

40 Digital Photography Techniques

YoungJin.com

Chapter 4: Shooting Landscapes

Copyright © 2003 SYBEX Inc., 1151 Marina Village Parkway, Alameda, CA 94501. World rights reserved. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or reproduced in any way, including but not limited to photocopy, photograph, magnetic or other record, without the prior agreement and written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 89-314-3501-0

SYBEX and the SYBEX logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SYBEX Inc. in the USA and other countries.

TRADEMARKS: Sybex has attempted throughout this book to distinguish proprietary trademarks from descriptive terms by following the capitalization style used by the manufacturer. Copyrights and trademarks of all products and services listed or described herein are property of their respective owners and companies. All rules and laws pertaining to said copyrights and trademarks are inferred.

This document may contain images, text, trademarks, logos, and/or other material owned by third parties. All rights reserved. Such material may not be copied, distributed, transmitted, or stored without the express, prior, written consent of the owner.

The author and publisher have made their best efforts to prepare this book, and the content is based upon final release software whenever possible. Portions of the manuscript may be based upon pre-release versions supplied by software manufacturers. The author and the publisher make no representation or warranties of any kind with regard to the completeness or accuracy of the contents herein and accept no liability of any kind including but not limited to performance, merchantability, fitness for any particular purpose, or any losses or damages of any kind caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly from this book.

Sybex Inc.
1151 Marina Village Parkway
Alameda, CA 94501
U.S.A.
Phone: 510-523-8233
www.sybex.com

Shooting Landscapes

While people photography is about reacting fast enough to capture the right moment, landscape photography is mostly about waiting for the right moment. I say mostly because unless you are on the trail of a twister or some other exceptional weather phenomenon, most landscape shots are pretty static shots of nature and cityscapes.

With landscape photography, there is no hurry. You can take your time to try the different lenses, experiment with different compositions, and wait for the right light or time to shoot your photo.



Landscape Photography Essentials

In order to take outstanding photos, you need to develop an eye for the beauty around you. The next time you come across a good photo, make a point to study it carefully and think about how it was shot. For landscape photography, you need to be sensitive to the light condition, and how sunlight changes the mood of the landscape. You also need to learn how to compose well-balanced landscape shots.

Choosing a Scene

Apart from dangerous situations such as a safari photography outing, you should always get out of your car and explore your surroundings on foot in order to find the perfect scene. When a view strikes an emotional chord, you will know instinctively that you have found your subject matter. Then you should wait patiently for the perfect time, light, and weather conditions to take the photo.



▲ You must actively go in search of a good scene for your photos.

CComposition is Everything

►►► Horizontal or Vertical?

Composition is the most critical factor in landscape photography so you should spend more time composing or trying out different compositions. It will help you to know that horizontal photos exude a sense of stability and emphasize the breadth of a scene, whereas vertical photos emphasize height and depth.



▲ A horizontal photo gives a sense of stability.



▲ A vertical photo emphasizes height.

►►► Camera Angle

You should also consider the effect of the camera angle on your photo. A low angle adds vitality and dimension to the scenery, whereas a high angle gives a down-to-earth feel. With practice, you can develop a visual sense of the angles and compositions that work with certain situations.



▲ A low-angle landscape photo appears majestic and full of life.



▲ A high angle landscape photo gives an enclosed, down-to-earth feel.

►►► Balance

If the composition is unbalanced, the photo will look unattractive even if the scene is fantastic.



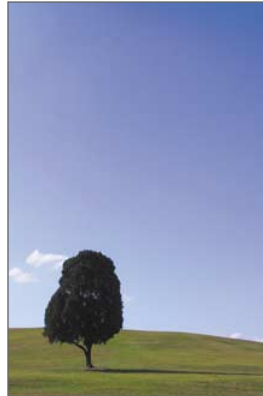
▲ The horizon is slanted, making the photo look unbalanced.



▲ The re-composed photo looks much better.

►►► Break Away from Convention

Conventional landscape photos place the main point of interest at the center of the frame. This sort of composition is fine but it can be boring after a while. Try placing the subject off-center for bold and interesting effects.



▲ Think of a few different subject placements and experiment with them.

►►► Simplify the Background

A good landscape photo harmonizes the subject with its surroundings. One way of doing this is to keep the focus on the subject by simplifying the background and eliminating unnecessary elements. This is why landscape photography is an exercise in the beauty of subtraction.

- Remove unnecessary elements from the background to emphasize the subject.



