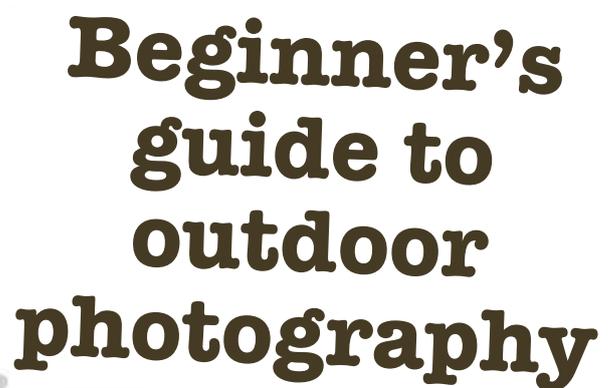




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**Beginner's
guide to
outdoor
photography**



**This Nifty Little
Guide Includes:**

-  **Essential Items**
-  **Manual Settings**
-  **Landscape Photography**
-  **Wildlife Photography**
-  **Outdoor Sports Photography**
-  **Questions to the Pros**

Outdoor Photography Guide



Want your Outdoor Shots to Stand Out?

Our comprehensive guide includes advice from professional photographers and covers everything from the perfect landscape shot to sharp sport captures.

Essential Items

Before you head out into the field, it's important to consider everything you will need. So as well as the spare batteries, camera case and watertight tent, think carefully about the items you are taking with regards to comfort and warmth: feeling comfortable will aid your photographing abilities.

Remember, it gets cold! Even in the summer, the temperature can plummet once the sun sets. Having all the photography equipment in the world won't help you take that perfect shot when you're shivering to the bones! Layers are the best way to control your body temperature. An important addition, however, is the right pair of gloves. Whilst fingerless gloves serve a purpose for a while, there's no getting away from the fact that eventually the tips of your fingers get cold and for any photographer, this is not good. A good pair of 'glomitts' allow your fingers and thumb to do the fine work: essential for any outdoor photographer.

The issue of whether to use a tripod when out in the field is hotly debated in outdoor photography circles. It is agreed, however, that whilst nothing quite beats the original full-size tripod, the lugging of a heavy tripod all day is no one's idea of fun. With mini tripods as well as a range of quirky alternatives such as bottle-top tripods making an appearance, we asked a couple of professionals for their opinion.

Tony West (www.tonywestphoto.co.uk) and Josh McCulloch (www.joshmcculloch.com) when asked if they took a full sized tripod replied:

“Always. I replaced my old heavy metal tripod with a Gitzo CF tripod and a Really Right Stuff ball head last year and it has made all the difference. There is a big difference between a good tripod and a great tripod!”

Josh McCulloch www.joshmcculloch.com

“Yes - they're a pain to carry but essential. Go for carbon”

Tony West www.tonywestphoto.co.uk

And finally, remember to pack some alcohol – not only is this a great cleaning agent for your lens, but it could also provide the inspiration for a stunning shot!

Manual Settings – Why you Need to Understand Them

So, the auto mode is great, but when tackling the demands of outdoor photography it makes sense to understand exactly what the manual settings are and how they can transform your photos.

Aperture

The aperture setting determines the size of the hole that lets light through to the sensor. It lets you control how much of your photo is in focus, allowing, for example, artistic shots to be created by keeping the subject of the photo in focus with the background blurred.



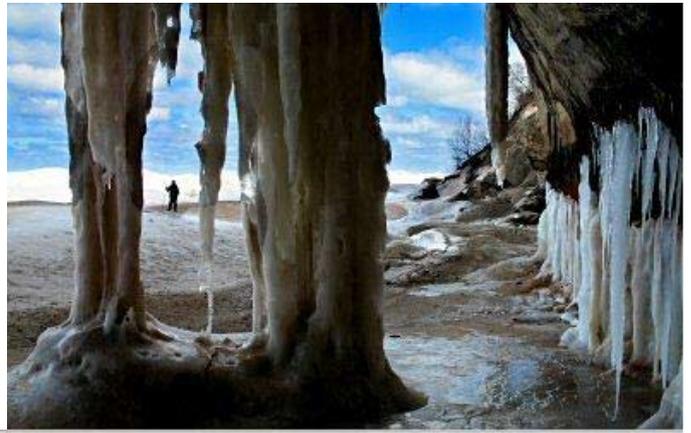
White Balance

In many lighting situations, your camera will leave your photo with an unrealistic colour cast. For instance, if your subject is in shadows it may turn out more blue than it should be. You can fix this later with the use of a photo editor, but you should try and do it right the first time.



