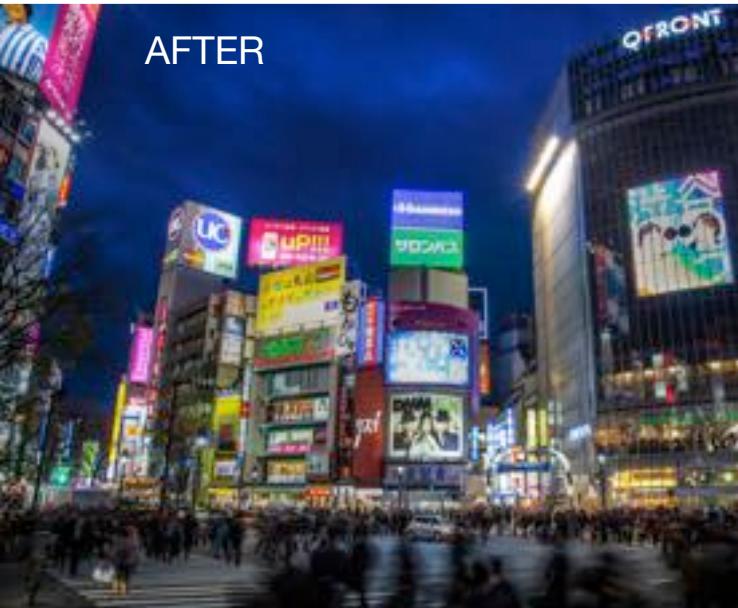


BEFORE



AFTER



Cityscape Photography

The Comprehensive Guide

Credits & Copyright

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Introduction

Photography is escapism. We want to see what we can't with our own eyes—towering skyscrapers, endless skylines, the people of faraway cultures. We long for the distant.

It makes sense, then, that cityscape photography should be so popular.



Who am I?

I work at **PictureCorrect.com**, one of the Internet's leading sources for photography tips and news. I've been shooting for more years than I can count, and I distribute my best shots through photo sites like Flickr, 500px and PictureSocial. I'm always honored when people reach out and want to use one of my photos—I've been able to secure licensing deals with book publishers, webmasters, design companies, institutions, creative producers and others, mostly from keeping a camera with me at all times and a constant exposure to photography information at work. I'm grateful that I've been able to make a living doing what I love, and this book is just the next step in helping others find their way along that long, rewarding road.



Camera Gear to Capture Crisp Scenes

A photographer shouldn't be inhibited by their equipment. I'll use a DSLR with a good sensor when I can, obviously, but if there's a gorgeous, spontaneous photo op and all I have is my iPhone, I won't hesitate to capture the moment.

I snapped one of my most popular images with a ContourHD video camera, a GoPro-like helmet camcorder with decent image quality. I was going over the video footage after the fact and found a single frame that I thought might look nice as a still. The client loved it. I didn't hide the fact that it was from video footage, either—they just didn't care. That was when I realized how any camera can produce an incredible image, regardless of fancy hardware. But of course it's always best to try to capture the highest quality image possible if time and equipment allow.

In this section, I'll go through some of the main gear expectations most landscape/cityscape photographers deal with. Don't feel obligated to buy any of it, especially all at once; your gear will be an ever-evolving stream of equipment that you'll buy, sell and upgrade over years and years. But it's important to know what's out there.



Camera bodies



There are a lot of technical specs to sift through when buying a new camera body. Before we get into the exact types, there's one myth we need to dispel first: the myth of megapixels.

Megapixels

Professional photographers know that megapixels aren't nearly as important as consumers are led to believe. Image sensors and low-light performance are much more crucial factors when choosing new gear.

The biggest reason to pay attention to megapixels is that a higher megapixel count will increase the image's resolution—meaning the image itself will be larger. This is especially useful if you shoot wide but plan to crop in later.

DSLRs

When it comes to choosing a DSLR, there's no right or wrong decision. It depends entirely on personal preferences.

The two giants of the DSLR world have long been Canon and Nikon. In the world of entry-level DSLRs, the rule of thumb is that Canons generally skew towards lighter, plastic bodies and user-friendly interfaces, whereas Nikons are heavier and sturdier, built with more metal parts and appeal to a certain devoted crowd. I personally shoot with a Canon, but mostly because I started out with a Canon Rebel, and began investing in Canon gear from there. Today I shoot with a Canon 5D, but I defy you to figure out which of my shots came from the Rebel and which from the 5D.

Sony is something of a newcomer to the DSLR world, but is rapidly becoming a strong contender in the market with quick speeds and small, light bodies. Olympus, too, is a unique company in that its DSLRs tend to gear towards niche photographers and hybrid camera models.

Full-frame or crop sensor?

This subject can be quite confusing, but essentially full frame means a sensor that is approximately 24mm x 36mm. Photographers who focus on landscape and cityscape photography should definitely lean toward a full frame camera body due to their superior image quality, wide-angle options, control over depth of field and high ISO performance.

Back in the days of film the standard film size was 35mm format, the same size as a modern full frame sensor. When a camera has a smaller sensor size than standard film, it's crop factor is the multiplier you use to find the 35mm equivalent of a given lens.

Cropped sensors still work fine, and most photographers (including myself) started with a cropped sensor due to their lower cost. They are usually less expensive, lighter in weight, and have greater telephoto reach due to their crop factor (which can be very useful for nature photographers). Don't worry if you don't want to purchase an expensive full frame body yet, crop sensor cameras can still yield amazing results.

But overall, full frame sensors can provide you with better image quality in most situations.

Here are some other features you should look for in a DSLR:

1. RAW file formats

RAW is the preferred format for professional photographers of any style, but it's especially useful for landscape and cityscape photographers. That's because RAW files are much more technically complex and rich: they're 12- or 14-bits instead of JPEG's 8, which encompasses over 4,000 color shades—significantly more than 8-bit shots' 256 colors.

When editing a colourfully rich landscape shot, you want a bit of leeway when it comes to post-production. Adjusting levels in a RAW file makes for a much smoother, more natural editing process than when the actual composition of the photo is smaller and rougher.

2. Aperture Priority mode

You might find yourself shooting on Aperture Priority mode a lot, this is an important feature.

In landscape photography especially, when deep depths of field are important, it's nice to not rely on your speed in manual mode and worry foremost about what matters most in landscape photography:

aperture. Also, when taking bracketed shots in preparation for a high dynamic range (HDR) image—you're gonna want a consistent aperture used in your bracketed sequence - aperture priority mode can ensure this.

3. Bracketing

These days most DSLRs will have something called AEB—Automatic Exposure Bracketing. With AEB, you can take usually up to three shots with a single press of the shutter, with the two "extra" shots as safeguards for what you believe to be the correctly exposed shot—just in case it isn't. You can adjust the exposure settings of the bracketing shots, too. Bracketing is also an important feature for doing HDR photography.

Some DSLRs are unique in that they offer AEBs that snap up to five bracketed shots or more. For cityscape photographers especially, this is a handy tool, due to the wide ranging light intensities from streets and buildings at night.

4. Mirror lockup

SLRs offer what's called a mirror lock-up, or MLU. This locks the camera's internal mirror in the "up" position before the shutter is pressed, which noticeably reduces the amount of movement in the camera itself.

Basically, just by taking a picture, a digital camera will vibrate. When we think of shakiness in a picture, we usually associate it with not using a tripod. But even using a tripod and pushing the shutter down with our fingers causes a great deal of blur.

The way to avoid this is with a remote control and tripod set up, but even this requires the mirror to snap up, the aperture to open and the shutter curtain to expose the sensor. All those little machinations cause the camera to vibrate all by itself—even without a person touching it.

Mirror lock-up reduces that to the least amount of movement possible, allowing your camera to remain virtually still while snapping shots on a tripod. It's a great tool for long exposure shots and quick multiple bursts.

5. Live View

When Live View debuted, it was widely seen as a dumbing down of “true photography”—the distinction between DSLRs and compact cameras was always that, to use a “real camera”, you had to use the viewfinder.

Since then, Live View has grown into an essential tool for photographers of all stripes.

One of my favorite uses is manual focus at night. With so little light, the bright screen is invaluable for zooming in and adjusting the focus at 5x or 10x magnification. It’s like having a 10x loupe magnifier built into your camera.

Some cameras now have tilting screens, too, which are useful for awkward angles that render the viewfinder useless. Abnormally high or low angles are ideal for popping out the screen to look at it from wherever you’re standing.

6. High ISO image quality

A great determiner of digital camera quality has always been high ISO performance. Low-quality cameras are marked by their noise—the grainy quality images suffer from when taken in extremely dark light with a high ISO like 3200 or 6400.

Stronger cameras with stronger sensors will overcome this noise problem with crisp high-ISO performance and low grain. When flash and tripods aren’t viable options (like at some concerts, for example), high ISO is the only option.

Larger sensors, in general, allow for more light to be let in, which create all-around brighter, more focused pictures. If your image does wind up noisier than you’d like, you can also turn your image around and own that style: play with layers and saturation levels in Photoshop and the grain can wind up looking like a more natural filter.



Mirrorless models

Arguably the biggest recent impact on digital photography has been the production of mirrorless cameras. A mirrorless camera produces the same image quality as a DSLR, but within a fraction of the weight and size.

They can afford this by removing the mirror from digital SLRs—the thing that we discussed above, which is a remnant of film SLRs and takes up as much bulky space as the sensor itself. In this way, mirrorless cameras are the way high-end digital cameras should be made—as small as possible to be more efficiently created.

The pros of mirrorless cameras are obvious: the size and weight make traveling a breeze unlike ever before. They are also, in theory, cheaper to make, because they use so many fewer mechanical parts.

Such fewer parts also mean that there are fewer opportunities for vibration—no mirror means no need for Mirror Lock-Up, and less noise to boot.

But the mirrorless models are new, and the product still has some kinks to iron out. The biggest one is battery life—between the smaller battery and constant live view, the most common complain across the board for mirrorless cameras has been about how quickly the battery dies. The second most common complaint is about that little thing I just mentioned, the constant live view; another casualty of downsizing the DSLR has been the optical viewfinder. Many mirrorless cameras don’t have one, so while the LCD screens on the backs of such models have been brighter, seeing them clearly in sunlight is still a trial, and they use up more battery life whether you like it or not. Some models offer electronic viewfinders, which suffer from a slow lag response or high-contrast manipulation (to ensure visibility, but not accuracy of color).

There are a few more pros and cons to each, including autofocus system and sensor size, but fans of each will point out cons of the other. The biggest definitions are stylistic ones: do you want a camera that’s smaller and easier, or bigger and occasionally more able? Neither choice is wrong.

Lenses

It's hard to overstate the importance of a good lens. If bodies are the meat, these guys are the potatoes.

More than Photoshop savvy or add-ons like flashes and remotes—heck, more than *the camera body itself*—good glass is often the biggest difference between a crisp shot and a blurry one. And their costs reflect that.

The good news is that lenses can last forever. Even despite a lack of autofocus or image stabilization, many old-school photographers still use their film SLR lenses on digital bodies. That's because lenses don't age the way camera technology does—a good lens can be locked onto any body, which is why many photographers who start off with Canon (like I did) wind up sticking with the brand their whole careers, because that's what all their lenses belong to.

If you're unfamiliar with lens focal lengths, a quick and terribly simple rundown: the smaller first number is the widest and farthest-back angle, while the larger number is how far you can zoom.

A standard kit lens will be 18-55mm. In a standard lens range, anything less than 18 is considered quite wide, while anything larger than 300 is a strong zoom. There are bigger extremes on both ends.



To use myself as an example, my primary lens is a 24-105mm. I like it for flexibility, and though it's not as wide as I like to get when shooting landscapes, it covers a good range in a relatively tight package.

If I carry a second lens for a landscape/cityscape shoot, it would be to complement my 24-105—I recently picked up a Canon EF 16-35, which is a great wide-angle lens and yields even better results in landscapes and cityscapes, but useless for zooms.

There are five general focal length ranges for lenses, each with a different purpose:

We'll start with **ultra-wide-angle** lenses. Usually between 12-18mm, these are ideal for vast, expansive landscape shots, but they give a different sense than you'd think—because of the amount of peripheral vision they offer, they're the closest thing cameras can come to replicating human eyesight. That means that when we see an ultra-wide shot, we feel immersed in it. Get close to objects rather than standing far away. Many photojournalists use ultra-wides to get up close to subjects and snap a portrait while still grabbing a lot of surrounding context: they'll stretch out nearby objects and distort depth of field, but without technically distorting the image—unlike a fisheye lens, which offers an equally wide angle but with unrealistic curvature.

The next tier of lens would be the **wide-angle** lens, with a 20-35mm range. These will come a good deal cheaper than ultra-wides on average, so if you're a beginner, you're more likely to be grabbing one of these. But they are still terrific for all-encompassing landscape shots. They're often light, small and heavy-duty enough to endure trekking a mountain to grab a heavenly sunset snapshot. Whether you're standing far away for a wide vantage point or want to play with foreground/background sizes, you'll definitely need a wide-angle in your gear bag.

If you want a more more versatility in a single lens, a **mid-range zoom** is a good bet. With an average of 24-70mm reach and often pretty fast apertures of around f/2.4, they encompass the breadth of standard fast prime lenses (like 50mm fixed lenses) and offer something a bit more extensive than the standard 18-55mm kit lens. A lot of photographers say to skip the mid-range zoom, since it's neither a strong zoom nor a strong wide-angle, but when you're shooting landscapes and don't want to lug around a lot of gear, simplifying can be great for saving time, not to mention space and weight in your bag.

If you plan on shooting subjects from far away—across cliffs or from building tops—you'll likely want a **medium telephoto** lens, something between 70-300mm. I rarely carry one around because I usually am looking for wide angles in landscapes—which this is definitely not. Nevertheless, they're incredibly useful for grabbing faraway details like flowers, people or statues that I wouldn't normally see otherwise.

Lastly, there's the titanic **super telephoto** lenses, 400-800mm. These guys are hefty, expensive beasts that will certainly double (if not triple) the cost of your entire pre-existing camera gear. I tried a friend's once for fun but haven't needed one ever since; they're common for sports or wildlife photographers who want to grab quick closeups from the sidelines. Otherwise, the fact that 400mm is its widest setting makes them incredibly restrictive for landscape photography, and frankly a burden to lug around and switch on and off your camera body.

Lens Verdict

When I travel, I like to keep my kit light and usually just rely on my 24-105mm lens, which encompasses the wide-angle, mid-range and telephoto span thus covering me for most situations. However if I know I won't need much zoom power where I'm going then I take my 16-35mm as it ultimately produces better results for landscapes and cityscapes.

If you invest in a lens with capability anywhere within the range of 12-35mm; I think you will be happy with that decision for landscape and cityscape photography.

Tripods

Tripods are pretty much essential for landscape and cityscape photography, because so much of it depends on stillness—especially at night, when long exposures become attractive. Especially if you plan on exploring the world of HDR photography you will need the camera to remain absolutely still through bracketed shot sequences.

When shooting with a tripod, you want to capitalize on speed where you can. If it takes you a long time setting up your equipment for each photograph, you're going to find yourself taking a lot less shots.

You're going to want a tripod that's quick to adjust and get situated.

The biggest considerations are weight and sturdiness. For my Canon 5D—one of the heaviest cameras on the market—I use a Really Right Stuff TVC-33S with a BH-55 LR ballhead and L-plate, which is admittedly quite expensive and not necessary for every photographer. I shoot enough landscapes and cityscapes that I felt my career justified the cost. I love its features and have never regretted the investment.

I didn't start out with that setup, of course. I used to have a smaller Sirui travel tripod, which worked fine to prop up my camera in normal weather conditions. The best factor was that it fit really neatly into my luggage, which is great to avoid checking luggage on planes. The problem was that, because it was lighter, it was quite vulnerable to motion from the wind and my long-exposure images came out blurry unless the weather cooperated. It also took a lot more time to set up because there were five incremental leg extensions instead of three, which is standard for heavier-duty tripods.



Filters

There's a great deal of debate surrounding whether filters are necessary on every lens in your kit. Some will argue that if you're spending \$1,000 on a lens, you ought to protect it—I use a B+W 77mm UV filter to protect mine, which causes little discernible difference in the end result, but simply protects my lenses from getting scratched.

Others will claim that a cheap filter ("cheap" is often classified as "less than \$100") will create unwanted flare or mug up the image quality. This is certainly true of some brands: it's best to do research and test out a few filters before purchasing one, if it's just for protection and not any added effect. (UV filters are common for this.)



That said, if you want a filter with some usefulness, there are loads to shop for to benefit your landscape shots. Like I mentioned earlier, neutral density (ND) filters are great for long exposures during daylight hours, because they darken the image enough to balance out the light let in by leaving your shutter open for seconds at a time, allowing you to shoot foggy, dreamlike waterfalls straight out of Narnia.

Another practical filter is a polarizer. These tend to take the harsh edge off bright whites and bring color out of gray areas, but most importantly, they cut reflections out of water and glass—an effect that's technically possible to replicate in Photoshop after the fact, but difficult enough that it's worthwhile just to buy the filter.

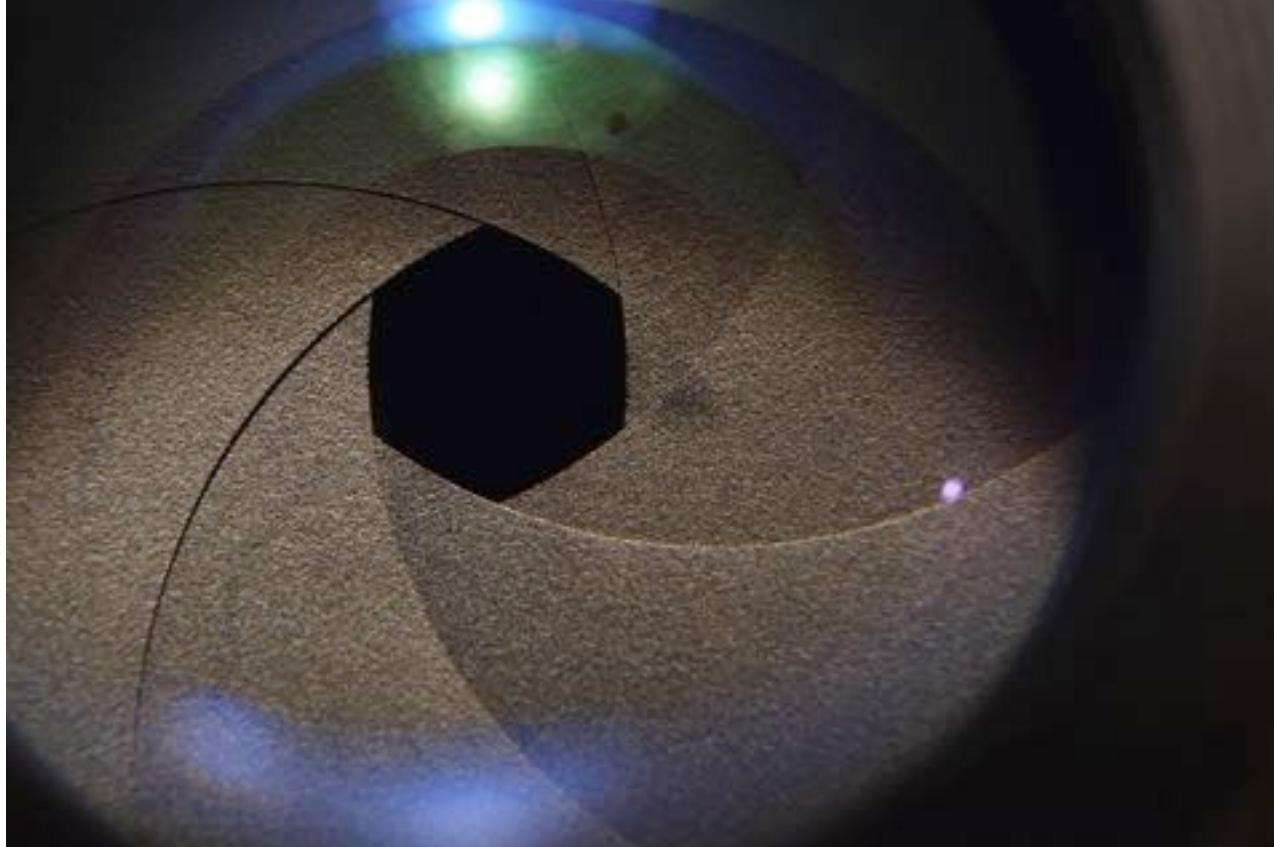
A lot of landscape photographers also like to shoot with a graduated density filter. This is similar to neutral density, except instead of covering the entire lens, it creates a gradual effect from neutral density near to the top to normal colorization at the bottom. It's purely for bright landscapes—ideal for when the sky is a harsh brightness, but you don't want to darken the bottom half of the frame along with it.

Common HDR techniques can solve this problem in post-production, but it's usually visible to the naked eye that photos are retouched like that; a graduated density filter creates a subtler, more natural image.

(And, like every instance of in-camera-versus-post-production, using a filter often takes way less time.)



Setting up for the Shot(s)



What an aperture actually looks like set at f8. [20130325-025-of-365](#) by [Calgary Reviews](#).

To take good photos, you need to understand good photography. While it's true that no amount of technical knowledge can match up to natural ability, the opposite also holds true—no amount of raw talent can teach you the fundamentals of what is, truly, a very technical art form.

In order to properly control what's in your foreground, background and center, you'll need a basic grasp of how the manual functions of an SLR work. It's not too hard—we'll go through it here.

Setting the Aperture

Aperture confuses a lot of beginners because it has a lot of phrases that ultimately refer to the same thing: aperture, f-stop and depth of field are all pretty much synonymous.

Here's how it works: you adjust your **f-stop** to control your **aperture**, which affects your **depth of field**. So, on a purely technical level, you're only really dealing with f-stops on the screen of a camera.

On most lenses, f-stops generally range from 4.5 to 8 or so, but various lenses will emphasize low-light condition, offering f-stops as low as 0.5 or 1.2.

What does all of this mean?

Aperture ultimately controls the **depth of field**, which is itself measured as "shallow" or "deep". A deep depth of field means everything will be more in focus—including the background and foreground almost equally. A shallow depth of field means that your subject will be in focus, but your background won't be; this is what's called "bokeh", when the background of an image is gently blurred. The quality of many high-end lenses is determined by the quality of their bokeh.

It helps to think of this one, visually, as a standard school ruler, from 1 inch to 12 inches. Focal length refers to what's in focus. If your depth of field is shallow and your focus is 2 inches away, whatever's sitting at 6 inches and beyond won't be in focus. But if it's a deep focal length, you can range what's in focus from 2 until maybe 8 inches.

The wider your aperture, the shallower your depth of field—f/1.2, for example, is a very wide aperture, so your camera lens will be big and open, also letting in a lot of light. You'll have to fiddle with your ISO and shutter speed to find a balance so the shot isn't overexposed.

If you want a deeper depth of field, you'll need a narrower aperture—something like f/16, which will create a consistently detailed image.

Typically, when capturing cities and landscapes, deeper depths of field are more desirable, so every detail of the frame appears in focus. This calls for a narrow aperture, or high f-stop.

A standard f-stop is f/8, which lead to the old photojournalism adage: “f/8 and be there.” It means that, as long as your camera’s set to f/8, all you need to do is show up to the scene and your shots will turn out at least decently.

If it sounds like an oversimplification, you might be underestimating the importance of aperture. When you see a rich landscape photo, you need it to be all in focus. I tend to leave my camera on “aperture priority” mode, because even if the shot is framed and lit beautifully, if the foreground trees are in focus and the background mountain isn’t, the shot is irreparably ruined. You can fix lighting in Photoshop, but you can’t fix focus.

Aperture is priority #1 for landscape & cityscape photography—try to use f/8 or higher when possible.



Select a higher f-stop like f13 to make sure you have a deep depth of field.

Setting the Shutter Speed

The camera shutter is the photographic term for the mechanism that opens and shuts to expose the sensor. Shutter speed, then, is how long that shutter stays open for.

Non-tripod hand-held shutter speeds commonly range from 1/100th to 1/500th of a second. The fractions in these numbers can be confusing, and those just starting out often get the system backwards, because they see the “500” and assume that’s a larger number than “100”. In fact, 1” represents one second, and 1/500” is one five-hundredth of a second—meaning 1/100 is a longer exposure than 1/500.

Beyond that, shutter speed is actually a pretty easy concept. The longer your shutter is open, the more light and potential motion your photo is exposed to. This is great at night, when there isn’t a lot of light and you want to let as much in as possible—you can turn a sliver of moonlight into a mystical blaze. But you’ll need a tripod or sturdy surface, because your hand probably won’t be able to keep the image steady for the full time. During anything longer than 1/60, shooting without a tripod is risky, because the shutter will record every shake and gesture your hand makes, no matter how subtle.