Pan Focusing and Selective Focusing

▶▶▶ Pan Focusing

Pan focusing is a technique used frequently in landscape photography to keep the entire photo sharp and clear. The effect is achieved by using a wide-angle lens and a small aperture ($f/8$ or higher), if you are using a semiautomatic camera, to keep both the foreground and background in focus. On an automatic camera, zoom out to the wide-angle setting and select the Landscape Scene mode which sets the focus at infinity. Pan focusing is another way of saying that the image has a deep depth of field.

▶▶▶ Selective Focusing

Use the selective-focusing technique with a large aperture ($f/2.8$ - $f/4$) if you want to limit the focus on a particular object. You can do this by setting your camera to Telephoto mode or if you are using a zoom lens, setting it to 70mm or above.

Depending on the camera distance, you can also use the Portrait or Close-Up Scene modes and zoom in to the telephoto setting to shoot a selective-focused photo.



▲ Use pan focusing to keep everything in sharp focus.



▲ Use selective focusing to emphasize a particular object.

The Changing Light

Besides composition, light is the other key element in landscape photography. The light changes continuously throughout the day, which is why photos of the same scene taken at different times of the day will appear drastically different.



▲ Shot at dawn



You have to be sensitive to the changing light conditions in order to capture a scene with the appropriate mood. Take note of the direction of the light. In general, backlighting emphasizes the shapes and forms in the landscape, whereas oblique or side lighting tends to enhance the contours and textures of the landscape.



▲ Shot during the day



▲ Backlighting emphasizes the shape and form of the leaves.



▲► Shot at sunset



▼ Using Fill Flash

Although the flash is normally used for poorly lit areas, using it to shoot objects in nature can create wonderful results. Set the flash mode to Fill Flash mode, focus on a nearby object in the foreground and then trigger the flash. Because the light from the flash does not spread over a wide area, this will make the object in the foreground look sharp and stand out from the background.



▲► Using the fill flash to give more depth to the photo.



23



Taking Vacation Photos

Since the camera is the essential travel companion for travelers in the 21st century, this section is tailored to experiences that are commonly encountered by travelers. You will learn practical skills and techniques that will help you maximize the photo opportunities you will come across in your travels.

Tourist Attractions

To get a good photo of a tourist attraction, find a spot where you can get a nice angle and check that neither people nor buildings block your view. In summer months or during extended holidays, this can be difficult as you have to fight with hordes of tourists, all armed with a camera just like you. In winter months, it is much easier to get a clear shot with few or no tourists in them, and this will improve the ambiance of your photos dramatically.

►►► Be Original!

Many people are familiar with famous tourist attractions through postcards and travel books without even visiting the actual location. This is because many of us take our photos from the same designated scenic spot. You should, therefore, try to shoot from a different view or incorporate the less photographed elements in your photos to set your vacation photos apart from everyone else's.

► Look for a unique scene.



►►► Include More Variety

Make it a point to vary the angle and composition of your photos. You should also think about giving your photos a personal style. If you have the time, visit the same sites at night to take photos with a different mood. Some scenes or landmarks, which look plain or dull in the day due to air pollution, will look much better as night shots if they are lit up at night.



▲ Photos of world-famous sites are the highlight of travel photos.



▲ Try to take some night shots as well.

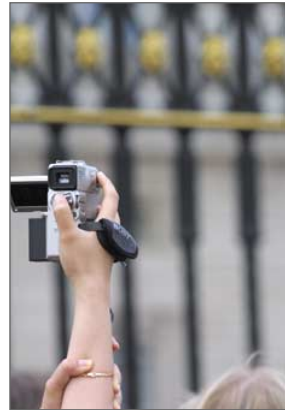


►►► Special Events

Special events are sometimes held at tourist spots. To avoid jostling with the crowd, go early and find a good spot.



▲ Scout the area for a good location to view the event.



People, Objects, and Location

Although most of the photos you will take while on vacation are landscape photos, you should get a good mix of landscape photos, and photos of yourself and your travel companions, in order to capture the memories you share together.

▶▶▶ Facial Expression

Be attentive and capture a range of expressions to document the highs and lows of your voyage.



▲ Smile for the camera.

▶▶▶ Memorable Objects or Souvenirs

Try to include street signs or other objects unique to the areas you visit in your photos. Street signs can help you remember where you have been, especially if you were on a whirlwind tour, while interesting objects make great conversation topics for your friends and family back home.



