

Travel Photography hints.

G Craig Jan 2008

Most people now use modern automatic digital cameras, but are not always that happy with the results. Here are some hints from my experience that hopefully will help you get a more reliable outcome.

Basics: Modern cameras can be very confusing to a newcomer as they have hundreds of different things that you can alter or adjust, but there are very few that you really need to know about. You need to read the instruction manual or ask someone so that you know how to do the following:

1. Turn the camera on and off.
2. Operate the zoom control.
3. Turn the flash off and how to force it on.

Light:

1. Sunlight causes harsh shadows and cameras can't cope with the high contrast between sunlit areas and shadows. If possible don't take people in the sun or if you must they shouldn't be wearing hats. Get the people into the shade. Photos in forest or bush where sun is shining on parts of the path or bush are also likely to disappoint because of the harsh shadows. Take photos in the bush where there isn't any sunlight showing.
2. If the sun is shining on your camera lens when you take a photo, the photo will have less contrast and be a bit washed out. Ask someone to hold their hand 6 or 12 inches above the camera to shield the lens from the sun while you take the photo.
3. Cloudy weather is much better than bright sunlight for most photos.
4. Don't be put off by a bit of rain, lighting can be very good for photos in light rain or just after rain.
5. Taking dusk (cars have lights on) and night photos. Use the flash if the only thing you are photographing is within 3 metres of you. For scenes and building interiors disable the flash and don't handhold the camera – see clause 3 under "Holding the Camera" below.

Flash:

1. Only useful up to about 3 metres (some larger cameras with a 10x or greater zoom have more powerful flashes and are useful up to 5 or 6 metres).
2. If taking low light or night scenes, or taking building interiors, turn the flash off or you will light up the foreground and see nothing beyond a few metres.

Scenery

1. Turn the flash off (the camera will do this automatically in good light conditions)
2. Try to have something of interest in the foreground, on the side, or frame the scenery with a tree or building.

Holding the camera:

1. In bright conditions anything goes – if you have a viewfinder it will be easier to use than the screen on the back in bright conditions.
2. In dull or low light, if you aren't using the flash (see limitations in "Flash" above), use the viewfinder, as holding the camera to your face will help steady it. If you don't have a viewfinder, then tuck your elbows into your chest whilst viewing the camera display. This is much more stable than having your elbows out wide and unsupported.
3. At dusk, dawn, and nighttime, if you can't use the flash because your object is further than 3 metres away, then the camera must be supported on or against a stationary object, you don't need to carry a tripod just hold the camera on or against a wall, against a power pole, etc and the flash must be disabled. Just keep holding the camera button down and the camera steady until it has finished taking the shot.
4. Inside buildings, again the camera must be supported on or against a stationary object, against a wall, on the back of a church pew, etc. The flash must be disabled.
5. In very low light if you can't find a suitable pole, wall etc rest the camera on a friend's shoulder and ask them to be as still as possible for a couple of seconds.
6. The basic rule of night and indoor photography is, if the subject is not within a few metres, don't handhold and don't use the flash or you will not get a useable photo.

Recording the day's photos and what you did (many ways of achieving this, but here's our way):

1. Keep a diary and make an entry every evening briefly saying where you were and what you did. This is a must do. If you're really tired then just a couple of lines is OK, but don't leave it till the next day – you will forget some of it!
2. If you have a portable PC or tablet download all your photos at the end of each day into a folder of that day's date, and also into a sub-folder (we label it 'manip'). Any manipulation, eg reducing in size for emails) is done in the 'manip' folder. Never touch the originals.
3. If you don't have something to download onto then make sure you have a large memory card and set your camera to start a new folder each day if it has that facility.
4. If you can't do either of the above, then you can easily sort them into dates when you get home, as each photo has a 'date taken' in its properties.