

William Patino

10 Tips For Aspiring Landscape Photographers



Introduction

After almost a decade of being a photographer, I've learned quite a few things about myself, nature and pointing a camera at a landscape. Looking back, there's a few key things that have helped me get to where I am today.

So, in this document, I'm passing on some advice. Hopefully you can take some of these on board as you continue your own unique photography journey.



1. Just Do It

Don't just read or think about it, get out there with your camera and into the landscape, as much as possible.

One thing that I feel greatly helped my learning was the amount of time I was willing to invest in being outdoors, playing with my camera and observing light and the land. Initially I didn't really know or overly care about what made for good photography conditions. Ignorance was bliss and I learned a lot from my mistakes and the many hours each week spent behind the lens.

With the amount of information and images available online, it's easy to

become overly critical and selective about the conditions and locations you want to photograph. But, there's much to be gained from going out and trying anyway, learning to deal with a variety of conditions and how to get creative when things are challenging. Memory is cheap, so get out there and fill up some memory cards. You'll learn a lot more doing things yourself than simply watching someone else do it on Instagram or Youtube.



2. Connect With Your Subjects

Growing up in Australia, I really took for granted living on the coast. Photography opened my eyes and helped me appreciate the beauty right at my doorstep. At first, it took me some time to develop an eye for detail and read the conditions to predict what may prevail.

The way light interacts with your subject varies greatly each day and at different times of the year. Front light, back light, side light, moon light, diffused light, harsh light, colorful light - there's an unlimited combination of ways you can combine your subject with natural light. As a photographer, light is what you're capturing, it is your main subject. Once you understand light better, the creative process becomes much more enjoyable, as things become more intentional and less accidental. The best way to do this? Watch and observe as frequently as possible. Even without the camera. Expose yourself to a variety of conditions and varying locations nearby and you'll start to see in a whole new way. Taking the time to connect with your subject will benefit your photography in so many ways.

This can also help with your processing skills as you learn how to work with a variety of tones and colors.

3. Less Is More

Particularly when it comes to gear. Unfortunately it's very easy to get GAS (gear acquisition syndrome) when you first start out, leaving you always wanting more instead of utilising and making the most of what you already have.

It often surprises people when I tell them I only carry a camera and three lenses and that's it. No filters, no tripod, no remote controls and there's no other lenses or equipment I have at home for special occasions.

The most modern equipment can certainly assist in some aspects of the creative process, but really, any equipment you have is most likely going to be enough to give you a start and opportunity to progress. The main ingredients with image making are subject matter,

composition and lighting. As your photography progresses, you'll eventually reach a point where your gear may be limiting your workflow and you'll organically recognise when this is the case. Just remember, the latest equipment isn't going to make great images, it's the experienced photographer that does.





4. Start Reading

The image above was captured at Milford Sound, about a 90 minute drive from my home. I'd wanted to create a new image here, particularly with a vibrant sky. In fact, that was the biggest factor in creating this, it had to be extra special, especially for somewhere so popular. After a few months of monitoring conditions, this photo was from my first and only attempt when I decided to drive in one afternoon, leaving home just 2 hours before sunset. How did I know? Thankfully sunrises and sunsets like this can be quite easy to predict, when you learn to read the skies.

Cloud types are everything when it comes to the texture and potential color in your sky. The key is a clear opening close to the horizon to allow for the sunlight to strike the cloud. Sunsets are easiest because you can observe the sky throughout the day and if you're able to view the horizon, you can assess if there's a gap for the sun to shine through. Sites like Windy.com are great for cloud overlay models and satellite imagery, not to mention weather webcams. For a sunrise, I'm typically looking for a high and medium cloud base with an opening somewhere out to the east. Keep in mind strong winds in mountain regions can create fantastic cloud structures (like lenticulars), and some of the best light can be at the clearing or arrival of a storm.



5. Be Over, Not Under Prepared

This is some advice that I need to keep reminding myself of, because I've had way too many occasions where I've been caught out without a specific lens, not enough warm clothing, a lack of food and the list goes on.

When it comes to photography equipment, if space and weight allows on your trip, definitely bring a variety of lenses, so you're not limited in any way creatively and to allow for any unforeseen moments. It's not fun having just a wide angle lens and then seeing an ideal telephoto scene unfold before your eyes.