Here’s a visual metaphor: Think of your camera as tightly sealed box, and light as a gas. If you open the box for 1/800th of a second, you’ll barely let in any gas. If you leave you box open for 1/100ths of a second, you’ll let in way more gas—eight times as much. If you leave your box open for two full seconds, your box will probably fill up with gas entirely.

Which shutter speed is best for landscapes and cityscapes?

To be honest, because I usually shoot in aperture priority mode—I don't often adjust the shutter speed manually. Your camera's Aperture priority mode will automatically adjust the shutter speed to balance the amount of light you're letting in with your aperture. That's the whole point of Aperture Priority mode: it lets you focus on your aperture, and conforms the rest of the manual settings to it.

For landscape and cityscape photography I often only worry about shutter speed when I don't have a tripod or if I want to blur the motion of something. For faster shutter speeds, lower the f-stop. For slower shutter speeds, raise the f-stop.

Setting the ISO

ISO speed controls how sensitive your camera sensor is to light. It is a crucial control to image quality and is very important to understand for variable lighting conditions.

The most important thing to know about ISO is that raising it causes "noise" to creep into your images, the higher the ISO the more noise in your images. Noise is the digital equal of film grain and essentially lowers the quality of your images (noise is essentially tiny colored dots).

When I shoot landscapes and cities during the day, I'll pretty much leave my camera on the lowest ISO possible. In sunlight, that's usually ISO 100, or something around there. **I try to always use the lowest ISO possible for any**



Select a low ISO speed (usually).

given conditions, but I'm not afraid to raise my ISO when it can help.

Example times when raising the ISO can help:

- If it's unexpectedly dark and you're caught without a tripod, a high ISO—even if it gets a little grainy around 3200 or higher—can be a saving grace—raising the ISO can help you achieve faster shutter speeds so you can hand-hold shots without them turning out blurry.
- You are photographing traffic late at night and you want less light streaks from headlights, raising the ISO will allow you to use shorter shutter speeds.
- You are in a windy area taking sunset shots, longer shutter speed shots are more susceptible to camera movement from wind even on a tripod, might as well take some shorter shutter speed shots at a higher ISO speed just in case just to make sure you get a sharp one.
- I personally don't like flash photography very much—a high ISO speed can allow you to take photos in dark or indoor conditions where other photographers are using flash.
- You are in a busy area of the city and people are bumping into your tripod and the ground might even be shaking. Raising the ISO speed in order to use faster shutter speeds can help.

Setting the White Balance

Every light is tinted a different color—you might just not be able to see it. You might notice that taking photos on cloudy days produces a bluer tint than normal, or that shooting under a canopy of trees will tinge your whole shot green.

That's called color casting, and it's what happens when light is absorbed by certain colors and bounced back out. Cameras can detect this casting; our eyes can't.

The answer is to tweak your camera's white balance. While every camera comes with an Auto White Balance (AWB) setting, and AWB is often pretty effective, sometimes it misses the mark, or produces a compromised grayish quality. I usually leave my camera on AWB on days with unpredictable weather or simple lighting, but if the weather is consistent, it's best to stick to a single weather pattern.

Types of lighting

For outdoor shots, white balancing options include daylight, overcast and shade (shadier tends to be bluer), although some cameras offer special presets for snowy scenes and beaches because the whiteness of the sand and snow tend to blind the sensor. There's also a white balance preset for when you use the flash, because a camera flash will also tint a scene towards the yellowish/reddish scale.

Indoors, you'll find two common light bulb options, tungsten (yellowish tint) and fluorescent (greenish/bluish tint).

Setting the Metering Mode

Even when photos look bright, eyeballing a shot can only take you so far. Light, especially for when you're printing photos, should be an objective, scientific measurement. Light meters take care of that.

Metering is the what your camera does when it judges an amount of light to decide on a shutter speed and aperture. Some film cameras never had this—in which case photographers needed an external light meter to judge how bright a spot was. Now, every camera has a built-in light meter. (Although professionals still use external meters when precision is key.)

The metering types

At its most basic metering allows you to dictate which subjects in your frame should be “properly exposed.” The three types of metering are evaluative metering (a Canon term; Nikons know this as “matrix metering”), center-weighted metering and partial metering, a variant of spot metering.

Evaluative (also called Matrix) metering is the common one. I leave my camera on evaluative, and you likely will also. Evaluative metering casts a wide net of potential lighting options and segments them into zones, after which it finds your focal point and measures the light of the entire frame based on that, often accurately. Simply put, evaluative metering helps your

camera choose an exposure based on how bright the scene is as a whole.

Center-weighted metering does what it sounds like: it chooses your exposure based on how bright the center of your frame is.

Spot metering works similarly but you can choose which focus area or spot on your frame that you want to meter from. Instead of taking several readings all over the subject, your camera's spot meter takes one from a tiny area of the subject.

Partial metering is similar to spot metering but acts a little bit more broadly. Spot metering measures roughly 2.5% of the viewfinder area in some cameras while partial metering measures roughly 6.5%. It's easier to set up shots quickly and works well for backlit photos—say, someone standing against a sunset.

Flash Off

There are a few situations, yes, where flash can help you cast a little more light on a landscape/cityscape subject in the foreground, but I honestly never use mine for landscapes or cityscapes. For essentially all the techniques listed in this eBook you should assume the flash is OFF.

RAW or JPEG

You'll have two output shooting options: do you want your files to be in RAW or JPEG?

The answer is RAW. It's pretty definitive, actually, if you're trying to be a professional at all. (Or even aiming for professional-grade photos for fun.)

The difference is simple: RAW files are enormous and richly detailed; JPEGs are smaller and quicker to work with. JPEGS are fine if all you want is to upload shots directly onto Facebook, but if you're planning on doing any post-production in Lightroom or Photoshop, RAW is the way to go.

I used to use JPEGs because they were smaller and uploaded faster to my computer, but the advantages of RAW outweigh that too much. On a single exposure, a RAW file produces a much more flexible ground from which you can edit color, contrast and light.

Setting the Focus

It takes years of shooting to train your eye to identify what's in focus versus what isn't. As a result, most photographers just starting out tend to leave the focus on automatic and not worry about managing it.

But autofocus isn't perfect. A lot of times, autofocus has no way of knowing what you want to focus on. If you're shooting a flower in front of a mountain range with a very shallow depth of



Choosing a subject to focus on.

field, you might want to focus on the flower, but your camera might easily assume you want the mountain in focus.

There are three preset ways to control autofocus: all points focus, flexible focus (also known as multi-point) and center point focus.

Center point focus is the most common, and the one I use the most. It means you've got to first center your image, then press the shutter down halfway to lock whatever's in the center of the frame in focus. After that, as long as you don't take any steps forward or back, you can adjust your camera around to arrange the composition however you like.

All points focus is useful for moving objects—animals, sports, or anything that would make it impossible to center and set up a composition. In landscape and cityscape photography, this isn't as common, but it's good to use if you want to snap any street shots or animals while you're out on a shoot.

Flexible focus is a hybrid of the two, wherein you're letting your camera decide which of the focal styles to use—a centered style or a multi-point one. This would be useful if you're not sure what you're going to find in a landscape shot, and you want to be prepared for anything.



Switch to manual focus and use the LCD screen settings to zoom in on what you see in the shot (zoom x10).

Focusing in low light— invaluable trick!

Focus trick when autofocus fails

Auto-focusing at night is extremely difficult, because cameras can only focus properly in bright light. (That's why flashes are necessary.)

One way to ensure a tight focus at night, or any time your autofocus is on the fritz, is to switch to manual focus mode and turn on your camera's LiveView screen option. Zoom all the way into a shot using the screen and focus it that way—as long as the edges are sharp, once you zoom back out, it will stay that way.



Once zoomed in adjust the lens focus until the edges of your subject are crisp in focus. This often works better than autofocus.

Turn off image stabilization for long exposures

When it comes to long exposure shots, image stabilization may be your worst enemy. The problem happens when the IS motor will suddenly detect its own vibrations, causing the tripod to shift and subtly amplify the movements. The quality of tripod or camera doesn't matter—it's just a weird glitch in the physics of digital photography.

The end result will be fuzzy, but you can solve the problem by turning off IS on long exposures—which you don't even need anyway, since you're using a tripod.

Setting the Exposure Bracketing

Exposure bracketing is kind of a luxury. If you have the time for it, it can save you a tremendous amount of pain and time spent digital retouching after the fact.

Exposure bracketing does what it sounds like it does: it means you're bracketing your shot with two others, one over-exposed and one under-exposed. The idea is a safeguard and can also prep you for a high dynamic range image if you decide to go that route in post-processing. You're protecting yourself against your camera's auto-exposure settings. The idea is that your camera's light meter, if you let it automatically select an aperture and shutter speed, might get the light wrong—it could see a skier standing in a field of snow and exposure the shot so the snow doesn't seem so blindingly bright, which in turn transforms the skier into a shadow. The opposite may also be true, and your light meter may incorrectly assume a shot is too dark when it's exposed the way you want it to be.

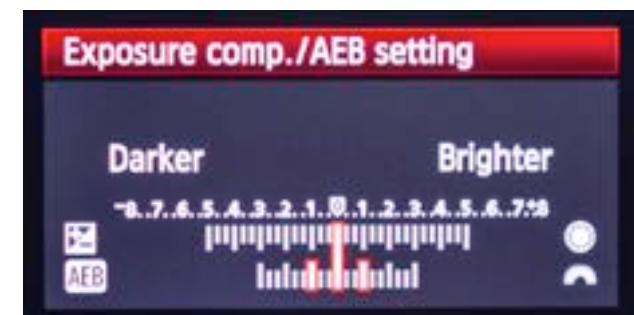
And what if the shot is a one-of-a-kind opportunity? You can't risk over- or under-exposing your shot, so you'd bracket it between two safety shots: one possibly over-exposed, and one possibly under. For really great shots I often blend the best attributes of each of the bracketed shots together for a high dynamic range image so everything in the photo is perfectly exposed (learn more about this in the post-processing section later on in the eBook).

For landscape shots, I tend to take three bracketed shots (-1, 0, +1).

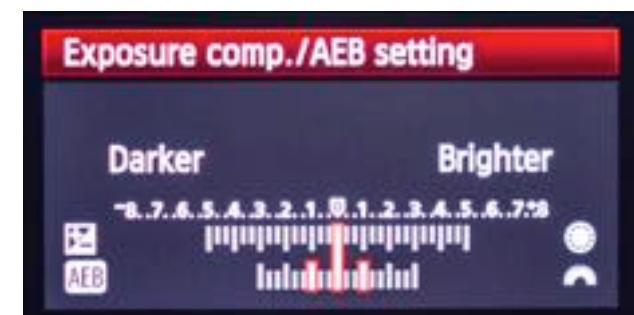
When I shoot cities, I sometimes bump that number up to five shots, with two brackets on either side (-2, -1, 0, +1, +2). Because cities tend to offer a lot more light spots and dark spots, it's good to have the balance available to you, especially when bringing the shot into post-production.

Usually, if the original shot is good enough, I can work with that alone in Lightroom or Photoshop and not bother with the bracketed ones. This isn't always the case, which is why it's good to have a backup—you can never really tell until you upload them on your computer afterwards. I sometimes find myself processing one of the higher exposed bracketed shots instead of the primary exposure because the extra light often makes the final result more dramatic.

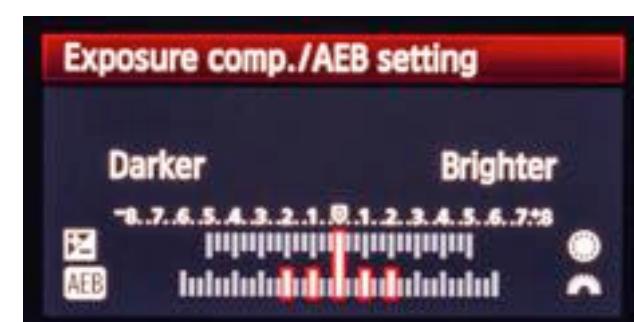
But like I said at the beginning: exposure bracketing is a luxury. If you've got the time for it, it's nice; if you're on a brisk schedule or can't stop every time, though, it's fine to just take one or two shots and not worry about setting up your tripod to take multiple exposures every time.



Setting 3-shot exposure bracketing. 3 shots is usually good for landscapes.



Switching from 3 shot to 5 shot exposure bracketing.



Setting your 5 shot exposure bracketing increments.

Setting the self-timer to reduce camera shake

Typically, when we think of using the self-timer, we think of family gatherings where one guy sets up the shot, sets the timer to five seconds and rushes into the frame with only a second to spare.

But professionals can use the self-timer also, and not just for self-portraits. The benefit is that the self-timer takes a shot regardless of whether you're pushing a button—and, when it comes to things like long exposures or bracketed shots on tripods, you need the shots to be identical and unmoving.

Try setting up a shot with a two-second self-timer to avoid any motion blur from your finger touching the shutter. This technique is also useful for handheld HDR shots during the day or dusk, because the self-timer can be set up to take multiple shots in a row. Again, bypassing any possible motion blur is a huge benefit here—whenever you can avoid touching the camera to take a shot, it helps.



Selecting the 2 second self-timer to prevent blur from camera shake.



-2 exposure

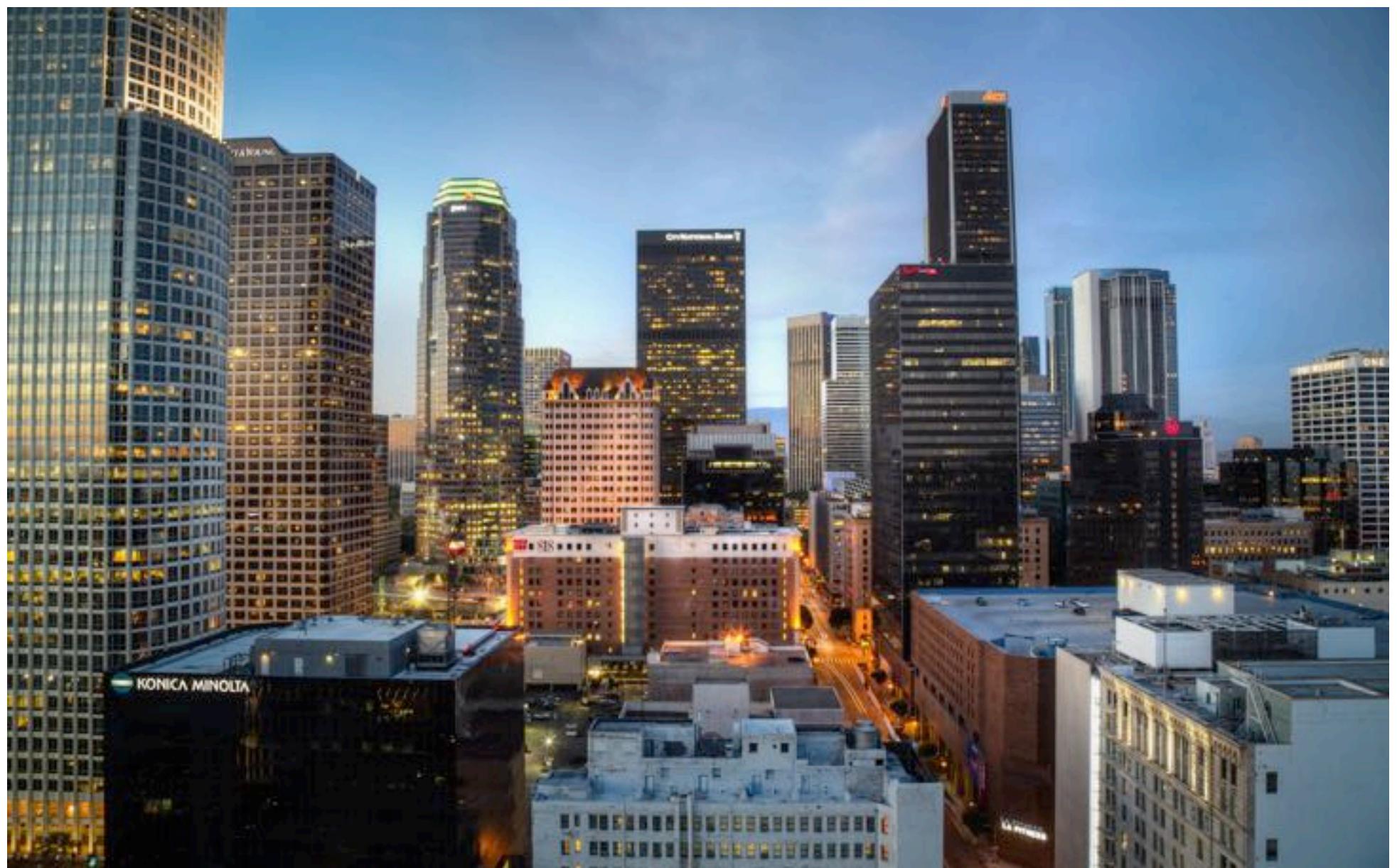
-1 exposure

f/13, 15 seconds, ISO 100, 24mm

+1 exposure

+2 exposure

Final result after post processing, combining the best attributes of the 5 exposures. Processed using Lightroom, Photomatix, Adobe Bridge, and Photoshop. See post-processing section for more info. Note that it was taken through a window which isn't ideal, but it's just meant to be an example of how to setup for a shot anywhere.





f/14, 20 seconds, ISO 320, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Cityscape Photography

Cities are symbols. They symbolize the triumph of what men and women can create when they work together, an accumulation of electricity, steelwork and design. They're also kind of terrifying: cities are absorptive monsters that consume us in traffic gridlocks. We see a photo of a downtown skyline, spot a small yellow square of light coming from an apartment, and realize how small we are in these densely packed urban areas.

Good cityscape photography makes the viewer feel both things: awe and terror. It should make them feel exhilarated at the endless possibilities tucked into every corner of downtown Tokyo, but also petrified at the enormity of Shanghai's systemic twisting roads. From an aerial view we can spot all the boats in Toronto's harbor, the landmarks of New York's skyline, and the signature rivers coursing through London, Seoul and Paris.

When we see cities, we see everything.

Shooting cityscapes isn't all that different from shooting landscapes. The same general rules apply: skyscrapers are mountains, roads are rivers and dramatic clouds make them look that much cooler.

The biggest difference is that cities change at night. A mountain is a mountain any time of day, but by night, a building transforms into a blaze of lights to challenge the stars, roads light up with moving dots of red and yellow, neon lights line the streets in attempts to catch your eye.

Visually, cities come alive at night.

When dealing with all this extra clutter, it's important to remember the fundamentals of photography, which still very much apply. You want to look for interesting angles, not just generic skyline shots. You need to know how to frame buildings of various sizes so the levels (or lack of them) play in your favor. You should understand how to see roads as leading lines and how to use exposure times to manipulate the movement of foot and car traffic.

There are a lot more factors to take into account, which can be difficult for first-time photographers. Don't see the human element as a burden, but as an opportunity to create exciting and dynamic images of the unnatural environment in which most humans live.



f/11, 1/1000 sec, ISO 125, 35mm, processed in Lightroom.

Always carry a camera in the city

f/7.1, 1/320 sec, ISO 400, 16mm,
processed in Lightroom.



For any photographer, just starting out or seasoned pro, cities are amazing, magical subjects. With unique people, architecture, landmarks, neighborhoods—just a unique essence in general—they offer so much photographic diversity and stunning, dramatic images can be found around every corner.

Every city has its own vibe, its own personality, some may say its own story. But the truth is, every city has a million stories. Its the job of the cityscape photographer to capture those stories and share them in their own personal way.

City streets are filled with photographic gems—interesting people passing you on the sidewalk, the eclectic clientele and vendors at city market places, chaotic traffic, graffiti, even public transportation can offer its share of interesting photos—the trick is to always be prepared for these moments. So, **always carry a camera in the city!**

Being Prepared

A DSLR is preferred, but the key is building a habit around carrying a camera at all times in the city, such as to work, on the subway, on your taxi rides, outings for food, etc. If you can carry a DSLR all the time, that's great - but I find this a little cumbersome sometimes so I also have a little point and shoot that I keep close to the door so I remember to grab it when I go out. If you're out to shoot cityscapes in the evening then, yes, you'll need a tripod, but great photos can also be taken during your daily routine when you least expect it.

Some of the best cityscape photos occur when pedestrians stand in the perfect spots, often without even knowing they're doing it. Since these perfect moments often happen unexpectedly, it's important to have a camera ready. Shooting from the hip is a great, inconspicuous and unique angle providing method to help you get the perfect shot.

I recently went on a bachelor party to New Orleans, and I didn't want to be "that guy" who was carrying a camera everywhere. So I ended up taking a GoPro and keeping it in my back pocket whenever we went out. I ended up capturing a lot of cityscapes and street photos with it on photo mode - and I have two of them in my portfolio now. The GoPro takes pretty decent wide angle 12 megapixel photos now - it's not ideal, but workable in post-processing and convenient to carry - just one example.

High quality mirrorless cameras are getting smaller and smaller and they work great for



f/14, 1/160, ISO 125, 28mm, processed in Lightroom.

carrying them in a purse, briefcase, or slung over a shoulder. I'm anxiously awaiting one that can comfortably fit in a back pocket which I think might be soon. Carrying little Leica cameras is even kind of a fashion statement around LA, I see photographers and well-dressed ladies alike with them slung over their shoulders all the time.

Fair enough, it's not always convenient or comfortable to carry a camera around. Maybe you're on vacation and just want to see the sights, maybe you're just tired of everyone staring at you like you're a clueless tourist. It's easy to find reasons NOT to carry your camera, but you will miss photo opportunities if you do. Including a convenient camera in your daily routine at home or on vacation can help.

Staying Confident

Don't get self-conscious carrying your camera. Sure, people might give you strange looks and often direct curiosity towards photographers on the street, but stay cool. The more confident you are, the more they will accept your presence as normal.

If people are staring at you, forget about them. Or, really show how confident you are by including them in the shot. I mentioned being inconspicuous earlier, but you don't want to sneak up on people or seem creepy. Ask them if you can take their photo, don't be shy!

Buildings

f/7.1, 1.3 seconds, ISO 4000, 28mm, processed in Lightroom.



I've always loved photographing buildings. There's just something about the way the lines interact with varying perspectives, the way the abstract details can be enhanced to create an entirely different view. There's so much beauty in architecture. And there are so many ways to photograph it.

Composition

Buildings can be a big challenge for effective compositions. For example, I was so excited to go to Dubai and photograph the Burj Khalifa, but once I was actually near it I found out it was so tall compared to everything else around it that I would have to be miles away if I wanted to fit anything else in the photo.

So I ended up taking photos mostly from the base looking up which wasn't my original vision. A few turned out alright but with no other buildings around it in the photo, it's hard for the viewer to get an idea of how gargantuan the Burj Khalifa really is.

The following pages discuss some effective strategies for eye-catching compositions in the cityscapes arena.



Top: f/7.1, 6 seconds, ISO 400, 25mm, processed in Photoshop.

Bottom: f/13, 1/1000 sec, ISO 125, 16mm, processed in Lightroom.

Converging Parallels

Normal lenses can also have some difficulty with this type of perspective. When you tilt your camera upwards to photograph a tall building, the image of the building appears narrower at the top. This is an effect called converging parallels, which happens because the top of the building is further away from the camera.

You might want to invest in a Tilt-Shift, or perspective control, lens if you want to capture building height more accurately. A Tilt-Shift lens can literally be shifted to be parallel to a camera's sensor to avoid convergence.

If you don't want to or can't spend the extra money on a shift lens, there are a few techniques you can try to work around distortion:

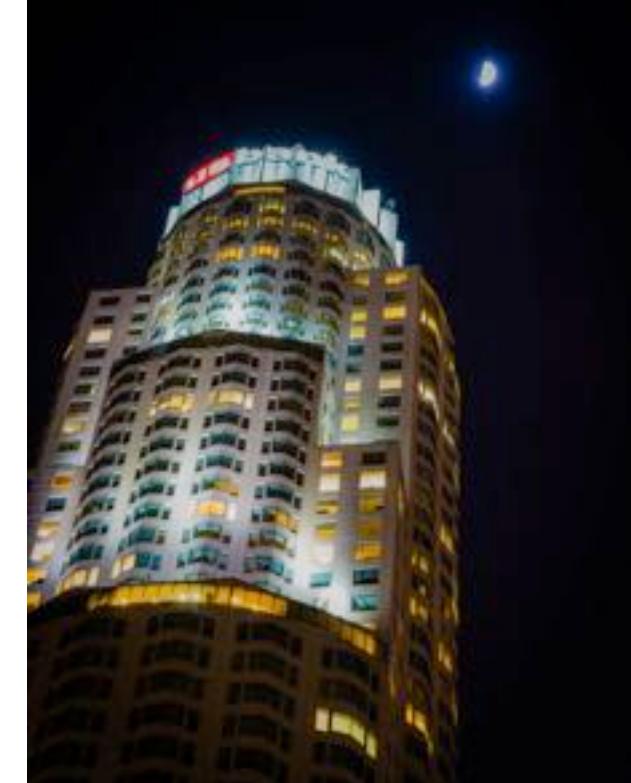
- **Go with it.** You can always work extreme convergence into your photos to give them a surreal look and feel. A wide angle lens will give you more convergence so move in close and tilt drastically.
- **Crop it.** If you choose a portion of the building to shoot, rather than the whole thing, you can avoid distortion.
- **Don't tilt.** To get a shot of the whole building without convergence, you will need to shoot straight on, no tilting, with a wide angle lens. You'll have to move a far distance back and include a lot of foreground, but you can always crop that out in post-production.

f/10, 1/80 sec, ISO 1000, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Weather and lighting

You should also consider weather and lighting conditions and the impact they will have on building photos. Dark shadows from surrounding buildings or shooting upwards into the sun when it's high can completely ruin your image. Morning and evening light provide much warmer tones and less shadows than midday.

