

# LuxuryTravelGuide

AN INSIGHT FOR THE AFFLUENT TRAVELLER

## Shane Green

SGEi President & Founder



As President & Founder of SGEi, Shane collaborates with client's c-level executives to craft customer experience and employee engagement strategies to support brand promises. He leads SGEi's team of operations, human resource, and training professionals: together, they inspire brands to deliver exceptional internal and external experiences that create brand advocates and loyal customers.

Prior to founding SGEi, Shane consulted for The Ritz-Carlton, where his foundation for understanding customer and employee dynamics was fostered. Since then his work with many of the finest hotels in the world, and well-known brands like BMW, NetJets, the NBA, Le Frak, Cisco Systems, and Christy's, has established him as one of the most sought-after speakers and insiders on customer experience and employee engagement. Shane has also established himself as a television personality, utilising more than 20 years of experience consulting for the hotel and hospitality industry as host of Travel Channel's hit TV series *Resort Rescue*.

Shane's multicultural background has created an ambience of diversity and global thinking at SGEi. He received his BS of Commerce in Marketing and Business Psychology from Canterbury University in New Zealand.

[www.sgeinternational.com](http://www.sgeinternational.com)

## Anthony Melchiorri

*Hotel Impossible, Five Star Secrets*



After serving in the US Air Force, Anthony spent 25 years in the hotel business; developing his own management style, helping turn around New York's iconic Plaza Hotel, putting the Lucerne on the New York Times list as one of the best run hotels in the city, and recreating the magic of The Algonquin, the literary haunt of the famous "Round Table." From there, Anthony went on to develop the Nickelodeon Hotel and Resort in Florida, became first vice president of Tishman Hotels and served as senior vice president of New York Hotel Management Company.

Utilising this vast experience, Anthony wanted to help others and share the excitement of what this industry is all about on television. This led to the creation of cable TV series, *Hotel Impossible*. Now in its sixth season, Anthony works each week to keep failing hotels with near-fatal problems, and especially the families who own these businesses, from going broke. To showcase another side of the industry, the 50-year-old Brooklyn native created *Five Star Secrets*, which features upscale hotels and showcases behind the scenes efforts that make those hotels some of the best in the industry. In addition to television, Anthony is nearing the completion of a book about running a successful business like a five star hotel.

[www.anthonymelchiorri.com](http://www.anthonymelchiorri.com)

## Antonio Cuellar

*Luxury Hotel & Resort Photographer*



Antonio Cuellar is a highly sought-after hotel and resort photographer in the luxury market. His dedication and perseverance has earned him several photography awards including being honored by the American Society of Media Photographers "ASMP" as Best Of 2013. He earned an Arts degree in Boston and Later an MBA from the University of Miami.

He has offices in the US and UK and has production teams around the world. Antonio has travelled worldwide for clients, with recent assignments taking him to Mexico, USA, China, Dubai, and London. As a hotel photographer, Antonio gets to stay in all of the properties he has worked with over the years and therefore received the full guest experience at a large number of prestigious hotels and brands over the world. Additionally, his keen eye for interior design and aesthetics of luxury hotels makes him an invaluable guest judge for the Luxury Travel Awards.

Antonio is currently undertaking a huge production, in collaboration with "The Castle Man", in which he will feature the most exclusive castles hotel accommodations in Europe. The production will be featured on a book, "Romantic Luxury Castles", that is scheduled to be published mid 2017.

[www.antoniocuellarphotography.com](http://www.antoniocuellarphotography.com)

## James Drakeford

*Luxury Travel Guide Editor*



Following the completion of his Master's degree in Journalism, James delved into the world of music, showbiz and lifestyles but it was his love of travel that shone through. He has been Editor-in-Chief overseeing the *Luxury Travel Guide* since 2012.

Since 2012, James has played a key role in the release of more than 20 publications that either focus on a particular continent or on niche topics such as luxury yacht charters. He has also been fortunate enough to travel Europe extensively and has now visited more than half of the countries across the continent.

In order to keep abreast with the latest trends in the travel and tourism industry, James regularly attends conferences such as the World Travel Market in London, International Luxury Travel Market in Cannes, International Luxury Hotel Association PINNACLE Summit and ITB Berlin.

James regularly combines his love of travel with his passion for running by competing in various marathons across Europe. He is a keen foodie and wine enthusiast and has recently discovered a keen interest in snowboarding and scuba diving. James is also an Ambassador for Birmingham-based non-profit charity organisation, Love Brum.

