

Assignment

Spirit of Place - the Landscape

Taking great landscape pictures can seem so easy compared to shooting action photography or taking pictures of children or animals. However, any photographer that's lugged their equipment to the top of a beautiful vista only to end up with sub-par photos can tell you that there's a lot more to great landscape photography than simply showing up. Here are a few things to keep in mind that will help your photos turn out fantastic.

Landscapes can have a magical impact on people. Dependent on the location, a provided piece of landscapes may instill a feeling of serenity or natural turmoil; it might imply lush development or continuous erosion; green with life or dim, grey, and lifeless; a talented photographer could massage these features to create pictures that are simultaneously captivating, poignant, and beautiful.



"Mountain hat" captured by Jim K.

However, this seldom occurs by chance.

Here's a short list of tips that can bring spirit to your panorama digital photography; several of the following suggestions may appear instinctive while some might be unexpected. In the long run, you'll have the ability to utilize these tips to create landscape pictures that seize the curiosity of your audience.

Use a Tripod to eliminate Camera Shake

In order to catch a broad, deep portion of landscape, you'll want to employ a smaller aperture to improve your depth of field. A smaller aperture generally requires a longer shutter speed to make up for a reduction of lighting; a lengthier shutter speed can make camera shake more probable, which leads to blurring. Use a tripod to eliminate the issue.

Use the Foreground as an Entrance to the Photo

Suppose your shot comprises a field of colourful flowers in the front with snowfall-capped hills etched into the backdrop. One approach to "bring" your audience into your photo is to use the foreground as a door-frame.

For example, bring your camera lower so the flowers are shot up close at eye level; the field will stretch into the distance towards the mountains in the background; this generates a graphic experience that makes it simpler for your audience to work together with your scenery.

Understand and use Depth of Field

If you are an experienced shooter, you might need to play with a much more shallow depth of field to generate unique effects. That said, amateur photographers should select as deep a depth of field as possible when shooting panoramas; that permits objects at varying distances from your camera to enter into focus.

Show Action

Panorama photography is typically thought of as capturing stillness. However, you can bring a unique result to your pictures by filming particular kinds of surroundings in a way that captures movement; for instance, water lapping a close by shore, trees swaying in a soft wind, a group of gulls slicing lazily through the air... these components animate your pictures; they attract the individual seeing the picture into the scenery's action.

Think Details

With landscape photography it's all about the details. The more you can shove into your image, the better it's going to look. Detail and depth of field are both increased by longer exposure times, so try to use a higher F-stop value, like f/16 (you'll probably see f/22 or higher number available but it's best not to go to the smallest, for a reason we can cover later. This will allow less light into the camera.

Hold 'em Steady

While slower shutter speeds will add to your detail and depth of field, lengthening the exposure time has its own risks. Even the most steady-handed of photographers begin to run the risk of hand "shake" blur at a shutter speed of about 1/125th, so we use a tripod, right? While doing that, use a cable (or remote) release. This will prevent the image from being compromised by the movement of your hands pushing the shutter button. If all else fails, use the short delayed shutter - it will flip up the mirror and it has time to settle before the shutter opens.

Aim for Something

Picture an empty room with no windows- pretty boring isn't it? Landscapes are exactly the same as any other photograph - you need a subject to make it interesting. No matter what kind of landscape you're taking, you want to have some type of focal point framed in the image. This may seem strange, but simply pointing a camera at a mountain and hitting the shutter isn't going to automatically result in an amazing photograph. Think of the "story" of each photograph, and try to tell it in the frame. I'm not going to say you must use a 'rule of thirds' but just find a composition that's pleasing to you.... you're using the tripod so you should be taking your time and thinking deeper about the shot by now.

Always Be Ready

Unfortunately, as a landscape photographer, you don't have the option of scheduling the perfect shot or creating the perfect lighting when you want it. You have to be willing to work with factors outside of your control and capitalize on these factors when they work in your favour. Photographs taken in the early morning hours are different to those taken near dusk, and those beautiful thunderstorm clouds outside your window aren't going to stick around while you decide whether or not you feel like shooting. If you want to take incredible landscape photographs, it's a good idea to keep your gear bag packed by the door (and battery charged) in case something interesting starts happening outside.