Light from within the buildings will start to shine out shortly after sunset so that is a great time to photograph buildings. You can still get great shots of buildings later at night but your sky will be black and not as interesting.



f/7.1, 0.4 seconds, ISO 4000, 92mm, processed in Lightroom.





Perspective

When taking pictures in and of a city, it's important to capture the essence of the city and portray the local way of life. To do this, you should take a bunch of photos of different scenes and situations with different angles and perspectives.

Of course, it's great to take pictures of the city's most famous sites and landmarks, but also get some images of everyday life. Say you're in Barcelona, you can't miss La Sagrada Família, but what about capturing a photo of three old men sitting on a bench, each holding his cane in front of him, watching the passersby? Perspective helps decide what kind of cityscape story you will tell through your photograph.

And now ask yourself, "How am I going to photograph those old men with the city in the background? Where will I position the camera?" Perspective options in cityscapes are more vast than in landscape photography.

From photographing old men sitting on a bench from the side to portray diminishing size, shooting straight up at buildings to emphasize height, or photographing down a long street to get a sense of distance, the possibilities for unique city perspectives are endless.

While everything may look exciting and busy from street level, try moving to a higher vantage point to get a unique view. A higher angle or perspective can transform an average scene into a compelling image. Find an observation deck, a bridge, or get to the top floor of a building to experience a completely different cityscape perspective.

f/8, 4 seconds, ISO 250, 45mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/14, 1.6 seconds, ISO 160, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Linear Perspective

When you employ linear perspective, it gives an impression of depth and enhances the sense of distance. It is applied by using parallel lines that naturally occur in the scene and making them converge at a point in the distance.

For example, you can try shooting abandoned train tracks down the lines. Shoot from a low point, between the rails so the lines appear wide apart at the beginning. As they get further away, they will look like they are drawing closer together until they meet at the vanishing point.

This perspective will also draw the eye of the viewer into the scene.



Height Perspective

Where the base of an object lies in a photo can help define height. The farther up in the horizontal plane it is, the farther away it appears from the camera and the greater its height perspective.

If the object is lower in the horizontal plane, it appears closer in the photo.

f/11, 1/400 sec, ISO 100, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



Diminishing Size Perspective

We all know that the farther away an object is from you, the smaller it appears. So, when you photograph people, for example, of roughly the same size, the furthest one away will look much smaller than the closest person.

Shooting a location that has a repetition of objects, like lamp posts, will help to establish scale in the picture.

f/16, 1/640 sec, ISO 1000, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



Rooftops

f/11, 8 seconds, ISO 500, 28mm, processed in Lightroom.

One of your privileges, as a photographer, is the ability to go where most people don't, to show them a world they rarely see. Rooftops are an integral part of that world. People don't often venture up to random apartment rooftops, and anyone whose home lacks a good view wouldn't even think they had the choice. That's where you can show them a new perspective of the world.

But not all rooftops are created equal, and often finding a spot is more difficult than framing the shot itself. Here are a few tips to ensure your roof-hopping adventures churn out quality results.



f/7.1, 1/60 sec, ISO 800, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

The view from above

While taking a shot from a new rooftop is always exciting, it's not always easy to find a good roof. Think of your city from a high perspective, and try to imagine where you'd find the best angle. Do you want to include a popular intersection, or a famous landmark? Often the tallest buildings are the most recognizable—it's common to climb the Eiffel Tower for a snapshot of Paris, but then your shot is missing the iconic tower itself.

Find out if the city you're shooting has any observation decks. Forget sacrificing quarters to those giant binocular stands and bring your wide-angle or telephoto lenses to capture whatever you see, because you know the views should be spectacular. But remember to time your visit right so the sun shines on your side—there's nothing worse than schlepping all your gear up high, only to realize your subject's covered in shadows.



f/9, 1/200 sec, ISO 100, 32mm, processed in Lightroom.

Open to the public

We can't see them from street-level, but rooftops play home to more than you might ever have imagined. Rooftop restaurants, parks, lounges and pools are all common in major cities, and many are open to the public. These places will pride themselves on spectacular views while dining or sunbathing, so you'll likely have a good opportunity to take attractive shots.

Aerial shots are the most entrancing angles for rooftops, because they're so rare. Gawking up at a magnificent building can make for daunting, impressive city images, but shooting from above is a more guaranteed way to show your audience something they might never have seen before.

Say the magic word

Every skyscraper has rooftop access—it's just a matter of who's permitted to go there. If you don't know anyone who works or lives in a building you want to shoot from, try just showing up and asking for the building manager. A polite introduction and professional explanation can sometimes be the difference between whether you get access or not. Who knows? Maybe the business owner will want a print once you're done. *Quid pro quo.*

Hotels are also great opportunities for rooftop shots. If you're staying in one, you can ask for a room with a view facing a particular direction—sometimes hotels facing shores will charge more, so the city-facing rooms might be less expensive. Even outside the rooms themselves, those windows at the end of hallways work fine, provided the view is decent.

If you're not staying the night but still want to check out the view, you can sneakily pretend like you're interested and ask to see a room on one of the top floors; it's a common courtesy for front desk staff to hand over a key and expect you back down in five minutes. (If you're not comfortable telling a white lie, you can probably also just politely ask the front desk workers to take a few shots from up high, and they will likely say yes.)



f/11, 5 seconds, ISO 100, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

All this, weather permitting

I've spoken often of the benefits to shooting in non-sunny weather: dramatic clouds look great, and overcast lighting creates a smooth natural light that's much easier to shoot in. But the closer you are to the clouds, the less true this becomes.

Sure, you'll have a great view of high-contrast cloudscapes and a beautiful chance to capture lightning or thunderstorms. But if the weather is overcast or hazy, depending on the height of your chosen skyscraper, you might find yourself surrounded haplessly by fog or drizzle that clouds up your picture. A clear sky is best if you want a crisp view of every detail the city has to offer—including a faraway sunset you might not get a chance to see from any lower down.



Photos Through Windows/Glass

f/16, 1/13 sec, ISO 125, 24mm, part of a bracketed sequence of shots - this is the +1 shot because the primary exposure came out too dark, processed in Lightroom

In our search for the ultimate vantage point, more often than not, there will be a window between us and the cityscape we want to shoot. Most observations platforms or rooftop establishments, for example, have high glass walls or windows to protect patrons.

Sometimes, there are ways around it, like if you're on an observation deck and the glass isn't very high, consider lifting your tripod up in the air so your camera can peer over the glass. You will need to focus to infinity and utilize the 10 second self-timer for this technique.

But, in many situations, you have no other option but to shoot through a window. While shooting a cityscape through glass isn't ideal, you can still capture great results. A handful of the photos in this ebook so far were captured through windows.

When you have to shoot through glass, there are a few tricks you can employ to cut reflections, minimize window grime and get clear shots that look like the glass was never there.

Shoot close and straight

First and foremost, you want to find the cleanest area of the glass and get in close. Smudges, dirt and reflections will be most visible if you are shooting from far away, but are greatly minimized when up close.

Test a larger aperture and press the lens up against the window if possible. This will put smudges and scratches out of focus, while keeping your subject in focus, to make imperfections unnoticeable.

Reflections also become more prominent when shooting from an angle, so if you can, shoot straight up against the glass. If you have to angle the lens depending on where your subject lies, experiment with different angles to see if you can get rid of the reflections that way.

Turn out the lights

If you're photographing city streets from inside, reflections from interior lights can ruin the photo, especially if the outside scene is darker than the inside. If you're shooting from inside a hotel room, for example, turn off all internal lights. If you don't have control over the internal lights, such as in a rooftop restaurant, try to get to the darkest area you can so there aren't many reflections on the glass from inside lights.

A good way to block the inside light from creeping into your outside image is to use a big enough black cloth behind and around your camera. You can tape a large piece of dark fabric to the window with a hole cut out to fit the lens, or if nothing else, drape a dark sweater or jacket over the camera and surrounding glass.

Flash off, too

Shouldn't even have to mention it but flash off! There's no way flash will help anything or anybody in this situation. Your goal is to block outside light from getting into your photo, so you don't want to add more outside light.

The flash will only show up as a burst of light in the image with all the spots and smudges on the glass emphasized and a nonexistent subject.

Use a polarizing filter

A polarizing filter is a great and easy way to get rid of reflections on the glass you're shooting. Basically, a polarizing filter cuts the extra light that causes glare in the image.

The best way to do this is to look through the viewfinder as you're shooting and adjust the polarizer until your image has the least amount of glare possible. You want to line up the polarizer with the angle of the glare to block it.

The Clone Stamp Tool in Photoshop Can Help

While you want to do your best to reduce the little imperfections while you're shooting, any minor issues that still remain can likely be cleaned up in post-production. So, if your resulting photo still has glass scratches or small reflections in it don't fret, the clone stamp tool in Photoshop is perfect for getting rid of those minor issues.





Sskylines

f/8.0, 1/15 second, 35mm, ISO 2000, no tripod was available at the time so I raised the ISO speed to help achieve a shorter shutter speed and did my best to balance the camera on an object looking between two pieces of glass for an unobstructed shot, processed in Lightroom.

When we talk about cityscape photography, one of the most basic and trademark shots is the full skyline—the artificial horizon, made of buildings and towers jutting up and down into the skies above. Skylines can be jagged and coarse, or faint and smooth—often depending on the nature of the city itself. What's important is that you let the cityscape speak for itself.

These often panoramic city views bring out the personality of the city from afar, and give viewers the rare chance to see what a city looks like in its entirety. It defines the city's personality—and often that personality is intense, enormous and full of life.



To find the city, escape it

One surefire way to capture a city skyline is to leave the city itself. If it's sitting on a river, hop across; if it's in a valley, climb the mountain outside. There are terrific vantage points outside cities, like hills, islands and boats, but all will involve a fair bit of travel time and some physical stamina to keep moving until you find a wide enough angle.

Take, for example, downtown Los Angeles: to capture this magnificent skyline, most photographers would hike up Mount Hollywood until they found a good angle. Of course, this angle precludes including Mount Hollywood itself, but that also gives you the chance to show the city in a slightly different light. If you want to include major sites, you'll need to go even

farther: take a boat down to the islands south of Toronto, and you'll find a clear shot of the CN Tower amid one of the world's most recognizable downtown skylines. You'll have to venture to uncommon places to find these angles.

If you do find yourself on a slow-moving boat, be mindful of your camera's shutter speed. Typically skylines glow with long exposures, but you won't have that luxury if you're constantly in motion.

Consider a Panorama

Sometimes skylines are too long to fit in one photo—that's when you'll find a perfect opportunity to try capturing it as a panorama.

A panorama is where you take multiple photos in a row with overlapping edges, then stitch them

together to make a single image. Naturally, this shot is wider than most—long and narrow, it can capture a full skyline, bypassing adding in too much excess sky or ground.

Most cameras (and even camera phones) have automatic built-in panorama modes. For the most part, they work pretty well—they occasionally make big mistakes, which is why it's best to try a few angles. If your camera doesn't have an automatic panorama mode, don't fret; we will explain how to take custom panoramas in much more detail in a later chapter of the Photography Tricks section.



f/16, 3 seconds, ISO 200, 24.3mm, Braemar Hill by [@^ ^@ elias](#).

Focus on the Corner of a Building

Finding the right focus can be difficult with the city miles away especially in low light. Remember a trick I mentioned in the “Setting up for the Shot(s) section”: in LiveView mode, use the LCD screen to zoom in on the corner of a building, and then manually focus until it is crisp. This will help ensure that your skyline comes out crisp and not fuzzy with the autofocus guessing game.

Another way to ensure an easier time focusing is to shoot skylines right after the golden hour, in what’s known as the “blue hour”—that short moment in twilight when the sky’s still blue, but the city lights have already turned on. Shooting in pitch-blackness is far more challenging, and not as visually stimulating, assuming you’re keeping your shot in color. The blue hour will give your skyline a hearty azure backdrop, and make your image that much more interesting.

Just like in landscapes, leading lines are an integral part of three-dimensional cityscape composition. They add perspective, depth and intrigue to any image, all while taking the viewer on a journey from one point of the frame to another.

In cityscapes especially, leading lines can create a strong sense of coherence in an otherwise chaotic scene. Think of train tracks, for example: rows of tracks surrounded by eager commuters and tall

buildings could easily appear cluttered and frenetic (which could be a good thing, or could seem unfocused), but slice the image up with the right composition and a clean line, or series of lines, can cut through the chaos.

Leading lines can convey conflict, perspective and importance, depending on where you place them. But you should also allow the lines themselves, if they're naturally placed, to dictate the feel of your shot. Standing far from the Petronas

Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, may give you the chance to shoot them in their entirety, but standing next to them offers a significantly different, more daunting position in the frame. Those far-reaching skyscraper lines create a sense of movement that's lost from afar.

Leading lines will guide your viewers' eyes, and tell them where to start and finish seeing the photo. It's subtle—we see all of an image in a few seconds—but there's an order it all happens in, and that order matters.



f/13, 1/100 sec, ISO 200, 50mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/8, 1/400 sec, ISO 400, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Where to look for leading lines

As I've mentioned before in this book, cityscapes aren't so different from natural landscapes. Mountains are skyscrapers; roads are rivers. These are all opportunities to find leading lines. Look for these next time you're out shooting in a city:

- Roads
- Painted road lines
- Electrical poles
- Electrical wires
- Buildings
- Antennae
- Trains and tracks
- Bridges
- Buses
- Rivers
- Boardwalks

There's no shortage of man-made lines in the world—it's just a matter of where you look. Use different perspectives (low, high, aerial) to capture moments from different angles, and contort those lines into something creative and engaging.

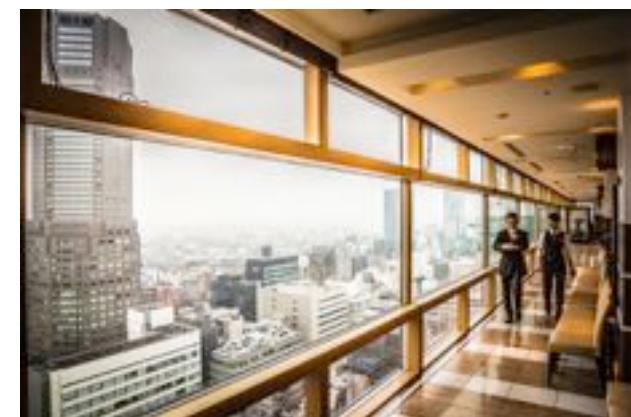


Captured on iPhone 5 with default settings, processed in Lightroom.

Create your own lines

If you're looking to add a sense of depth where there is none—say, a fairly flat cityscape at night—you can create your own leading lines. One trick is to use the ol' long exposure trick on traffic, turning car headlights and brake lights into fluid, zooming lines. This is a very handy tool for capturing a city's natural sense of kinetic energy in a surreal way, but with minimal post-production.

You can also find regular lines and simply position yourself around them in your shot, leading the audience's eye from one side of the image to another. Remember: the key to proper leading lines is movement from side to side and/or front to back.¹⁰ There should be the sense of a journey, otherwise the line is flat and uninteresting.



f/11, 1/40 sec, ISO 500, 24mm, took 5 bracketed hand-held shots activated by the 2-sec self timer as they walked toward me, processed the -1 bracketed shot in Lightroom



Street Photography

Want to take good street photos? Then you've got to take a lot of crappy ones.

So much of street photography is luck—shooting from the hip, chancing upon an interesting-looking person—that

the best street photography is largely based on patience and happenstance. Street photography is basically a genre all to its own; while the same rules of artistic composition apply (rule of thirds, leading lines, and so on), you're unlikely

to have the time to set them up: street photographers move quickly, quietly and rarely have time for a second shot.

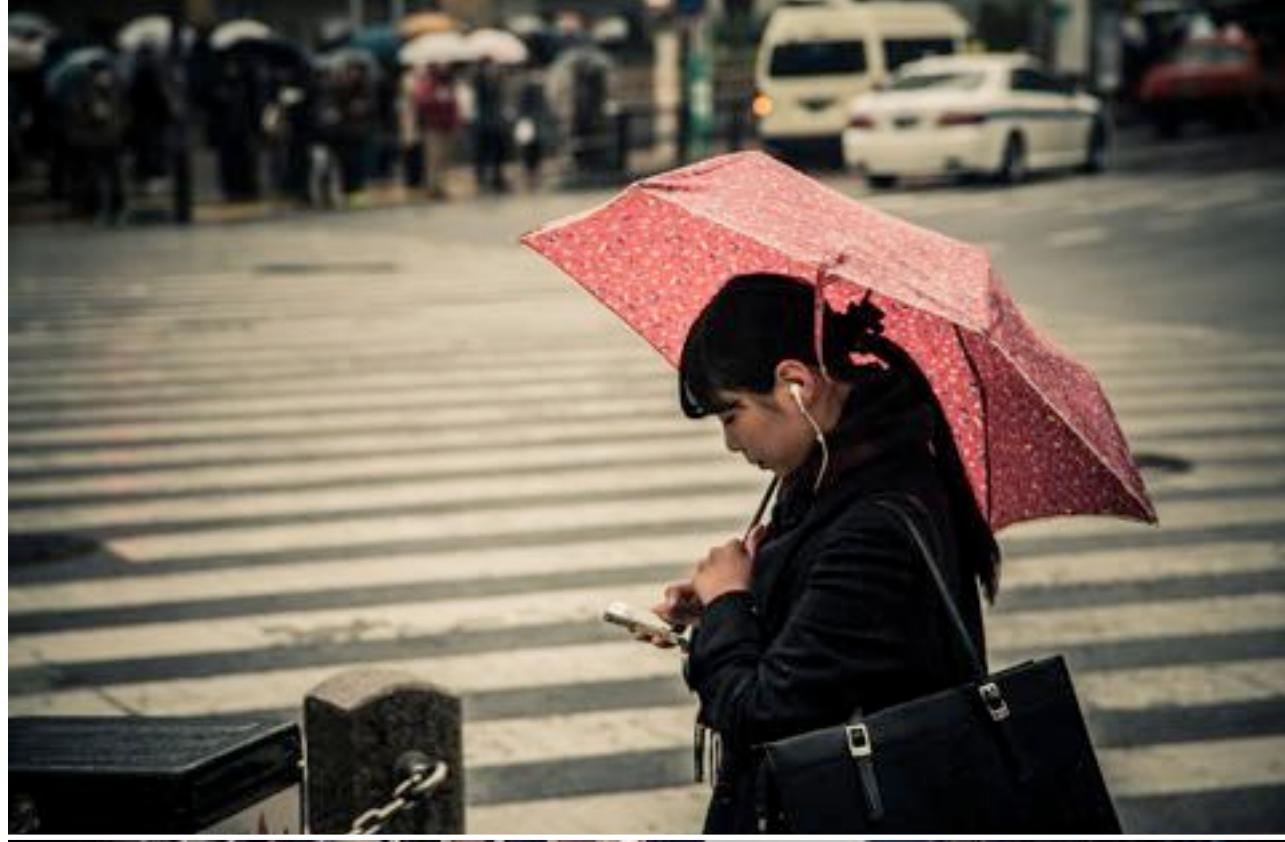
First, let's clear a few things up about the genre itself.

How do we define street photography?

Street photography tends to mean different things to different people: a sub-sect of cityscape photography, street photos focus less on landscapes and more on human beings. Street photography can tend to delve into portraiture, but often not in deliberate way; rather, it frames humans as part of a man-made landscape, capturing city life for what it really is. In this sense, it's the closest thing to documentary photography that we'll cover in this book.

Street photography is often candid: people don't know they're being photographed, which creates a wonderful sense of naturalism. This is where subtlety becomes necessity. In many cases, street photographers are wallflowers, and their subjects never know what shot them.

Telling a story with people in it is a surefire way to increase human interest. Like I mentioned in the "Including People" chapter of the Landscapes section of this book, people love seeing people: it creates a sense of empathy, realism and perspective that pure cityscapes lack, and satiates viewers' inherent curiosity about the lives of others. Much like how we love reality TV and social media, we are drawn to watching others act naturally.



Top: f/5.6, 1/160 sec hand-held, ISO 500, 105mm, processed in Lightroom.

Bottom: Hand held shot at waist level while walking. f/10, 1/40 sec, ISO 200, 17mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/11, 1/100 sec hand-held, ISO 800, 24mm, processed in Lightroom

How to take street photos

There's no real "secret" to street photography, except that discretion is often paramount. One common technique is known as "shooting from the hip"—an act of photography so subtle that only the noise from your shutter gives you away. The idea is to hold your camera by your side, aim blindly, and take a series of shots to try and capture a scene without anyone knowing you're shooting them.

When shooting from the hip, try to slow down your pace. You may feel the urge to hurry up, to snap your shot and move on quickly—but slowing down will give you better odds of keeping a steady shot. You should get comfortable stopping and starting. If you need to keep walking, walk slowly, pushing the shutter whenever you have a chance to stand still.

Also be aware of the low angle from which you're shooting. People often look bad from low angles, but stand in front of a fruit stand, for example, and you can find some great foreground imagery with people working behind.

When using the viewfinder, you'll have to be subtle in setting up your shot. Don't point your camera at someone for too long: if someone catches you, you might get a negative response. Just smile and be friendly—pretend like you're a wide-eyed tourist, taking photos of everything you see, with the secret knowledge that only one of those five shots will be useful—the one with your subject in it.

I find it's better to snap single shots in rapid succession when it comes to street photography, rather than a bracketed sequence



f/11, 1/250 sec hand-held, ISO 500, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

of shots. That said, it's nice to find some variation in street images by taking handheld bracketed sequences using the two-second self-timer, especially if the lighting isn't on your side.

If you don't have the time, though, it's better to keep a low profile and stick with single shots. It's faster, quieter and can loosen up your job so you can move onto your next shot quickly.



f/5.6, 1/60 sec hand-held, ISO 400, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Get used to saying, “Excuse me, I’m a photographer”

While candid photography typically requires discretion, sometimes openness and honesty works better. Posed street photos can reveal even more than un-posed ones, especially if you get permission from, say, a street vendor, to hang around and shoot for a while. The vendor’s calmness will assuage any concerned customers, and will give you the freedom to use the real-life scenario as your own personal photo shoot, capitalizing on better angles and intimate moments.

Of course, you’ll have to first get comfortable approaching people at all. It takes a lot of courage to go out into the world and snap photos of people out for a quick trip to the grocery store. But boldness is a useful quality for photographers to have: even when you’re shooting subjects in a studio or hiking a mountain, a photographer needs confidence to know what he or she wants. You have to be able to envision a shot and make it happen—and, sometimes, that means filling others in on your vision. This can seem awkward at first, but talking to people is a great way to boost it.

If you want to take posed street photos, you can also ask people to stand a certain way and try to capture a certain moment or emotion—working with the homeless, street vendors and buskers tend to be easier than people walking from one place to another, since they stay in one place. If you see a good opportunity and want to make it work, by all means, get bold; but in the experience of many photographers (myself included), candid shots are both easier to shoot at the time, and result in better images afterward.



f/10, 4 seconds on tripod, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

The laws and ethics of street photography

Because street photography necessarily involves other people, it's a little more restrictive than normal cityscape photography. You need to be tactful and respectful—especially in those situations where someone catches you snapping a photo of them and isn't very pleased.

The entire concept of street photography inherently toes the line between private art and public space. The United States' legal system has had some historical trouble finding this line, as exemplified in the case of *Nussenzweig v. DiCoccia* from 2005–2007, wherein a street

photographer (Philip-Lorca diCorcia) captured a gorgeously detailed shot of an Orthodox Jewish man (Erno Nussenzweig) walking down a New York street. Nussenzweig attempted to sue diCorcia, under the claim that the artist violated his personal space and the Biblical commandment against graven images. The lawsuit failed, and diCorcia's artistic rights were upheld as far as the New York Supreme Court under the First Amendment.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't play it safe, of course—especially outside the U.S. While you should still technically be OK in the European Union under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Freedom of Expression), good luck explaining that to an angry Latvian on the streets of Riga before he breaks your camera (or your nose).