▲ A photo of a milepost

▶▶▶ Shooting from Inside a Moving Vehicle

You will sometimes see a great view while you are inside a moving vehicle. Increase the sensitivity (ISO) of your camera to produce sharper images.



▲ Blurry motion lines in your photos

Tip Taking Photos through a Window

- Place the camera at an angle and as close as possible to the window to cut down on reflections.
- Select the Landscape Scene mode to set the focus to infinity. If your camera is set to autofocus, it may end up focusing on the window pane, leaving the scene a blur.



▲ Take the photo at an angle to avoid capturing the reflections on the bus window.



▲ In this shot, I did not use the Landscape Scene mode because I wanted to capture the ice crystals on the plane window.

►►► Combining Subject and Background

If you stand too close to the subject, you will neglect the background, but if you stand too far away, the subject becomes indistinguishable from the background. To give equal importance to the subject and the background, shoot at a distance and angle that will give a sense of balance between the two.



24



Rainy Day Photos

Rainy days are great for taking landscape photos because the falling rain cloaks the landscape in a shroud of mist and water, and the resulting low contrast scene with muted colors can give a painterly quality to your photos.

In this section, you will learn how to protect your camera from the rain and how to take good photos on a rainy day.

Protecting the Camera

Digital cameras, like all electronic products, are very sensitive to moisture and humidity. You need to take extra care to protect your camera from the rain. Most people would take a shot holding the camera in one hand and an umbrella in the other. This is ineffective because strong winds can get the rain on the camera. Here are a few ways of protecting your camera from the rain:

▶▶▶ Waterproof Case

The most secure method is to use a waterproof case, which is designed for underwater photography. As such cases are very expensive, it is not the most practical solution.



▲ Your best bet is to use a waterproof camera case, but these cases are very expensive.

▶▶▶ Plastic Wrap

Take a common household plastic bag, wrap it around your camera, and make a hole in the plastic for the lens. This is an inexpensive option for amateurs.



▲ Wrapping the camera with a plastic bag.

▶▶▶ Waterproof Camera Bag

Waterproof camera bags have great water-resistant capabilities and are cheap, making them effective as well as practical.



▲ Waterproof camera bags are not only great for rainy days but also for winter outings.

Tip If All Else Fails...

If you just cannot shield the camera from the rain, take photos of the scene outside from inside instead.

Tip Caution

For your own safety, do not go out when there is a lightning or thunderstorm.



▲ A photo shot from inside.

Tips

- Camera Shake

On rainy days, you may need to use a slow shutter speed due to the poor light condition. On an automatic camera, you can try shooting in the Party/Indoor Scene mode. As this increases the risk of motion blur, we recommend that you use a tripod.

- Artificial Rain

If you don't like getting wet, an alternative is to use a garden hose and create artificial rain. This lets you control the rain and use it to mimic the effects of a summer downpour.

- Adding Accents

If the scene is universally dark and gloomy, try to compose the shot with a brighter object in the foreground to add accents to the photo.



▲ Use flowers as accents.



▲ Use lotus leaves as accents.



Taking Photos of Raindrops

If you want to capture the falling rain, set the scene against a dark background. Set the shutter speed between 1/250-1/1000 second or use the Sports Scene mode.

You can also create a rainy day mood by taking photos of raindrops on leaves, raindrops hitting the windowpanes, or people holding umbrellas. Using selective focusing (Portrait Scene mode or Close-up mode) and a telephoto lens, you can create a dreamy, misty effect.

Snowy Day Photos

For the most part, you should take the same precautions when photographing on snowy days as you would on rainy days. There are, however, factors you need to keep in mind in addition to protecting the camera from the snow.

Battery

Apart from waterproofing your camera, you should always have an extra battery on hand. The battery will drain rapidly when out in the cold so try to keep it warm by putting it in your pocket.

Shutter Speed

Set a shutter speed faster than 1/100 second or use the Sports Scene mode to capture the falling snowflakes. Press the shutter as soon as you find the perfect balance between the subject and the falling snow.



▲ Capture the right moment with a fast shutter speed.



▲ A slow shutter speed gives a silky texture to this river, enhancing the dream-like quality of the image.

Polarizing (PL) Filter

A clear morning or night is best for taking photos of snowy landscapes. If you have a Polarizing (PL) filter, use it to enhance the contrast and saturate the colors.



▲ Use a PL filter to enhance the contrast.

