

Hands On with the New Nikon 28-105 Zoom

by Jim McGee

If there is one universal truth to photography it is that the longer you are in it the more gear you'll accumulate - and carry. Then one day you realize that you spent two hours preparing for that relaxing walk in the park and people are staring because you're packing more gear than a Himalayan expedition.

At that point you start to think about how you can lighten the load and simplify your camera life.

For me this epiphany came when I was preparing to depart for a meeting in Las Vegas. It was to be a short five day trip, one out, one back, and three days on the ground. My back was bothering me and thoughts of heavy suitcases were not dancing in my head. Many years of business traveling had taught me how to pack light - now I looked at my camera bag and thought about applying the same rules.



Outside Caesar's Palace at 28mm opens up the perspective here. A circular polarizer was used to cut the reflections from the harsh mid-day desert light

out of the question and since Vegas had changed a lot since my first trip I decided I'd play tourist this time. One lens, a single body with a built in flash, and a couple of rolls of film. I grabbed a Nikon

Nikon 28-105mm f/3.5-4.5D AF

At a Glance

Filter Size: 62mm

Lens Hood: HB-18 not incl

Weight: 19oz

Dimensions: 2.8"x3.5"

Front Rotate w/Focus: No

Groups/Elements: 13/16

Close Focus: 1.7'

Close Focus Macro: 8.5"

Macro: Yes

Available Mounts: Nikon F only



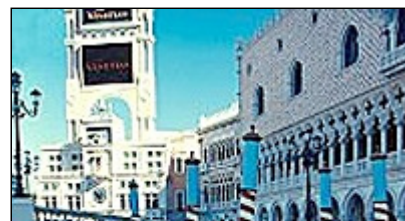
Verdict: Thumbs Up

My normal *light* travel bag includes two bodies, a flash, 20mm, 24mm, a fast 50mm 1.4, 28-85, 70-300, 2x extender, filters, tripod, remote cords, etc. You get the picture. Light means no heavy 2.8 zooms, and no lenses over 300mm.

My back was telling me that lifting a gallon of milk was a bad idea and suddenly my light bag was looking pretty heavy. How far could I pare this thing down?

The fact that Vegas is the Convention Capital made things a little easier. I had been there several times before and figured that I'd be back in the future. So I wasn't worried that I'd miss a once in a lifetime shot in a place I'd never see again. I also realized that somewhere along the line I'd stopped shooting the city. I had found some areas I loved in Red Rock Canyon and Valley of Fire. My habit was to hike out there in my free time and shoot sunrises and sunsets as my schedule permitted.

Since climbing rock faces was



N70 and Nikon's new 28-105 lens to see what kind of shots I'd get. For a camera bag I grabbed one of those little camera holsters that Ritz Camera sells for your belt. This way I wouldn't have to carry the camera around my neck. And finally a light weight travel tripod.

With it's indoor and outdoor canals and singing gondoliers the Venetian hotel is not to be missed.

After five unpleasant hours wedged into an airline seat we arrive in Vegas. I've yet to find an airline seat that fits. It may be my imagination but I'd swear that the seats are getting smaller by the year. I throw my bags in my room and head out to the strip to walk the kinks out.



The fountains at the Bellagio. Using rear curtain sync and a pop of fill flash from the N70's built-in flash you can capture both background and foreground detail at night.

The first thing I notice is how incredibly light this setup is. The tripod is back in the room, so I've just got the camera and lens hanging off my hip. At 19 oz. the 28-105 is not the lightest lens out there but it's far from the heaviest. Coupled with the N70 the whole works is only about 2 1/2 pounds (39 oz.).

One thing I begin to realize is that this is an incredibly versatile lens. In the viewfinder it's bright and sharp, noticeably sharper than some consumer 28-80 lenses I've tried. The zoom and focus controls fall easily to hand and the lens feels well balanced on this body. Apertures are set with an audible click that you'd expect from a Nikon lens.