Indeed, beyond simple tact and politeness—not to mention a willingness to part with any photo you take of strangers on the street, under protest—it helps to be prepared with an arsenal of preventative measures. Whenever you're visiting a new country, try to research the laws around public photography.

Hungary is an interesting and delicate example that, as of March 2014, technically requires the permission of everyone identifiable in a photograph for a shot to be taken. (Art supporters and lawyers have criticized the government's move as impossible to uphold and downright crazy, but as of writing this book, whether the law is overruled remains to be seen.)

The point remains: in foreign countries, photography culture is different. Be cautious, and be smart.



f/16, 4 seconds on tripod, ISO 160, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



Nights in the City

f/14, 0.6 sec, ISO 160, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/11, 15 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

It's impossible to write about nighttime cityscape photography and not focus on long exposures. Cities light up at night, despite the world around them turning dark: car lights blaze down the streets, condo buildings ignite, and star burst open all in a single frame.

Shooting cities at night may seem like an exercise in repetition, but it doesn't have to be. The rules about finding interesting angles still hold true, though sometimes even obvious shots look more interesting at night: common landmarks during daytime or the golden hour may completely transform when lit up and surrounded by darkness. Always look for what you can do differently from the norm—always stick out.

Aside from that, the usual nighttime requirements are still in demand during this section: a sturdy tripod, your camera's self-timer and extensive exposure bracketing.

Bracketing night

Just after sundown, I usually try and take five bracketed shot sequences in cities: the variety of light, between the bright street lights and the cooling sky, makes for a full palette of color and light that should be captured as accurately as possible. Later into the evening, as shutter speeds get longer, I usually condense that to just three bracketed shots because of time—sometimes even single exposures can do the trick, if I'm spending too long on a shot.

With bracketed sequences, you are effectively limited by a 30-second maximum shutter speed. Once you hit that point but find your shots need more light, you have a few options: you can try smaller bracketing increments, or else try the usual methods of lightening photos—higher ISO, lower f-stop, or a single exposure longer than 30 seconds using a remote shutter.

Night photography can be tricky, so find a good spot and get comfy. You're going to have to take some time to figure out the best method of capturing night lights on a case-by-case basis.



f/14, 25 seconds, ISO 125, 16mm, processed in Lightroom



Bringing out sunstars at night

Remember the rules about sunstars from the landscape section? Squint your eyes at a bright light and you'll recall that they shoot beams out like little stars. Well, this works for more than just the sun—it applies to every building light at night, too.

Putting the stars above with stars below can be a very poetic photographic technique. Use a higher f-stop to create the starburst effect out of anything from lit-up condo windows to streetlamps. If you're hoping for a more realistic, subdued feeling, use a lower f-stop and counterbalance that lightness with a lower ISO.

Focal lengths also have an effect on this phenomenon. Although we usually want to use wide angle lenses for cityscapes, longer focal lengths will increase the size of the starburst effects.

Patience is a virtue

Cities are moving, living things, and snapping two relatively quick single-exposure shots of a city at night can give wildly different results.

The fact is, when your shot includes busy roads, your composition is at the whim of traffic and pedestrians. We'll deal with tackling those contents with long exposures in the next few chapters; if you're not using an especially long exposure to slur together cars into long streaks of yellow and red, you can create different light patterns with headlights moving down highways and roads, and find people moving in different directions. In these scenarios, it's best to shoot a variety of shots at different times and wait for the best pattern to emerge.



Higher apertures combined with a longer focal length cause sunburst effects on each light source, f/11, 4 seconds, ISO 4000, 50mm.



f/11, 1/20 sec, ISO 800, 28mm, processed in Lightroom.

Motion from Traffic

Moving traffic is like a city's bloodstream—it's always moving, pulsating through veiny streets, bringing images to life. Capturing traffic in a city is almost inevitable, and while it's hard to shoot it "wrong" by simply taking a long-exposure shot of any length, it can also be hard to control the exact shot you want.

f/13, 13 seconds, ISO 400, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/14, 1.3 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Choose a speed, any speed

When it comes to traffic moving in the evening, you have a few technical options to catch a cool scene. It all boils down to shutter speed: a slower speed will blur the traffic more, while a faster speed will blur it less.

That much is obvious. But what's less obvious are the qualitative associations we make about blurring traffic. People often assume that more

motion blur is better, but that isn't always the case. Using a super-long exposure against a small amount of traffic won't make the image look better—it'll make it look desolate. (Which might be what you're going for, of course, but if your intention is to show a bustling city, that won't be the best way.)

Whatever shutter speed you choose will largely depend on the time of night and what other settings you're working with. If you have a set aperture in mind, you'll need to wait for the time of evening to match your desired ISO speed. Try waiting a while for the sky to change colors, and you'll find your traffic blur will necessarily change, too. There's no "right" or "wrong" exposure—just what you're going for.



f/9, 20 seconds, ISO 320, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Where the wild cars are

Finding the right location for heavy traffic can be tricky. You've got to know a city pretty well, or at least have an idea of where the congested thoroughfares will be. In general, though, I find these areas tend to work very well with on-camera traffic:

- **Intersections**
- **Bridges from above or below**
- **Highway overpasses**
- **Road corners**
- **Forks in the road**
- **Tight uphill switchbacks**
- **Stop signs**
- **Bus stops**

The common theme here is movement—traffic in a straight line can maybe be interesting if you've got some variety in the shot (maybe skyscrapers or a city icon nearby), but failing that, you're going to want to see some movement, leading lines and curves. That's why bent roads and intersections work so well—you can create light lines out of conflict, movement and chaos.

Playing with light density is also very cool—when cars stop the density of their light will grow in the final product, or might even be completely still during a shot, which is why working with stop signs and bus stops often works so well. When one car has stopped but others are moving, it creates a sense of emotion, isolation and dynamism on the screen that's hard to capture any other way. Variety is the key.

The color of cars

Tired of working with black, blue and green cars? Look for taxis and buses—often their distinct colors will show up on slower long exposures (especially at night), making for great subjects.

Of course, other cars work well in this scenario, too; they're just harder to find. Because shooting at night will inevitably be so dark, any time you find a splash of color—a red convertible, a yellow taxi, a blue bus—shoot it. In cities where things mesh together so often, you've got to grab any chance you can to make a unique impression.

Shutter Speed Comparisons: In the following three images watch the effect of shutter speed length on traffic moving across a bridge as it gets darker in the evening. All other settings constant (f/13, ISO 400) shooting in aperture priority.



I sat on this hill overlooking San Francisco shortly after sunset and took photos for an hour while eating a Clif Bar - ended up having so much fun! None of these shutter speeds were "right" or "wrong", it just depends what lighting conditions and lighting effects you like best. Get out there and try it for yourself!

0.6 seconds.



3.2 seconds.



10 seconds.



Motion from Pedestrians

f/11, 3.2 seconds, ISO 500, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Cities harbor people. Sometimes they're unavoidable, sometimes they're nowhere to be found. If you're shooting in a city by yourself, the best thing you can do is prepare for any type of shot and take what you get, because it can be very difficult (read: impossible) to control huge swaths of human beings all at once.

Let's set aside the fact that predicting the turnout of large groups is putting your faith in chance. Even when you're faced with a large mass of souls, you have no idea what they're doing, where they're going or how quickly they're going there. Some will stop in the middle of your shot; some will stop *before* entering your shot, hoping to avoid it. People are beautifully unpredictable that way—embrace it.



f/14, 0.5 sec, ISO 125, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Predicting the unpredictable

As with every situation, the best way to deal with this is by taking a variety of shots from a variety of angles and shutter speeds. If you're worried about freaking out a particular person or group, simply move and try a different angle on the same scene. As with moving traffic, you'll find different patterns emerge from long exposures of human movement. When I want to show motion from crowds I find that shutter speeds between 1-5 seconds usually work well. Any shutter speeds longer than that the people tend to kind of disappear into a blurry mess.

Sometimes you'll encounter excessive politeness: even if you want people to move in front of your camera, adding to the dynamism of the scene, they'll stop, stare and smile. You can tell them it's okay to walk through, but even then, they might not understand—especially in foreign countries. For example, in China, I once was trying to take some photos of a large group of people, only to have as many as 10 stop before they entered the frame, snapping photos of me with their camera phones.



f/16, 1.3 seconds, ISO 250, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/13, 1 second, ISO 100, 24mm.

Since they built it, they will come

Where do you find people to shoot? While still generally unpredictable based on the time of day, time of year and day of the week, there are some sure-fire options for finding groups en masse:

- Public squares
- Major intersections
- City lookouts
- Building observatories
- Landmarks
- Street festivals
- Markets
- Protests

When it comes to intersections, some bigger cities—New York, Tokyo, Toronto—will have four-way crosswalks, where pedestrians stream across in all directions, stopping cars on all four sides of the intersection. These make especially great hectic shots, with cloudy masses surrounded by headlights and condo lights.

Standing out in a crowd

Observation decks and landmarks are good options, too, for finding a few people standing still, and contrasting them in an ever-moving crowd. Some of the most effective long-exposure shots are born out of a variety of motion, with some people moving and others standing still. Photographing tourists taking photos can be a great meta-approach to finding definition in a crowd.

Try to find people who will remain fairly static, and you can achieve terrific results. Shoot a busker, homeless person or anyone sitting on a park bench or waiting for a bus to achieve that “world passing them by” effect, where everyone is moving and ignoring them, but they remain still and in-focus.

Reflections



f/11, 1.3 seconds, ISO 125, 16mm,
Rainy day in Paris, France.

Cities are overwhelming beasts. Bright lights, steel rods, red signs, quick cars, tall towers—they’re intimidating and chaotic, lively and engaging. Sometimes overwhelming is good: it gives a sense of intrigue and power, and makes the viewer wonder what’s going on behind the lights.

Reflections can really amplify that sense of wonder, or they can break it up to give the viewers’ eyes a rest. And you can find them anywhere.

Glass buildings, for example, mirror their surroundings excellently, day or night. They can emit an eerie doppelganger effect, or completely blend a building into its surroundings. Combined with a long exposure at night, those city lights can really pop.

Another good opportunity is right after a rainfall, when asphalt is dotted with little reflective ponds that bring out whole new texture that few photographers are lucky enough to capture, but which pretty much always looks great. (If you want a film noir look, there’s no better opportunity.)

Or you can shoot even bigger to make cities look smaller. Grab a wide-angle lens and shoot far from a city to capture a skyline’s reflection in a nearby body of water. Most cities were built on water—rivers, lakes, bays—depending on the time of day and quality of water, any of these can produce a beautiful, soothing replica of the cityscape above.



f/9, 5 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Tips for shooting reflections

Here’s a list of some great reflective surfaces you can find in every cityscape:

- Glass buildings
- Car windows
- Rivers
- Park ponds
- Rain puddles
- Bays and harbors
- Rearview mirrors
- Storefronts

When framing your reflection shots, try to avoid an angle where direct light hits the water or mirror. This will often create a glare that shoots your exposure to hell. Instead, angle yourself so that the light hits your subject that’s being reflected. For example, if you’re shooting a reflection of Tokyo SkyTree in a pond, try to shoot at a time when the SkyTree is illuminated by the sun—it’ll pop right out of the water.

Lens filters are also helpful for this. A graduated density filter can even out the difference in levels between a darker reflection and the rest of your city without needing to hop into Photoshop afterwards. If you do decide to manually edit the shot afterwards, take care not to go crazy—the reflection should still be darker than the “reality” around it, otherwise it’ll look off.



f/13, 1/320 sec, ISO 400, 24mm, processed in Lightroom

Patterns

Patterns have the ability to bring a sense of visual rhythm and harmony to an image. While at first sight, a common city scene may appear dull or bland, focusing on repeating strong graphic elements, like shapes, lines, colors or forms, will draw the viewer's attention and make the whole thing a lot more interesting.

There's something fundamentally pleasing about seeing order in a way that we may

not expect. In most cases, repetition is a tool used to relax the viewer, making them feel at peace while enjoying the view.

When used effectively, patterns can transform an otherwise drab cityscape image into something that is eye-catching and beautiful.

Once you embrace patterns as powerful photographic elements, you will start to notice them everywhere: in brick laying

patterns, rows of buildings against a park, grids of windows, lines of trees in a city park, etc. Patterns are all around the city, you just have to look.

The key is to be aware of your surroundings as you go about your daily life and carry a camera at all times! Look around with a fresh eye, you'll start to see familiar, ordinary surroundings as new, compelling images.



f/10, 1/200 sec, ISO 800. 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/7.1, 1/400 sec, ISO 500, 35mm, processed in Lightroom.

Explore different angles

Amazing patterns can be found anywhere, but in a city you will be surprised by what appears when you explore different vantage points, especially from up high. You might not notice the beautiful interplay of different colored umbrellas passing you on the sidewalk, but the scene changes drastically from above. Get to a high window or rooftop to gain a new perspective.

Explore potential subjects from a bunch of different angles. A recurring pattern often happens without the help of the photographer, but you can change everything by shooting from unique angles and getting a new perspective on the lines or shapes.

If you have the chance to get high above the scene, do it. A tall bridge or rooftop will let you see city patterns that occur in traffic, parks and urban architecture.

Man-made patterns

Symmetry and pattern is widely used in man-made structures—bridges, buildings or houses of similar sizes, symmetrical windows and doors, even brickwork is designed with aesthetic purpose. Architects implement patterns into their work for the same reasons photographers seek them out: they are pleasing to the eye and bring a sense of unanimity and harmony.

Again, if you can get up high to capture aerial views of the city, you will see man-made patterns all around. Look for repetition in windows, balconies, apartment and housing complexes. Seek out the repeating colors, lines, shapes that architects have incorporated into their designs.

Using patterns in your cityscape scene will add an engaging element to your final image.

Break the pattern

As I talked about in the Landscapes section, a common technique to keep repetition from becoming boring is to deliberately “break” the pattern. This applies in cityscape photography too. Think of a line of taxi cabs with one red sports car in the middle. This technique is often referred to as creating a “Spot”.

A spot is a deliberate use of resistance to force the viewer to make a double-take. It may seem simple, but changing an element in your shot can make the difference between boring and engaging.

The great thing about photographing patterns in the city is that you don’t need any special equipment, just a well-trained eye and a unique vantage point.

Daytime in the City

Shooting skylines in the daytime can be tricky because the light is usually harsh and direct, so many photographers try to avoid this and opt for twilight or night photography. But it is a different story on street level within city.

While harsh sunlight is not ideal for open areas, the lighting elements that usually make daytime shooting tricky can be used to your advantage within the city. Buildings can block out a lot of direct light and create really interesting lighting conditions, like shade mixed with reflected light off the various materials used to coat buildings and windows.

If photographed within the right context, shadows add contrast and depth. Reflections from glass and metal buildings add a sense of wonder. Colors are amplified. These enhancements can't be captured at twilight because the light balances everything out.

f/11, 1/100 sec, ISO 200, 65mm, processed in Lightroom



What to photograph during the day

Look for elements that will really stand out. Drastic reflections can be beautiful so, depending on the time of day and position of the sun, the shiny surfaces of glass or metal buildings are great. You also want to keep an eye out for strong, bright colors. Reds, blues and greens provide nice, bright contrasts, but you can also focus on things like rust which will be emphasized and incredibly detailed in direct light.



Difficult daytime exposure

Photographing cities means capturing a number of different elements in one frame, which can be troublesome for proper exposure when shooting during the day. Your camera can't capture the very dark and the very bright at the same time, instead it will meter to one or the other. So, you'll get clear shots of sky and clouds with dark shadows under trees or other objects in the frame or clear shady areas with blown out bright areas. Bracketing can help with this but not completely.

One way to combat this is to avoid super bright clouds in your composition. White clouds are usually too bright compared to a building, for example, so eliminating clouds from the photo will make getting the right exposure easier. A clear blue sky in the background will allow you to expose for the building and make simple lightening adjustments to the sky in post-production.

Try to keep the sun behind you. By having the sunlight fall directly on your subject, you can balance it out with the already bright sky, at the same time bringing out bright colors and enhancing details.

You can also isolate your subject to minimize exposure issues. If your camera doesn't have to capture too many different extremes in terms of light, the image will be clear and vibrant.

f/7.1, 1/800 sec, ISO 500, 16mm, processed in Lightroom.

Dealing with reflections

Buildings have a big effect on reflecting light and shadows and on the amount of light reaching street level. This can either be a hinderance or something you can embrace.

Modern architecture employs a lot of shiny surfaces and sometimes the light reflected from these buildings can be too much. Look at the Vdara "Death Ray" for example. Vdara was a new hotel in Las Vegas and when it opened the curve of the building combined with the glass was creating magnified light that reflected into the pool area with such intensity that it was burning people. Reporters covering the story would bring plastic bottles and watch them melt before their eyes. Just one example of how buildings can have a profound effect on lighting conditions at street level.

Camera-melting heat aside, photographing that kind of reflection can be hard. But, using the light of the reflection to capture a subject at ground level works to your advantage. It's just a matter of finding the right subject and using the dramatic daytime lighting conditions to bring out its magic.

Bad Weather = Moody City

f/11, 0.6 seconds, ISO 125, 27mm, Cityscape of Singapore.



True, shooting in bad weather comes with some challenges, but also a few really cool benefits. When everyone else is running for cover, the weather-braving photographer has the city to himself, making for an easy, peaceful cityscape photoshoot that can produce moody, eerie, Gotham City-like images.

Grey, dull cloud cover, heavy rain, fog, strong winds, whatever terrible weather Mother Nature throws your way can actually be transformed into something wonderful—if you know what to look for. The thing about bad weather is that it has the ability to create great lighting, which if used with the right subject, can add a sense of moodiness and drama.

Overcast is good

Overcast skies can be an urban photographers best friend because they are basically their own softbox. Shooting in direct sunlight comes with harsh shadows, but a cloud covered sky will diffuse the sun for even, full lighting.

A cloudy day offers great lighting all around. Because the scene will be more evenly illuminated, you'll be able to get detailed shots of city buildings without glare or shadows and capture contrasting colors more effectively.

You might even get lucky and catch a few rays of sun poking through the clouds to add a spotlight effect to your images.



f/11, 1 second, ISO 125, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

A wet city can be beautifully dramatic

I'll get to how amazing it can be to photograph the city and people on the street in the rain up ahead, but even after a rain shower, the city can be astonishingly beautiful. When the roads are wet you can capture reflections of traffic lights, street lamps, any light from a bustling city street, making the scene that much more interesting.

Even fog can make for great photos as it reduces contrast and dulls the scene, providing a moody atmosphere around the city. Finding an amazing vantage point will also give your image that extra edge, so try to grab a moody skyline photo of the city from a distant vantage point like a bridge or high building.



Things to remember when shooting in bad weather

While most temperamental weather is safe to venture out in, it should go without saying that if the weather is exceptionally bad, it's not worth the risk. In LA for example people don't know how to drive when moisture gets onto the streets and end up crashing their cars all over the place, stay vigilant out there.

Since rain and cloudy skies restrict available light, you may have to go with a higher ISO and/or wider aperture. Shooting in aperture priority mode will mean you only have to worry about perfecting the shutter speed so you can concentrate more on capturing the right elements to create your moody, dramatic, beautiful city shot.



Fountains

f/7.1, 0.6 seconds, ISO 400, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Photographing fountains within your cityscape can add another element of beauty and serenity to your image. Most cities are full of them, from small, historic fountains that can add interest to a composition to huge water fountain light shows that blast water up in the air and make for exciting and spectacular photos.

Whichever one you're shooting, you need to decide how you want to capture it to best tell its story.



f/7.1, 1 sec, ISO 500, 24mm.

Different types of fountains

Old style or ancient fountains are often found in towns and villages, but can also still be found in historic parts of big cities. Once used as public washing and drinking areas, many of these old fountains have been removed or replaced with modern architecture and plumbing, but if you're lucky enough to find one, they are a pleasure to photograph.

The best time to capture the characteristics and essence of a small, older fountain is during the day, since it most likely won't be illuminated at night.

If you're photographing a very modern city and can't find an old style fountain, there are plenty of big, dazzling fountains that are also great to shoot. These usually cater to the tourist scene and can be found in the city centre, near popular tourist attractions, or around government buildings.

Most of these are brightly lit up at night to draw attention and many offer fascinating light shows. Probably the most famous is the Fountains of the Bellagio, in which hundreds of high-pressure water jets dance around to accompanying music to create a massive and unique water show.

The way in which these fountains are illuminated at night allows for amazing photos. With so much shooting potential, city fountains with lights at night are like a photography playground.

Settings and equipment

I talked about capturing the movement of water in the Landscapes section and the same rules apply here: if you want to portray a smooth flow, use a slower shutter speed, or speed it up to freeze the water and show drop detail.

You'll definitely need a tripod, especially if shooting at night. Aperture and shutter speeds will vary depending on how well illuminated the fountain is and how fast the water is moving. Since a high-paced fountain light show is always changing, it's best to go with a faster shutter speed because a long exposure will blur every element of the show.

In my experience, shutter speeds between 0.2 and 1 second should be good; that range has yielded the best results for me as I find it maintains some movement, but not too much.

Just like a fast-moving sporting event, the next move in a big city fountain light show can't really be predicted. So, just keep shooting! By continuously taking photo after photo, you're pretty much guaranteed to capture a great shot—as long as your camera is stable and your settings are correct.



Fountain Silhouettes by Dwayne Bent.

Dealing with crowds

While people gathered around a fountain make for great photographs, you'll also need to be aware of people walking through the scene as their movement will be blurred in the photo.

Some of the most famous fountains can get bombarded with people wanting to see and photograph it, so you might have to get super creative in how you capture it. If you can get a spot near the front great, but if not, look for something you can place your tripod on to give you an extra height advantage.

Big fountain light shows are photography chaos because they often only run for a few minutes every hour or so, which means as soon as they start people of all kinds cram the viewing area, holding up their camera phones, iPads, whatever they have. I remember when I tried to photograph the fountains at the base of the Burj

Khalifa it was so busy and space was so limited that I ended up setting my zoom manually, activating the 10 second self-timer, and setting my tripod up on a fence pillar, then pulling it down after each shot.

Fountain shows are kind of a guessing game so you have to prepare as much as possible. Go early to find a good spot and take lots of shots at varying shutter speeds to get a good one. Stick around for the second, even third show and move around to capture the scene from many vantage points.

Capturing the way the light works with the water and highlights the fountain's features and surrounding cityscape from different perspectives will give you such an advantage. The different views will ensure you're getting a great photo that stands out.

Black and White

Hopefully by now you've read the black-and-white landscapes section of this book. I won't repeat all the tips here, but there are many that apply to cities just as much: contrast, tone and shape are all as relevant here as ever, and, if anything, cities only offer more by way of interplays between light and dark shades.



f/13, 13 seconds, ISO 125, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Alive by night

Cities come alive at night when shooting in color, sure; when shooting in black-and-white, that feeling is only intensified.

In truth, shooting cities at night is too easy. Bright city lights against pure dark skies are an obvious and easy contrast: take any simple shot and the juxtaposition of tones and exposures can carry almost any composition.

So rather than bank on reliable tropes, use these moments as an opportunity to push yourself artistically. Try radical new compositions, use different lenses and find new angles to shoot from. Your fallback will always be the city lights, which illuminate images in a way that stars simply cannot replicate in a black-and-white landscape.

New in town?

Unlike landscapes, which stay more or less the same and demand you contort your schedule and position around them, with cities, you have to always be on the lookout. Not all streets see sunlight the same way—you'll need to know which ones run north-south or east-west, which have visually interesting storefronts or markets, which create natural leading lines to landmarks and which are dead-ends.

Exploring a city is difficult, time-consuming work, and online mapping tools like Google Maps can help you sort out which roads might be the better roads taken. But the result of all this labor will surely be the best possible shot, taking advantage of the strongest shadows and light.



f/16, 2.5 seconds, ISO 160, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Follow the shadows

In cities, shadows come and go during the day—they are unpredictable and ever-changing. Use the shadows of passersby and cars, especially long shadows from a low-hanging sun, can create terrific street imagery with great contrast and fluid movement.

Silhouettes are also great at night, if the city's natural lights are too bright. Think of the iconic poster shot to Woody Allen's *Manhattan*: a silhouetted couple sitting on a park bench. It's incredibly simple, but emotionally effective.

Your specific shots may well be results of pure luck, but at a certain point, photographers have to know how to make their own luck. Put yourself in a position where you can take advantage of the natural world's offerings (like light and leading lines), and match that with being in the right place at the right time. Add a little patience, and you're set.