Exposure

One of the most crucial factors in snow-covered landscape photography is the exposure. Because the snow is white and your camera's exposure meter is calibrated to 18% gray, you will get an inaccurate exposure reading if you take the reading off of the snow. If you follow this reading without adjustment, your photos will be underexposed and the snow will look gray instead of white.

This can be corrected by increasing the exposure. Although this may vary depending on the weather and the amount of snow, raising the exposure by 1/2 stop or 1 stop can usually correct the underexposure. If your camera has AEB, or Auto Exposure Bracketing mode, use it to get the best results.



▲ Exposure increased by 1 stop.



- For gray, urban landscapes, it may be advisable to shoot when the city is covered in snow as the highlights from the snow will give the scene a pure, refreshing appeal.

Night Photography



Novice photographers hesitate from taking outdoor photos at night because such photos require the use of a tripod or other accessories, and it is quite difficult to get the exposure right. In this section, you will learn that it is not that hard to take stunning photos at night, capturing city lights, creating traffic light trails, and shooting photos of fireworks.

Capturing City Lights

Light sources like streetlights, automobile lights, neon signs, and brightly-lit buildings or areas offer many opportunities to take photos of the city at night. With good planning, you can take captivating shots of brightly-lit areas that stand out against the dark.

▶▶▶ Camera Shake

A tripod or some other on-location support is essential for night photography because it will keep your camera steady during long exposures. Professional photographers will also use a cable release or the remote control function on their cameras to trigger the shutter-release button. This is to prevent camera shake which becomes more obvious on the image during long exposures. For beginners, neither the cable release nor the remote control function are really necessary. Just a firm but gentle press on the shutter-release button will do.

▶▶▶ Shutter Speed

You need a digital camera that supports shutter speeds of one second or longer.

▶▶▶ Adjusting the Exposure

Using the Automatic mode to take a photo of the city at night will produce a photo with a dark background. You can try to compensate for this by increasing the exposure using exposure compensation. Although this will make your photos brighter, you will not be able to capture the actual mood of the scene. To reproduce the brightness of the scene more accurately, set your camera to Spot Metering mode and reduce the exposure by 1/2 stop.

If you can't adjust the exposure, use the Night Landscape mode which turns off the flash and uses a slow shutter speed to take in the city lights.



▲ Increasing the exposure under Automatic mode will make your photos too bright.



▲ Use Spot Metering mode and reduce the exposure by 1/2 stop to reproduce the actual scene.

▶▶▶ Time of Night

Night photography refers to photos taken from the moment the sun goes down to the moment the sun begins to rise. Photos taken at dawn and at dusk have a bluish tint because there is still some light in the sky. This light has a high color temperature, giving your image a bluish color cast.

For photos taken in the middle of the night, the sky appears completely black because there is no longer any light in the sky. Experiment with taking photos of the city at different times of the night.



▲ Photos taken right after the sun goes down appear bluish in tone.



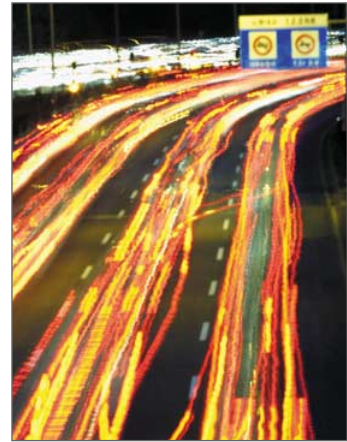
▲ Photos taken in the middle of the night the sky appears black.



Creating Traffic Light Trails

Setting the shutter speed to two seconds or longer in the Shutter Priority or Manual mode will allow you to capture the light streaks or trace the movement of lights from moving vehicles. This method captures the movement of light sources in a way that is not normally visible to the human eye. When photographing light trails, you should check that the scene is dim enough. If is too bright, it will cancel out the light trails in the photo.

Even if you can't set the shutter speed on your camera, you can still create this effect by using the Night Landscape Scene mode. You have to check that your camera supports shutter speeds of two seconds or longer though.



▲ The light streaks brighten up the image considerably.

Cut the Noise Out

Slow shutter speeds have a tendency to add electronic noise to your photos. This can be reduced somewhat by using a low sensitivity setting, for example ISO 50 or ISO 100. On some entry-level cameras you can activate the Noise Reduction mode to cut down the noise while on others, the camera automatically processes photos taken in the Night Landscape mode to reduce noise before saving them to the memory card.

