



Phoenix Woman Turns Photography Passion into Profit

When Kristen Bentz set out with her husband on an Alaskan cruise, she never expected to make money while on vacation.

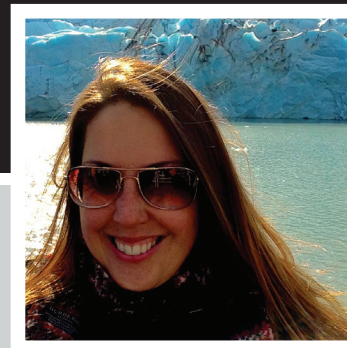
But as she sat in the lobby reviewing and editing her vacation photos, a noise behind her got her attention.

“I turned around and there were like 20 people standing behind me looking over my shoulder at my pictures,” she said. “One guy said, ‘I’ll give you 20 bucks if you send me a set of photos.’ Until then, I thought my photos were nice but didn’t think anyone else would think they were that great.”

Then it happened again. A coworker visiting her home during a holiday party offered \$50 to take a framed 8x10 photo of lightning right off her bathroom wall.

Until then, everyone around Kristen, 32, saw her potential as a photographer – except her. But these unexpected incidents, and urging from her family, were finally enough to push her forward.

“At the time, I really was miserable and not in a good place in my life,” she said. “My family said, ‘You may not think your photos are worth anything, but you need to do this.’”



GREAT ESCAPE SUCCESS STORY:

Kristen Bentz

“I didn’t have any photography skills or training before. I learned it all through a couple of workshops. I’m a testament that, with a camera and passion, you can learn this and make money from it.”

GREAT ESCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

MEMBER:

Kristen Bentz

LOCATION:

Phoenix, Arizona

HOW SHE GOT HER FIRST CLIENT:

While she edited her vacation photos on an Alaskan cruise, Kristen received an offer from a fellow traveler to buy a set of her photos.

TOP GREAT ESCAPE PROGRAMS:

- *The Lazy Man’s Guide to Stock Photography*
- *The Ultimate Money-Making Photography Workshop*
- *South Africa Photography Expedition*

“SO MANY AVENUES FOR PHOTOGRAPHY”

At the time of that Alaskan cruise, Kristen worked full time in a sales job she dragged herself to each day, and took pictures for fun in her spare time and on vacation. She knew near-nothing about the mechanics of photography, shooting everything with the auto settings on her camera. But she had a natural eye for spotting and composing shots.

When Kristen thought about making a living with photography, images of Bridezillas came to mind. “I didn’t know you could make money in photography, other than weddings and portraits,” she said.

Kristen set out to build her skills – and her confidence. Searching online, she stumbled onto photography programs from Great Escape Publishing. She began with a self-guided online program, *The Lazy Man’s Guide to Stock Photography*.

When a three-day event came to her hometown – Great Escape’s *Ultimate Money-Making Photography Workshop* – she didn’t hesitate to sign up.

“When I went to the workshop in Phoenix, I realized there are so many avenues for photography that have nothing to do with weddings,” Kristen said. “I got so many ideas. I really liked the idea of putting my pictures on an online marketplace and having them sell regardless of what I’m doing.”

The following year, the avid traveler went big and attended a stock photo immersion workshop through Great Escape in Cape Town, South Africa. She joined other photographers and instructors in a villa and photographed hired models – giving her much-needed experience in capturing people. Then they practiced their landscape and wildlife skills on a champagne safari.

In this small-group setting, Kristen learned shooting and editing techniques to improve her chances of getting accepted by stock photo sites.

“There’s something to be said for having a couple of pros standing over your shoulder. It made the learning

experience so much better,” she said. “The immense amount of planning and organization that Great Escape puts into their workshops blows my mind.”

\$6,200 IN A SINGLE WEEKEND

With her newfound skills, Kristen embarked on the process of getting her pictures onto stock sites. After a few tries in the gauntlet of Shutterstock’s very selective process, she was finally accepted.

As it turns out, Kristen’s investment in the South Africa workshop began paying off quickly; those photos are among her best-selling images on Shutterstock.

Kristen has also turned a longtime fascination with storms into cash. When the weather is at its worst, she is the first one to head out in it – capturing it from the shelter of a camper shell on the back of her truck. Before her photography training, she had to Google the appropriate settings and then her husband programmed them into the camera.

Now, Kristen is intimate with the controls on her Nikon D40. Her shots of lightning bolts at night are some of the most desired pieces at craft fairs. It was at one such fair that Kristen got the biggest jolt to her photography self-esteem. In a single weekend, she earned more than a month’s salary in her previous job.

“At the end of a craft fair, my husband, Matt, popped out of his fold-up camping chair behind the till and yelled, ‘We made \$6,200 this weekend!’ she said. “I nearly knocked over the table with excitement.”

Besides stock sites and craft fairs, she adds to her income with postcards and headshots for businesses – ideas she picked up from Great Escape.

AN AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER

Kristen's life has changed dramatically in three years. Soon after the Phoenix workshop, she left her full-time job. Now, she earns half of her income from photography and the other half as a freelance cruise specialist for travel agencies – two passions that complement each other.

When she's not booking travel for others, she's traveling herself. She has sailed on no less than 21 cruises, all over the world.

She's built an impressive list of honors, including Arizona's Monsoon Photographer of the Year in 2012, and awards from the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, the American Sugar Association and from Log Furniture Co. And now she returns to Great Escape workshops – as a favorite speaker – where she shares her inspiring story.

"I didn't have any photography skills or training before," she said. "I learned it all through a couple of workshops. I'm a testament that, with a camera and passion, you can learn this and make money from it."



KRISTEN'S TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

- **Connect with other photographers** – Kristen stayed in touch with fellow members she met at the Phoenix workshop. They shoot together, share ideas and motivate each other.
- **Don't be afraid** – You won't know what's possible if you don't take steps forward. "If I hadn't printed some of my photos and gotten them out there, nothing would have happened," she said.

Ready to pursue *the photographer's life?*

Learn more about the program that launched Kristen's career at [*The Ultimate Money-Making Photography Workshop.*](#)