Reverse expectations

Black-and-white cityscape photography is pretty inextricably linked to film noir. The very sight of steely buildings and puddly concrete brings to mind Humphrey Bogart smoking in a trenchcoat.

So here's a tip: don't do that.

The best photographs in any genre are ones that challenge our perceptions of reality, while still being very much grounded in it. Rather than trying to create the millionth perfect film noir homage, look for opportunities that might stop viewers in their tracks. What's surprising about a scene? A happy couple at night? A quirky shop sign? Weird-looking food being sold in a Chinatown stall? Find something unique to show, and show it.



The Golden Hours

Certain landscapes are known for their golden hours. Most cityscapes aren't. But capturing a city during its golden hour can produce a magical result, as most of us can't appreciate the cities in which we live during these hours—we're too busy sleeping, commuting or eating

dinner. Though I've said it before, it bears repeating: at its finest, photography shows us our world in a way we don't normally see. Because so few of us see the sun rising or setting over our skylines, the golden hour is a great opportunity to define a city's character in, literally, a new light.

f/9, 1/250 sec, ISO 400, 24mm, -1 selected from a bracketed sequence of 5 shots, processed the -1 shot in Lightroom.

In addition to the usual techniques we've covered—like shooting in AP Priority mode, and manually focusing by zooming into certain corners—there are a few city-specific techniques you should keep in mind to bring out the best your city has to offer.



f/16, 2.5 seconds, ISO 160, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Plan ahead

Take stock of which direction the sun is going to rise and set in. With landscapes, it can be easier to maneuver yourself nature, crossing your fingers only for good weather. But in cities you may be faced with skyscrapers, odd street angles and difficult vantage points. Finding a high angle from which to shoot is one way to avoid those types of problems, but if you're shooting from the ground, knowing which buildings get hit by certain lights is always best.

Do some location scouting. Walk through your city during the golden hours instead of driving when you need to get somewhere (or not during the golden hour, but with an eye for cardinal directions) and notice which parts light up. If something strikes you in particular, take note of it for a return camera outing.



f/7.1, 1/500 sec, ISO 500, 29mm, processed in Lightroom.

Do some reflecting

Many modern buildings feature curtain walls—lightweight, reflective exteriors created purely for smooth design, rather than structural integrity. In other words: their surfaces are shiny. Aside from being aesthetically cool, these glassy exteriors make for beautiful city mirrors, and can double the clouds during golden hours. Use them whenever you can.

You can find many more reflective surfaces in cities than in natural landscapes—as I've mentioned before, you can find reflective

surfaces in car windshields, storefronts, bays and fountains. But when it comes to shooting during the golden hours, wider water bodies like lakes, rivers and fountains tend to work better, because sunlight doesn't hit them straight-on, and they can double up the orange glow and any clouds floating above.

Again, it's good to have spots in mind; stumbling upon city locations is possible, but planning ahead will make your cityscape photography experience much easier.

The unbearable lightness and darkness

Probably the single biggest difference between cityscapes and landscapes, which I've mentioned briefly before: light variance. During pure night this doesn't matter quite as much, as you're exposing to manage building or lamp lights, but the surrounding scene is otherwise black. That's not the case during the golden hour, when the sky's light and buildings' light are both powerful, burning bright, and vastly different. Moreover, you'll likely be adding some pure black in the mix as well, not to mention in-between shades.

This is where exposure bracketing becomes absolutely critical. I try to shoot five-shot brackets in these situations whenever possible, in order to capture all the tones of light: the natural sky tones and artificial building ones. The range of light can be quite drastic here, so you'd do best to try and catch everything perfectly, in one shot or another.

Another lighting trick to balancing the light, if you're shooting a city without very much sky (but using the golden hour light to enhance a building or street), is to switch your metering to spot-metering, and spot it to a part of a city set in the shadows. Underexpose your camera by one f-stop to balance the details between the highlights and shadows. This is valuable in landscapes, too, but in cities, it's almost always the case where half your scene will be blocked by buildings, and the other half lit up by gorgeous light. But such is the contradiction of cityscape photography: it hinges on balancing the beauty of our natural world with the magnificence of our hand-built one. Do it well, and you'll forge an unforgettable moment out of a fleeting one.

Sunsets and Sunrises



f/11, 0.4 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

After the golden hour settles, the sky grows darker while city lights illuminate below. Keep shooting. Ignore what professionals say about the magical golden hours, it's this moment—this immediately post-sunset or pre-sunrise moment, known variously as twilight or the Blue Hour—that, I would argue, is the best time for shooting cityscapes. Building lights turn on before the sky turns off, and the balance of light can look almost equal. It's a great combination of tones, and worth getting up in the morning to catch.

Be alarmed

Sometimes sunrise comes early. But you've got responsibilities to your art: get to bed early and wake up early, sometimes as early as 4 a.m. Set that alarm—you'll need it.

Capturing a whole cityscape from a broad angle may require a bit of early-morning hiking up nearby mountains or to wide-open fields. The important thing is that you scout out your location beforehand and get there before twilight—well before the golden hour, at that—and set your exposure and ISO along with your tripod position. That way, once the sun starts to peek out, you can immediately begin taking photos, to take advantage of every possible lighting scenario.

As usual: bracketing, bracketing, bracketing

I've gone over this before, so I won't repeat myself... too much. But it's important to stress how much bracketing makes a difference in photography at this time of day. During night photography, I've mentioned how critical it is to have multiple exposures, giving skies and darker buildings some breathing room and texture.

Well, twilight makes this just as important. Because of the number of tones between the azure sky, the lit-up buildings and the harsh lights themselves, shooting five brackets is a good habit to get into at these times of day.



Traffic jam sunset by Chris Waits.

Don't stop shooting

Remember: as the sun rises or sets, every second is different, and offers different colors, tones and shades. Once you've completed one set of brackets, don't relax: immediately jump into another set. Trust me, the lighting will be different. It may not be better, but it will be different, and you won't be able to judge what turns out better until you look at the final product in post-production anyway.

So never get tired, and try to avoid getting cocky and assuming you have a shot simply because you've taken one. Take dozens. Take hundreds. During these precious moments of little light, every second—and every shot—matters.



Manhattanhenge

f/3.2, 1/160 sec, ISO 800, 24mm, *Manhattanhenge from a Taxi by Dan Nguyen.*

Want to get serious timing your cityscape photography? Forget calculating the time of day—plan instead for the time of year.

Twice a year, Manhattan is famous for what's been dubbed "Manhattanhenge," a Stonehenge-esque visual effect whereby the sun sets in perfect alignment with the east-west running streets of Manhattan. The effect sees the sun setting right on city's natural horizon line at a perfect moment, creating a beautiful orange ball at the very end of the street. This happens only twice during summer, and it's become a very popular time of year.

A quick, unscientific explanation

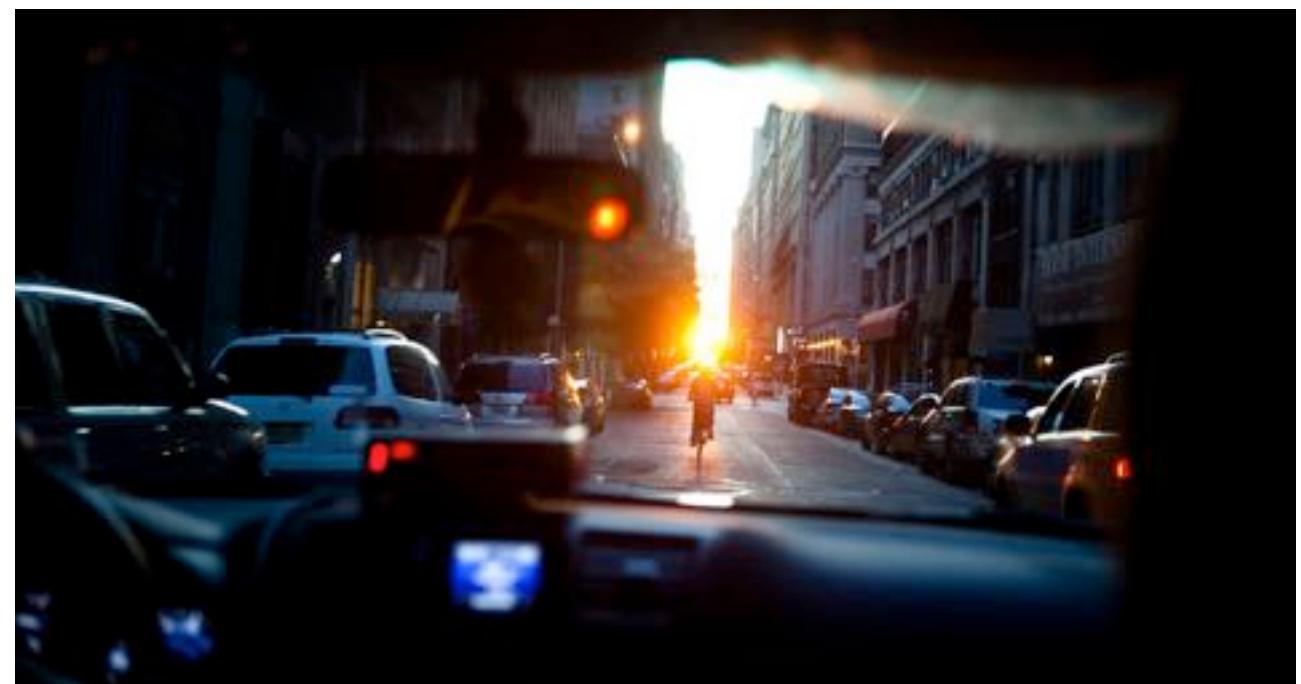
The phenomenon and moniker were made famous by Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist and nerd culture icon from New York. The name is inspired by Stonehenge, an ancient and mysterious set of stones erected in Wiltshire, England, that line up with the summer solstice annually. That site has become a congregating point for modern druids—sun-worshippers—who consider the site not a tourist monument, but a sacred temple.



f/5.0, 1/80 sec, ISO 800, 24mm, *Manhattanhenge at 42nd St and 2nd Ave* by [Geoff Stearns](#).

Manhattan, of course, is not that. It's a coincidence that the effect transpires in both places, although at different times: even though Manhattan's streets are often composed of perfectly straight grid lines, they were built roughly 30 degrees off-kilter from true cardinal east and west, meaning Manhattanhenge doesn't appear on the summer solstice itself.

Because the sun sets in different spots across the horizon, for 363 days out of a standard year, simply walking down an east-west street in New York won't reveal the sun itself setting—it will be behind some building somewhere. However, on two days around the summer solstice (a.k.a. the longest day of the year), often around May 30 and July 12, the sun will set in perfect, symmetrical coordination with the city's layout.



f/3.2, 1/160 sec, ISO 800, 45mm, *Riding into the sun* by [Dan Nguyen](#).

On the American Museum of Natural History's website, Tyson explains it further:

"Note that any city crossed by a rectangular grid can identify days where the setting Sun aligns with their streets. But a closer look at such cities around the world shows them to be less than ideal for this purpose. Beyond the grid you need a clear view to the horizon, as Manhattan has across the Hudson River to New Jersey. And tall buildings that line the streets create a vertical channel to frame the setting Sun, creating a striking photographic opportunity."

The phenomenon also occurs during sunrises around the winter solstice, though that's much less popular than its summer counterpart, and harder to spot due to weather conditions.



42nd St by Wendy.



The Commuter by Michael Tapp.

Seizing the moment

Okay, enough history. What does this mean for photographers?

For starters, it can mean a lot of stress. The innate implications of Manhattanhenge—that it only appears for roughly 30 minutes at a very specific time in the evening twice per year (weather depending, at that!)—mean that you don't have very much room for error.

Compounding this stress is the fact that Manhattanhenge has become something of a social phenomenon. Tourists, media and locals alike have begun to crowd Manhattan's streets during these times, especially near icons like the Empire State Building and Chrysler Building.

And arriving early isn't any use, because the timing is so specific. Mob mentality takes over, and the area comes to a virtual standstill while anyone in range whips out a camera or smartphone to get “the shot”.

The only way to avoid this is to try and find a quieter stretch of the city. Tyson recommends keeping as far east as possible, but avoiding major tourist zones, or having some way of shooting around them, will be useful for avoiding crowds.

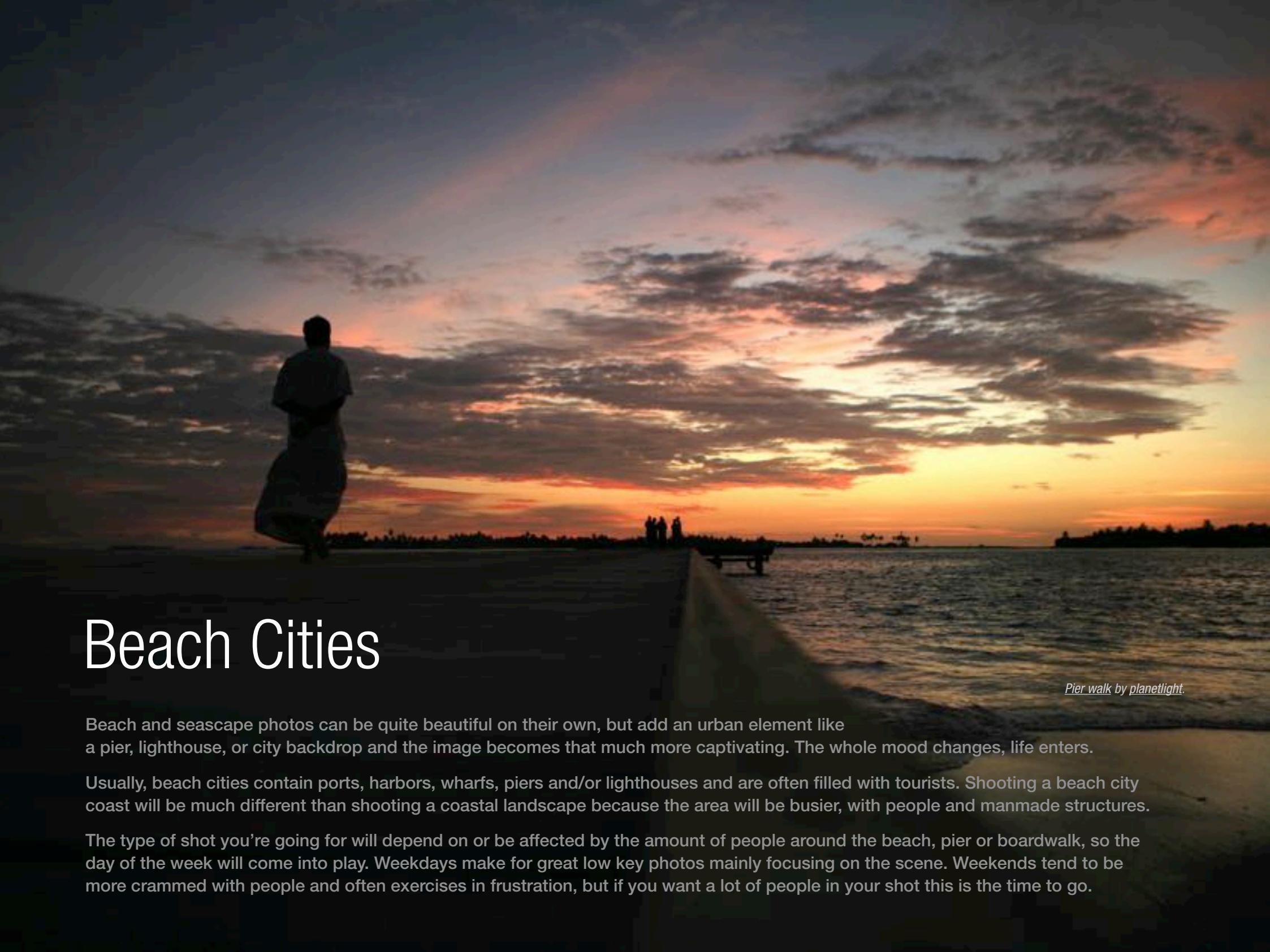
Failing that, just roll with it. You've got to shoot reality: if that reality includes hordes of gawkers, then that's your shot. Try to incorporate some rules from the “street photography” chapter of

this book and catch some fun candids with the glorious sunset fillin the background, like a fun play on what we perceive to be important. After all, as a photographer, you want to be able to show your viewers the unexpected: What's less expected than a Manhattanhenge shot with the star of the show as a mere background?

Exploring other ‘henges

If you're not in Manhattan, try adding “-henge” to whatever city is nearby—grid cities will all have different moments of cardinal direction perfection, but they should all exist nonetheless, even if the horizon isn't quite as clear.

Popular copycats include other famous grid cities like Baltimore, Toronto and Chicago. None are as popular as Manhattan, but that doesn't make them any less impressive: the low orange ball still illuminates the steel corridors of the city, the glass buildings and stone sidewalks, creating a colourful reflection where, otherwise, none may ever be seen again for a long, long time.



Beach Cities

Pier walk by planetlight.

Beach and seascape photos can be quite beautiful on their own, but add an urban element like a pier, lighthouse, or city backdrop and the image becomes that much more captivating. The whole mood changes, life enters.

Usually, beach cities contain ports, harbors, wharfs, piers and/or lighthouses and are often filled with tourists. Shooting a beach city coast will be much different than shooting a coastal landscape because the area will be busier, with people and manmade structures.

The type of shot you're going for will depend on or be affected by the amount of people around the beach, pier or boardwalk, so the day of the week will come into play. Weekdays make for great low key photos mainly focusing on the scene. Weekends tend to be more crammed with people and often exercises in frustration, but if you want a lot of people in your shot this is the time to go.

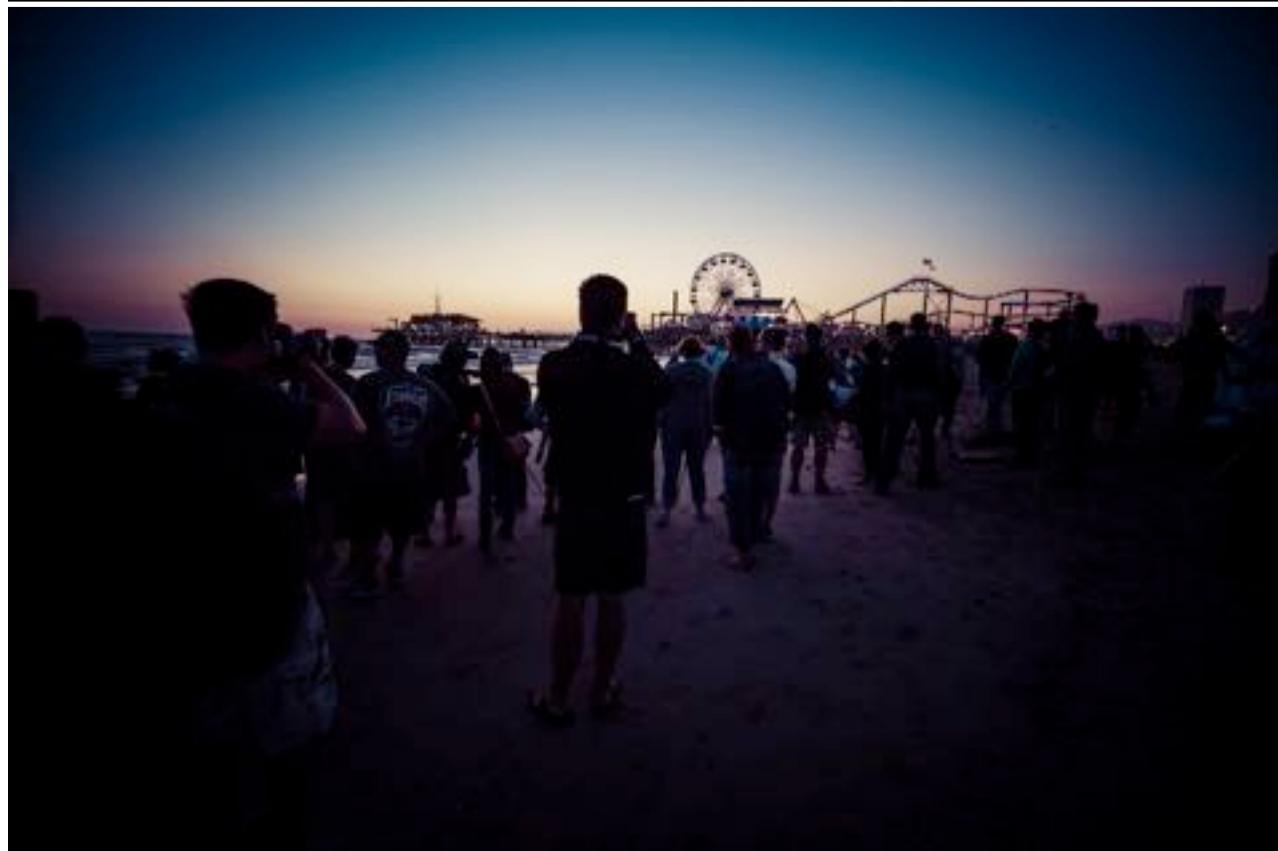
Leading lines and reflections

Beach cities are an excellent opportunity to play with leading lines and reflections. Since our eyes naturally follow lines, by incorporating leading lines into your image, you will lead the viewer's eyes along the path, through the image to your focal point, or even right out of the image.

Leading lines are abundant when shooting beach cities; you can find them in nearly every view, for example:

- Docks or piers stretching out to sea
- Shorelines
- Boardwalks
- Cliffs or rocks
- Rows of beach resorts or apartments
- Sand dunes or formations from water
- Street lamps along the beach pathway or boulevard
- Rows of boats

Reflections can also make for great beach photos. Photographing boardwalk attractions or lighthouses reflecting in the water, for example, can add interest or drama to your image.



Top: f/11, 30 seconds, ISO 100, 26mm, [Worthington pier](#) by [piers fearick](#).

Bottom: f/4.0, 1/15 sec, ISO 100, 16mm, Santa Monica Pier.

Vantage points

Take a walk along the pier, around it, under it to find unique vantage points. Look down the pier or stand at the end of it looking back on the city.

Up top, you'll no doubt see local color, like fishermen, couples walking hand in hand, street performers, children playing—all of which will add a personal touch. Shooting from the beach to the pier will highlight the structure in its surroundings; this works really well during sunrise and sunset. Shooting down the pier will draw the viewer's eye out to sea.

Try incorporating a lighthouse into the frame. Use a wide-angle lens and place the lighthouse in a far corner to change the scene. Use a slow shutter speed to really capture the beam of light shining out in the distance.

These types of photos are really fun in the evening when you have the motion of the water to play with as well as city lights such as on the pier or shore. As evening draws in, street lights and dock lights will come on, reflecting beautifully off the water, brightening up the scene, or adding a starburst effect to enhance the visual effect.



f/13, 25 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, [Boscombe Beach Pier](#) by Ben Cremin.

Capturing motion

Experiment with different exposure times to either slow down movement or speed it up. Long shutter speeds can be really interesting here, as they will blur the incoming waves; really long shutter speeds will make the whole water surface look sort of like a surreal mist.

Do the same to blur the movement of people and capture the hustle and bustle of the scene.

If, on the other hand, you want to freeze the image, go with a short, fast shutter speed. This is great for capturing crashing waves against rocks or under the pier.

It's important to do different shutter speed tests, but you should also use lots of bracketing when capturing incoming waves or other movement in the foreground. You can always do exposure blending (as we explain in the next section) to take the best shoreline exposure and blend it with the other exposures that worked the best on the background.



Rainy Days

Going out to capture the city streets and life on a rainy day isn't everyone's cup of tea, but if you're prepared and don't mind getting a little wet, a rain-soaked city is surprisingly photogenic.

You just need to be careful and make sure to keep your gear dry. Keep a lens cloth handy to clear your lens or lens filter of spray, fog, or condensation. Find shelter near areas without shelter. For example, if you stand under an awning near a busy intersection you can likely capture some great shots. If you're prepared, the photographic opportunities are endless.

Rain creates misty, romantic scenes, dramatic skies, a melancholy atmosphere. It produces deep, saturated colors, captivating reflections and shimmering surfaces. If you really look at the city streets or the skyline during a rainfall, you will find unexpected beauty and a number of great photo ops.

f/18, 3.2 seconds, ISO 200, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.



f/5.6, 1/125 sec, ISO 500, 105mm, processed in Lightroom.

Capturing mood

Not only does rain have the ability to completely change an ordinary cityscape into a moody, vibrant and captivating scene, it can also change how people look and feel. The impact rain and bad weather in general can have on our emotions is amazing and worthy of photographing. Try incorporating disgruntled, hurried or even pleased passersby in your composition to add to the story.

In cities where it rains often, you might be shocked at how quickly almost everyone seems to have an umbrella ready at the first drop. This is a great time to include pedestrians in your composition.