To photograph traffic light trails, position your camera where there are a lot of cars. Remember to keep a safe distance. Since you need a slow shutter speed of two seconds or longer you should use a tripod or place your camera on a flat surface when taking the photo. You should also bracket your exposures for the same shot.



▲ Shot at a shutter speed of 30 seconds

Shooting Photos of Fireworks

To take photos of fireworks, you will need to bring a tripod. Once you reach the scene, check the wind direction. Because the smoke from the fireworks can get in the way of your photos, your back should always be to the oncoming wind.

To get a good composition, include people, buildings, or water in the foreground to give the viewer a sense of the location and the magnitude of the fireworks display.

On an automatic camera, you can set it to the Fireworks Show mode which uses a slow shutter speed, responds more rapidly to the shutter-release button, fixes the focus at infinity, and turns off the flash to capture the display. Not all automatic cameras come with this mode so you should check your camera's specifications.

If you have a semiautomatic camera, you should set the shutter speed to three seconds or longer at most fireworks displays. Since you will never know when the climax of the display is coming, always make sure you have ample memory space and keep your attention on the fireworks right up to the end.



▲ A shutter speed of 8 seconds was used to capture several fireworks in one photo.



▲ Use a telephoto lens to fill the frame with an electrifying and impressive view of the fireworks.



▲ Focusing on the foreground has the effect of diminishing the size of the fireworks. You don't want to do this!

Capturing Sunrises and Sunsets

It is relatively easy to take good photos of sunrises and sunsets because errors in exposure will not drastically affect the final image. This is one of the reasons why sunrises and sunsets are among the most rewarding subjects for novice photographers. In addition, the dramatic display in the sky is there for all to see so you will not need to venture far to take the shots.

Planning

Since you only have a short time to capture the rising or setting sun, you should plan your shot beforehand and look for a location with a clear view of the sky. The best time to shoot is about half an hour before or after the sun rises or sets. This is the time when the sky and the landscape are bathed in a warm, golden hue.

Use a Telephoto Lens

A telephoto lens is essential. With 3X zoom lenses like the 35m-105mm lens, you can get a nice shot of the landscape with the sun in the background, if you set the lens to its maximum telephoto capability.

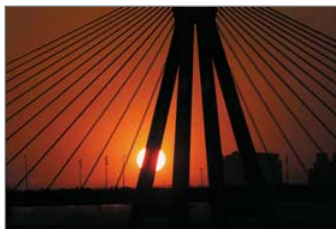


▲ Sunset taken with a 50mm lens



▲ Sunrise taken with a 50mm lens

However if you want the sun to dominate the frame, you will need a digital camera with a higher telephoto capability. Alternatively, you can use your camera's digital zoom feature and include nearby buildings or objects in your photo to make the sun look larger in comparison.



▲ Using a 200mm lens to fill the frame with the sun's orange hue



▲ This sunset was photographed using a 400mm lens. The photo includes the nearby buildings to show the sun setting on the city.

Rule of Thirds

In general, photos with the subject directly in the center look less interesting than photos with the subject off-center. For example, if you are taking photos of a sunrise or sunset, divide the frame into thirds and place the sun or horizon on the lower 1/3 of the frame to emphasize the sky or the upper 1/3 of the frame to emphasize the water or land mass.

This is called the Rule of Thirds and a more detailed discussion of this rule is found in Technique 8: Composing a Shot. It is best to take the Rule of Thirds as a guide and a reminder to avoid placing your subject in the center in all your shots. In some instances, it may even be better to break this rule.



▲ Emphasis is placed on the ocean.



▲ Emphasis is placed on the sky.



▲ Capturing birds in flight to add movement and accents to the photo

Capturing the Changing Hues of the Sky

The sky is at its most beautiful when the sun is on the horizon. However, you can get a better range of colors in the sky when the sun has dipped below the horizon or when it is about to rise. Since the sun is not in the scene, it is also easier to get the correct exposure.



▲ At sunset, the ocean looks golden.



▲ Vibrant hues fill the sky at sunset.

Be sensitive to the changing light. At sunrise and sunset, the sky can put on a show of reflected light that dramatically lights up clouds or bathes the landscape in a warm soft glow. The best thing about shots of sunrises and sunsets is that they are always unique. You can't take another shot with the exact same combination of cloud cover, lighting, and hue.



▲ Capturing the beauty of sunrise.





▲ Capturing the beauty of sunset.