[www.luxurytravel-guide.com](http://www.luxurytravel-guide.com)



## AN INTERVIEW WITH GUEST JUDGE **Antonio Cuellar**

Antonio Cuellar is a highly sought after hotel and resort photographer whose assignments take him across the globe. Antonio has a passion for his craft and a unique ability to capture and convey the true essence of the world's most luxurious and glorious hotels.

Honored by the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP) as the best of 2013, Antonio was recently selected as the hotel judge for the "Luxury Travel Guide" thanks to his legendary eye for detail, reputation throughout the industry and passion for the finest luxury hotel photography. Antonio's genuine love for these amazing properties combined with his technical expertise ensures images that take the viewer into unique worlds of luxury and sophistication.

Antonio has offices in the UK and the United States and travels extensively with his ongoing assignments worldwide. Here Antonio shares some of the insights and behind-the-scenes efforts that go into taking the perfect picture in addition to his passion for his art.

### How did you get into hotel photography?

Early in my career, there was an increased demand for high-quality architectural images, and I began building a portfolio as the real estate market was booming. Over time I developed a deeper and deeper interest in architecture and interiors photography.

Architectural photographers have a unique ability to showcase space and structures; however, I was interested in more than that. I began to focus on mood and lighting and the ability to convey an environment and an atmosphere.

Through this process I developed a unique lighting style that was ideally suited to luxury hotels. This style takes full advantage of digital technologies but still retains many elements of classic photography. Improving my lighting techniques became somewhat of an obsession as I strove to produce my vision of the perfect image. Hotels began noticing the results and the rest is history.

### How do you capture the essence of a hotel through photography?

The most fundamental thing to understand is the type of traveller the hotel is appealing to. I think it is vital to take a different approach when a hotel's key market base is business travellers as opposed to leisure travellers.

Business hotels tend to be located in an urban setting and the imagery must reflect this. My personal preference is to photograph a business hotel at night to create elegant yet inviting images where clients can envisage coming and relaxing after a long day's work. A business traveller's days are invariably busy, so the evenings are when they will spend most of their time in their hotel. This might be for private relaxation or business entertaining. This is why I like to focus on areas such as the bar, restaurant, lobby and, of course, I highlight the sophistication and elegance of the accommodation, showcasing at least one type of room. Hotel staff interaction is friendly and cordial while guests are photographed elegantly dressed, tidy and professional.

I take a very different approach for hotels such as beach resorts that focus on leisure travellers. Most of the images will be produced during the day focusing on areas such as pools, beaches and perhaps areas where kids enjoy daily

activities. Hotel staff are featured in a friendly manner and guests are portrayed in a more casual fashion.

Construction and hotel location also tell a story and create a fantasy. When I photograph destination hotels, I also give guests a glimpse of the beautiful location they will be visiting. Destination hotels and resorts today are doing a wonderful job of creating a full cultural experience for their guests, and I enjoy showcasing the best of these unique properties.

### The luxury hotel experience in the 21st Century goes beyond offering a comfortable and stylish place to sleep and now includes a whole host of facilities and services from fine dining to fully-equipped spas. Has this altered the landscape for what is required from hotel photographers?

More and more hotels now offer extensive spa services as increasingly sophisticated travellers expect personal wellness on the road. Spas have enjoyed annual growth of nearly 15% since 2014 alone, so these exquisite images are critical to a hotel's marketing package. In addition, most hotels market their spas to the local population in addition to hotel guests in order to maximise revenues. Therefore, it is important to capture the essence of health and wellness services offered by hotels, especially if those services are very much a part of their identity.

Fine dining is also a stabilising source of revenue. Most luxury hotels have more than one restaurant and they are also marketed locally with a high demand for quality imagery. I thoroughly enjoy capturing the finest food, restaurants and backdrops when it comes to luxury hotel restaurants.

### Can you talk us through your typical assignment?

Regardless of the location, I have a three-step approach to my jobs. The pre-production stage involves meeting with the clients to coordinate logistics and discuss ideas. It also involves a very extensive location scouting to determine the best angles and the best time of day for photography. Finally, I meet with the stylist to determine what props are needed or allowed by the brand guidelines in order to accentuate the existing decor.



When these initial steps are completed successfully, then my focus during production shifts to lighting, propping and coordination with talent. My style involves several techniques such as light painting, where multiple images are blended together. Because of my unique approach to photography and my commitment to the highest-quality work, I spend a substantial amount of time in post-production. However, every step in the process is equally important to creating remarkable hotel photographs.

