



A GUIDE TO TRAVEL PORTRAITS

For many, creating portraits while travelling can be a challenge; it's one thing to engage with a beautiful location, quite another to engage with a stranger from a different culture. Travel pro Ilan Wittenberg guides us through his process of making captivating portraits while on the move

Ilan Wittenberg is an accomplished photographer whose work has taken him around the globe. His latest project, *The Maasai People*, came about after he won a safari trip to Tanzania as part of the grand prize in the 2018 Sony Alpha Awards. For most, a trip like that would be all about the wildlife, but Ilan's heart lies with portraiture, and he sought out the indigenous Maasai population to document their culture, which, sadly, is disappearing.

Ilan shares with *D-Photo* his most valuable tips for photographers interested in the art of travel portraiture.



SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

Self-confidence is one of the travelling photographer's most useful tools. No matter where you travel, there will be no shortage of entrancing scenes and interesting characters; the trick is having the nerve to capture opportunities as they arise.

"I did not plan to create these portraits but was overwhelmed when I first saw members of the tribe," Ilan explains.

"The Masaai have a distinct look; their earlobes are elongated and pierced,

and they were wearing vivid blue or red garments. They were working at the lodge when I approached one to ask if I could create his portrait."

Although Ilan had to shoot quickly, as they were working and he was on tour, the encounter sowed a seed that would grow into a fully fledged project when Ilan had an English-speaking worker put him in contact with other Maasai.

SONY A7R III, 31MM, 1/80S, F/8, ISO 160

SONY ALPHA A7R III, 37MM, 1/400S, F/4, ISO 100



DO YOUR RESEARCH

Being spontaneous enough to take a chance is one thing, but being prepared enough to make the most of it is quite another. If you approach your travels without any knowledge of the culture and society you are entering into, it's bound to make for shallow imagery.

While Ilan hadn't come to Tanzania with the Maasai in mind as a subject, he quickly became a font of knowledge about their history, societal structure, religious system, traditional adornments, and even their hut construction processes. Without learning about his subjects — through a

mix of reading, talking with others, and first-hand experience — there's no way Ilan could have accomplished what he did in the limited time he had.

"These are not candid snapshots but carefully composed portraits that honour the Maasai people," the photographer notes.

