

TOP 10 TIPS LANDSCAPES



hot PIXELS
PHOTOGRAPHY

Mountain runner on Mount Riley, Richmond Ranges. Enveloped in mist and poor lighting, this drab scene was resurrected as a black and white image. It won a national competition.

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TOP 10 TIPS LANDSCAPES

This e-book is dedicated to my cherished wife Lynette,
who keeps the home fires burning while I chase the light.
You are the reason I keep coming home from lonely mountain summits;
from wild, windswept beaches; from lengthy road-trips with my camera.



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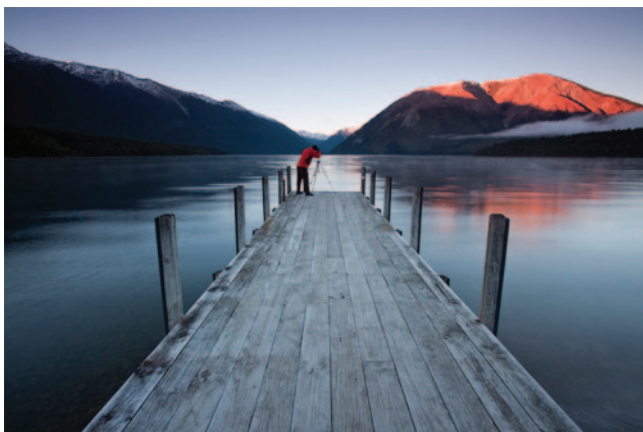
As a self-employed photographer, I rely on selling my photographs and any supporting educational material such as this e-book.

I offer this free guide in good faith that you will not distribute this to anyone without my express permission.

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TOP 10 TIPS > LANDSCAPES

With the rapid rise in popularity of digital photography, it seems that everyone now has a camera, at least on their cellphone. However, some things don't change, such as the need for quality light, or the rules of composition. Here are ten top tips to enable you to create stunning pictures.



01 Camera

A wise photographer recently remarked that 'the best camera is the one that's with you'. Nevertheless, I strongly suggest that if you are serious about landscape photography, that you invest in a quality **DSLR camera**, not just a point-and-shoot, or micro four thirds.

When you invest **money** into a hobby, you are more likely to invest **time** — time practising, as well as time learning about how to use your camera, and how to compose good shots.

DSLR (digital single lens reflex) cameras have larger sensors which capture more detail. They also fit better quality lenses and filters and other accessories.

02 Focal length

For landscape photography, the pros use **wide-angle lenses**. These range from 10–40mm in focal length, and capture the big picture. They are also more likely to produce sharper results.



A telephoto / zoom lens is perfect for isolating subjects from the background, creating the illusion of depth in a two-dimensional photograph. These kea were sunning themselves in Mt Aspiring National Park.



A telephoto zoom lens can compress perspective, & bring elements together

The other common lens is the ubiquitous **tele-zoom**, with a focal length around 70–200mm. This is great for shooting details in the landscape, such as abstracts or wildlife, and is also useful for compressing the perspective of a scene. (see mountain landscape above).

03 Filters

If your camera can fit a filter, there is one that will work wonders: the **Polariser**. This is an expensive piece of glass, but when screwed onto your camera lens, it will darken blue skies and saturate colours, as well as reduce glare and nasty reflections in the water.

In addition, serious pros carry a range of **Neutral Density filters** which slip into a dedicated filter holder. These are used to tame a bright sky, or to slow down moving water, and especially to get that stock-standard blurry waterfall shot. (see over)

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This waterfall is on Gridiron Creek in Kahurangi National Park. To slow down the shutter speed of the camera (and blur the water), a Neutral Density filter was used.

04 Timing

Just like in comedy, timing is everything. Contrary to popular practice, shooting under the midday summer sun is unlikely to produce inspiring results; the overhead sun creates short shadows, which are harsh. Therefore, landscapes lack three-dimensional form and appear flat and lack-lustre. People have unflattering shadows under their facial features.

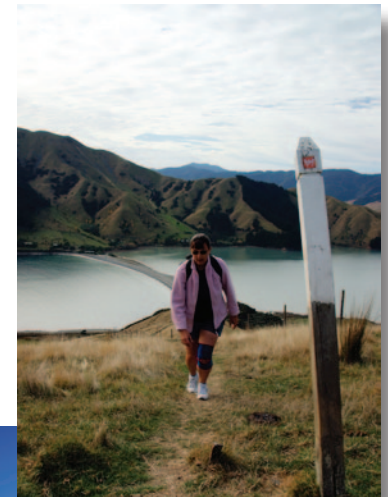
Blue-sky days are great for exploring outside, but make for boring photographs. For quality light, try shooting in the **Golden Hour** – that magical time of day before sunset (or after dawn) when the light is softer and diffused, the hills are bathed in a golden glow (and when your companions are most likely heading home for dinner.)