Exposure

The exposure setting determines how much light reaches the sensor. It is a combination of the intensity and the duration of the light hitting the film, and it is one of the most frequently used settings. Turn the exposure down and your photo will come out darker, turn it up and it will be brighter. In many lighting situations you will lose detail in shadows or highlights, so the exposure setting just lets you choose which direction you want to head with your photos.



ISO

The ISO setting determines the camera sensor's sensitivity to light. A higher ISO means a more sensitive sensor which allows for a quicker shutter speed. This is good for low-light situations where a longer shutter speed would cause motion blur. The downside is that a higher ISO results in a noisier, less clear picture.

Flash

You may well be thinking what part flash has to play in an outdoor photography guide. Well, it turns out that flash is used a lot more than you would think. You can use it to brighten your foreground when it is shadowed and your background is bright. The most common use of flash outdoors would be to take a photo with the subject directly in front of you in a shadow, whilst behind the subject the scenery is bright and well lit by the sun. Without flash, the subject would get lost in a dark shadow.



Landscape Photography

Beautiful scenery, impressive locations - landscape photography can amaze and delight, and even transport you to the location itself. Follow our tips, and your photos will gobsmack.



Photo by http://www.flickr.com/photos/ex_magician/

Find Your Focal Point

All shots need some sort of focal point and landscapes are no different – in fact, landscape photographs without them end up looking rather empty and will leave your viewer’s eye wandering through the image with nowhere to rest (and they’ll generally move on quickly). Focal points can take many forms in landscapes and could range from a building or structure, a striking tree, a boulder or rock formation, a silhouette, etc. Think not only about what the focal point is but also where you place it.

The Sky Can be Your Friend

Most landscapes will either have a dominant foreground or sky – unless you have one or the other, your shot can end up being fairly dull. If you have a bland, boring sky, prevent it dominating your picture by placing the horizon in the upper third of your shot (and you’ll want to make sure your foreground is interesting). However, if the sky is filled with drama – perhaps interesting cloud formations and colours – let it shine by placing the horizon lower.

Think About Your Foregrounds

To set your photos apart from the rest, think long and hard about the foreground of your landscape shots. Placing points of interest in them offers the viewer a way in to the image as well as creating a sense of depth.

Sunny days may seem the obvious choice for outdoor photography, but harsh shadows, overly bright areas and having to operate with the sun behind you make these conditions extremely challenging.

Pay close attention when including dark shadowed areas with bright areas as the contrast will be harder for your camera to handle and as a result detail will be lost.

Wildlife Photography

Wildlife photography produces some of the most fascinating pictures ever taken. Whether it's a magnificent image of a lion tackling its prey to the ground or a beautiful capture of an insect you didn't even know existed, wildlife photography has delighted since the birth of the hobby. We've compiled some tips for the next time you're out in the wild.



Photo by <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mikebaird/>

Circle of Fear

A natural 'circle of fear' surrounds animals, meaning that they tend to become more afraid as they watch you approach. At a certain point, they may either run or fly away or they may attack you – you have stepped inside the circle of fear. The size of this circle varies and depends on the type of animal, its attitude at the time and whether it is aggressive or timid in nature.

So give the animal control of the situation by sitting quietly and letting it approach you. Doing this will also allow you to take photographs at a much closer range.

Camouflage

OK, so you don't need to dress in full-on, head-to-toe camo gear, but camouflage does minimise the impact of your presence on an animal's behaviour by reducing your visibility or breaking up your outline. Drab clothing can be just as effective as camouflage. Think about carrying around some light-weight scrim netting that you can throw over your camera gear and yourself.

Want to Photograph Birds?

Birds hate to stand or fly at a low level with the wind behind them and will naturally land and take off into the wind. They will also perch facing the wind. Capitalise upon this behaviour to maximise the chance of getting the image you want.

