

Landscape Photography

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What is Landscape Photography? Ask 10 different photographers and you will get 10 different answers. Most people think of landscape photography as an open area with no structures or people present. Others consider landscape photography to be capturing an image that embodies the spirit of the outdoors. This could be a picture of a mountain, city skyline, a body of water, etc

One of the best definitions comes from [PhotographyLife Website](#):
“Landscape photography is the art of capturing pictures of nature and the outdoors in a way that brings your viewer into the scene. From grand landscapes to intimate details, the best photos demonstrate the photographer’s own connection to nature and capture the essence of the world around them.”

Today we hear a lot about “scapes”. In addition to landscapes there are cityscapes, seascapes, cloudscapes, mountainscapes, etc). The definition of a scape is either an extensive view, or a picture or representation of such a view.

A good landscape photo will give the viewer a sense of *being there* to see something incredible. Their hearts should jump. You want them to feel the same emotions that you felt standing in the middle of nature and bringing back something amazing.

There are basically three styles of landscape photography

- Representational
- Impressionistic
- Abstract

Representational

This style shows the landscape photo as you see the landscape in real life. Light and colors are important with this style.

Impressionistic

This style aims at creating an impression of the scene in the photographer’s eyes rather than showing the realism of the scene. It is not the photographer’s intent to fake the scene but rather to focus on the part of the scene that creates certain emotions. Ex. Blurred waterfalls or moving clouds.

Abstract

Here the photographer will use shapes and colors as design elements. The goal here is not to show a realistic scene. Most of the time, the actual landscape is unrecognizable. Some people call this type of photography fine art. Ex. Images shot with the intentional camera movement

Some photographers consider landscape photography to be hard, while others including myself, consider it to be one of the easiest ways to teach composition, camera handling, lighting, etc.

One of the nice things about landscape photography is you don't have to have a lot of money invested in equipment. All you need is a camera and a good lens. Contrary to what a lot of people think, you can take good landscape photos with cell phones. However, most people use their cell phones to take snapshots, not photographs.

No matter what type of camera is used, the photographer needs to follow the rules of good composition.

Equipment

In spite in what was said above, if you want to take great landscape photos, you will need good equipment.

- Camera
 - Ideally, the camera should be a dSLR, or a good Point and Shoot camera where you have total control of the camera (change the settings).
 - If using a dSLR camera, consider setting your White Balance to Cloudy – it will give your photo a warmer element.
- Lens
 - Wide angle lens (16-35 mm or something in that range).
 - Telephoto lens to capture a detail in your photo (70-200 or something in that range).
- Tripod and Ball head
 - The tripod should be sturdy (not a Wal-Mart special).
 - When it is expanded, the tripod should be at eye level without having to use the center pole (if the tripod has one).
 - If you have to use the center pole, it should not be extended more than halfway.
 - A ball head will give you the flexibility of turning your camera in many different directions without messing with a lot of controls.
- Remote control shutter release
 - This can be a cable that attaches to your camera.
 - Or, it can be a wireless release.

- Special Equipment
 - Circular Polarizer Lens – to take the glare off shining surfaces
 - Variable Neutral Density Filter – Use to reduce the amount of light coming into your camera. This is especially helpful in shooting waterfalls in bright light.
- Hoodman's Loop – used to put over your camera's LCD viewfinder.

Camera Settings

The camera setting you use will depend on the situation you are in and what you want to show in your image.

Image Format

- Shoot Raw if you are using photographic software to improve your images.
- The Raw Format will preserve much more of the data than a JPEG image.
- Raw will allow you to pull much more detail out of the shadows and highlights.

Exposure Mode

- You should use Aperture Priority (A or AV on most cameras).
- This is where you set the aperture (F-Stops) on your camera. Then the camera will work out the rest for the correct exposure.
- Usually in Landscape Photography, you will want to use a higher F-Stop to get more Depth of Field (DOF). Something like F-14, 16 or 22.
- However, if there is no real foreground, shoot at F-8 or F-11.

Shutter Speed

- If shooting in Aperture Priority, the camera will automatically set the shutter speed.
- However, if you are hand holding the camera, the shutter speed should be roughly the reciprocal of the focal length of the lens or faster. Ex. If the focal length of the lens is 30mm, then the shutter speed should be at least 1/30th of a second or higher.
- Ideally, you should not shoot less than 1/30th of an second unless you are on a tripod.
- Another factor to consider is Wind. If you are shooting a low shutter speed and it is a windy day and trees are involved, your trees will be blurred.
- This is can be a concern if shooting waterfalls.