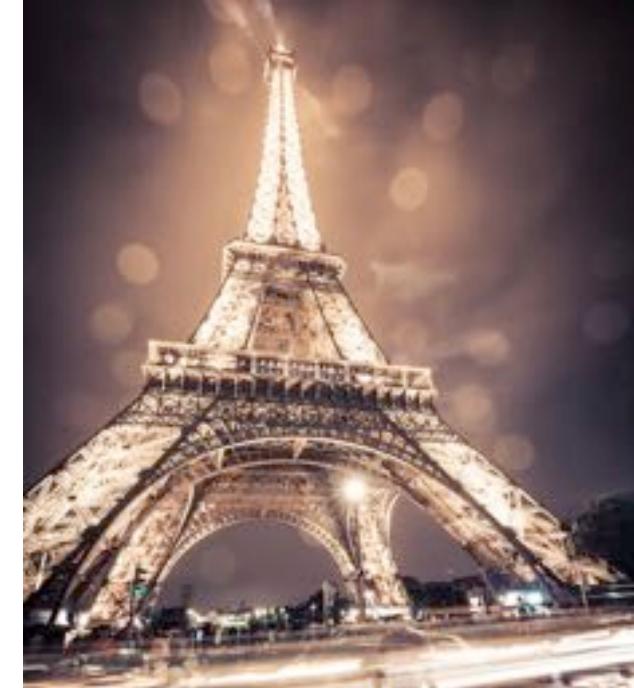
I'm from LA and when I visited Tokyo I was very surprised at how prepared everyone was for the rain. One day I ventured out with my camera and when the rain started to fall I was basically

the only one not carrying an umbrella out of thousands of people on the street. It was pretty cool to see and really fun taking photos of all the umbrellas walking around.

A street full of people carrying umbrellas can add an element of interest to your photo. If the umbrellas are dark, they will add a sense of gloom, and brightly colored umbrellas contrasting against the black tarmac will add a feeling of optimism.



f/11, 2.5 seconds, ISO 500, 16mm, Eiffel Tower at Night in the Rain.



f/11, 5 seconds, ISO 400, 16mm, processed in Lightroom.

Saturated colors

With moisture and wetness everywhere, it just seems like the city glows more right after a rainfall. Most surfaces and structures will appear more colorful when wet as water tends to bring out the saturation.

Stones and brickwork, for example, will be really saturated and show up so much more in your photo. Rain has the power to change not only color, but depth of surfaces like streets and buildings.

While reflections of surrounding buildings and scenery can be intriguing and are great to shoot (see the Reflections section), you might want to cut down on surface reflections to add even more saturation to the image. Use a polarizing filter to eliminate glossy sheen on pavement and buildings.

Choosing shutter speed

You'll need to decide how you want the rain to appear in your photo. Do you want to freeze the drops so you can see each one clearly? Or do you want a streaky, blurry image that portrays fast-moving, heavy rain?

Shutter speed actually matters during the rain. With the high contrast opportunities within cities, by using shorter shutter speeds you may actually see the raindrops in the resulting photo (depending on how hard it's raining and what is in your background). With longer shutter speeds you probably won't see the rain in the resulting photo, or if you do, it will appear in long streaks.

This is different from landscape photography because there usually aren't backdrops in landscapes that provide enough contrast against the raindrops to make the drops visible.

Try backlighting

Backlighting can help as it illuminates the raindrops and brings out more definition. This makes the drops much more visible because the light shining through them is concentrated and a little brighter than the surrounding scene.

Look for artificial lights in the area, like street lights, headlights, a glow from a store window and shoot towards it. If the storm is passing and the sun shines from beyond the edge of it or is breaking through the clouds, you can shoot towards the natural light to get the same effect.

You want to shoot directly enough to get the best results without shooting too directly, as the light source can overpower your exposure. Experiment with different angles to find the sweet spot.



Winter in the City

f/11, 1/30 sec, ISO 200, 28mm, *Central Park by Ralph Hockens.*

Taking pictures outside in the middle of winter doesn't exactly sound like fun. With shorter daylight hours, frigid temperatures, wet snow, slushy roads, and harsh, bitter winds, the task is a little more challenging as far as shooting conditions go. But, if you're up for the challenge, and are prepared for weather (see Winter Snow and Ice in the Landscapes section), the results can be absolutely stunning.

Icy, cold city streets add a new dimension to the scene and make for crisp, beautiful images. There is just something so fresh and clean about a city during and right after a snowfall. Everything seems brighter, new, pure.

Lighting conditions

Winter light is unlike any other time of year; the low sun casts long, magical shadows across city streets and buildings, creating interesting lines. You can use these shadows, which are especially stark against pristine snow, to lead the viewer's eye into the scene.

True, winter days are shorter meaning less hours of natural light to work with, but the light we do get is ideal. Summer heat comes with haze and humidity, limiting visibility, but the cold crispness of winter makes for fresh, clean air that brightens the sky and city. This is particularly noticeable at dusk when the winter city comes alive with vibrant lights from buildings and street traffic. As the sun grows dark, the city lights become even brighter and more magical, providing innumerable photo opportunities.

Time of day

City streets tend to be more empty during or after a snowfall than at other times, so you should use this opportunity to catch desolate street scenes. Early morning is the best for this as the new, fresh scene is untouched and the light is golden.

Frost combined with soft morning light can transform even the most ordinary objects. It can soften outlines on cars, city benches, statues, or it can define details, like the shapes of leaves that normally blend into each other.

In the late evening and at night, try long exposures to capture holiday lights or falling snow. You have to take advantage and make the most of whatever light you have available.



f/4.5, 1/160 sec, ISO 800, 25mm, *Times Square Snowstorm* by Dan Nguyen.

Look for color

Snow mixed with the color opportunities within cities can provide great contrast situations. Think of yellow taxis surrounded by snow, red phone booths covered in powder, Christmas lights shining in an otherwise grey background. The latter is also nice because in the U.S. when we think of winter in the city we also think of the holiday season, so it's a good way to portray the joyous, festive mood.

Color against the snow can really pop. When everything else seems bland and colorless, adding a bright contrasting object will create a strong viewpoint and just liven up the image. This works well both when it's snowing and when it's clear.

Falling snow can actually cause an extra glow within lighted streets. The bright city lights or objects will reflect off the snow, so you don't need a flash to capture the moment. In fact, you should avoid flash at all costs, as it will bounce off the snowflakes, turning them into little balls of overexposed light, which doesn't make for a very attractive photo.

Visiting Foreign Cities



f/7.1, 1/100 sec, ISO 10,000, 24mm, processed in Lightroom.

Photographing a foreign city can be challenging, as there are now language barriers, different and unfamiliar customs, and just a general feeling of uncomfortableness and uncertainty.

It's one thing to be lectured by the police over photography issues in a domestic city, but if you are traveling internationally things can be more serious. With language barriers and unfamiliar laws, misunderstandings can get out of hand quickly.

Varying photography laws

Unfortunately, there isn't one set universal guideline for what can and cannot be photographed. Each country has their own rules and customs and it's up to you to find out what those are before you get to a new place and just start snapping away.

In some countries, it is illegal to take pictures of women, children, holy men, or the military, for example. You can also find yourself in trouble if you're caught photographing official buildings like embassies and government headquarters, like in Moscow.

I went on a trip to Dubai once and learned that any person being captured on camera in any public space in the UAE can bring the photographer to court. They are especially sensitive about photographing Muslim women and families. I found out that if you get caught, you could be looking at some hefty fines, so I played it safe. I was still able to get a lot of great photos there, but I was extra cautious when taking street style photography with pedestrians.

Try to **research where you are going** so you know what is acceptable in terms of photographing the locals and buildings. Find out as much as you can—read guidebooks, online forums, travel blogs, talk to friends.

Think before you shoot. First of all, a lot of people don't want their photo taken by some

stranger on the street. If someone is glaring at you it likely means you should avoid taking photos in their direction. You don't want to draw unwanted attention to yourself, so refrain from taking pictures of police or official-looking people and buildings. If you are obtrusive, you're just asking for someone to come over and start asking questions or for your passport.

Carry your passport

Or at least a copy of it.

It is definitely important to have this information with you, especially if you look like a professional photographer and not just a tourist taking pictures on the street. If they start asking questions, most law enforcement officers will just want to see who you are and where you're from.

When in Tokyo one time, I was confronted by a group of officers; they didn't speak English very well so I was pretty stressed for a few minutes as they asked questions and I tried to explain what I was doing there. As soon as I carefully pulled out my passport and showed it to them they were satisfied. They were very friendly the whole time but I think it was a good thing I had my passport with me.

A copy of your passport is usually good enough, and is better than carrying the original around in case you lose it or get pickpocketed.

Beware of pickpockets

Pickpocketing can and does happen anywhere. Professional, stealthy thieves are just waiting for the perfect opportunity to rob unsuspecting tourists of their valuables. You already look like a rich tourist, with your fancy camera and equipment, so don't make it any worse.

By flaunting expensive things you are making yourself a target for thieves and scammers. If you're not using your camera, keep it in a subtle bag. Don't wear expensive jewellery, watches, clothes—try to blend in.

Keep your wallet in your front pocket or even better, an internal pocket. You can also buy a money belt that goes under your clothes. Just keep your wallet hidden and close to your body.

Pickpockets use a number of tricks to get what they want, but you can be tricky too. Separate your money—keep some in your wallet or money belt, some back in your locked suitcase, some in your sock, just split it up. Some photographers even make their camera look old and undesirable by putting tape on it. Whatever you can do to avoid attention.

When tripods aren't allowed

f/8, 0.4 seconds, ISO 2000, 24mm, since I didn't have a tripod I set my camera down on this little ledge with the camera strap still around my neck to make sure I didn't drop it, then clicked the 2-second self-timer and didn't touch it while it took the exposure, I was very happy when I saw the result, processed in Lightroom.



True, tripods are an essential part of cityscape photography in the evening—they stabilize the camera so we can use slow shutter speeds to capture clear, sharp skylines and city lights that just can't be clearly captured with a hand-held camera.

But we don't always have the luxury of using them as many tourist places don't allow them, so what do we do when tripods are prohibited?

Many businesses with great city views that attract photographers have gotten the impression that tripods mean professional work and therefore, money. These establishments won't let photographers in with a tripod likely because they might be able to make money by charging a permit fee or production fee. I've run into this problem mostly in the U.S., but have also come across it in a few international cities I've visited. It is upsetting indeed, but instead of letting it defeat you, try to do your best with what you have.

If you're staying or live in a nice highrise with fantastic city views, or know someone who works on a top floor of an office building, you're at an advantage. It will be easy for you to set up your tripod and continuously shoot the city undisrupted, knowing your images are going to be shake-free and sharp, especially at night.

For the rest of us, we need to look for high vantage points like public attractions with high viewpoints. In NYC, for example, you can get great city shots from atop the Empire State Building or Rockefeller Center, but neither of these places allow tripods.

So, now you're up there, it's getting dark outside, the city is lighting up and looking incredible and all you have is a camera, no tripod. Here's what you do:



f/7.1, 1/15 sec, ISO 25600, 24mm, when I tried to enter this rooftop lounge in Shanghai the doorman told me I couldn't bring in my tripod so I tried to do the best I could without it. There was no place to set my camera down in order to take this shot so I upped the ISO speed as high as it would go and was able to hand-hold a decent shot at 1/15 second shutter speed, I took a few extra shots here in case a few turned out blurry because 1/15 of a second is risky to hand-hold the camera. I was shocked to see how well this one turned out. Processed it in Lightroom including some special attention to noise reduction since the ISO speed was so high

Improvise

1. Look for the compositions you want, then look to see if there is a place where you can set your camera down for the shot so you don't have to hold it risking blur from hand movement. You can use tables, pillars, walls, edges, benches, anything that is flat and safe—make sure your camera is steady and won't fall.
2. If you can't find a flat surface, you can make one. Prop your camera up with your jacket or other item of clothing. Try small photography bean bags. These are made specifically for this sort of situation so if there is an uneven surface you can set the bean bag down first and shape it into a decent platform for your camera.
3. Try using just the tripod ball head. Most establishments that ban tripods won't be looking for ball heads. Attach the ball head to the camera and set it on a platform, like the ones mentioned above. This is a great solution because ball heads have a flat base to sit nicely on something and the ball allows you to adjust the angle of the camera.

With each of these methods, you can use the camera's self-timer to get a clear, vibration-free shot that is just as good as if you had used a tripod.

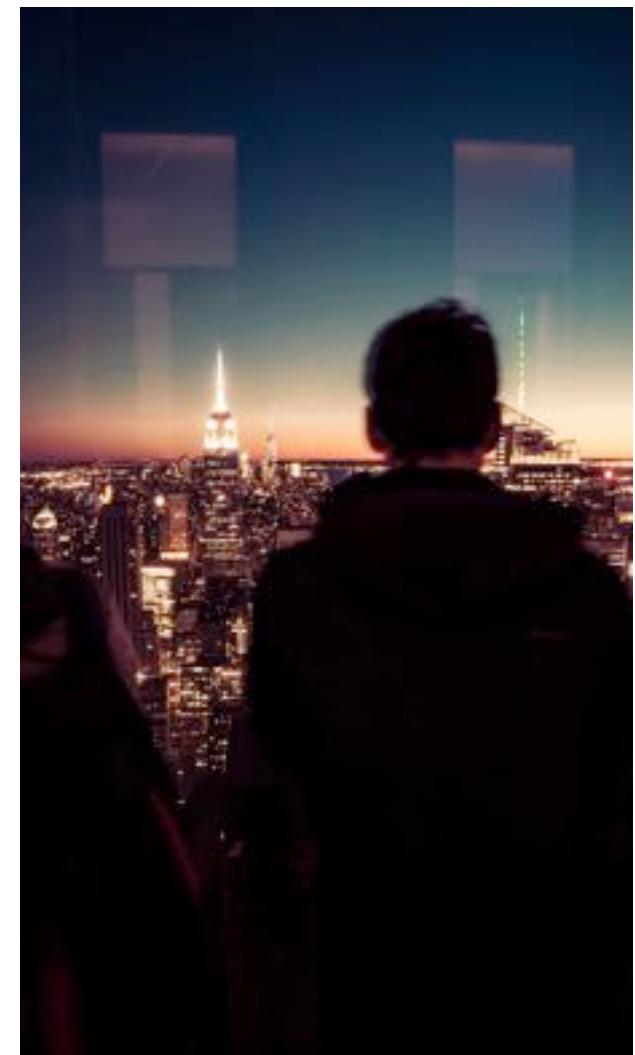
Be your own tripod

If there isn't a place to set down your camera, you're stuck trying to hold it steady yourself, which is especially difficult for low light shots. Steady your body as much as you possibly can. Lean against a wall or pillar with your legs spread apart to gain stability, or rest your arms on something, like a railing, anything you can do to avoid movement.

The minimum shutter speed I always try to aim for when doing hand-held shots is 1/60 second. Keep raising your ISO speed and widening your aperture until a decent exposure can be taken at 1/60 second shutter speed or faster. If you are maxed out in terms of aperture width and ISO speed and it's still too dark to get 1/60 of a second shutter speeds, try it anyway but take a few extra shots because some will likely be blurry.

If you are trying to hand-hold a shot at less than 1/60 of a second, think like a sniper in terms of maintaining stillness on your target. Hold your camera firmly yet comfortably with support from both hands, take a deep breath and hold it as you press the shutter, then breathe normally after the exposure is done.

The banning of tripods is inconvenient for sure, but as long as you're creative you can still get amazing shots that will impress.



f/8, 1.3 seconds, ISO 640, 16mm, processed in Lightroom.



Inside Big Buildings and Cathedrals

It's obvious that cities contain buildings. But some buildings also contain cities—so to speak, anyway. They hold the same atmosphere, the same bustling life that makes cities feel vibrant and chaotic. More importantly, indoor images will help diversify your image portfolio; seeing the outside of buildings repeatedly can generally create a sense of curiosity in viewers that makes them want to see inside. Offer them that. Satisfy that curiosity. Often, wide interior shots become landscape images in their own right, replacing mountains with stairwells and rivers with streamlined lineups of people.

Not every building is photogenic, but it's not hard to take a good indoor shot. The same photographic rules apply, although you'll likely have to bump up your ISO and lower your shutter speed. Even if they seem well lit, you have to realize that your eyes can adjust much more adaptively than a camera's. In terms of objective luminescence, these places are darker than they look. A tripod is almost always essential.

Wells Cathedral 45 by Gary Ullah.



Central nave – Hagia Sophia by Jorge Láscar.

No tripods allowed? Better to beg forgiveness than ask permission

The biggest problem with indoor shooting is that you probably won't have a "right" to be there. You may pay to enter a temple or cathedral, or else it may simply be private property—you can show up, sometimes you can shoot photos, but sometimes security will draw the line at tripods.

It's sometimes a space and fire hazard thing; don't blame the messengers. It's often easiest to just play by the rules—or, better still, assume there are no rules until you learn otherwise.

Being ignorant in these situations can help you get a few great shots. As the old adage goes: It's better to beg forgiveness than ask permission.

Always start with your tripod as a default shooting rig, although remain inconspicuous just in case. If anyone comes up to you and asks you to stop, you can simply say you didn't know and pack up politely - which has been true in all the cases I have been stopped. At least this way you'll have a few tripod-secure shots under your belt first.

This happened to me once while shooting in Grand Central Station in New York City. The station is renowned for its gorgeous interior architecture, and I'd been capturing that quietly and respectfully from a few different spots for nearly an hour before a security officer came up to me. He told me I needed a permit to use a tripod. I honestly had no idea. (Later I looked this up on their website, which confirmed it—

apparently they consider a tripod "professional equipment" and require a permit for that and, presumably, anything else attached to the camera itself.)

I thanked the officer and put away my tripod, then took a few more handheld shots with a higher ISO to compensate for the shakiness. It turned out great for me in the end—I got plenty of solid shots with my tripod, but still complied with their rules once I found out about it.

I hesitate to say that the answer is always to plead ignorance, but let's just say that if you're confident there are no tripods allowed, don't test fate; otherwise, it's best not to ask, and be polite when confronted.

Breaking down the technicalities

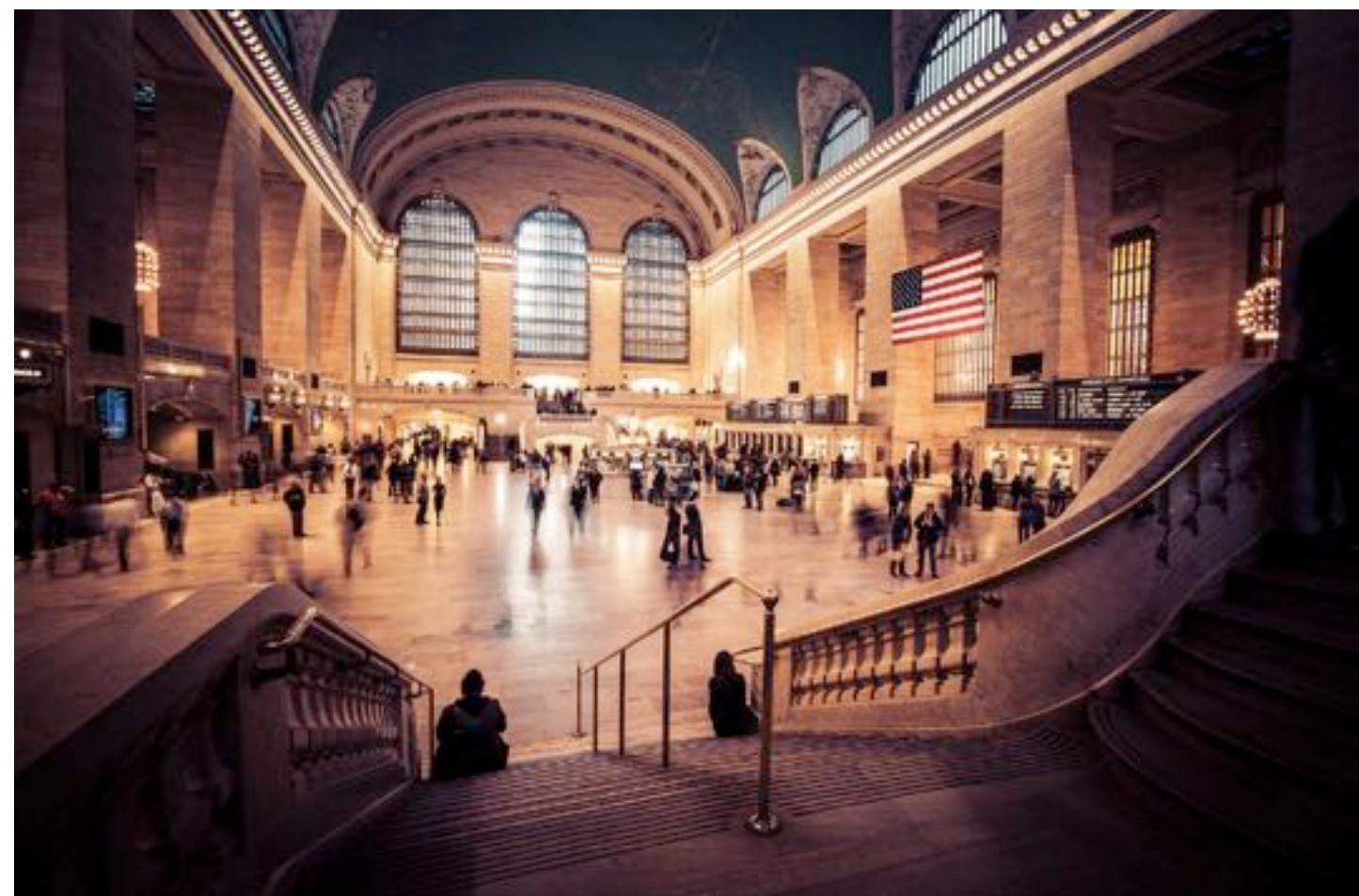
Ultra-wide angle lenses shine in these conditions. Anything between 12 and 18mm can capture the full width of most indoor spaces, wall-to-wall. That sense of completion is great when shooting expansive indoor shots.

Those are the kind of images you want to start with—the first shot through the door, wide and all-encompassing. After you've got the obvious perspectives, look for interesting details like architectural nodes, window frames and ceiling tiles. In Grand Central, the obvious shot was from the center of where the staircases come together, but one of my best shots came from an off-center angle I found in the back corner of the stairway itself. It gives viewers something different, too, while still engaging with the compositional rules we went over earlier, like leading lines and the rule of thirds.

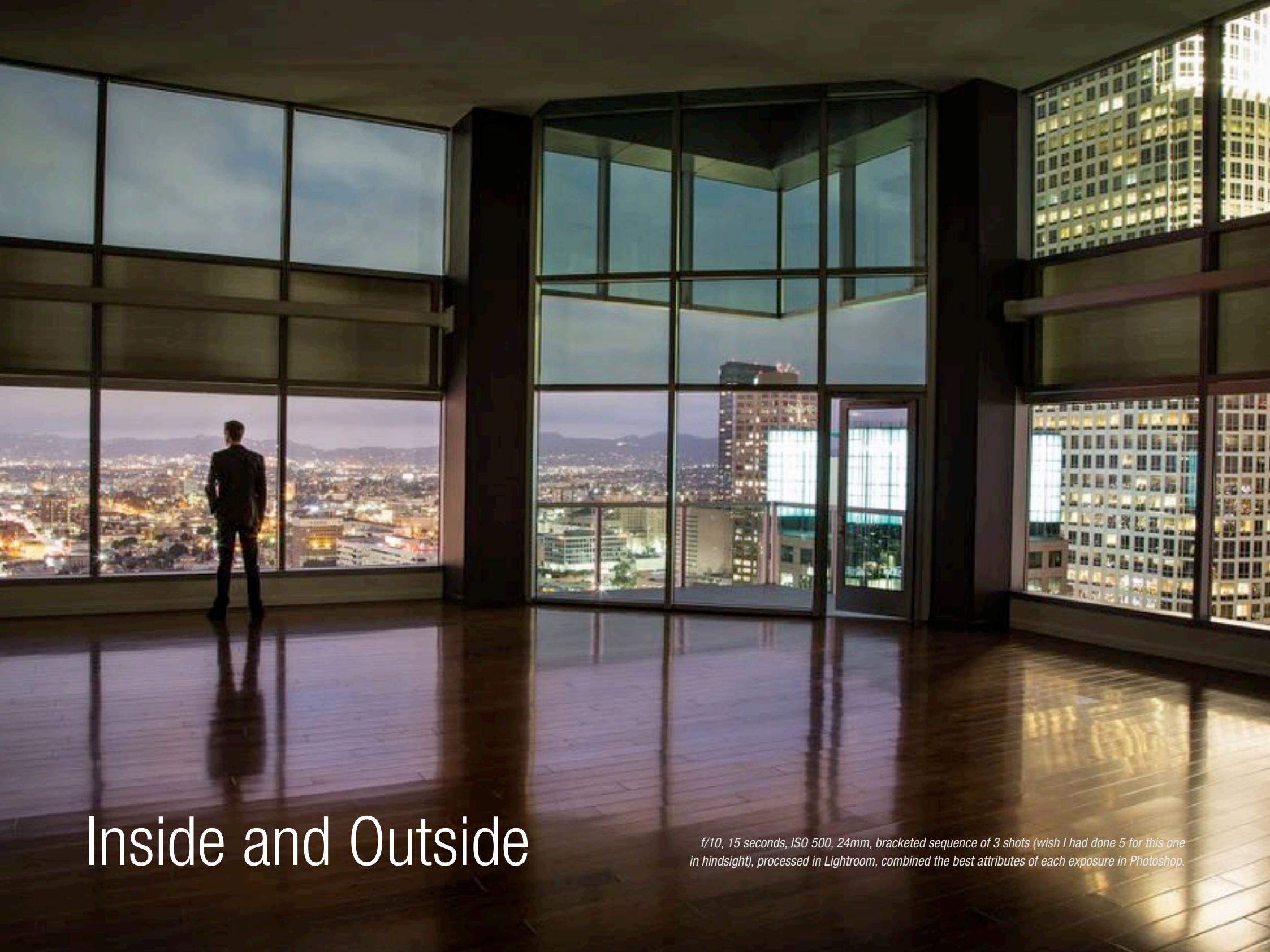
I like to bracket shots as often as possible, but if your tripod's been banned you'll have some trouble with that. Occasionally I try to meter my shots in darker spots of the scene and push my camera to overexpose images a bit, which can work excellently in cathedrals if there's light streaming in through the stained glass. Sometimes the whites might be blown out, but other times it works perfectly.