For good photographs of birds in flight, consider the flight path of the bird. If the bird is flying towards you, the auto focus or manual focus should track the bird whilst you take your photographs. It is important to focus on the bird's head to ensure the best image. A better option can be to position yourself so the birds are flying across you so that the distance isn't changing dramatically.

You don't need to use a high shutter speed for photographing birds in flight unless you want the bird to appear very static in the image. Some motion blur on the wingtips will portray a sense of movement. With a good panning technique, it is possible to take very attractive flight images with shutter speeds below 1/30th second.

Catch the Light

The best photographs of wildlife are rarely taken at midday with the sun directly overhead. At that time the sun throws harsh, nasty-looking shadows that spoil most photographs. Early morning or late afternoon - with the sun lower on the horizon - gives the wildlife photographer the chance to take beautiful warm images in attractive lighting. Slightly overcast days with high cloud are good for photographing animals with a high contrast.

Dead or Alive?

A 'catch light' is the photography term that describes the specular highlight in a subject's eye from a light source. When photographing wildlife it is important for this to appear, as it gives life to the subject. This effect can be achieved through the careful use of flash or by later modification.

Focus

Most wildlife photography is taken with long-focal-length lenses, from 200mm up to 600mm or greater. The depth of field with the magnification produced by these lenses is very limited, so the point of focus is critical. The eye of the subject is the crucial area to focus on. Auto focusing on a subject will often target the chest or side of the subject which means the eye isn't sharp. Try to focus manually or auto focus on the eye and then use focus lock to recompose the image. If the eye isn't sharp, then try again!

To Flash or Not to Flash?

Used correctly, the effects of using flash shouldn't be noticeable in the final image. What you can achieve from using fill-in flash is a catch light in the eye and a localised edge contrast boost which gives a perceived increase in image sharpness. It can also be used to balance the exposure of a back-lit subject.

Get Up Early

If your forte is photographing the insect world, make sure you're an early riser! Most flying insects cannot fly until they have warmed up. Take advantage of this fact by getting up very early and find your subjects before they can fly away. It is possible to get very close when the insects are still too cold to fly.



Low and Slow

Approaching insects very slowly - crouched down or even crawling - can secure you a position close to the subject. It isn't easy to achieve, but with practice it can be done and the rewards are great if you keep trying. Remember: do everything slowly. Move your hands, arms, legs body and head slowly, and you will capture some great images. Also ensure that your own shadow never moves over the insect, or it will be gone before you can even blink.

Outdoor Sports Photography

This is the crème de la crème, the Hollywood of outdoor photography and the area all the cool kids are trying to infiltrate. Follow our handy tips to ensure your pictures don't fail.



Photo by <http://www.flickr.com/photos/owenbushell/>

Use a polarizing filter to virtually eliminate the glare and reflection caused by the sun bouncing off water and particles in the atmosphere. Polarizing filters turn bright rivers into see-through water wonderlands. And when the sky appears hazy and dull on the brightest of days, a polarizing lens will transform it into an exquisite, cobalt blue.

Better cameras take better pictures - invest in a mid to high-end SLR. Today's digital SLRs create high-quality, high-resolution shots in a multitude of settings and modes. Many brands are comparable in price and most cameras in similar price ranges match up well in head-to-head comparisons. Plus, digital SLRs produce fantastic, professional outdoor photographs.

There are many settings to choose from on most digital cameras. Determining the desired effect of a photograph is the first order of business. Read the manual that comes with the camera to familiarise yourself with modes and settings. Try experimenting with the follow simple tips when taking outdoor sporting pictures.

Outdoor sports photographer Forest Woodward has this to say:

“Get out there and get dirty! A huge part of being a successful outdoor/adventure photographer is actually getting yourself into unique and beautiful places, and to have friends who are good athletes and can model for you. It may sound simple, but often people get so caught up in gear and technical quibbles, and forget that the most important part is picking up the damn camera and getting out there and doing it. You could be the best landscape photographer in the world, but you'll never know unless you get out and explore.”

Play to Your Strengths

If you have experience in white-water kayaking, sailing, climbing - whatever it may be - you'll have a leg up on anyone who doesn't know the sport and is trying to get into it. You'll know the moves to look for, the split second timing that is the difference between a stellar shot and a missed one and where to position yourself.

