Travel Secrets from an Award-Winning Writer & Photographer

LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM MASTERS TRAVEL AND LIVING WELL

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Wouldn’t it be great to be a jetsetter traveling the world to visit the hottest urban epicenters and off-the-beaten path exotic locations? Well… there are globetrotters out there doing it! And one of those people who has always inspired me to travel more is Lola Akinmade Åkerström. This bubbly Nigerian woman is an award-winning writer and photographer who has circled the globe – visiting more than 60 countries – to capture real life through photos and prose for notable print and online publications, such as *National Geographic Traveler*, BBC, *Travel + Leisure* and Lonely Planet. We caught up with Lola on her recent book tour to chat with her about all things travel, including her new book *Lagom* and the secret of living well; her tips for photography etiquette; and what’s next on her bucket list.

ON ASSIGNMENT: *Lola documents locals preserving traditions in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa for National Geographic Channel. (Photo Courtesy of Yann Macherez)*

LAGOM IS YOUR NEW BOOK, AND IT'S A BIT OF A DEPARTURE FROM YOUR TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK, *DUE NORTH*. WHAT'S THE NEW BOOK ABOUT?

While on the surface it feels like a departure from Due North, it's actually in-line with my beat as a travel writer and photographer. I explore culture through food, tradition and lifestyle. And Lagom is the quintessential Swedish lifestyle and mindset. It's often described as "*not too little, not too much, just right*." But the word is a lot more nuanced than that. It governs almost all aspects of Swedish culture and on a subconscious level, is the way Swedes naturally battle stress. You can tell a lot about a culture by how it battles stress.

HOW HAVE YOU MASTERED THE SECRET OF LIVING WELL?

I think the beauty of living and experiencing different cultures is that I can pick and choose the very best parts of those cultures and weave them into my own lifestyle to create what's right for me and my family. With regards to Lagom, I've picked the very best parts of that mindset. And that's how I lay out the book. I describe why the lagom mindset operates the way it does, and then show readers different ways we can incorporate aspects of it into our own lives.

COTTAGE IN THE ARCHIPELAGO, WEST SWEDEN. (*Photo Courtesy of Lola Akinmade Åkerström*)

HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR LIFE AS A TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER AND SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY?

I have to say right away that I have the world's most amazing and supportive spouse who fully understands my work as a travel photographer and writer. In terms of balancing this all with family life, I'm more cognizant of the type of assignments I take on and don't just travel for the sake of travel or just for the 'gram (aka, Instagram). It's also important to show more diversity and women of color working professionally and successfully in fields traditionally reserved for others. I want my daughter to see that. I want that to be her new normal.

IS THERE A TRAVEL DESTINATION YOU'D LIKE TO VISIT WITH YOUR FAMILY? IF SO, WHERE? WHY?

Ever since spending three weeks in Fiji working as part of an expedition race, I've always wanted to return to the South Pacific and go island hopping – from Tonga and Samoa to Vanuatu, Tahiti and more – with my family for months. That would be the ultimate dream travel for me and my family.

ICONIC GÁSADALUR VILLAGE ON THE FAROE ISLANDS. *(Photo Courtesy of Lola Akinmade Åkerström)*

YOU RECENTLY SHOT YOUR FIRST WEDDING BY REQUEST IN MATERA, ITALY. WAS IT A DESTINATION WEDDING? HOW WAS THE EXPERIENCE? WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN?

It was for a destination wedding where I was flown down to document my friend (who also works for Emilia Romagna Tourism, Italy) Silvia's big day. She likes the way I take environmental portraits during my travels and so she wanted me to capture the wedding in a similar, natural way.

Weddings are deep wells of raw emotions and I want the freedom and flexibility to be able to capture those unfiltered moments of pure joy and happiness, and to commemorate them in a way that feels down-to-earth and relatable. To capture a sense of place and time and feeling, which is technically what I do as a travel photographer.

I would definitely do it again if given the same free reign and flexibility.

SILVIA AND SERGIO IN MATERA, ITALY, FOR THEIR DESTINATION WEDDING. *(Photo Courtesy of Lola Akinmade Åkerström)*

DO YOU HAVE A LIST OF THINGS PEOPLE SHOULD NOT DO WHEN TAKING PHOTOS? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?

Be sensitive to cultural norms in the place you're visiting. I personally dislike sneaking photos of people unless it's done in a way that captures the environment and isn't necessarily focused on just the person. Acknowledge people first. It gets you closer to them to take the kinds of portraits you admire from other photographers.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES TRAVELING AND TAKING PHOTOS? WHERE WERE YOU? AND WHY WERE THEY UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES?

There are way too many memorable experiences (a fact I'm super grateful for) to list but right off the top of my head, I would say sailing with icebergs in Greenland, chasing Northern Lights in Swedish Lapland, living with locals in Nepal, exploring the entire length of Jordan, driving the Faroe Islands, to name a few.

SAILING WITH ICEBERGS IN ILULISSAT, GREENLAND. *(Photo Courtesy of Lola Akinmade Åkerström)*

WHAT'S STILL ON YOUR TRAVEL BUCKET LIST? WHAT EXPERIENCE OR PLACE WOULD YOU ENJOY CAPTURING WITH YOUR CAMERA?

So much more to see, experience and explore, including the North Pole. I even wrote about some countries I would love to explore here. Since I'm primarily drawn to experiencing culture through food, tradition and lifestyle, I would love to learn more about indigenous cultures all over the world as well as have the opportunity to be truly invited in.

Inspired by Lola's globetrotting travels around the world and want to speak with a ***Vacation*** *travel agent about how you can plan an amazing trip, too? Let one of* ***Vacation****'s on-call travel experts connect you with a specialist to plan your next vacay.*

LOCAL FARMER IN PANAUTI, NEPAL. *(Photo Courtesy of Lola Akinmade Åkerström)*