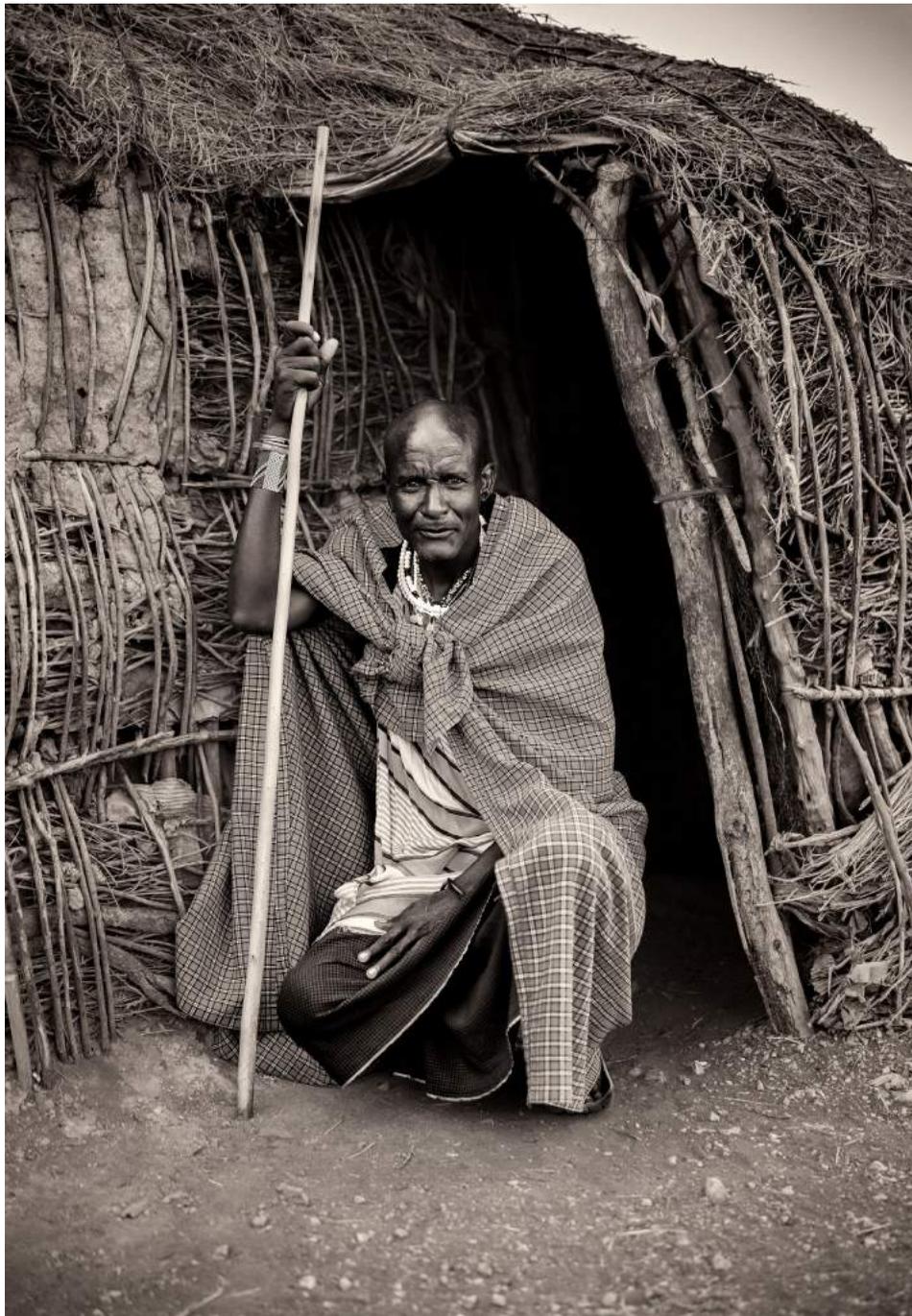
SONY A7R III, 86MM, 1/200S, F/4, ISO 320
SONY A7R III, 77MM, 1/160S, F/4, ISO 1600



COMMUNICATION

Treating people of a different culture with respect, kindness, and dignity is (hopefully) a given while travelling and shooting. However, expressing these sentiments gets complicated when you and your subject don't share a language.

There are many ways to express yourself through facial and body gestures — smiling is always good — but learning a few key phrases in the local language will go a long way. Ilan found this invaluable in building rapport with the Maasai: “I asked one of the guides to teach me how to say in Maa language: ‘My name is Ilan; what is your name?’. I then repeated it aloud about two dozen times so it would get into my head — the guide was really entertained by my memorizing exercise. I then repeated that with every encounter, and the Maasai opened up.”



GRATITUDE

On a whirlwind tour, it can be easy to forget that, when you're shooting other people's images, you are essentially entering into a creative collaboration with them. Everyone likes to be thanked for their contribution, and, in many countries, a financial 'thank you' is very much appreciated.