Also try shooting in the **Blue Hour**; half an hour after sundown, when the colours of the sky can become brilliantly intense.

Alternatively, brave the elements and shoot immediately after a storm, waiting for the moment when a shaft of light penetrates the moody sky. NZ photographer, Andris Apse, reckons “the third dimension is mood.”

A dull, overcast sky didn't do justice to the beauty of Cable Bay in Nelson (or my wife).

Two months later, the same shot was improved markedly by taking advantage of the excellent light quality during the Golden Hour.



“Just like with comedy, timing is everything.”

“The most important tool for composition is your feet.”



Walking on water over Lake Iron, in Kahurangi National Park. Climb above the tree-line to simplify your compositions to a monochrome world of white ice and black rock.

05 Location, location, location

So many people take photos from where they happen to be standing, from eye level. Merely moving a few metres away, or lying down on the ground can instantly improve your camera angle. It is especially important when photographing children or wildlife to get down to their level.

If you're tramping, you find better light and more simple compositions above the bush-line. And, of course, better views.

06 Keep Composed

Rules are made to be broken, but they're an important starting point. Remember that the professionals abide by these 90% of the time too.

The most common mistake is to place your subject in the centre of the frame ... boring! Try applying the **Rule of Thirds**. Divide your camera's LCD screen into a 3x3 grid, and place key elements of your scene on the intersecting lines. For instance, if the sky is uninteresting, (see below) put the horizon one third of the way down the photo, and major on the landscape. Conversely, if you are looking at a stunning skyscape, make this fill two thirds of the photograph.



Dancing over to Johnston Peak, in Mt Richmond Forest Park. Note how the tramper is positioned on the intersection of the 3x3 grid.



The author relaxes at Lake Rotoiti, as the first light of day strikes Mt Robert – Nelson Lakes National Park.

The exception to the Rule of Thirds is when shooting a **symmetrical scene** such as a building, or a mirror lake with reflections. A square crop (see above) exudes that sense of tranquil & timeless calm.



Symmetrical composition at Lake Matheson, Westland

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*Trio of nikau palm at Punakaiki on the wild West Coast of NZ.
An odd number of objects helps achieve better balance.*

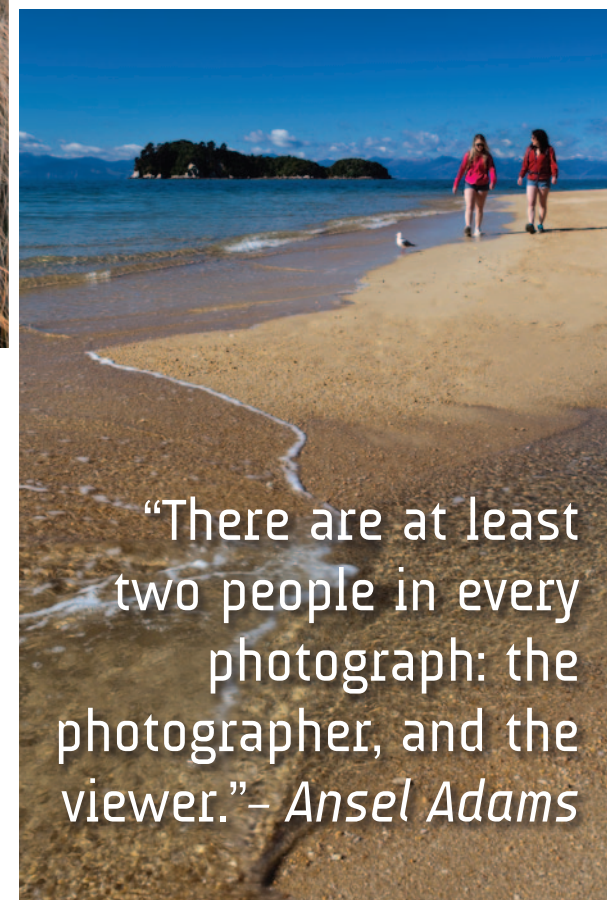
A lesser-known rule is the **Rule of Odds**. If you have two competing subjects in your shot, they can cancel each other out. The viewer won't know which one to look at. So, having an odd number of subjects, (e.g. 1, 3 or 5) will help achieve a better balance.



*This boardwalk directly leads the viewer's eye toward the main focal point
(Saxon Hut, Heaphy Track – Kahurangi National Park).
On the right, the curvy shoreline of Apple Tree Bay serves a similar purpose.
(Abel Tasman National Park).*

Finally, try to include some **foreground interest** in all your photos. This gives the viewer's eye something to lock onto, before exploring the remainder of your picture.

Leading lines such as fences, tracks or rivers can help the viewer's eye to navigate through your composition, then finally arrive at the focal point.