Being prepared for weather changes, particularly in

mountainous or remote regions, is a serious matter and should never be taken lightly. Food, appropriate clothing, emergency procedure and informing people of your plans should always be considered. Let's face it, there's nothing more distracting than gnawing hunger pains while you're trying to shoot.

6. Invest In Your Processing

In my early days of photography I wasn't at all interested in learning about post-processing. I just wanted to be a photographer and spend my time out with the camera. The result was having images that were lacking in depth, flat tones and an overall unrefined look.

Although I still prefer to be away from the computer, over the years I've learned the importance of investing time into the skill of post-processing. Similar to shooting film, raw files need to be correctly 'developed' to reveal detail and balance tones. At the very least you should be aiming to get the file to look like the scene you captured and saw with your eyes.

Of course there is also the artistic aspect of processing where we can apply various techniques of brightening, darkening, softener blurring etc to help transition the eye through a scene.

Although getting desired results in the digital darkroom takes time to learn, the results are certainly worth it. Whether it's Photoshop, Lightroom, Capture One or any other raw developing programs out there, I really encourage you to invest some time in learning processing alongside your photography. As your editing skills progress, you'll actually be able to overcome many issues in the field and you'll see how this part of the trade complements the work you do behind the lens. I have quite a few online courses to help people fast track their post processing learning and it's been encouraging hearing how these have really helped so many people take their work to another level.





7. Ditch The Tripod

OK, you don't need to completely get rid of your tripod but I want to encourage you to try and compose and capture your scene without using one. Why? Well in the past couple of years I've organically stopped using a tripod for anything that's not a night image and it's completely changed my workflow. In the field I have way more freedom and creatively I feel unrestricted like I was when using a tripod. Have you ever used a tripod to align a sunstar within a complex forest scene on an uneven, soft surface? I can tell you now that you probably don't want to. Exploring an environment without the hindrance and limitations of a tripod will expand your creative freedom and compositional options. Now that I've gone down this road I can't see myself ever going back.

To do this you'll need a camera with in-built stabilisation and steady hands to shoot at slower shutters. At the very least it's worth exploring your compositions handheld without being bound by a tripod's limitations.



8. Don't Think About Business

One of the biggest factors that I feel helped me grow and expand my skills as a photographer was that I never set out with an intention to monetise my photography and make a career out of it. For me, my photography started out as an outlet for creativity and self expression, a means of escape from the rush of the world and to this day, it still is.

Occasionally I'll receive emails or DM's from people who want to know how to make a career out of photography, and it's clear when I see their work that they've barely put any time in behind the lens. If your aim is to profit from photography

