



PRO TIPS FOR CLOSE-UP PHOTOS

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Cover image by Philip Ruopp with the Tamron 18-300mm F/3.5-6.3 Di III-A VC VXD



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PORTRAIT OF A HOLY MAN

Mauro De Bettio celebrates India's sadhus with his Tamron **SP 35mm F/1.4** and **SP 15-30mm F/2.8 VC G2** lenses.

PHOTO: MAURO DE BETTIO

SP 35mm, F/2.8, 1/160th sec., ISO 100



SP 35mm, F/2, 1/250th sec., ISO 320

Taking pictures of people used to intimidate Mauro De Bettio. The travel and documentary photographer, born and raised in a tiny village in the Italian Alps and now based in Barcelona, started taking pictures when he was a teen, and he waded in with photos of local fauna, gradually moving up to landscapes. Soon macro found its way into his workflow, but portraits eluded him. "People were the subjects that scared me the most," he says. "I started photographing them from afar, and then, slowly, I approached them."

Today, documentary photography defines [Mauro's portfolio](#), and he uses the [Tamron SP 35mm F/1.4 Di USD](#) and [SP 15-30mm F/2.8 VC G2](#) lenses to help him capture his subjects. "Documentary photography represents my way of speaking and allows me to live the way I want to live," he says. "I explore vanishing cultures, ancient traditions, and contemporary culture, always including the human element, spending my life working on projects that touch on important social and human rights issues. The 35mm is the lens I use the most; it's so bright and fast-focusing, and offers the sharpness I need at all apertures. The 15-30mm, meanwhile, is sharp even at the edges, and it's extremely clean, with almost no vignetting."

Read on for a glimpse into Mauro's photographic style, as well as on how he used these two lenses on a recent trip to India to document the country's sadhus, or religious ascetics.



SP 15-30mm, F/7.1, 1/250th sec., ISO 320

How would you define your work as a photographer?

Mauro De Bettio: I like to call myself a storyteller. For me, a photograph represents my way of speaking. As a photographer, the only powerful medium I possess to express myself and communicate is my camera—a tool that offers an infinite range of perception and interpretation, creating images that stimulate and provoke.

Tell us about your most recent trip to India. What was your photographic goal on this trip?

Mauro De Bettio: My passion for photography and traveling has taken me to India five times over the last 10 years. Although it's difficult to express in words exactly why I love and am so attached to

India, I will say that it feels like a second home for me, and it's given me some of the most unforgettable moments of my life.

I've always been attracted to this culture, its traditions and values, the spirituality, and the diversity of locations, from the beaches in the south to the incredible Himalayas in the north. But the thing I'm drawn to the most are the people. They're the most memorable people I've ever met. Most of them are generous, honest, gentle, and full of dignity, and the way they welcome you and show tolerance toward all religions and cultures is unique, in my view.

During my various long journeys to India, one of the things that caught my attention the most are the sadhus, or holy men. These are devoutly religious Hindus living throughout India, part of orders that date back thousands of years.

The purpose of this long-term project of mine was to take portraits of these incredible individuals.

My main goal was to observe what knowledge and experience helped sadhus live such an isolated life. To do this, I had to live as closely as I could to their lifestyle—that was the only way to get the intimate portraits I was looking for. I felt and knew that each one of those faces had a story to tell. [\(See a behind-the-scenes video here on Mauro's project.\)](#)

How did you help your subjects get comfortable in front of your camera?

Mauro De Bettio: Many times it was hard to explain to them what I was trying to do: why I wanted to take portraits of them, why I wanted to tell their story and share their spiritual path, why I wanted to take a photo in a certain location or at a particular time of the day—all factors that, for a photographer, are the keys to a compelling portrait.

I did my best to spend as much time as I could with my subjects even before I set up my equipment. It was a necessary step to gain that mutual trust. It was also important to get to know the people who would be immortalized forever in a frame, to remember who they are, their names and their stories. Once we had that rapport between us, the portraits easily evolved out of that.

Talk about lighting.

Mauro De Bettio: I tried to use all-natural light where I could. I spent time examining the scene and chasing the light, trying to understand where the sun was rising and where it was setting, and



SP 35mm, F/1.8, 1/100th sec., ISO 500



SP 35mm, F/3.2, 1/200th sec., ISO 125



SP 35mm, F/3.5, 1/250th sec., ISO 200



SP 35mm, F/1.8, 1/200th sec., ISO 500



SP 15-30mm, F/7.1, 1/320th sec., ISO 160

"I LIKE TO CALL MYSELF A STORYTELLER. FOR ME, A PHOTOGRAPH REPRESENTS MY WAY OF SPEAKING."

choosing the best time of day to better compose the visual story I was trying to create.

When that wasn't possible, I also used external flash lighting. I strongly

believe that a flash helps to achieve much better results in a number of different situations, such as when there are overexposed backgrounds, or to fill the shadows, shape the subject, direct attention, create mood, and simulate lighting that otherwise doesn't exist.

How did you decide on a composition for each subject?

Mauro De Bettio: Most of the time I preferred to portray my subjects in their environment, in context. That's definitely the best choice if you want to show an entire story in one frame. But there are times when I found myself in front of such special subjects that I decided to show them up close. People who, for example, are able to communicate without speaking, with just a glance, through the wrinkles on their face or hands, or by the clothes or jewels they wear. Those are all details that you can only capture by taking a more intimate portrait.



PHOTO: MAURO DE BETTIO

SP 35mm, F/11, 1/125th sec., ISO 100

ABOUT: MAURO DE BETTIO

Born and raised in the Italian Alps and now based in Barcelona, Mauro

De Bettio is a documentary photographer who's learned his own way of seeing the world, shaped by the environment and people he encounters in his travels. His award-winning photos have been featured in such publications as National Geographic, Condé Nast Traveler, and Edge of Humanity, among others. <https://maurodebettio.com> [Instagram@mauro_de_bettio](https://www.instagram.com/mauro_de_bettio)

SP 35mm F1.4 Di USD

Model..... F045
Focal Length..... 35mm
Max. Aperture..... F/1.4
MOD..... 11.8 in
Max. Mag. Ratio..... 1:5
Length..... 4.1 in
Weight..... 28.7 oz
Mounts.. Canon & Nikon DSLR
Mirrorless with Mfg. Adapter