A quick note on respect

Obviously it's important that you get the shots you want, but remember that, indoors, you're probably not alone. Always be respectful of the space you're in—especially places of worship or religious significance. If your camera has a silent shutter mode, use it. If you can keep quiet, do. Being inconspicuous while shooting isn't just about grabbing candid shots or staying away from security guards—it's also about respecting the rights of those around you. Never be a good photographer at the expense of being a good person.



Moved into the corner of the stairwell to try to capture a new angle of Grand Central, f/10, 1.6 seconds, ISO 250, 16mm.



Inside and Outside

f/10, 15 seconds, ISO 500, 24mm, bracketed sequence of 3 shots (wish I had done 5 for this one in hindsight), processed in Lightroom, combined the best attributes of each exposure in Photoshop.

Skyscraper cities are being built upwards: thousands of residents in condo-filled downtowns have gorgeous views of blinking lights, gleaming rivers and luminous icons right from their living room. These are often the great metropolises of Asia and North America (New York, Hong Kong, Toronto, Tokyo, Seoul, et al), while hotels, top-floor restaurants and upstairs patios all strive to offer patrons that same proud feeling of overlooking full cityscape splendor.

These shots offer audiences outside the high-up floor a glimpse of power and surveillance. Combining the inner room and outside world through the window into your shot is great for a few reasons: on a purely visual note, it's an interesting **framing device**; as context it creates a **visual metaphor** of gazing out, admiring or judging what's below; and, from a documentary angle, it **shows the viewer another perspective** on how humans live and see the world.

Technically, though, capturing all this can create some new challenges, chief among them being exposure. Insides will often be darker, and properly exposing them will blow out the outside world; vice versa means you'll lose details inside but have a proper outside exposure.

How to photograph rooms with big windows

The key to managing both exposures, unsurprisingly, is exposure bracketing. Shoot five brackets when you can, but three can sometimes do the trick also. Any instance wherein you're not pressed for time, shoot five brackets. If time is indeed on your side, you might want to consider taking two sets of photos: one metered to outside light, with another metered to inside light. You can play around with them in post-production to see which works better.

Always try to keep a narrow aperture to maintain a large depth of field—otherwise you might risk keeping the inside of your room in detail but

blurring the outside, or vice versa. This is quite noticeable with these types of shots because of the stark difference in subject matter. At night, you'll find you have to widen the aperture a bit; if you have to choose which is in focus, I'd recommend the city outside rather than the room inside—it's what most people's eyes look to first. Of course, if there's a natural focal point, even if it's inside (a piece of furniture or person), to blur the city as a nice background creates a full, complex backdrop.

We won't get into too many details yet, but I hope to show you some of the best techniques for blending bracketed exposure in Lightroom, Bridge and Photoshop in the upcoming post-production section of this book.



Getting access

Perfecting this technique can make you a go-to photographer for real estate and architectural photography. Building managers, hotel owners and anyone looking for subletters or tenants are increasingly seeing the value in getting professionally taken photographs to advertise their space. Great views are a major part of that.

I load some of my best of these shots onto my smartphone or iPad and, whenever I check into hotels, lounges, or Airbnb pads, take a convenient moment to show the owner or renting host my work. This accomplishes two things: first, it creates an atmosphere wherein I'm more likely to get permission to shoot photos in that venue; second, it sometimes (and only with good bargaining skills) gets me discounts or free entry to places with these types of views. This is an especially golden rule for Airbnb places—architectural photographers are expensive these days so most Airbnb hosts don't have great photos of their place, so working out a discounted stay or just selling your photos to them becomes a major bargaining chip.

Top: /10, 15 seconds, ISO 500, 24mm, bracketed sequence of 5 shots, processed a few in Lightroom, combined the best attributes of each exposure in Photoshop.





Cityscape Selfies

f/14, 8 seconds, ISO 160, 24mm, this one didn't quite turn out like I hoped because I turned my head during the exposure with blurred my face, but I was still really glad I took it. I setup my tripod, focused the camera on the yellow square on the ground, activated the 10 second self-timer, then went and tried to stand as still as I could for the 8 second shutter duration while pedestrians rushed around me. It could have been better but you get the idea... sort of a "lost in translation" attempt in Tokyo.

Unlike landscape selfies, cityscape selfies should feel more natural—which, ironically, is what makes them often more difficult.

They're natural because people naturally fit into cities: barren streets look cold and empty, while lively ones seem full and kinetic. Landscapes, of course, are the opposite: we cringe at the sight of hundreds of tourists swarming national parks, and sigh in relief when we see impossibly pristine versions. And while in both instances emphasis on a single person can work, they send profoundly different messages: a face in the wild seems adventurous and bold; a face against concrete looks at home, even if alone.

In this light, a city selfie should be more natural, more expected. And yet to actually pause and take a shot of yourself with crowds, traffic and natural vibrations from footsteps and passing trucks makes for a much more challenging photographic scenario.

BYOM (Be Your Own Model)

See an opportunity for a beautiful cityscape shot, but lacking a focal point? Sometimes we wait for passersby to fill the space, and patiently peer through our viewfinders until they hit the right spot. This is classic candid street photography—also a luxury for those with time.

There's no shame in filling the space yourself. Sometimes, there's even a knowing poetry to it; a beauty in modest self-portraiture that most photographers delve into at one point or another. There's no reason the photographer needs to always stay behind the camera. This is to say nothing of how easy it is: simply set up the shot, know where you want to stand and use the self-timer to capture yourself there.

This also makes it easier for aspiring photographers to work with placement: try standing in a few different places to find which way works best, so that by the time you're working with other people, you'll have a better sense of what works, spatially and logically.

Expose yourself

For cityscape selfies at night, long exposures will often be necessary, and you'll learn firsthand just how hard it be to stand still for even 20 seconds. It ain't easy being a model. Bracketed sequences are even trickier, forcing you to stand still through three shutter durations—and don't even try a five-shot bracketed sequence, because it's just not worth it.

What is worth it, though, are long exposure selfies: they can create very cool “lost in translation”-style images of one person standing still in a crowd. Use the inherent chaos of a crowd to your advantage and stand yourself out in some way. The basic tenets of photographic contrast apply just as much to content as to light and texture: by inserting yourself in a crowd, you can stand out and create a powerful image.

If you do wind up posing for your own long-exposure cityscape selfie, I wouldn't recommend standing for any longer for five seconds—it's just too difficult to capture an image while standing still for longer. Of course, if it's too dark, or you have a very specific shot in mind, let the sky be the limit for your ambition.

The necessary confidence of an artist

People will stare at you. Some might laugh. Forget them: you've got a mission, and the only thing worse than being laughed at for taking a shot is when that laughter discourages the shot from even existing. Be bold, be brave, and ignore the rest of them.



Post-processing & Editing

When Adobe's photo editing software began gaining popularity, there used to be some debate over its legitimacy in the world of photography. Purists would bash it for being an easy fix; professionals lamented how casual photographers relied on it for fixing their exposure errors.

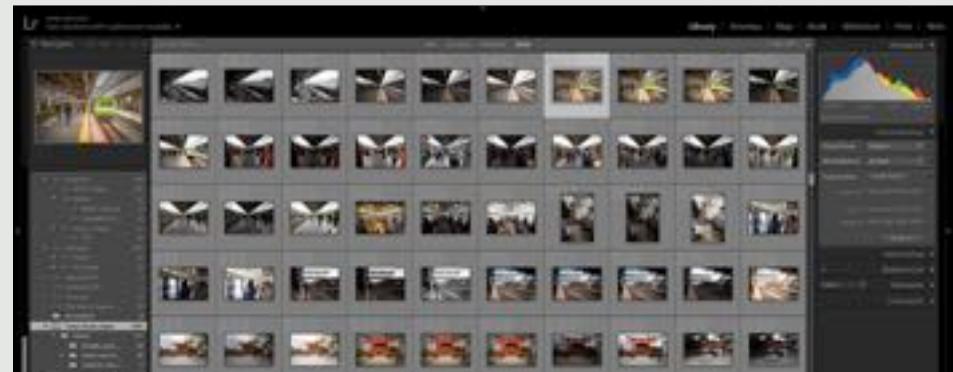
That debate has calmed down in recent years. Now, any professional photographer not post-processing is considered more an oddity than a purist—everyone knows that digital cameras simply aren't perfect, and don't capture the reality of the world as well as they could. (Colors aren't always true, exposure is sometimes off.) It's the new norm: as long as post-production is used to enhance the shot (rather than distract from it), it's a helpful addition to a photo's lifecycle.

The pros and cons of having infinite possibilities

The best part about Lightroom or Photoshop is that they can truly unlock infinite possibilities for your photography. Problem is, that's also the worst part.

It's tricky when you're just starting out with Lightroom, Photoshop or any post-processing application—you don't have any presets, and you're not sure how images look different in different lights and with various color casts. I used to spend hours tweaking a photo in every direction, only to wind up with the relatively simple style I'd started out with; it took me a while to learn which edits worked regularly for my shots, and now it only takes a minute or so to make an image pop.

Nowadays, the only time I'll spend a lot of time experimenting with a shot is when it's an especially good one—I'll find it's not only productive, but also simply more fun to try and bring out its full potential.



The product hit list

The world has grown beyond just Photoshop. Adobe is still the leader of the pack, with products like Lightroom and Bridge supplementing Photoshop in many photographers' arsenals (including my own); I also use Photomatix occasionally, which is an industry leader for HDR processing.

Photoshop's competitors (Corel's PaintShop Pro, Serif's PhotoPlus, Capture One Pro; there are many) are viable alternatives at sometimes as little as half the cost of Adobe's mainstays, and if you already have one of those, the general rules of what we're going to be discussing in this section will likely hold true, even if the tool names are different.

For our purposes, though, I'll be sticking with Lightroom, Photoshop, Bridge and Photomatix. You don't need to buy all these, but it's still good to know what the possibilities are. If you only invest in one program, I would recommend Lightroom.

The first few pages in this section will cover the quick and effective processing methods using the Lightroom presets provided with the book, then we will dive in deeper if you want to take your photos further.

10 Premium Landscape/Cityscape Lightroom presets provided with this eBook

Lightroom presets work so well these days it's easy to just use them and nothing else. These are 10 that I developed for landscape/cityscape photos, they cover most situations that I get into, and they are a great starting point for any photo processing. Have fun!

Just Right – A great general preset for almost any photo, I always try this one first.

Emphasize It – Just as the name implies, if you want to emphasize everything in the photo give this one a click.

Not Much Needed – For photos that look great without post-processing, try this one to just add a little something.

Black & White – An ideal black and white conversion preset

Black & White Stylized – A slightly heavier black and white conversion preset

Portrait in the City – Try this one on street style portraits or portraits of your friends.

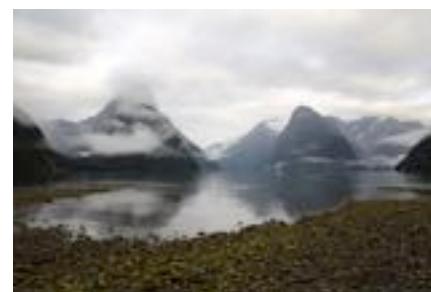
Urban Drama – If you like the look of most cinema movies and posters you will probably like this preset.

Heavy Crowds – Great for heavy crowd shots in the city.

View from Up High – Try this one for any aerial photos of cities.

Warm Sepia – This sepia preset does the job while leaving a little color behind, try it out and see what you think.

Before



Black & White Stylized Preset



ONE CLICK
→

Before



Heavy Crowds Preset

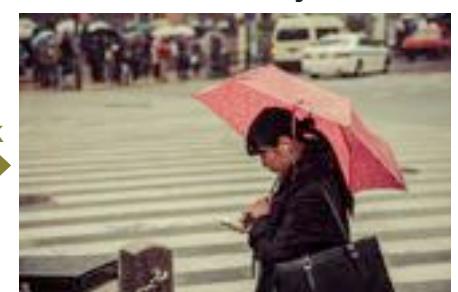


ONE CLICK
→

Before



Portrait in the City Preset



ONE CLICK
→

Before



Urban Drama Preset

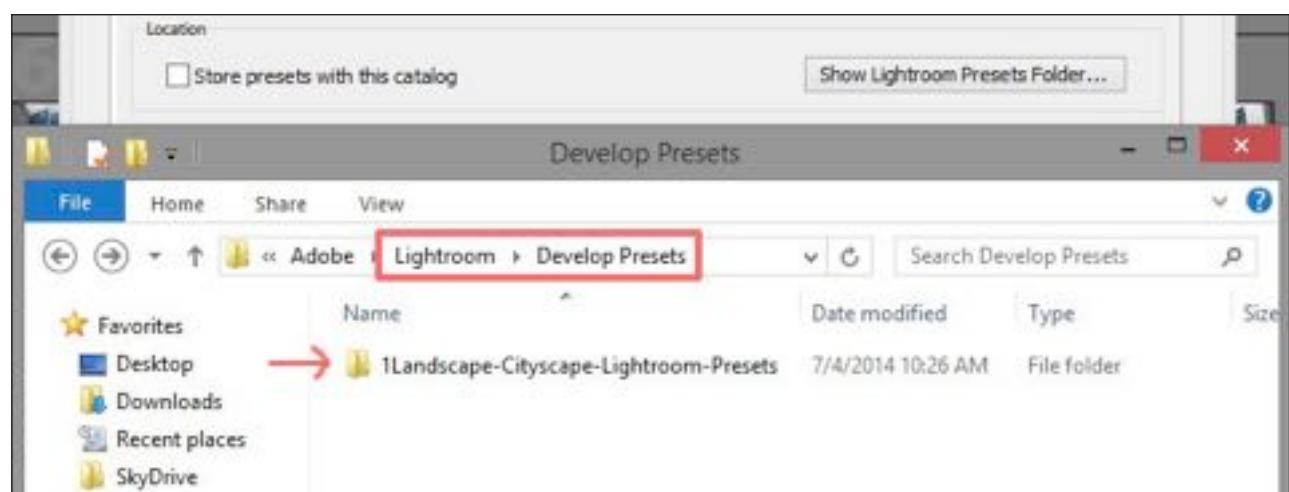
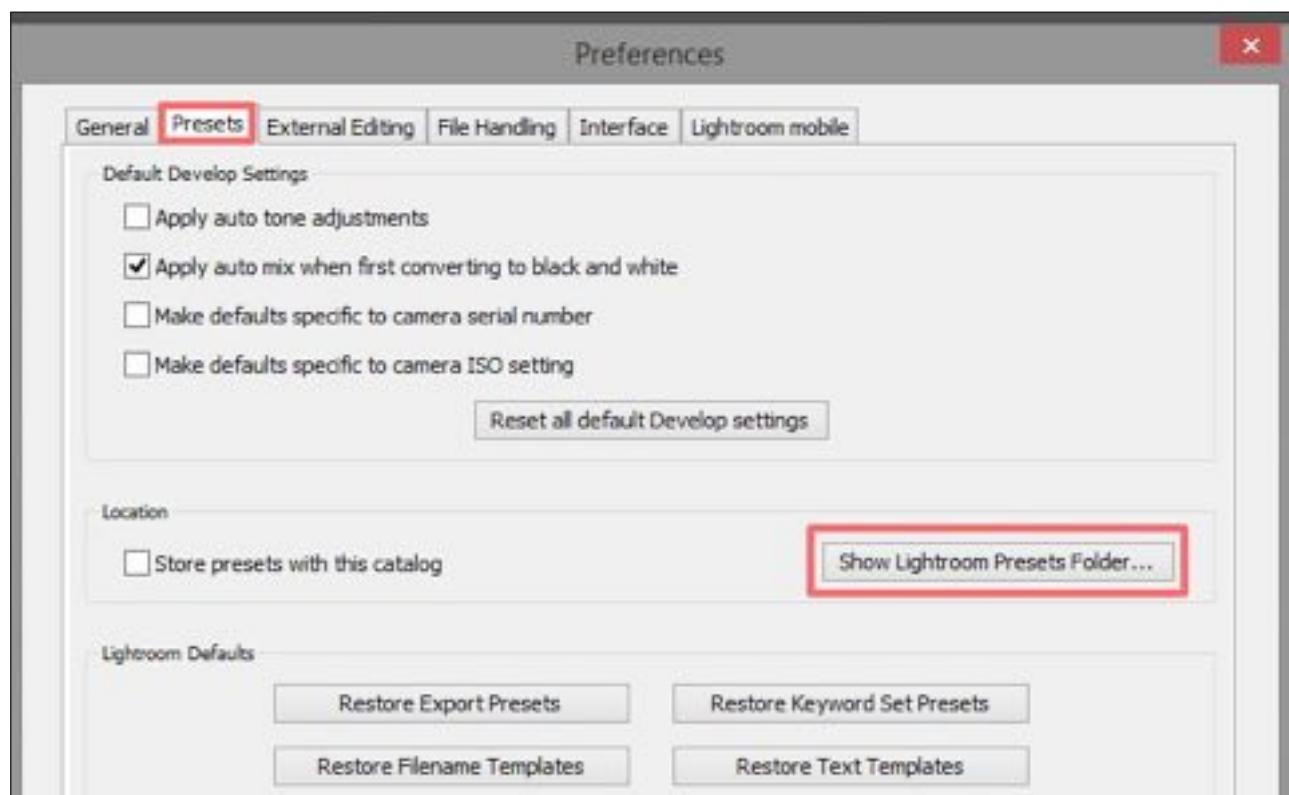


ONE CLICK
→

Installing the Landscape/Cityscape Lightroom Presets

When you downloaded this ebook there was a folder of lightroom presets also included in that download. This is how to install that folder of presets in Lightroom:

1. Open Lightroom
2. Click on Edit at the top, then **Preferences**.
3. The preferences window will open, then make sure the Presets tab is clicked at the top, then click the **Show Lightroom Presets Folder button**.
4. Double click on the Lightroom folder
5. Double click on the Develop Presets Folder
6. Copy the *1Landscape-Cityscape-Lightroom-Presets* folder into the Develop Presets Folder.
7. That's all! Now just close and restart Lightroom and you should see them within the Develop tab of the program.
8. If you are still having trouble, [here is a youtube video tutorial on how to install presets.](#)



Processing a Single Raw Photo in Lightroom

This tutorial goes over how to edit a photo in Lightroom using presets. This is my technique for editing most photos. The presets make it quick and easy so you can spend more time with your camera and less time on the computer.

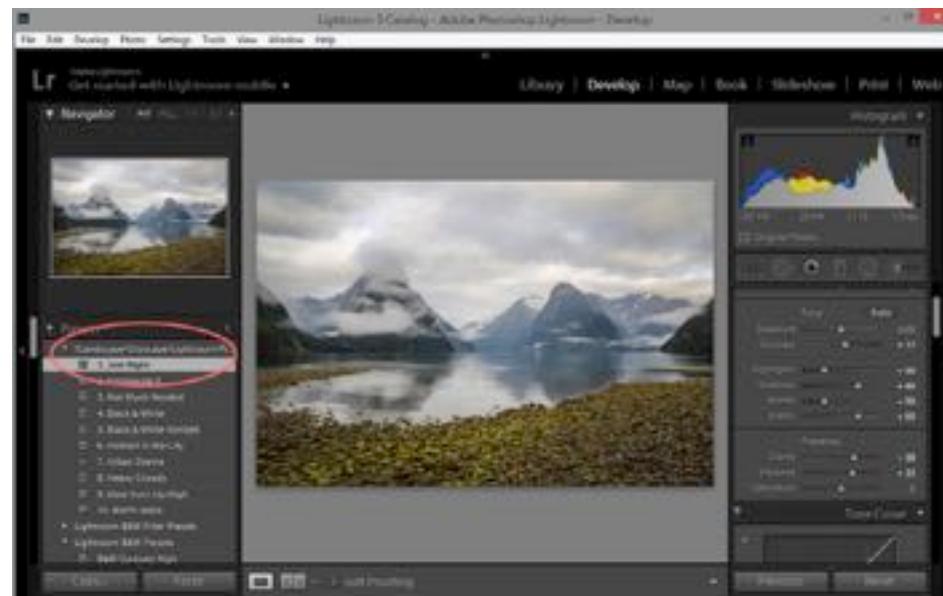
1. Once in Lightroom, Import the photo(s) you want to edit
[\(for more help on this step here is a tutorial from Adobe\)](#).
2. From the Library module, select the photo you want to post-process.



3. Then click over into the Develop Module.



4. If you installed the included presets as explained in the previous section you should now see them in the Develop module. In this tutorial we are going to use the “Just Right” preset so go ahead and click it. You should now see the preset adjustments applied to your photo. The presets are that easy! Feel free to export and share your photo at this point.



5. (Optional) If you want to do further adjustments on your photo try adjusting the various sliders on the right side depending on what your photo needs. It's a good idea to give all the setting sliders a try at some point if only to familiarize yourself with all the possibilities.

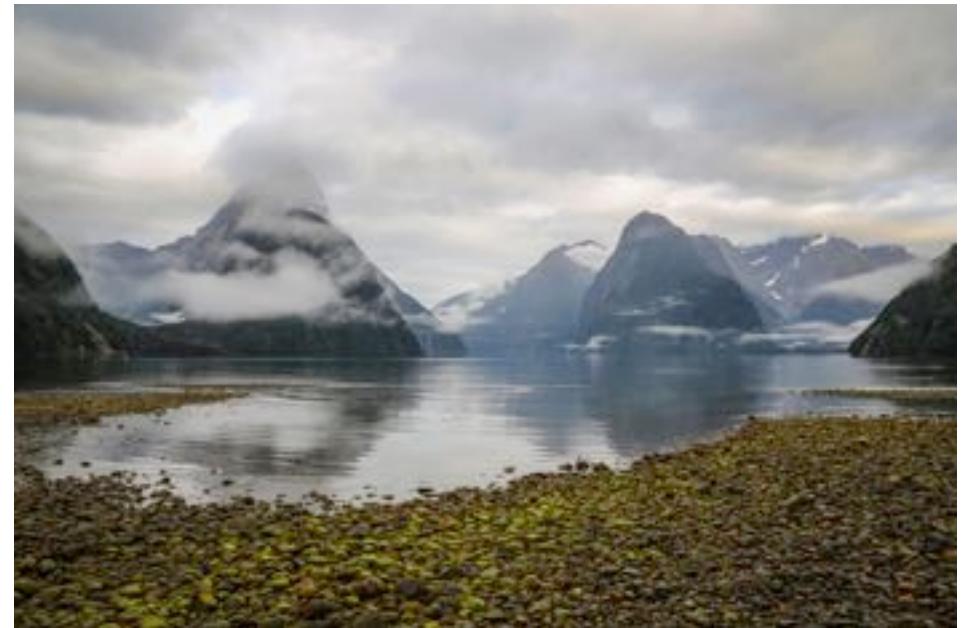


6. Export photo and share (I usually export as JPEG at 100 Quality Color Space: sRGB)

Before



After (using only the “Just Right” preset)



Whether you want to do further editing after the preset is applied is up to you. Here is the lowdown on how the various settings work in the Develop module. For example I usually do vignetting as a last step, the presets already apply a conservative vignette, but if you want to add more you can adjust it within the Effects portion of the develop module:

The Develop module

A. Presets, Snapshots, History, and Collections panels

B. Histogram

C. RGB values

D. Tool strip

E. Adjustment panels

F. Toolbar

- The Histogram panel in the Develop module allows you to measure color tones as well as make tonal adjustments to the photo.
- The tools in the tool strip let you fix red eye, remove dust and spots, crop and straighten photos, and apply adjustments to specific areas of a photo.
- The Basic panel contains the main tools for adjusting the photo's white balance, color saturation, and tonal scale.