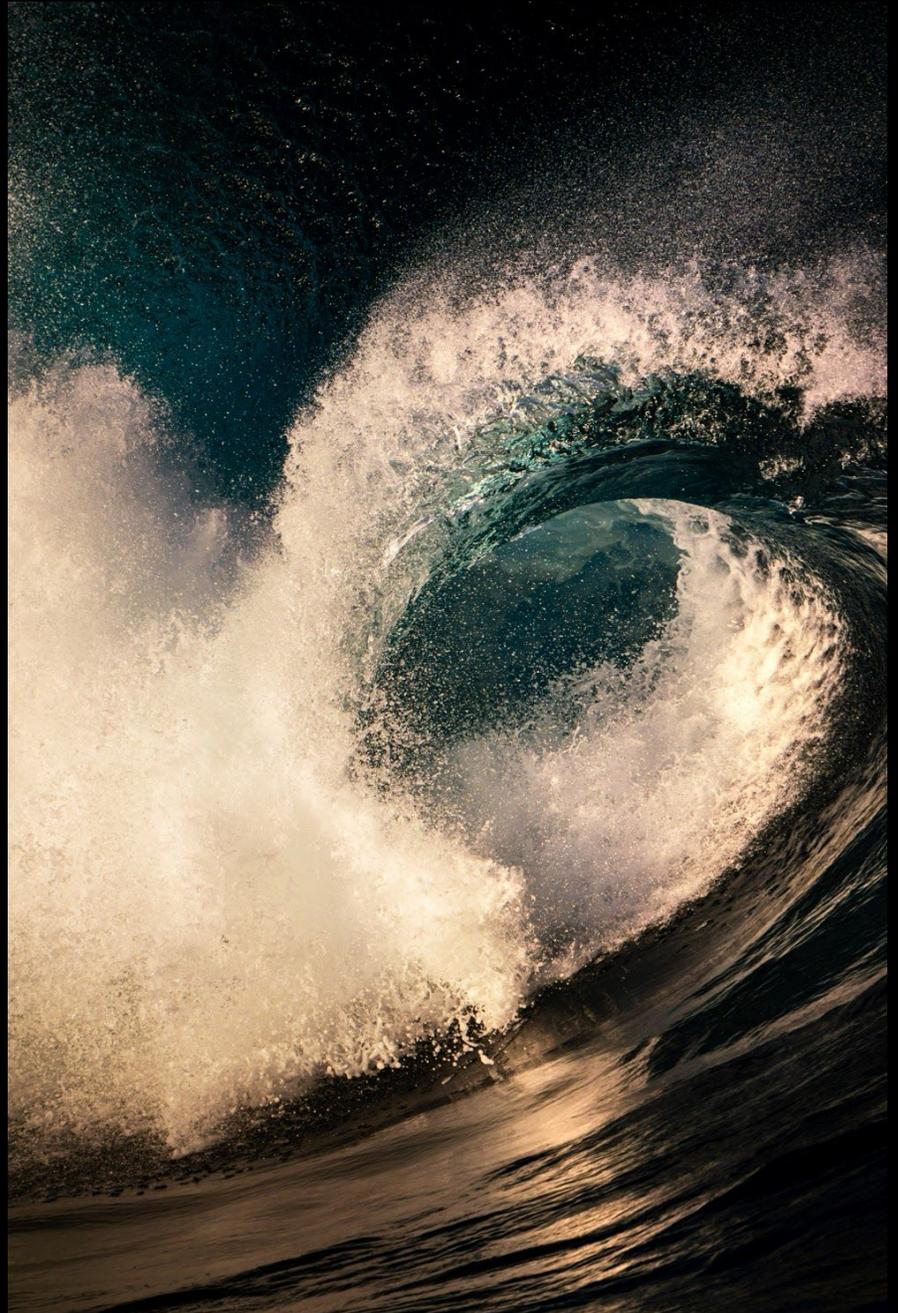
before you've even mastered the craft, then you're selling yourself short and being deprived of the true freedom that landscape photography provides. And it will show in your work. Don't let social media numbers and online popularity distract you, stay true to yourself and your art and good things will come in time.

9. Keep Moving

In regards to composing a scene and creating images, I highly encourage you to keep moving and not remain static capturing the exact same scene over and over. I was certainly guilty of this when I first started out, setting up the tripod, framing everything up and dialling in the settings, then just shooting exposure after exposure. When I'd get home, I'd have over 100 very similar files that I'd have to sort through.

The downside to stationary shooting like this is that you're not maximising your time and the potential of a location. Once I started moving around more, I've had countless scenarios where I truly felt like I had the best possible framing at first, but then I was able to find something even better, despite having confidence that I had it right the first time.

Of course, you can always move back to the original composition, especially if the conditions improve but if you go home with a variety of different images, then you're more likely to have something that you really like. Be confident in what you've captured and if the exposure and focus is on point, move on and give something else a try.





10. Just Be You

There are certain locations and compositions at specific places that have been done countless times, and for good reason - because it works. When you're starting out, you'll naturally learn a lot from replicating other people's work. You'll see why the popular compositions work and hopefully see why other options may not necessarily be as effective. But eventually, you'll reach a point where you need to break away and start to see and capture places through your own unique vision.

Of course, this can be hard at certain locations, but you'll be surprised how many other good compositions exist outside of the 'famous' ones. Or, that there might be somewhere just as good, or even better, just around the corner. Arriving at a famous place, most people get tunnel vision and are drawn into doing what's been done before, which is completely normal. But if you can make an effort to consciously not do this, or even better, explore and photograph areas that you haven't seen captured much, your creativity will really flourish.
