PHOTOGRAPHING STORMY WEATHER

PUBLISHED - 07 MAR 2019

Instead of hibernating, get outdoors in stormy weather, as it can whip up some great opportunities – use our tips to maximise your results with the minimum of hassle.



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Keep it steady

Mount your camera on a tripod, firing the shutter via a cable release or the self-timer. The more pixels your camera's sensor packs, the more likely that tiny movements will be recorded

as blur in your shots, and the longer the exposure and the larger you're intending to display your final image, the more important this is.

Long exposures enable you to create dynamic streaks in the sky from scudding clouds, milky surfaces on lakes or the sea instead of choppy waves, and ethereally smooth waterfalls (see Water Effects, below). For a belts-and-braces approach, most tripods have a hook underneath the plate from which you can hang something heavy (like your kitbag), anchoring the set-up even more securely.

• Read more tips for using a tripod here.

Protect your kit

Pack a lens cloth and use it frequently; a rain cover for your camera and lens is also a wise investment. At a pinch, put your camera in a clear plastic sandwich bag, fastened around the lens with a rubber band. A UV filter will also protect your lens from dirt kicked up by the wind or corrosive sea spray. When you get home, thoroughly wipe down and dry out all your kit, including tripod plates, to prevent damage.

• The Nikon Store has a great range of Nikon-branded protective kit, including lens hoods, cloths and waterproof camera covers.

All at sea

For stormy seas, use a long focal length (e.g. 300mm) so you can shoot from a safe distance; rogue waves can not only soak you and ruin your kit, but they also have the potential to knock you off your feet and into the swell. Take care on cliffs, too – stand well away from the edge, especially in windy conditions.

It's a good idea to take a buddy to watch out for potential danger while you're concentrating on your photography.

Water effects

To freeze scudding waves or tumbling waterfalls in vibrant action, you'll need a fast-ish shutter speed, probably at least 1/125sec, which might mean bumping up your ISO.

Alternatively, for a smooth, ethereal effect and dynamic cloud trails, set a low ISO (100 or 200), a narrow aperture (f/16 to f/32) and use a neutral density filter to cut down the amount of light hitting the sensor – this will enable you to achieve a long enough shutter speed (around 2 seconds or more).

• Check out more tips for blurring water here.

As right as rain

Drizzle and steady rain offer great opportunities for reflections in puddles and on wet pavements and roads; go for a low angle for abstract results.

Rainy skies make for dramatic images in their own right; watch out for towering storm clouds, which look particularly spectacular in the late afternoon or early morning light. Patches of blue sky and shafts of sunlight streaming through clouds as the rain starts to clear also create great images, and if you're lucky you might even catch a rainbow.

• Find more tips on shooting in the rain here.



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Thundering success

Lightning can make for dramatic skyscapes and landscapes. Set a focal length of around f/5.6-8 and the shutter speed to B (bulb). Focus manually on infinity, then use a cable release or the self-timer (set to around 10sec) to leave the shutter open long enough to capture a couple of strikes.

Now here's the caveat – stay safe and shoot from indoors. If you do get caught in the open, stay away from trees, water and metal objects such as poles and umbrellas, and seek low-lying ground. A hard-topped car will also offer protection, because if it's stuck the metal body acts like a Faraday cage and conducts the lightning around the outside of the car and down into the ground, rather than through you. If all else fails, don't lie down but squat, hugging your knees with your head tucked into them, making as little contact with the ground as possible (wet earth is a remarkably efficient conductor of electricity).

Quick tips

• Choose a location you're already familiar with so you don't have to waste time in inclement conditions looking for the best angles.

• Use a graduated neutral density (ND) filter to help you balance out your exposure when you have a dark foreground and bright sky, or vice versa.

• Dull, leaden skies can deaden a colour image; convert to black and white to bring up dingy mid-tones and create a far more compelling result.

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