

Photography in Cold Weather.

Sometimes some of the most striking pictures are those taken in the dead of winter. There's something beautiful and serene about a blanket of snow lying over everything. We live in a part of Canada that is known for extreme amounts of snow and temperatures that are accompanied by the terms "Arctic cold snap" on a regular basis so we have the opportunity to take photos under these conditions regularly.

If you've been bitten by the photography bug and haven't yet done much winter photo-snapping, you might be wondering about the best way to approach the whole process.

Here are some of the things that I've learned in winter.

1. Carry a Ziploc bag in your camera bag

I know, that sounds kind of weird but it's a great way to protect your camera from condensation on your lenses and even inside the body. Going from very cold outdoor weather to warmer indoor temperatures can cause problems for your camera. If you've ever had the misfortune (like me) to wear glasses outside in the winter, you know how quickly your lenses fog up. Now imagine that happening on all the delicate bits inside your camera. Yikes!

While a Ziploc bag is not perfect, it can help. When you're ready to come back inside to thaw out with a hot cup of cocoa, stop first and place your camera inside the bag and seal it. THEN, place the bag back in your camera bag. No matter how impatient you might be, leave it like that for at least a couple of hours. This allows your camera to slowly warm back to room temperature. If you really can't wait to see your photos, slip your card out first.

2. Protect your camera from snow

Most cameras can handle a bit of gentle snowfall but if you're out there in a blizzard, you're going to want to keep your camera undercover a bit so it doesn't get soaked. There are cases that you can use to enclose a variety of cameras but you could just use a hat. I've had some strange looks from people when I pass them with one hat on my head and a matching one around my camera, but it works. I've also unzipped my coat and tucked the camera inside, zipping it back up until I need to use it again, but the odd shaped sticking out from your body may get even stranger glances!

3. Invest in extra batteries

If you don't already have a spare battery you're going to want to invest in that if you have plans to take more than the occasional outdoor shots in the winter. The colder the temperature outside, the faster your battery power will be depleted. I've even had a battery just about die on me the same day I fully re-charged it. If you carry a second battery (or pack of batteries if you have a point and shoot that takes AAs), don't keep it in your camera bag or it will get just as cold as the one in your camera. Instead, place it in your pocket, preferably an inner pocket that's close to your body. You can even wrap it up in a piece of fleece or flannel to keep it extra toasty. There is nothing quite like the disappointment of going to take what would have been a gorgeous winter scenery shot only to realize your camera won't turn on because your battery has brain freeze.

4. Keep yourself warm and dry too

As a fairly recent newcomer to Canada it's hardly my place to tell you how to dress for the cold. When the weather is temperate and you're comfortable it can be easy to just wander for great lengths of time with your camera. In brutally cold weather you'll need to prepare yourself a little better. In order to withstand the cold, bundle yourself up. Consider long underwear or at the very least, a lot of layers. Wrap up with a good scarf and keep a hat on your head. Wear appropriate boots and I strongly recommend a second pair of socks. I recently got a pair of fleece-lined trousers ("pants" to you) which do a great job and they had the added benefit of having more pockets than a whole bunch of pool tables.

5. Pick the right gloves

Your hands might be one of the biggest problems when it comes to cold weather photography. Thin knit gloves will allow you to access your camera with ease but they will NOT keep your hands warm for long, especially if you're holding cameras and tripods.

Thicker gloves or mitts will keep your hands and fingers warm but good luck if you need to actually make use of any buttons on the camera. Even taking the picture can be a challenge due to the bulky nature of those gloves.

I've found two good solutions. One is to wear mitts that open at the top to reveal fingerless gloves underneath. This way your hands will remain warm and if you wiggle a bit you can actually get just your index finger out to press buttons. Those mittens which open up and fold back to let the fingers (or just one finger) out are good.

Another solution is to combine two pairs of gloves/mitts. I'll put on the thin knit type on my right hand, then pull a thicker pair of gloves or mitts over that. I can take the outer layer off as needed to take pictures, then put them back on when I'm not actively using my camera. It's a bit tedious I suppose, but it works for me.

6. Reward yourself

When you get home, having survived a cold stint of winter photography, I suggest you reward yourself with a nice hot cup of coffee, tea, or cocoa. While it won't do anything to improve your skills, it might improve your mood while you sit around waiting for your camera to warm up!

Do you have any cold weather photography tips to share? Let us know, and feel free to show off some of your favourite cold day shots that you've taken that made the weather worth it.