

digital landscape photography

7 TOP TIPS TO GET GREAT LOOKING SHOTS



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introduction

This short e-book will help you to build your photographic skills in taking professional-looking landscape photography.

Whether you own a compact digital camera or an advanced digital single lens reflex camera (digital SLR), you will learn the basic principles from these tips and as you progress you can build on these in the future.

Most importantly, look for the natural beauty in what you see and use your improved skills to get the results you want. Happy photographing!



tip 1 know your camera

Most of us hate reading manuals and nearly every sort of camera seems to come with ‘too much information’, often overwhelming the beginner (and the more experienced!) But its important to get to know what your camera is capable of as you progress with your photography ...and of course how to use it to get the best. If your camera has ‘manual’ override don’t panic yourself into believing that you are ‘cheating’ if you have it set to ‘automatic’. Remember its not a camera that makes the photograph—its what you see through it and how you interpret the scene.



Using an inexpensive everyday compact digital camera, set to ‘auto’ I took the scenes opposite and got great results. Once you get to know your camera’s capabilities, through experimenting, you will spend less time worrying about settings and more time ‘seeing’ the wonderful possibilities of the landscapes that you encounter.



So, yes, know your camera! Experiment a lot using just the ‘auto’ setting. Get your pictures looking good before you get into the more complicated arena of understanding the ‘manual’ settings.

tip 2 best angle of view

Effective photographic composition is simply the pleasing selection and balance or 'arrangement' of subjects that make up the scene within the picture area. Just moving your camera to a different position can dramatically alter the composition. Most good landscape images depend on selecting the best point of view. Its easy to just 'snap away' but better to not rush and take your time. Walk around a bit look at the scene from all sides.

Most amateurs take shots from their standing or sitting positions—be different, learn to get some unusual angles, even views from just above ground level can give amazing results and change the scale of the foreground subjects.

The rocks in the close foreground opposite are only 3 inches or so in size because the angle of view was just 7 inches above the ground. The result provided interest in the foreground and created greater impact In the areas of light and shade.



Experiment to get the best angle of view—don't be embarrassed to 'lay down' if necessary!

tip 3 use the rule of thirds

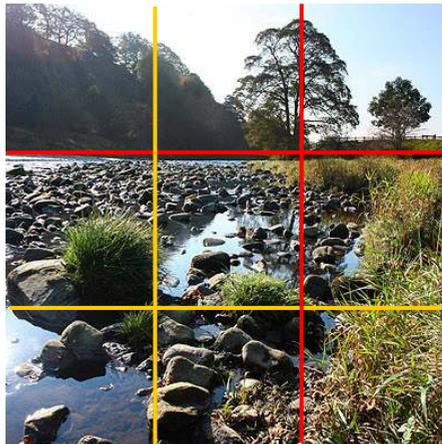
If you are unsure about the balance and arrangement of elements within the scene you are viewing there is a golden rule that you can follow in photographic composition. It's called the 'Rule of Thirds' You can improve your shots by making the centre of interest away from the centre of the scene and make it more interesting.

Before you take your shot try to imagine the rectangle of your view with two horizontal lines cutting the scene into thirds. Do the same by imagining the two vertical lines doing the same.

It's crucial that your shot feels balanced BEFORE you snap it!

The shots opposite show how the rule of thirds (red lines mostly here) helped me balance the subjects in this English summer morning river-scape scene.

Many cameras have 'third's' set in their viewfinders to assist you with this rule.



Remember, study your scene and apply the 'rule of thirds' to help you get the right balance BEFORE taking the shot.

tip 4 using linear elements

Often in a scene, some 'predominant lines' can direct the viewer to a specific area of interest. To maintain the viewer's interest in your shot, these lines should 'run' into the picture—not out of it. Otherwise an imbalance in the scene is caused.

These 'lines' appear in almost anything, such as roads, buildings, paths, fences or even shadows

By selecting a camera angle that utilises these 'lines' you can add real interest to your composition.

The example opposite shows how the pillars of the underpass 'frame' the couple walking in the distance and the drama of the waves behind them.



If there are noticeable 'linear' elements in your scene, always try to use them to get real interest.

(Note that the 'rule of thirds is also applied here)

tip 5 the right backgrounds

The background in a picture can make it either successful or unsuccessful. It can set the mood of the image or tell a story. At worst, it can detract from the subject and spoil the whole picture.

Before you use the rules you have learned, when about to take a picture, just stop to see if there is anything in the background that is best to avoid– or indeed, to actually include.

Sometimes an uncluttered background can emphasise a subject.

Above opposite shows a shot where the background element of the building on the hill provides a key centre of interest and below the uncluttered beach background does not detract from the foreground subjects.

Remember the background can make or break a good landscape shot. Look carefully!



tip 6 foreground textures

Many world famous photographers such as Joe Cornish and Charlie Waite believe that foreground interest is absolutely key to getting a fabulous landscape shot, even if it means standing in water. Textures and shapes are so important to maximise the visual interest in a scene.

In certain woodland scenes I have often 're-arranged' the branches and debris on the ground to help the shot.! Nature will provide exactly what you need in most cases though.

As well as choosing your area of interest' in a scene, you may, later on, want to experiment with 'areas of focus'. This will allow you to emphasise some thing deliberately in the foreground. More about that in my next guide. The image opposite is a bluebell woodland scene I took in late afternoon. The bluebells of course added the interest but the shot would have been bland without the tree stump and moss textures which helped to set the mood and tranquillity that I wanted.



Always make sure there is something closeby that has texture and shape to help but not to detract from the main scene.

tip 7 keep it simple & inspired

The last of my tips is to tell you to **'keep it simple and inspired'**. What do I mean? Well, cameras are complicated things, settings are complicated things...and 'how to do it' manuals can muddle as well...that's why I have tried to keep this one simple.

The thing is just to remember why you are there. You love nature, you probably love walking and you love beauty. They are the simple but powerful 'drivers' to get you keen on taking beautiful shots. So making a habit of simply searching out the beauty is the really enjoyable and most important part. Sure, you want to make the most of your visit and end up with a couple of special shots. And you will if you remember the basics. These will become literally second nature to you. But the camera should only be an extension of your eyes and emotions. The camera is essential but secondary.

Read and study the work of others it will inspire you. I recommend the book 'First Light—A Landscape Photographer's Art' by Joe Cornish to start you off on a truly inspired path. It really did it for me.