Be Patient

Although it may seem strange that landscape photography requires grabbing an interesting shot on short notice, landscape photography actually requires a lot of patience. The moments in time captured by a landscape photographer's lens will likely never happen again in quite the same way, so be prepared to wait for the perfect shot.

So it should be no surprise that landscape photography can be deceptively complex. It seems that all a landscape photographer would need is a camera and some nice scenery, however, a good photographer really needs a bit more. A photographer needs the right equipment, a patient mindset plus an understanding of how the time, weather and photo composition all come into play into creating an outstanding image. With those couple of things, you can start taking great landscape pictures that you'll be proud to display on your wall.

Light Ratios

Landscape photography relies a lot on good lighting. Let me rephrase that... it relies on great lighting. Great lighting can be found if you know where to look, and when.

Understanding the balance of light, or light ratio, between foreground and background areas will put you on the road to better landscape photography. The background usually means the sky, and the foreground is usually the subject of the photograph, e.g. a hill, building or lake.

For the sake of simplicity, let's assume the subject is a hill.

It's 6am, and you've chosen a nice spot where the sun will rise **behind** you (or, at least, not directly in front of you) and your camera. You set up your sturdy tripod, engage the mirror lock-up, and wait. The first rays of the sun slowly breaks out above the horizon and illuminates the peak first, because that's the highest point. The sunlight gradually illuminates the whole hill as the sun rises higher above the horizon.

By 8am the sun would be high enough to illuminate the hill quite completely, thereby giving you a 50:50 ratio of light between the hill and sky. Imagine for a moment that you are shooting from the opposite direction, with the sun **facing** you, shining at you from behind the hill. The lighting ratio would drastically change to about 5:95 (hill:sky) because there would be very little light illuminating the hill, but a lot of light in the sky because the sun would be shining directly into your lens. This is evident in photographs of scenery with a white sky and a dark landscape. Or silhouette photos. Now that we know which direction NOT to shoot from, we will try shooting with the sun to our left. This will create cross lighting which can be very attractive. Cross lighting is used in people photography in the form of off-camera flash. Now you know why your built-in flash rarely gives flattering portraits!

At 12 noon the sun will be directly above almost everything in your scene, giving it a 20:80 ratio. This is because the sky will almost always be brighter than your hill at this hour, especially in humid tropical climates like Malaysia. In dry climates you may still get a 50:50 ratio at this hour. If storm clouds start gathering behind the hill, the dark clouds will create a 60:40 (hill:sky) ratio if there are openings in the cloud cover that allow the sun to illuminate the hill. This can yield beautiful landscape photography because the sunlit foreground can really stand out from the background of dark clouds.

Shooting at the right time and direction will make a dramatic difference to your landscape photography. Understanding the balance of light and what affects this balance will bring your photography to the next level.

At many other times, you will find that landscapes can be very difficult to capture well because the sky and the land are on hugely different exposure values. Check it out - point your camera at the sky and see what meter reading you get (if in Aperture priority the shutter speed will change; in Shutter Priority the aperture will change). When you work it all out there may be between six and ten 'stops' of difference between sky and land. What to do about it? Three options here..

1. Average out the readings and expose accordingly - but you'll have an underexposed foreground and an overexposed sky.
2. Using the tripod, take two shots at two different exposure values - one to suit the requirements of the sky and one to suit the foreground. Then they can be combined in your Photo Editor at home. But you may not have, or want, any software that is capable.
3. Use a Graduated Neutral Density Filter.... this effectively gives a 'normal' exposure to the foreground (through the clear part of the filter), but gives far less exposure to the sky (through a darker area of the filter). Some quick arithmetic should be used to gauge how 'strong' a filter is used - they are mainly available in 'strengths' of 2 to 6 stops.