“There are at least two people in every photograph: the photographer, and the viewer.” – *Ansel Adams*

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■ 07 Less Is More (more or less)

Beginners often try hard to get everything into a single exposure: their friends, plus the pretty view behind the group. Less is more.

Try filling up the frame with your subject. Don't be afraid to crop off the top of a person's head to get an intimate portrait of their facial expression.

Ask yourself: 'what are the key elements in this scene that make it work?' Stick to a single subject; eliminate everything else.

Colin Prior reckons he goes into the wilderness to shoot 'what is not there.'

■ 08 Sharp Shooting

With landscape photography, **you will usually want everything pin sharp**, from foreground to background.

If your camera has this function, dare to turn the dial from 'Auto' to Aperture Priority (A, or AV on Canon models). Take control of the **depth of field** (how much of the scene is in focus) by setting the camera to a small aperture between f/11 to f/22.



This scenic shot of Oaro lagoon on the Kaikoura coastline employs a range of compositional techniques: the rule of odds, the rule of thirds, and a prominent leading line. But perhaps the most important feature is the simplicity of having a solitary focal point – the lone tree.

Also, you may deliberately choose to focus the camera about one third of the distance into the scene. This is called the **hyper-focal distance**, and will ensure all elements in your photograph are sharp.

- If your camera has an **ISO rating**, set this to 100 to kill sensor noise, an issue with digital cameras.
- Choose the **largest image size** available (e.g. 'super fine') to get the maximum number of pixels. The higher resolution, the better. You can always reduce the image size later, say, if you need to email the picture, or upload it to an on-line album. But you can never increase the image size without deterioration in quality.
- If you're serious about image quality, **shoot RAW files** rather than JPEGs, and learn how to process these using specialised software such as Photoshop or Lightroom.

Another issue affecting image sharpness is camera shake. I **always use a tripod**. Failing that, rest the camera on a bean bag, post, trekking pole, a rock, whatever is available. Use the camera's **Live View mode** and, looking at the LCD screen, zoom in close to check for optimum focus.

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French Ridge Hut, Mt Aspiring National Park

09 Plan Ahead

It wasn't raining when Noah built his Ark. Professional landscape shutterbugs plan their shoots with military precision, then strike when the conditions are favourable. I have a photography kit bag on hand, packed with a first aid kit, survival kit, torches, thermos, snacks, cellphone, iPod, spare batteries, cleaning cloth, mittens, beanie, raincoat, etc.

Tools such as tide charts, the weather forecast, or *The Photographer's Ephemeris* are invaluable. Use the free program at www.thephotographersephemeris.com which will calculate the exact compass bearing that the sun and moon will set and rise from any given location on Earth.

10 Paint with Light

If everyone else takes photos during the day, why not make your photos at night? The literal definition of the Greek words *photos* and *graphos* mean to 'draw with light'.

Go outside and illuminate your subject with a powerful head-torch. If it's a backcountry hut, a couple of candles can light up the building interior while you paint the exterior with light.

It's best to set up your camera on a **stable tripod** at dusk, and pre-focus on your subject before auto-focussing becomes impossible. A **cable release** or remote timing device is essential, so you don't accidentally bump the camera.

Another idea is to **shoot the stars** with a long exposure to effectively blur these planets into circular trails. This is a challenging genre of photography with many inherent difficulties to overcome, but the rewards are there for the patient photographer who enjoys facing a challenge.

Painting with light: French Ridge Hut is perched high on the flanks of Mt Aspiring. It's solar-powered lights are complemented by the photographer's torch with which he has carefully painted the hut exterior & surrounding tussock. Cregan Hut is illuminated within, but the author has painted in the shadow areas, & also used an Interval-ometer to record star trails. Zeke's Hut – two-minute long exposure using candle-light within and a headlamp without.



Cregan Hut, Awatere Tussock Track, Marlborough



Zeke's Hut, Hihitahi Conservation Area, Central Plateau

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■ 10 Commandments for Landscapers

1 > Use thephotographersephemeris.com to predict conditions (sun & moon sets & rises). Use a map to estimate travel times.

2 > **Check thy Tide Charts.** With coastal scenes, an out-going tide will leave a pristine beach, free of footprints. Rocks will still be wet and hence, reflect the light.

3 > **Check thy gear** before leaving home. Batteries must be charged; memory cards must be empty. The tripod shoe should be on the camera. Lenses and filters must be clean.

4 > **Arrive at thy location one hour early** If thou art relaxed, thou wilt be in a better frame of mind to produce great images.

5 > **Scout thy location thoroughly**, looking for

likely compositions. Pre-focus. Wait for the right light to fall.

6 > **Use a hot shoe spirit level** to keep the horizon straight. (Useful for video too.)

7 > **Tell someone exactly where thou art going.**

8 > **Thou shalt look after thyself.** Don't forget to fuel up. Have snacks, hot drinks, music, warm clothes, first aid, cellphone, etc.