This is a two ring lens. The zoom ring has a positive and well damped feeling. It's an easy turn from 28mm out to 105mm making it a joy to document

the many sights on the Vegas strip. It's a pleasant surprise that this lens will close focus to about half of the 20 inches in the Nikon literature. The 28-105 is capable of taking close-ups to 1/2 of life size on film.

Being used to shooting with a 28-85 and a 80-200 or 70-300, it's a joy not to have to swap lenses while strolling down the street. See something you like and you can snap away. Switching to manual mode the focus ring has the same well damped feeling as the zoom ring - what you'd expect from a Nikon lens. The rubber lens grip is comfortable in the hand and offers a solid grip on the lens barrel even for hands sweaty in the desert heat.



The old Vegas Strip is now under a huge enclosure. The reflections and neon made for a tricky exposure. Print film gave me plenty of extra latitude. This image was printed at +1/2 stop.

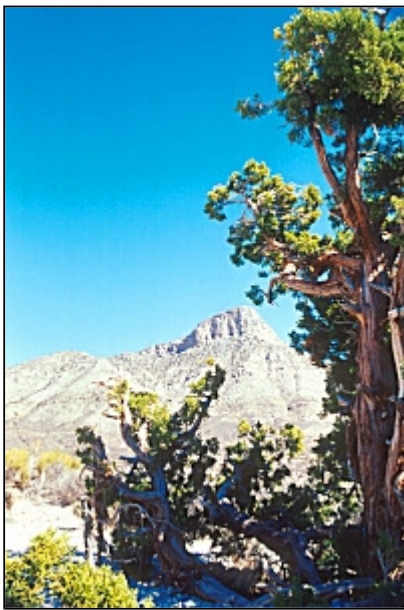
At the end of an afternoon walking around the Vegas strip I was surprised at how light this setup still felt. The only downside seemed to be the camera bag. The holster had seemed to be a good idea when I left, but walking around I was snagging in constantly

on doors, railings, chairs, and people. The bag did have a shoulder strap and I found that this was definitely the best way to carry the camera.



Sunrise, Red Rock Canyon

The next morning I drove out to Red Rock Canyon in the dark to catch the sunrise. Even if I couldn't hike there are some great views from the access road. Sunrise in the desert is something we should all experience just once. It's incredible to sit in Red Rock Canyon and watch the colors of the mountains shift and change as the sun climbs into the sky. This particular morning the sky was cloudless so I looked for potential panoramic images that would allow me to include foreground elements and the brilliant colors of the rocks while cropping out a bland and uneventful sky.



No lens is perfect and this one does have a few minor drawbacks. When zooming the front element rotates a quarter turn. Not a big deal but you need to be aware of it if you're using a polarizer or an ND grad filter. You also need to be aware that thick filters, such as the two just mentioned, may vignette at 28mm (If you look at the lower corners of the statue outside of Caesar's you'll see it).

You can get around this by removing the 1A filter before mounting the polarizer (assuming you have one on the lens), but this can get to be a hassle. The real solution is a thin polarizer now offered by several manufacturers (including Nikon).

When the first batch of slides came back I was pleasantly surprised. The slides are sharp and contrasty. With a street price of around \$300 I had expected consumer lens quality or a little better, but the quality of the images was on par with Nikon's pro lenses - making this an incredible bargain, able to fill the bill as a wide angle landscape lens, a normal lens, a portrait lens, and everything in between.

The 28-105 has a macro setting, and in close up work it provides good center sharpness, but the corners are a bit soft. For casual macro work the image quality should be fine, but for serious macro work I'd recommend a true macro lens.

Is this a perfect travel lens? Well nothing is perfect. There were times that I wished for a little more reach or a little wider angle. However going to a 28-200 or a 28-300 I'd have to give up image quality. With this lens I don't have to make that compromise. Nikon had taken a lot of heat in the Internet news groups for having been slow to introduce a lens in this zoom range. But in the end they have produced an excellent, reasonably priced all around lens that has replaced their 28-85 in my camera bag.