### What equipment are you currently using?

As a rule of thumb, if there is some equipment out there that improves the quality of my images, I will acquire it. My wife regularly comments that we are running out of room for more photography equipment, but I can never resist exquisite new gear.

I use Hasselblad medium format cameras and lenses. I also use the latest drone technology for aerial photography when utilising a helicopter is not feasible. I use continuous lighting as well as strobes with an extensive range of color gels to better capture the mood.

As I mentioned, I am obsessed with the constant improvement of my lighting techniques to create the perfect image. I put an inordinate amount of work into

my productions until I am 100% satisfied with the results. Creating images that are evocative of the amazing atmospheres that these hotels have created requires a lot of work on location and in post-production. It became apparent that luxury hotels were the only ones willing to support the extent of the production required to create images that accurately portray their property and ultimately increase sales.

With the increasing amount of travel that I do, I have focused on becoming more practical and simplifying the process where I can without affecting the quality. I am now able to produce better quality images in less time and with less gear.

### Has your perception of the luxury hotel industry or the hotel industry in general, changed since entering this profession?

My perception has definitely changed. A few years ago, you could find many independently owned hotels. These slowly disappeared as the big players in the industry, with the rise of the internet, began dominating online bookings. Brand recognition is increasingly important as big franchises continue to acquire smaller hotels. This constant acquisition and development by the larger hotels has, however, created a challenge for travellers looking for something unique. This, in my opinion, is why we have seen a rise in luxury boutique hotels. The luxury boutique hotel offers travellers a truly unique experience. Bigger brands have recognised this and began exploring this demand for travellers wanting to experience a different culture while travelling.

It is now very common for a luxury brand such as Ritz Carlton to acquire properties that offer something different and reflect the local culture. This is a very important aspect that must be considered while producing images abroad, and it is often overlooked by international hoteliers. In an effort to appear sophisticated, some hotels try to recreate a western feel while located in exotic places. The location is more often than not one of the biggest attractions for a destination hotel and it should be embraced and celebrated rather than disguised.

**What do you feel is the most important criteria when you are judging a hotel on its quality?**

Aside from the obvious criteria such as location, amenities and service, I tend to look for hotels that offer a unique traveller experience – one that exposes travellers to local cultures through its architecture, cuisine, décor and sense of style. I also seek hotels that embrace the area by offering unique activities. As an example, the Sofitel Legend Cartagena not only has beautiful colonial architecture and delicious Colombian food, but also offers horse chariot rides for guests interested in a true colonial experience. In the same manner, Ashford Castle in Ireland offers falconry and archery.

Another important factor is the friendliness and warmth of the staff. This makes all the difference between an excellent experience and a disappointing one. Luxury hotels sometimes have a reputation for less-than-inviting staff and I've seen both ends of the spectrum. I've been fortunate to photograph many hotels that focus on customer service from the moment someone calls, emails or steps into the lobby.

**In terms of your own travel experiences, can you give us an insight into what your travel diary looks like?**

It is always busy! I constantly receive requests to provide quotes for hotels worldwide, many with a very short lead time, and am always happy to accommodate. In the upcoming months, it is highly likely that I will be in Los Cabos, Mexico; Doha, Qatar; Dubai, UAE; Nashville, USA, and The Seychelles.

**From your travel experiences do you have a personal favorite?**

I am always excited to visit and experience different cultures. I am also very curious as to their unique approach to hospitality.

I am always impressed by sophisticated architecture. In Beijing, for example, I was captivated by the level of luxury some hotels were offering. Éclat Hotel comes to mind. This is a hotel with the most elite energy-efficiency certification along with a stunning contemporary art collection that includes the biggest private collection of Dali sculptures and Warhol art scattered throughout.

Excellent customer service and staff experience recently surpassed my expectations at two locations: Ashford Castle in Ireland and Grand Solmar in Los Cabos Mexico. Their service was exemplary and simply superb; hotels can only achieve this if the staff genuinely loves their work and the hotel.

**Finally, do you have any travel advice for our readers?**

Yes, travel as light as possible, make your booking as far in advance as you can, and be considerate to those who work in the travel industry. They have heard every complaint and dealt with every possible situation. When you are nice to the staff and make an effort to connect with them on a personal level, you will have a better chance at receiving an upgrade or other perks.

Finally, I encourage guests to take full advantage of technology. Travel with an unlocked cellphone and purchase a data plan upon arrival – this will allow you access to apps with recommendations and advice from other tourists and travellers as well as maps that will make navigating a new city a breeze.

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