- The Tone Curve and HSL/Color/B&W panels contain tools for fine-tuning your color and tonal adjustments.
- The Split Toning panel colors monochrome images or creates special effects with color images.
- The Detail panel lets you adjust sharpness and reduce noise.

- The Lens Corrections panel lets you correct chromatic aberration and lens vignetting caused by the camera lens.
- The Effects panel lets you adjust the vignette or add a film-grain effect.
- The Camera Calibration panel makes adjustments to the default calibration settings for your camera.

Processing a Single Raw Photo in Photoshop

Before Lightroom came along Photoshop was my primary editing program. I still use Photoshop a great deal for advanced HDR editing which we will discuss more in the following pages. But the power of Photoshop's adjustment layers for basic editing on single exposures should not be discounted. This tutorial is just an example of basic processing to a single RAW photo with adjustment layers in Photoshop. ([for more info on how adjustment layers work see here](#)).

1. Open your photo in Photoshop.



2. Press the New Adjustment Layer button, then select Levels - Levels is the best adjustment layer to start with in my opinion.



3. Within the Levels adjustment window, drag the Shadow and Highlight input sliders inward until they touch the ends of the histogram (or until they almost touch the histogram). This will allow your image to use the full tonal range.

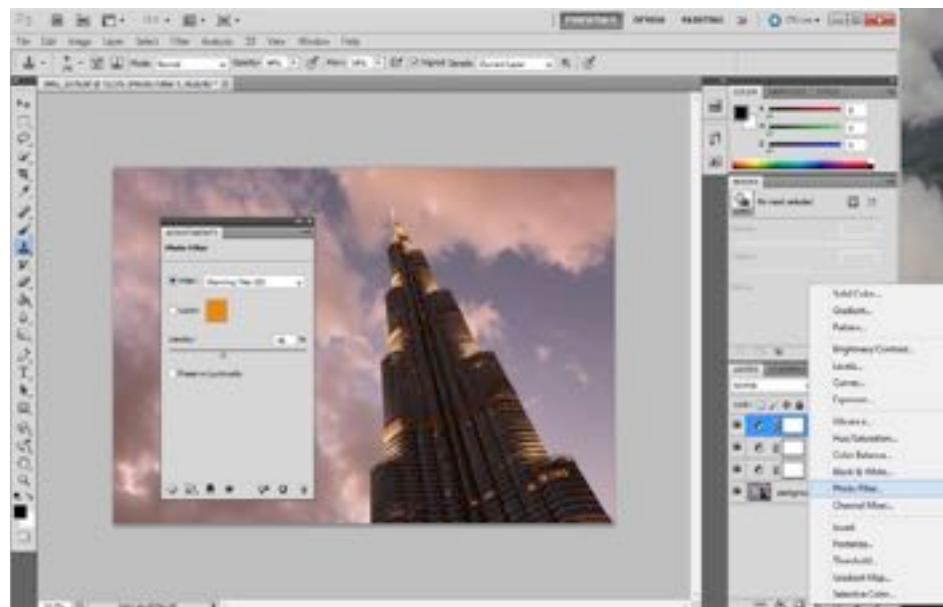


4. Then maybe add a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer. Within the Brightness/Contrast window drag the sliders to see if you like how they affect your photo.



5. This last step is a personal taste adjustment for this photo. Since this was photographed in Dubai I wanted to give it more of a desert “feel”. So I added a Photo Filter adjustment layer to add a kind of orange hue.

Try the other adjustment layers as well to see if you can improve your photo further. If at any time you change your mind about an adjustment, you can simply press the eyeball on each adjustment layer to see how your image looked before it was applied. Or you can simply delete each adjustment layer.



Before



After



High Dynamic Range (HDR) Processing Techniques

HDR EXPOSURE BLENDING TECHNIQUE 1: LIGHTROOM+PHOTOSHOP

In this tutorial we are going to take a step into high dynamic range processing. We will process three photos from a bracketed sequence using the presets in Lightroom, then use Adobe Bridge to open them as layers in Photoshop, then use Photoshop to combine the best attributes of each exposure using layer masks.

In this example, I took a 3 shot bracketed sequence in one of the world's busiest intersections - Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing at night (for cityscapes I sometimes use 5 shot bracketed sequences but here it was too busy to stand in one spot for too long, people were bumping into me and my camera so I just tried to do 3 bracketed shots).

1. Once in Lightroom, Import the photos you want to edit.

2. From the Library module, select the first photo in the sequence to process.

3. Then click over into the Develop Module.



4. For the first photo after trying a few I like the look of the “Emphasize It” preset so I’m applying that one.



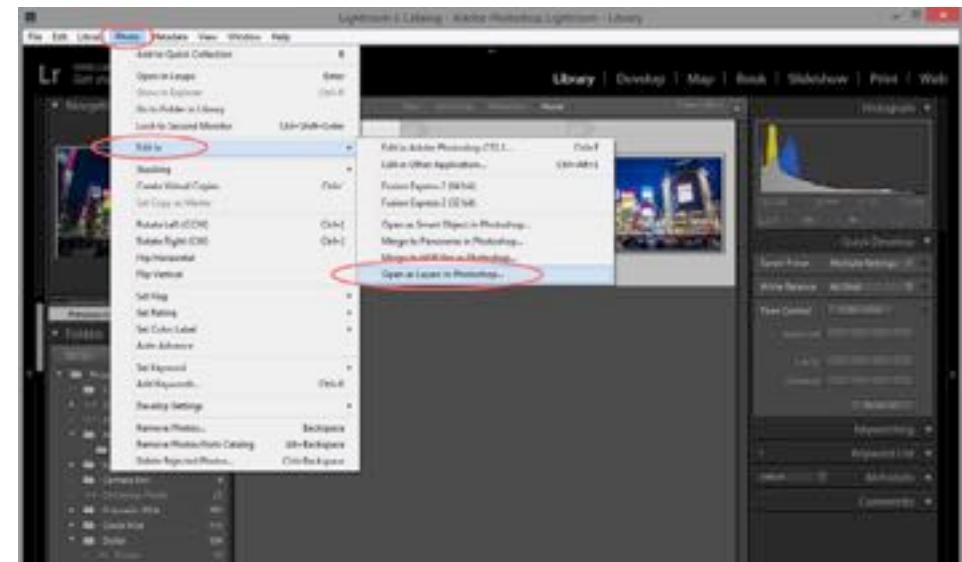
5. Then click the right arrow to get to the next photo in the sequence which in this case is the -1 bracketed shot (underexposed). For this one I like how the “Just Right” preset improves the lighted banner ads just enough. We will use this shot to replace some of the overexposed lights from the primary image.



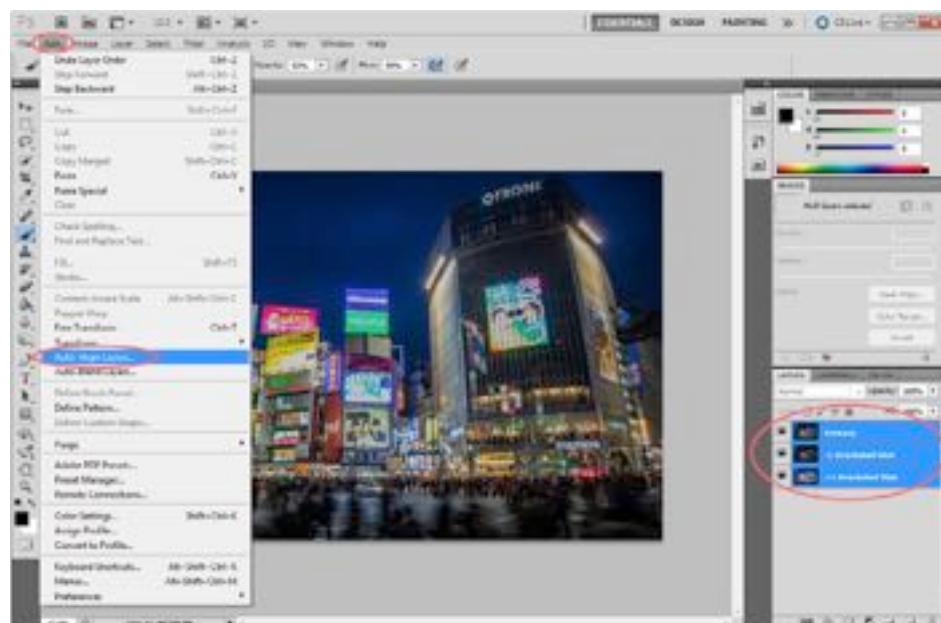
6. Then click the right arrow again to get the next photo in the sequence which in this case is the +1 bracketed shot (overexposed). For this one after trying a few I like the “Heavy Crowds” preset. We will use this shot to add some flare to the primary image so I like how the heavy crowds preset makes the lights bright and shiny on this one.



7. So now that we have processed all 3 bracketed photos in Lightroom, let's open them as layers in Photoshop. In Lightroom's Library view select all three images (on a PC you can do this holding the Shift or Ctrl key and click them). Then go to the Photo menu at the top and click Edit in > Open as Layers in Photoshop.



8. So now we have all three photos loaded as layers within Photoshop. And to just make things easier let's organize the layers so the primary photo is at the top, and then the -1 and +1 bracketed shot layers are below it. To make things easier I renamed the layers as well which is optional. Now select all three layers (on a PC you do this by holding the Ctrl key and clicking all three), and select Edit > Auto-Align Layers. This is just to make sure the layers are truly aligned together in case your tripod moved a little or if you hand-held the shot sequence.



9. Now we are going to work on combining the best attributes of the Primary shot and the -1 bracketed shot.

- Since the +1 shot is not needed until later go ahead and click the eyeball next to it so it will not be seen for now.
- Then select the primary layer and Add a layer mask to it by clicking the layer mask button in the lower right ([more info on how layer masks work here](#)).
- Then select the brush tool from the left tool bar. Use a soft-edged brush and set it to a good size relative to what areas of your photo you will be working on. Try setting the opacity to around 70%. But once you see how this works feel free to adjust your brush size and opacity to whatever you like best.
- Now we are simply going to brush all the overexposed areas where we want the -1 lower photo layer to show through. (*Make sure you have the layer mask selected, if you don't see anything happening, that is likely why*).



10. Since we brushed over those areas on the mask, you can see they are now better exposed because the image from underneath is showing through in those spots.



11. To get a better look at what was done, for fun click the eyeball of the layer below the primary one to turn it off, now you can see all the places we brushed on the mask.



12. Now that we fixed the overexposed areas go ahead and merge those two layers. Make sure both the layers are activated with their eyeballs visible, then select Layer > Merge Visible.



13. Now we are just left with two layers, the Primary and the +1 bracketed shot.



14. Now we are going to work on combining the best attributes of the Primary shot and the +1 bracketed shot.

- Select the primary layer and Add a layer mask to it by clicking the layer mask button in the lower right.
- Then select the brush tool from the left tool bar. Use a soft-edged brush and set it to a good size relative to what areas of your photo you will be working on. Try setting the opacity to around 70%. But once you see how this works feel free to adjust your brush size and opacity to whatever you like best.
- Now we are simply going to brush all the underexposed areas or just areas that could use more light and “flare” in general. See in this example all the areas where I am going to brush on the mask to add more light and interest.



15. Ok, I just brushed all those areas and look how it turned out! Definitely a lot more dynamic and lively now.



16. So that's it! You can Layer > Merge Visible again if you like or just save it. I usually save it as a High Quality JPEG at this point.

Before



After

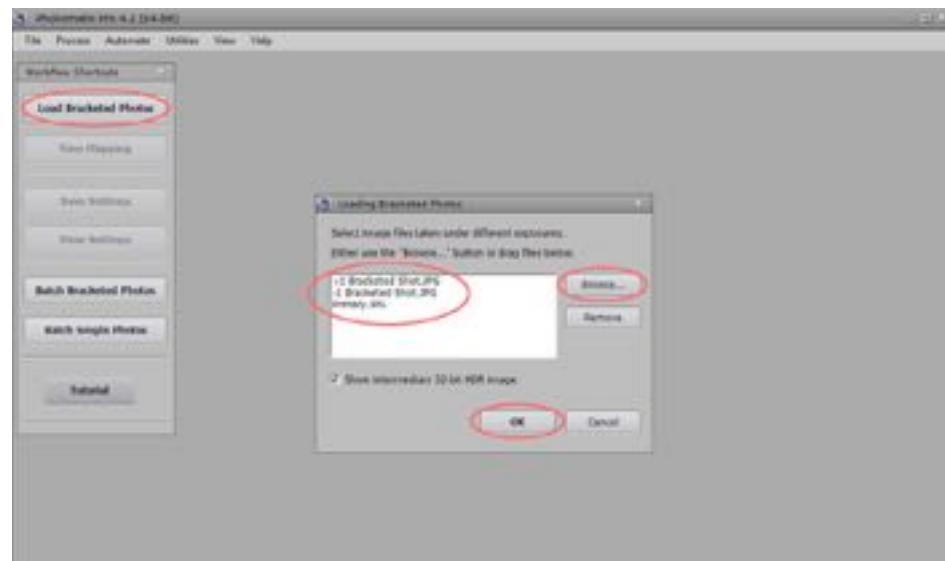


HDR EXPOSURE BLENDING TECHNIQUE 2: PHOTOMATIX BY ITSELF

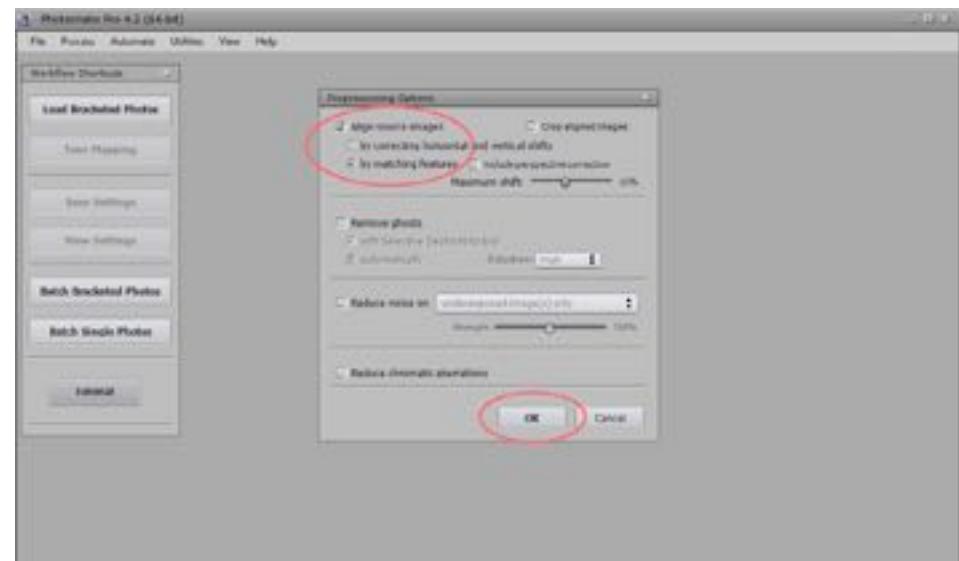
Photomatix Pro is the software of choice for many professional HDR photographers. Occasionally I like to drag my bracketed photos in there and see how they turn out compiled by Photomatix. It can work as a standalone program or as a plug-in for Photoshop or Lightroom. If you are interested in getting the program for 15% off, remember to use the Coupon Code “PICTURECORRECT” at checkout.

In this tutorial we will take those original 3 photos from the previous tutorial and see what Photomatix Pro can do with them on it's own. There are tons of options you can play around with in this program but this is what I usually do:

1. Once in Photomatix Pro, click the Load Bracketed Photos button, browse to find the sequence of photos you want to process into HDR, then click OK.



2. I use the setting to Align Source Images (in case the camera moved at all while shooting the sequence), and using the by matching features option. Then click OK.



3. Once the program align the images it might look a little crazy, but don't stress, then click the Tone Mapping / Fusion button.



4. For Process, click Tone Mapping. For Method, select Details Enhancer. Then adjust the sliders until you like how the photo looks. You can see the typical slider settings I use in the screenshot (I usually don't change these settings much from what you see here). Keep your eye on the histogram and try to keep the bell curve within the area (not hitting the ceiling of the graph). Then when it's looking good click the big process button near the bottom.



5. Once it's done processing, then click File > Save Image.

6. That's it! Go open the exported file and see how it turned out.

Before



After



HDR EXPOSURE BLENDING TECHNIQUE 3: LIGHTROOM+PHOTOMATIX+BRIDGE+PHOTOSHOP

In this tutorial we will cover one more method, this is my preferred method of HDR processing because it combines the realism of the primary shot out of Lightroom and the brilliant light of the processed photomatix shot. We will simply process the primary exposure in Lightroom with a preset, process the 3 original bracketed shots in Photomatix the same way we did in the previous tutorial, then combine the best attributes of both of those in Photoshop.

1. Once in Lightroom, from the Library module, select the first/primary photo from the original bracketed sequence.



2. Then click over into the Develop Module



3. After trying a few I like the look of the “Emphasize It” preset so I’m applying that one.



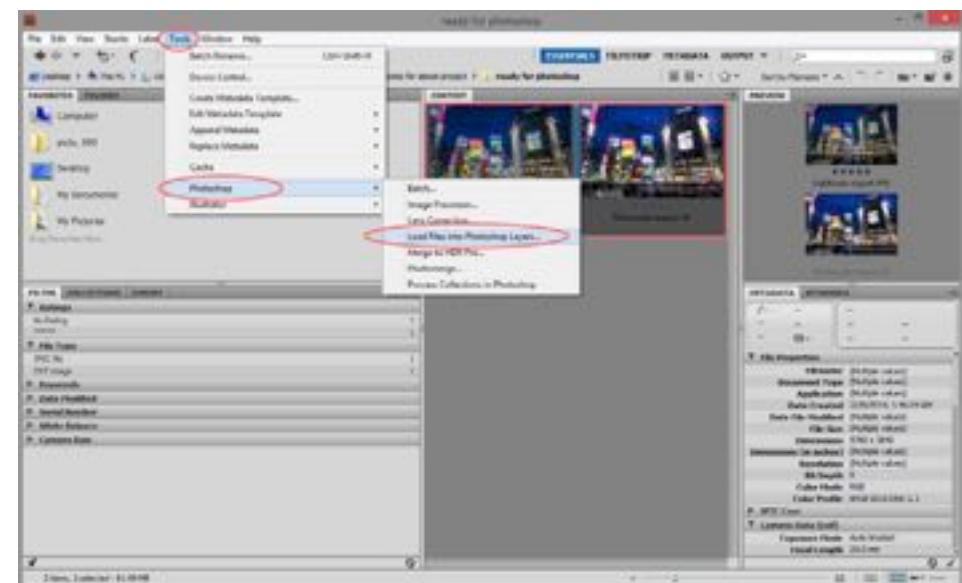
4. Now export it, File > Export. Save it somewhere you can find soon. Now that one is ready and waiting for us.



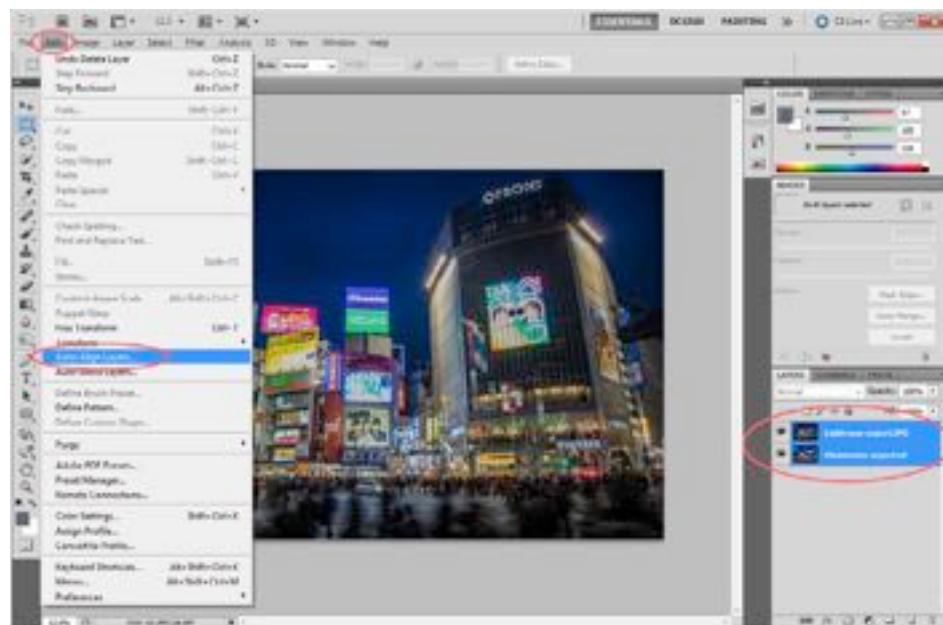
5. Now process the 3 *original* bracketed photos in **Photomatix** (**exactly the same as in the previous tutorial**). Once it's done processing, save it somewhere you can find soon. Now that one is ready and waiting for us.



6. Then open up Adobe Bridge. We are going to use Adobe Bridge to open those two processed photos as layers in Adobe Photoshop. So once in Adobe Bridge find those two photos, the one we just exported from Lightroom and the one we just exported from Photomatix. Select both of them (on a PC you do this by holding the Ctrl key and clicking both of them). Then click Tools > Photoshop > Load File into Photoshop Layers. (If you don't have Bridge you can accomplish this in Lightroom also, but it's an extra step)



7. So now we have both photos loaded as layers within Photoshop. Since the Lightroom version is the more “realistic” of the two lets organize the layers so the lightroom version is at the top and the photomatix version is at the bottom in terms of layer order. Now select both layers (on a PC you do this by holding the Ctrl key and clicking both of them), and select Edit > Auto-Align Layers. This is just to make sure the layers are truly aligned together in case your tripod moved a little or if you hand-held the shot sequence.



8. Now we are going to work on combining the best attributes of the Lightroom version and the Photomatix version.

- Select the Lightroom version layer and Add a layer mask to it by clicking the layer mask button in the lower right.
- Then select the brush tool from the left tool bar. Use a soft-edged brush and set it to a good size relative to what areas of your photo you will be working on. Try setting the opacity to around 70%. But once you see how this works feel free to adjust your brush size and opacity to whatever you like best.
- Now we are simply going to brush all the areas where we want the brilliant dynamic lighting of the photomatix version to shine through. *(Make sure you have the layer mask selected, if you don't see anything happening, that is likely why).*



9. Ok, I just brushed all those areas and look how it turned out! Look how the light shines through from the Photomatix version in those areas that were brushed/masked.



10. So that's it! I usually save it as a High Quality JPEG at this point.

Before



After



Topaz Plugins

If you want to go even further Topaz plugins are sometimes nice to add finishing touches. For example, here is the final photo from the previous tutorial opened into the Topaz Photoshop plugin [Star Effects](#). Topaz Star Effects has a couple City Lights presets that can add an extra “shimmer” or “shine” to city lights. Can you see how the preset made the lights shine more? It can be adjusted too. Sometimes fun to add an extra “pop” to your final result!

Recommended Topaz Plug-ins:

[Topaz Adjust](#)

[Topaz Star Effects](#)

[Topaz Clarity](#)

[Topaz B&W Effects](#)

[Topaz Detail](#)

Now that you know how to use layers and masking, don’t forget to try various layer blending options along with these plugins. Simply duplicate your main layer, apply a plugin effect, then mask or blend as needed.



For further training on photo editing

There is always something new to learn in the world of photography post-processing. I think we covered some of the most critical and effective techniques in the previous tutorials, but if you are hungry for more knowledge on how to edit & process photos here are some more great resources:

1. [Adobe's Lightroom Video Tutorials](#)
2. [Adobe's Photoshop Tutorials](#)
3. [Super Photo Editing Skills](#)
4. [Lightroom Made Easy](#)
5. [Understanding Post-Processing](#)
6. [Understanding Post-Processing the eBook](#)
7. [Before / After Lightroom Tutorials](#)
8. [Organize Your Photos – The Three Level System](#)
9. [Photoshop Basics for Photographers](#)
10. [Backup or Die - How to Keep Your Photos Safe](#)