To keep your gear safe, carry a rain jacket that you can wrap around the camera body. Always use a lens hood - not only does it cut down on lens flare, but also it can save the glass on your lens if it falls. Often you'll be working in dusty or rainy conditions, where changing a lens exposes the camera sensor to serious dust/moisture issues. Think ahead so you have the right lens on.

The Golden Hour

The golden hour is the first hour after the sun rises, and the last hour before it sets. The vast majority of landscape photographs are taken during this time. It's called the golden hour because of the golden warmth to the light, it is the most dramatic and descriptive light. If you want to create beautiful landscape photographs, get a tripod, and be ready to hunt during the golden hour.

You can see all of Forest Woodward's work at <http://www.forestwoodward.com>

Questions to the Pros

We've posed a few questions to some photographers to gain an insight into the life of a pro.

Josh McCulloch (<http://www.joshmcculloch.com>) is an outdoor photographer from Canada.

Tony West (<http://www.tonywestphoto.co.uk>) is an outdoor photographer from Cumbria, UK.

Which area(s) of outdoor photography do you focus on?

T: Living in the Lake District allows me to pursue several markets. The tourist industry keeps me fairly busy with a wide range of work which is mostly centred on the outdoor experience. Likewise I shoot for companies that manufacture and market outdoor equipment like apparel, rucksacks, bicycles and GPS. I also really enjoy shooting landscapes but with just so many photographers doing the same I pursue this only for my own pleasure, accepting that from a commercial standpoint this market is oversupplied.

J: A mix of landscape, outdoor adventure sports, and outdoor lifestyle.

What are your favourite places you've photographed?

T: The colours and moods of the Lake District take some beating. I also really adore shooting in the deserts of the American southwest.

J: The West Coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, and the Canadian Rockies. I'm lucky to live in such a beautiful area and surrounded by constant inspiration!

What essential items do you take with you when shooting outdoors?

T: Personal comfort comes high on the agenda. It's pointless using the best professional photographic equipment when you're so cold or uncomfortable that you can't think straight. A good foreground could mean standing in six inches of water or kneeling on slippery or sharp rocks. A kneeling pad, good boots or wellies, plenty of warm clothing, including hat and gloves, are essential. It may be a long wait for the killer shot.

J: My tripod goes nearly everywhere - it has greatly improved my shooting. Also I take extra batteries, lens cleaners and rain cover.

What is your favourite outdoor photo?

T: I don't have a single favourite but Ansel Adams' images of the Snake River and the Teton Mountains are amongst my all time favourites.

J: Honestly, I can't pick just one - I have a dozen or so all-time favourites from my travels.

How did you get into outdoor photography?

T: Having a passion for photography and the outdoors. If you want it that bad you make it work.

J: I started bringing a camera with me on backpacking adventures, and was shooting as a way to show family and friends what my trips were like. It just took off from there.

What's the most extreme situation you've been in when taking a photo?

T: Lots of hanging off ropes above big drops, but a full engine failure in a 65-year-old light aircraft is right up there too.

J: Probably my first ever helicopter shoot, which also happened to be my first time in a helicopter. I was strapped in and hanging out of the side of the chopper with my feet on the skids and the door removed, while shooting over Long Beach & Pacific Rim Park near Tofino. Nothing like skimming over the ocean at 100 feet looking through the viewfinder!

What's the most dangerous situation you've been in when taking a photo?

T: A festival in South America where the very drunken crowd decided they didn't want me there. I nearly lost my camera but thankfully I had a minder who thought quickly and offered to buy beers all round.

J: I don't shoot much wildlife, and my longest lens is a 200mm f/2.8. I was in the Rockies a few years ago and came across a herd of Bighorn Sheep - I was so focused on getting the shot that I ended up about 50 feet from a large ram. He started to drop his head just as I realized and I quickly backed away. Too close for comfort...

Which photo do you wish you had taken?

T: All those when I got there just too late.

What's the most important non-camera related item you take with you?

T: A head-torch. Try packing up in the dark without one.

J: My iPhone. Keeps me in touch with clients and keeps me entertained while waiting for the next shot!

Most obscure photography tip?

T: If it's awkward to position the camera, painful and messy to look through the viewfinder then it's probably worth shooting.



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