Snow Photography Tips

How to Take Photos in Snow

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Snowy conditions make for some wonderful photography opportunities.

However, taking photos in snow can be a little bit challenging.

This is for a number of reasons, from the brightness of the snow, through to the cold weather conditions that can hamper a camera’s functions.

Then of course you have to consider general winter issues, like ice and cold, that can make conditions challenging for a photographer.

Start with the Composition

Whatever type of camera you have and regardless of the subject or scene, the composition of your image should always be one of your key considerations.

Composition in photography is all about deciding what is going to be in your image, and how the different elements of the image work together. So you need to think about what exactly your image is of – the subject – and compose around that.

Shoot at Blue and Golden Hours

Light is a key component of photography. Through the course of the day, the light changes in both its direction and colour. In the early morning and late evenings, when the sun is just below the horizon, the light is very blue and cold in tone, and this time is known as the blue hour.

Just after the sun rises and before it sets, the light is very yellow and warm in tone, and this period is known as the golden hour.

Winter Sky

Winter skies can be beautiful this time of year. Warm and cool tones can create a different mood and will make your snow images pop. Use sunrise and sunset to capture warm tones from the sky reflecting on the snow. If you want to create a more dramatic image, expose for the sky and everything else will be darker. This technique adds a little mystery and changes the mood of your image.

Shoot in Aperture Priority Mode

Aperture Priority (“Av” on Canon and “A” on Nikon camera) will allow you to quickly change your depth of field. When shooting in Aperture Priority, the camera will choose the appropriate shutter speed. Aperture Priority is great in cold weather because it allows for a lot of creativity.

If your camera doesn’t have an aperture priority mode, then you might check to see if it has a snow photography mode (or winter mode), which will help ensure correctly exposed images.

White Balance

Snow pictures using default or automatic settings on your camera can turn out grey. The reason for this is exposure and white balance. The camera gets confused in the bright snow because your camera thinks the world is grey. So when it sees a bright snowy image, it will automatically try and adjust the picture to make your image look grey. Snow usually shows up on the blue side of the color spectrum. Try using the cloudy white balance setting or manually set your white balance around 6,500 kelvin.

Try a Polarizing Filter

Another snow photography tip for cameras that support interchangeable lenses is to use a polarizing filter. A polarizing filter is a bit of glass that attaches to your lens which is used to filter out polarized light.

Polarized light is generally light which has been reflected from a certain type of surface, which includes snow. If you use a polarizing filter when shooting snow, it cuts down on the glare, and will improve the contrast and colors in your image

Exposure

If you want your snow to be white you have to overexpose because your meter wants everything to be grey. With snow photography, it's a good idea to overexpose to compensate for your camera's automatic metering system (which is calibrated for middle gray). Just move your exposure compensation dial up by 1 to 2 stops and you will have perfectly white snow in your image. If you don't, you'll end up with different tones of dull gray images.

Use a Lens Hood

If you have a camera with a removable lens, like a mirrorless camera or a DSLR camera, then you should consider using an accessory known as a lens hood. These are also sometimes called sun hoods.

A lens hood is simply an extended piece of circular plastic that fits onto the end of the lens, giving it an extended look. Usually, the main reason to use a lens hood is to reduce unwanted glare entering the lens from the sides of the shot, which can cause flares and other image quality issues in your photos.

In snow photography, there is often a lot of glare as the snow is so bright, and a lens hood can help cut down on this, giving you higher contrast and cleaner images.

RAW

Shoot in RAW format (or RAW+JPEG).

Capturing the correct exposure and color temperature when your scene is overwhelmed by reflective white snow can be tricky.

Setting your file format to RAW allows you to safely adjust your settings without being limited to the restrictions found in JPEG files.

If you shoot in raw, you'll be able to recover highlights and adjust shadows afterwards.

Protect Your camera

Before heading out in the cold winter, be sure you have either a UV or clear filter to protect the front elements of your camera lens from moisture and condensation.

Batteries lose charge in the cold and in the extreme cold they can lose their charge very quickly. So not only do you want to have an extra battery, be sure to keep that extra battery warm.

To avoid condensation buildup in your camera when you come in from the cold, grab a large zip-lock bag for your camera and seal it tight.

Throw a couple of silicon paks in the bag to help absorb moisture. Keep the bag closed when you get home and don’t open it until the camera reaches room temperature.

Allowing your camera to return to normal temperature gradually will significantly reduce that chance of condensation.

Camera LCD Display

Don’t trust the preview of the images you see in the LCD screen on the back your camera. Shooting in the snow is like shooting on a really bright day at the beach. The LCD on your camera is going to be washed out so you’re not going to get an accurate view of your image. It’s easy to be fooled by what you see on the back your camera. You may want to bracket your photos and be sure to save everything until you get home and you’re able to view your images on your computer.

Check the Histogram

Another idea for checking your exposure when shooting in the snow is to take a look at your histogram to be sure you are not losing image details in the snow. The histogram will tell you if your highlights are overexposed or blown out. Conversely, you want to be sure you're not overcompensating and underexposing everything. So it's a good idea to shoot in raw so you can make adjustments when you get home.

Metering

Most DSLR cameras a different light metering modes to select from. The most common metering modes are:

- Matrix Metering (Nikon) or Evaluative Metering (Canon)
- Center-Weighted Metering
- Spot Metering

Try experimenting with different metering modes when shooting in the snow. If you have a Canon, start with *Evaluative Metering*, or *Matrix* Metering for Nikon users. For sunny days, try Spot Metering.

Camera Settings for Snow Photography

Here's a quick overview of my suggested settings for snow photography for some different camera types to get you started.

Snow Photography Settings for Mirrorless / DSLR / Camera with Manual Controlset it up as follows:

- Aperture priority, wide apertures (f/1.2 – f/4) for shallow depth of field, and narrow aperture (f/8 – f/16) to get more of the scene in focus
- ISO – either set the ISO to Auto, or adjust based on the light. Usually 100 – 400 will be fine except at night.
- Shutter speed – in aperture priority this will be set for you
- Exposure compensation: Set to +1
- RAW: configure the camera to capture images in RAW mode
- White Balance: Set to Auto and you can adjust this when post processing

Snow Photography Settings for Compact Camera / Camera without Manual Control

If you have a compact camera or a camera that doesn't give you manual controls, then try the following for photographing snow:

- Set the camera to "snow" or "winter" mode if it has one (many do)
- Exposure Compensation: Nearly every camera has some form of exposure compensation feature. Set this to +1. There might be a "+/-" button on the camera, otherwise check your camera manual for the feature
- White balance: Auto
- Flash: Off

Snow Photography Settings for Smartphone Cameras

If you have a smartphone, the chances are you have limited manual control over many of the key settings. However, most smartphones these days are very clever, and should be able to get great snowy photos without too much adjustment on your part.

Some things to try:

- HDR mode on – this will ensure an evenly lit image across the whole frame
- Exposure Compensation: Nearly every smartphone has an exposure compensation feature in the camera app. Set this to +1
- White balance: Auto
- Flash: Off


BIENVENIDOS AL
PARQUE NACIONAL COTOPAXI
AREA NATURAL PROTEGIDA CUIDALA
HORARIO DE ATENCION DE 08h00 A 15h00
Kodak
Ecuacolor
Snow