9 > **Know thy gear.** (Thou cannot see thy camera controls in the dark). When the sun is setting, thou wilt only have a short window of opportunity to capture the best light. Now is not the time to be fumbling around trying to read the manual in the impending darkness!

10 > **Thou shalt have fun!** If it doesn't work out, don't fret. Pack up, go home and treat thyself to a hot shower or a decent meal.

It is not uncommon for two out of three photo shoots to fail. That is, thou may not have bagged any great photos. But this can be par for the course, as one cannot completely control the vagaries of the weather ... the wind, the tides, the clouds. Indeed, it is precisely this uncertainty which makes Landscape Photography such an exciting pursuit.

“Landscape Photography is the supreme test of the photographer, and often the supreme disappointment.”

– *Ansel Adams*

■ The 5 P's...

1 > PURPOSE

Slow down & define your creative objectives. (e.g. why are you shooting this?)

2 > PASSION

If you're not inspired by what you're photographing, don't expect others to be.

3 > PERMISSION

Give yourself the time & freedom to be creative.

4 > PERSISTENCE

Your determination is a key factor in making great images.

5 > PATIENCE

Hurry up & wait ... then wait some more.

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■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi there. My name is Ray. I'm a trained photographer and graphic designer living in Nelson, the sunshine capital of New Zealand. We normally get glorious weather, which makes for easier landscape photography.



I've been snapping scenic photos for 40 years but this obsession has now become my business. I also shoot people, sell stock to on-line libraries, design [eBooks](#) and make [video tutorials](#). If you are visiting New Zealand, [come on my tours](#)!

As a qualified and experienced art & design teacher, I am passionate about helping you improve your photography. If you've purchased an expensive camera but don't really know how to use it, why not invest in your hobby as well?

■ GET YOUR PHOTOS CRITIQUED

Upload your latest images to our Facebook group, where you can ask questions, learn from others, & get constructive feedback.

JOIN **FACEBOOK** COMMUNITY

■ TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CAMERA

Would you like to:

- Feel empowered and more confident with your DSLR camera?
- Fulfill your potential as the photographer you know you could be?
- Impress your friends with stunning images?
- Say goodbye to disappointing, out-of-focus, over-exposed snapshots?



Would you like to master...

- **The Exposure Triangle** — know how aperture, shutter & ISO work together?
- **Depth of Field** — understand how to get nice, blurry backgrounds?
- **Metering Modes & Auto Focus Points** — so you get sharper shots & accurate exposures?

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■ Cool Stuff on the Internet

1 > THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EPHEMERIS

Find out sunrise / sunset / moonrise times

www.thephotographersephemeris.com

2 > FAST STONE IMAGE VIEWER

Free image manipulation software...

poor man's Photoshop! Great value.

www.faststone.org/FSViewerDetail.htm

3 > HOT PIXELS PHOTOGRAPHY BLOG

Learn landscape photography vicariously as Ray explains how he created his images.

www.hotpixels.co.nz/blog

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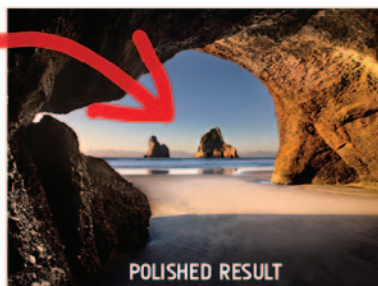
- Keen on landscape photography?
- Struggling to understand camera settings?
- Wishing your photos looked better?
- Intimidated by Photoshop?

Would you like to...

- Feel confident in post-processing your photos?
- Fulfill your potential as the photographer you know you could be?
- Impress your family & friends with stunning images? Win competitions?
- Say goodbye to disappointing, amateurish snapshots?

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- **RAW files** - so you can follow along in Adobe Photoshop (Get this for a 30-day FREE trial)
- **TRANSCRIPTS** - so you can print off the step-by-step instructions
- **PC & Mac instructions**
- **Beautifully-designed PDF guides**
- **Access to on-line Community** - to get your photos critiqued
- **14 Behind The Scenes** 'making of' movies - to inspire you

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■ WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING:

Here's what a few of my students said:



■ The composition lessons helped me understand why some of my photos work and others don't, and helped me be more deliberate in my composition.

— Peter George

- A great course! I definitely recommend it. It covers topics like setting up your DSLR right for the scene, composition and such. The workflow is quite demanding but it gives really impressive results (for example section 9 on Hooker Lake; amazing!)

— Pawel Czerwinski

- I was excited to view this course, not only for the great scenes and teacher, but because NZ has been on my bucket list for decades. I now am able to go there (if not in reality) and visit the places taken in this course. Thanks Ray!

— Steve Packhurst



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