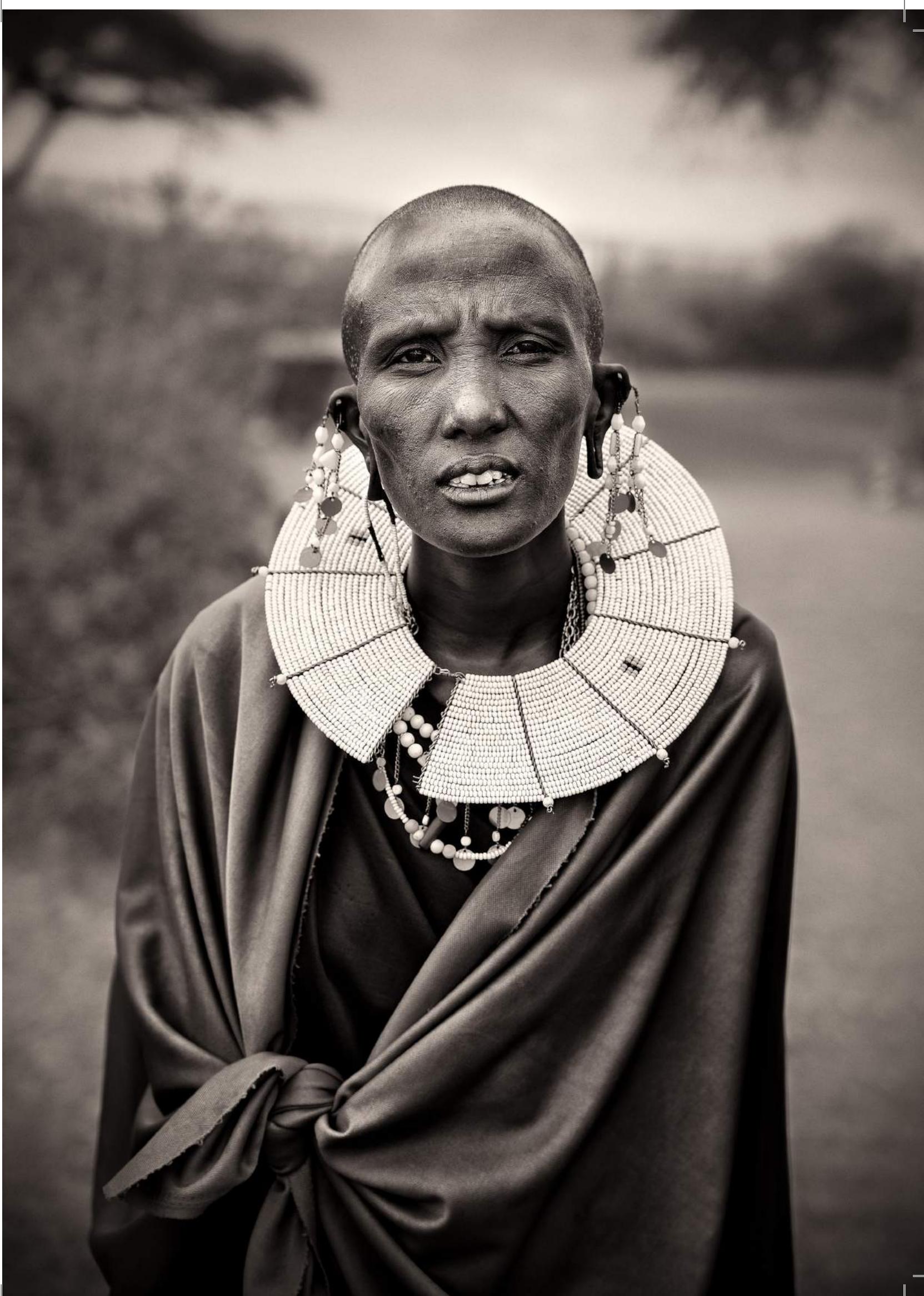
Ilan always made sure he was carrying money to tip his subjects with, so the

experience felt like a win for them both. Of course, cash isn't the only way to express your gratitude.

"I learned the local symbol of saying 'thank you' using a hand gesture," he explains. "I would make a fist in my right hand, bang it softly against theirs, bring it back to touch my heart, and then open it towards the sky."

SONY ALPHA A7R III, 55MM, 1/500S, F/1.8, ISO 100

SONY ALPHA A7R III, 72MM, 1/400S, F/4, ISO 100



ILAN'S GEAR LIST

Sony a7r III

Sony FE 55mm f/1.8 ZA lens

Sony FE 24-105mm f/4 G OSS lens

Sony HVL-F20AM flash

SHARE YOUR WORK

Having your photo taken and never getting to see the result isn't a fun situation. People in touristy areas might not mind so much, but if you've built a good rapport with your subject it's always nice to show them an example of what you've created.

You can always do this on the display of your camera, but it's more special if you can provide them with the end result. After Ilan returned home, made slight retouches, and applied his hallmark monochrome treatment, he was able to show the village his work due to connecting with some of the younger Maasai who had smartphones and messaging apps.

"They were so proud and delighted with the outcome," he says with pleasure.

"They said that the album shows that I really love the people."

Ilan has already picked up awards for the project in both local and international competitions, and is currently organizing an exhibition of 28 life-size prints to be shown in Auckland's Uxbridge gallery in early 2020, with plans to exhibit the show in Australia as well — undertakings that will help expose the world to the Maasai way of life.

SONY A7R III, 55MM, 1/125S, F/1.8, ISO 8000