ISO

- Start with the lowest ISO available on your camera – 100 or less.

- This low ISO will give you a cleaner image (less noise or grain).
- If you are hand holding your camera, you may need to increase the ISO to avoid camera shake.
- ISO can always be increased or decreased depending on your other camera settings.

Putting it all together

- First set your Aperture.
- Second set your Shutter Speed.
- Third adjust your IOS to get the needed exposure.
- Don't be afraid to experiment.
 - Try different F-Stops.
 - Different Exposures.
 - This can be done by bracketing your photos using different F-Stops and/or Exposures.

Landscape Photography Tips

Tip # 1

- Research
 - Research the area you are planning to photograph.
 - Learn as much about the area as possible.
 - Go online and search for photos of the area to get an idea of what others shot.
 - Download various apps for your cell phone. Some of the more popular ones are;
 - Really Good Photo Spots
 - TPA
 - Photo Pills
 - Sun Seeker
 - Scout the Location.
 - Can use this app to show when and where the sun is now and where it will be at a certain time in the future.
 - Good for Sunrises and Sunsets
 - Make a list of what you want to shoot

Tip # 2

- Decide when to go.
 - When is the best time of the year?
 - When is the best light?
 - Golden Hour – usually 1 hour after sunrise and/or 1 hour before sunset.

- However, if you are in a location around noon (bad light) and you will probably never be back, shoot the landscape and do the best you can in Post Processing to get the photo the way you want it.

Tip # 3

- Be Flexible.
 - You get to your site and it is raining. Be flexible and get the most out of the day.
 - Mother Nature has a way of throwing plenty of curve-balls.
 - Expect the unexpected.
- Have a Plan B
 - Have a backup plan.
 - The bottom line is that no plan is perfect.
 - Be flexible.

Tip # 4

- Have a Strong Focal Point.
 - All photographs need a focal point. Landscape photography is no different.
 - Without a focal point, the viewer's eyes will wander all over the photo with nowhere to rest.
 - A focal point can be anything the viewer can identify. Ex. building, mountain, rock formation, a person, etc.
 - Once a focal point is established, then where do you put it in the photo? Consider the Rule of Thirds.

Tip # 5

- Watch for Clutter.
 - Clutter in a photo can be defined as things that do not add any interest to the image.
 - Avoid clutter by changing the composition (move the clutter around to completely remove or at least reducing it in the frame or zoom in on the subject.
 - Don't forget to perform the border control of the frame to see if there are any unwanted elements.
 - Ex: tree branch protruding from the top or side of the frame
 - The last resort is to take any unwanted items out in post processing.

Tip # 6

- Consider the Sky.
 - Most images have a dominant foreground or sky.
 - If the sky is uninteresting, do not show much of it. Place your horizon line higher in the picture.

- If the sky is filled with beautiful clouds or cloud formations, then include more of it in the photo. Place your horizon line lower in the picture.
- Never have the horizon in the middle of your image.
- Use a Polarizing filter to bring out the color.
- Be sure your horizon is straight
- Sometimes you just have to be patient.

Tip # 7

- Foreground
 - Try to have a strong foreground element in your photo.
 - This will add a sense of depth.
 - It will lead the viewer's eyes into the image.
 - Foreground elements can be anything such as a small plant, rock formation, etc.
 - Consider getting low and as close as possible to the foreground element. This can really help in creating a dynamic composition.

Tip # 8

- Get everything in Focus.
 - This is where Depth of Field comes into play.
 - In landscape photography, normally you want as much in focus as possible.
 - To do this you will need to use a F-Stop of F13 or higher.
 - Focus your camera approximately 1/3 of the way into the scene.
 - Consider bracketing your photos using different F-Stops.

Tip # 9

- Change your Perspective
 - Many photographers will set their tripod up at eye level and shoot the scene. That is a great place to start.
 - However, consider getting down on the ground and shooting the scene.
 - Look for other points of view to shoot from.
 - Explore the area and look for other vantage points to shoot from.
 - Don't forget to turn around.
 - Many times a photographer will have a beautiful landscape view from an overlook. However, there may be a good of picture behind you.
 - When photographing, always work the scene (front, back, up, down).
 - Remember, you have feet and so does the tripod. MOVE Around,

Tip # 10

- Show Size and Scale
 - This is a composition element that many times a photographer forgets about.
 - To give the viewer a sense of grandness, place an object in the photo that the viewer can recognize. Ex. a person, building, etc.
 - A person will add perspective to the image. This is especially true if the person has on bright and/or vivid clothing.

