



Landscape Photo tips (Updated October 2022)

1. The best light will usually be found in early mornings and late afternoons.
2. Look for interesting compositions.
3. Look for a point of interest to focus the eye within the composition.
4. Use a tripod and remote shutter control whenever possible.
5. If you don't have a remote shutter control, use the camera's 2 second timer.
6. Try to have a foreground, middle distance interest and long-distance items within the image to create depth within the photo.
7. Leading lines. These can help an image and should lead into the image and towards the points of interest. These usually work best from either bottom corner but can work from anywhere. Sometimes a symmetrical image looks great with leading lines from the bottom centre or both corners.
8. The rule of thirds usually works well to frame the composition and locate the point of interest. The horizon is usually located on the bottom third line or the top third line depending on whether the main interest is the foreground or the sky. This doesn't have to be exact but close to the third points often works best.
9. If you don't use the rule of thirds have a reason for not doing so as judges in competitions will often comment on this.
10. Vertical symmetry for reflections often works well, so this may be a time when you don't use the rule of thirds vertically.
11. For people, animals, vehicles, etc, in the image, allow space for them to "move" into.
12. Carry out "border patrol", which is to check for items sticking out of the edges of the frame. If you can't achieve this in camera, then do it in post processing.
13. Look for the light on the foreground, middle distance and long-distance items and the point of interest to enhance the image. There usually needs to be some contrast between the layers to provide depth to the photo.
14. Wait for the light. Clouds moving across a scene can change the light dramatically over short periods of time.
15. Select an appropriate f stop for sharpness throughout the image (i.e. a good depth of field). This is reasonable sharpness throughout the image. Probably for landscapes its best between f/8 – f/11 on full frame cameras (This can vary depending on the camera type you are using). Generally, don't go above f16 on a full frame camera as this is when diffraction really starts to become a noticeable issue.
16. Diffraction starts to appear on most lenses at f11 and on some at f8 but it's not usually noticeable in general landscape situations at f11 unless something close to the camera needs to be very sharp. The sharpest f stop of your lens (particularly in the centre) may even be as low as f5.6 but this doesn't provide a very wide depth of field, which is why we sacrifice a little sharpness for depth of field. If there is a requirement for a very sharp image then focus stacking will be required as noted later, where two or three photos with the focus taken at say foreground, middle ground and distance objects are blended in post processing.

17. If you deliberately want to focus blur out parts of the image, use a lower f stop such as f2.8 – f4. This will give a shallow depth of field. Experiment with various f stops to see the results.
18. Use as low an ISO as possible (usually around 100) and extend the exposure time to compensate to get the correct exposure. This is where the tripod is vital.
19. Some cameras require / suggest the image stabilisation to be off when using a support such as a tripod. Try it on and off to see how your camera performs best.
20. If its windy and the tripod and camera is vibrating or moving, have the image stabilisation on. Check the results and if it's still not sharp which means you can't use a slow shutter speed / longer exposure, increase the shutter speed to say 1/250 or 1/320 second, which depending on the light may mean a higher ISO, but its easier to remove noise than sharpen a blurry photo.
21. The other reason to increase the shutter speed is if something is moving in the shot and you don't want to show the movement blur. This could be leaves on the trees or grass in the foreground or a person walking across the image.
22. If it is windy, you can either lower the tripod by closing the thinner legs or by hanging your camera bag below your tripod head (i.e. have it hanging down just lightly touching the ground so it doesn't swing about) with a bungy cord or similar. If it is very bad, you can do both. Both points will help stabilise the tripod.
23. Use the histogram or zebras to check exposure and that nowhere in the image is too bright and detail has been lost. Its ok for the sun to be bright and also bright artificial lights such as streetlights.
24. Work out your focus point. There are ways to calculate this, and one method is called the hyperfocal distance but in general use, focusing one third into the image is a good rule of thumb. If there is a deep image particularly with things that need to be sharp close to the camera and you also want it to be sharp front to back you may want to take three photos focusing in turn on the foreground, middle distance and long-distance items and blend them together in post processing. This is better than trying to use a high f stop such as f16 or f22, as although your depth of field will improve diffraction will soften the image.
25. Add a graduated filter to "stop back" the sun / sky if too bright. Use a hard or soft filter to suit the light on the day. These can be replicated in post processing, but this can depend on the dynamic range of your camera. Be careful with hard graduated filters if they cut across parts of the image and can for example darken tops of mountains so these are best suited to a flat horizon such as a sea scape. If the horizon is not flat a soft or medium graduated filter would be better.
26. Neutral Density filters can be used to reduce the amount of light to just reduce the dynamic range or to slow down movement / blur clouds & waves. The darker the filter the slower the shutter speeds can be. To blur water, experiment with slow shutter speeds to get the desired results. Try a range of filters to achieve shutter speeds between 5 – 30 seconds.
27. If you want a longer shutter speed, you normally need to use your cameras "Bulb" function and manually hold and release the shutter or use a timer if there is one in your camera or on your cable release.
28. Use a Polariser to help the sky if it's too bright. Be careful not to overdo this if there is a lot of blue sky as it can make areas go very dark and patchy.
29. The polarising effect of your filter is at its greatest when you shoot at a 90-degree angle to the sun, so it is perfect to use for compositions with side-lighting. When the sun is behind

you at 180-degrees, the polarising effect will be non-existent. Between these two points, the amount of polarisation will vary. You will know once you have achieved maximum polarisation, as reflections will disappear and the contrast between the blue sky and structure of the clouds will be more prominent.

30. Also use a Polariser to reduce glare and reflections particularly in water but also on shiny leaves and wet cobbles, etc. If you want to remove the reflections from the water so you can see the detail underneath a polariser can be very useful.
31. Histogram. Most modern cameras have a histogram that you can access. Its important after taking a photo to look at the photo and the histogram to check that the whites have not been blown out or the blacks are too dark, and detail lost. There is more detail in the white areas of an image (the right-hand end of the histogram) so the rule of thumb is to “expose to the right” a little but if you go too far the highlights will be blown out and the detail lost. Here similar to focus stacking you can take exposure bracketed shots, say one shot at the recommended exposure, one stop below, one and one shot above and blend these together in post processing. This basically extends the dynamic range of your camera.
32. The last and possibly the most important point is checking your images by playing back images on the back of the camera so you can retake if the composition looks wrong, the exposure is out, or the focus is off. Its no good when you get home and look at the photo on the computer and say I wish I had taken it a bit to the left, a bit wider or find that the whites are all blown out. Take the time to check and retake the photo before you leave the location. This is especially important when a long way from home and you can’t easily revisit the location.