

Top Ten Tips for Landscape Photography

1 The magic hour

Beautiful landscape photos are often defined by the quality of light they were taken in. As a consequence, photographers tend to shoot early in the morning or during late afternoons when the sun is lower and often displays a subtle colour palette of moody hues. For this reason, the hours after dawn and before dusk are known as the 'magic hours'. If rising at dawn doesn't sit well with your idea of a relaxing weekend, don't panic - there are plenty of great landscape opportunities throughout the day. Though there's nothing to beat being up at dawn in the summer, spending a couple of hours photographing in superb light - and maybe mist - and then heading for breakfast at the nearest Timmy's (other chain restaurants are available). There's a really neat little software called "[The Photographer's Ephemeris](#)" which will pinpoint directions and times of sunrises, sunsets and even the Moon's position, at any point on the planet. There's a similar little "iApp" for iPad and iPhone users.

2 Composition

Composition is key to a successful landscape image, and if you don't know where to start, use the 'rule of thirds' to get things going. It's an easy principle to apply - simply divide your frame into imaginary thirds on both the horizontal and vertical axis. Now simply place areas of interest at the points at which the lines intersect or - in the case of a horizon - along one of the lines. However, don't be afraid to throw away the rule book and totally disregard the conventions of composition. While you might have some awful failures, you might also create an original and striking masterpiece. Be bold and experiment. Crop later, in software, if you like, but you'll be removing some of the precious pixels and making an image that may no longer be printable at larger sizes. What's good composition? It cannot be explained - you need to check out lots of images and see what works.

3 Get out there

There's no substitute for putting in a bit of groundwork before embarking on a photographic adventure. Research and find the best locations, get a map, a compass and remember that you'll probably have to get out of the car and walk to get the best shots. There's a bit of strange 'professional' advice about leaving your camera at home and researching the location thoroughly first..... but that's for professionals, who may be on a commission to get some pictures and can happily go back to their hotel to plan the following day's shoot. In real life we have to be able to take a photograph when we're there and only rarely can we take time to 'reconnoitre'.

4 Polarising filters

Most landscape photographers will have a circular polarising filter in their kit bag. There are many uses for filters like this, but for the landscape photographer the two key characteristics are their ability to cut out reflections and glare from a scene and the increased colour intensity, saturation and contrast they create. You'll really notice the effect in clear blue skies - which is great if that's what you want, but bear in mind that it may not give you a picture that's just as you remember it.

5 Depth of field

Many landscape photographers desire an image that appears sharp throughout the scene, so that elements of foreground interest, such as a rock in a lake, look just as sharp as the distant horizon. This can be achieved relatively easily using the principles of depth of field, whereby the smaller an aperture you use, such as $f/22$, the greater the area both before and beyond the point of focus also appear to be sharp. This principle can be taken one step further with hyperfocal focusing. (Something for you to look up but, in brief, it's the distance you need to have in sharpest focus to get a sharp picture 'front to back'. That point is around 2/3rds of the distance from camera to subject. When you're using small apertures you'll get slow shutter speeds, so a tripod is essential.

6 ND grads

One of the great problems for landscape photographers is the difference in brightness between the sky and the land. While the human eye is capable of perceiving detail across this tonal range, a digital sensor isn't capable of recording it. So ND Grads (neutral density graduated filters) were created and have been avidly used by landscape shooters ever since. Their gradual transition from clear to dark neutral density allows the photographer to balance the exposure between the sky and the land to make a more even exposure in which detail remains in both the highlight and shadow areas. An alternative to this is exposure blending, where different exposures are made of the scene and combined in software later, but that cannot recover details that are in areas in deep shadow or burnt out highlights. What you capture in the camera is much more important.

7 Man and the landscape

Great landscape photography is not necessarily about hunting out the most picturesque scene, in the most wonderful light and at the most perfect time of day. Indeed, there are many aspects of the world's landscape that are less glamorous, such as the effects of heavy farming, rapidly expanding suburbs and sprawling industrial wastelands, that can make a poignant subject for the concerned photographer. Take a look at the effects of man on the landscape near your home and use them as photographic subjects. You could use items in your view that may give scale - that includes people, machinery - anything that gives the viewer a recognisable reference.

8 RAW

To maximise on quality and also to allow you to edit your original images non-destructively, always shoot your landscapes in the RAW format. RAW processing software, such as [Adobe Camera Raw](#), is now so sophisticated that unless you want to significantly manipulate your image you rarely need to switch to traditional image-editing software, such as Photoshop.

9 Slow exposures

Slow exposures are regularly used by landscape photographers, whether it's to optimise depth of field with a small aperture or to create smooth and milky seas. Exposures can be seconds (rather than fractions of a second) long, so a sturdy tripod is a must. To further minimise camera movement during the exposure consider using a cable release or your camera's self-timer, as well as locking the mirror up. With cameras that don't have a 'mirror lock' feature, see if you can use a short self-timer, at the 2 or 3 seconds setting - the act of pressing the shutter button will initially raise the mirror and by the time the shutter is opened the vibrations would have gone.

10 Inspirational photographers

There are many great landscape photographers to draw inspiration from, as a simple Google search will prove. However, it's worth looking at the work of [Ansel Adams](#), who is often considered the old master of landscape photography. If you get the chance to see his work in a gallery, make sure you go! Closer to home, the work of [Fay Godwin](#) reveals aspects of man's influence on the land in a unique way. And, of course, the work of favourites such as [Joe Cornish](#), [Charlie Waite](#), [Andre Gallant](#) and [David Noton](#) is sure to inspire...
