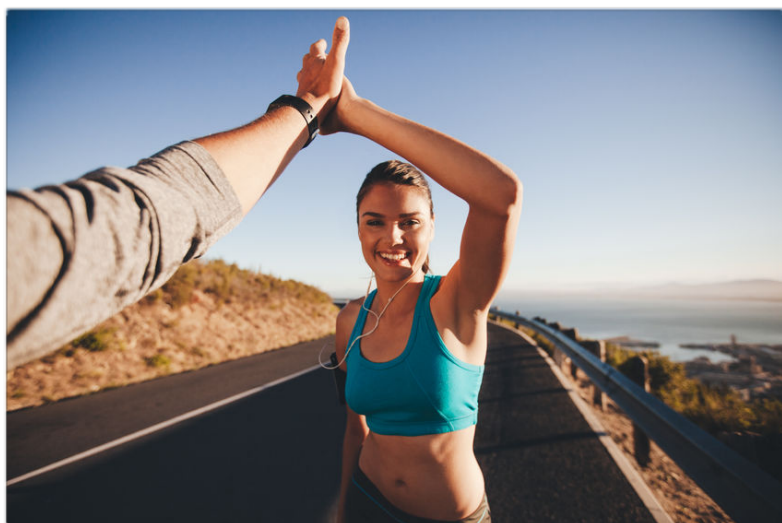
subject(s). Personal space bubbles may need to go out the window temporarily, but the results will be worth it! Self-portraits that include your own arms or feet work well too as they immediately put the viewer in your shoes. In general, use the mantra: low angle and close range.

### **Use effective clues in the foreground.**

Objects in the foreground and background establish the setting. Oftentimes shooting through or over elements right in front of the camera add dimension to the image and help give the impression of being immersed in the activity. Switch your autofocus system to single point spot focus (or manually focus) to pinpoint where you want your camera to focus. Move around and experiment with interesting angles. Sometimes I just hold the camera low down or in hard to reach areas and shoot blindly—these sometimes provide the most interesting angles!

### **Seek dynamism.**

One way to make still images come alive is to capture scenes that depict motion and activity. It doesn't have





to be as dramatic as racing down a trail on a mountain bike though; a simple toast or a moment of animated conversation is enough to instill a sense of dynamic activity. This helps set the scene in motion and the viewer will instinctively play out the sequence in their head, adding to the power of the image.



## Important things to remember:

### **Convey a clear, saleable concept.**

It's important to remember that capturing a compelling image from a first-person point of view is a method, not the end goal. The golden rule of stock photography—having a clear and marketable concept—is still needed for the image to have strong sales potential.

For example, the photo on the right clearly conveys the ideas of

accomplishment, achieving goals, and hard work, while also having a first-person,

in-the-moment feeling because of the angle and composition the photographer used.





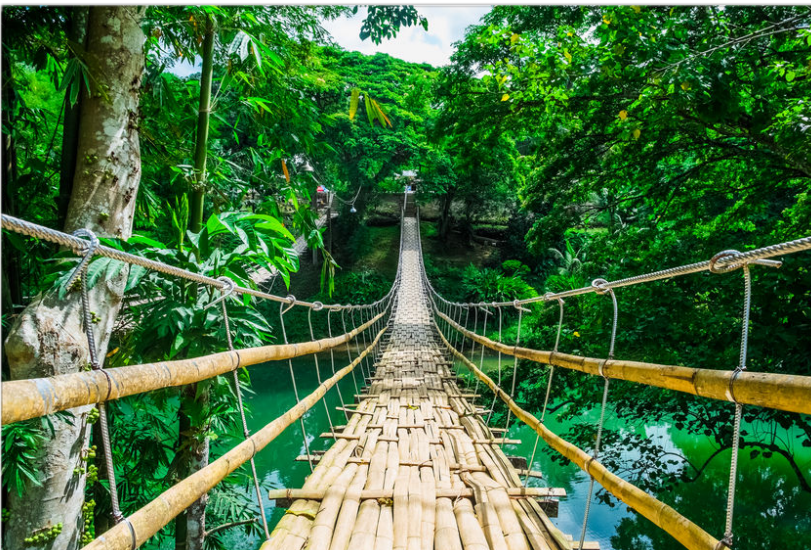


### **Have a focal point.**

Successful stock images have a clear focal point the viewer's eye is drawn to. This is more than just a portion of the image in sharp focus; it's the part of the image one's eye naturally gravitates to. Leading lines, selective focus, as well as the usage of color, patterns, and other compositional techniques all contribute to steering where the eye is drawn.

### **Minimize distractions.**

It can be especially tricky when you are shooting with a wide-angle lens to keep unwanted things from creeping into the foreground, background, and edges of your frame. During the shoot, think critically about whether the images on the back of your camera are getting the message across. Are there elements of the image that aren't actively contributing to your concept? If so, find a way to take them out.





## Human connection.

Finally, images of this category fundamentally center on the experiences and interactions of people (or animals). At the very least, hints of the human subject like arms or feet are needed to anchor the image as being from a first-person perspective.



## Keywording:

Most buyers are going to purchase the image based on the subject portrayed first and then

the shooting style second. First, keyword your images with the standard who, what,

why, and when as you would for any other stock image, then consider adding additional words (and phrases) that further describe the perspective such as: first-person, perspective, point of view, pov, and low angle.



Let's work through a real example. Here is an image captured with this style and I would tag it with the following keywords:

conversation, discussion, friends, team, group, ideas, brainstorm, planning, talking, lifestyle, project, meeting, together, creative, casual, café, coffee, man, woman, sitting, table, laptop, technology, perspective, low angle, diverse, indoors, communication, looking, interaction