Tip # 11

- Zoom In
 - After you have taken your wide angle photograph, consider zooming in on a specific area of the landscape. This is called catching the intimate landscape.
 - This can be especially helpful when shooting waterfalls.
 - Shoot the over picture of the falls.
 - Then shoot specific areas in the falls.
 - Doing both can be helpful at telling the story.

Tip #12

- Look for Reflections
 - Reflections can add an incredible perspective to a photo.
 - Most people think of water reflections.
 - However, a reflection can come from anything shiny.
 - Look for angles that will reflect as much of the landscape as possible.

Tip # 13

- Lines
 - Lines are another compositional element that sometimes go unnoticed.
 - Lines can be used to lead the viewer to your subject.
 - Lines can give an image depth, scale, and may even create patterns in the image.

Tip #14

- Movement
 - Many people think of landscapes as calm, serene and passive environments. However, this is not always the case.
 - To show movement in an image will add drama
 - At the same time, it can distract from a photo.
 - Some examples of movement that can add to an image are wind in trees, waves, clouds, and water.
 - To capture movement, you usually will need a longer shutter speed (less an 1/30th of a second), so a tripod will be required.
 - Waterfalls

1. Many photographers like to show waterfalls in slow motion. They want a silky or milky effect.
2. To do this, you have to use a very low shutter speed (1/4 sec or lower).
3. You definitely need a tripod and cable release (or you can use the timer on your camera) for this.
4. You may also need a variable neutral density filter if you can not get your shutter speed low enough.

Tip # 15

- Get up Early and Stay out Late
 - Sunrises
 1. He who snoozes loses!
 2. Do your research before hand to find the best location.
 3. Get there at least 30 minutes before sunrise.
 4. Consider shooting both vertically and horizontally.
 - Sunsets
 1. Research for the best location.
 2. Look for a body of water, as to get a reflection of the sun setting.
 3. Be there at least 60 minutes before the sunset.
 - Remember the Golden Hour Rule.
 - There are a lot of good apps for your cell phone to tell you when the sun will set or rise.
 - Consider staying later after the sun sets to shoot the night sky.

Tip # 16

- Weather and the Environment
 - If the conditions are cold:
 1. Layer your clothing.
 2. Carry your second camera battery in your inside pocket to keep it warm.
 - Carry a towel or plastic bag to put your camera, camera bag, etc on, so it is not directly on the ground.
 - If the camera and/or lens gets wet, use a dry cloth to dab the water off. Do Not rub the water off. Doing so could rub the paint off it.
 - Be aware of DUST. If the conditions are dusty, change lens in a closed area (car).
 - If it is raining, shoot from the car or a covered area.

Tip # 17

- Never Stop Learning.
 - No matter where you are in your photography skill set, there is always more to learn.
 - Join a Photography club or group.
 - Read.

- Watch videos.
- Go out on photo shoots with photographers whom you consider to be better than you and learn from them.
- Consider taking a Photo Workshop away from home.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Learn to feel the light – lighting can make or break a photo.
- Good landscapes photos require good landscapes to shoot.
- Look for shadows – they can add intrigue to your photo.
- Put a pdf of your camera manual on your smart phone. That way you always have it.
- Be sure your camera is set up for the correct Time Zone.
- Consider
 - Using HDR.
 - A Panorama photo spread.
 - Shoot the Stars.
 - Time Lapse.
 - Focus Stacking.
- Look for backlit subjects.
- The Viewer of your Photos
 - When someone looks at your photos their eyes see (in order);
 1. Brightness.
 2. Sharpness.
 3. Warmth (the feeling of the image).

The Ten Deadly Sins in Landscape Photography:

- Crooked Horizon Lines.
- No clouds in the sky.
- No foreground object.
- Shooting in harsh light (mid-day) – except in bad weather.
- Border Control – unwanted objects along the border of your photo,
- Frozen water on a waterfall – want milky or silky water
- Choppy water – want mirror like water
- The camera setting is on either A (Automatic mode) or P (Program mode). Shoot Aperture Priority.
- Not getting up early enough to get that great sunrise photo. (He/She who snoozes – loses).
- Not following good Composition Rules.