

Landscape Photography



Landscape photography requires a 'considered' approach, and like fine wine or food, should not be rushed.

You may even want scout out the desired location beforehand to check lighting and composition.

Be aware of the lighting, in both bright and shaded areas, the time of day at which you shoot and how to set up your camera for a great shot.

Camera Settings

1. Use a small Aperture for maximum Depth of Field - at least f16, but f22, f32 is better.
2. Use a low ISO - 100 or 200
3. Use RAW rather than jpeg as this is unmodified image data and gives greater control in post processing if required.
4. Use a wide angle lens, say between 10mm and 24mm.
5. Use Manual Focus on a point about a third into the scene, (or use *Hyperfocal* distance calculations - see the last slide).

Depending on the light, these settings may result in a slow shutter speed of less than 1/30 second. If so, a tripod and shutter release cable should be used to prevent camera shake and a blurred photograph!

Composition: The key to great landscape photos

1. Use the Rule of Thirds to position the Horizon or Focal Point a third from the bottom or top, depending on what the scene contains.
2. If available, find a Focal Point - a building or structure, a striking tree, a boulder or rock formation, a silhouette etc.
3. Keep the Horizon level - use a spirit level mounted in the flash hot-shoe, or the horizon indicator in some SLR view screens.
4. Use 'lead-in' lines to attract the viewer into the scene. These can be paths, streams, rivers, fences, hill/mountain lines, sand dunes...
5. Try to add some foreground elements for interest and scale - animals, rocks, wood, fences....
6. Embrace adverse weather conditions to add dramatic sky and lighting effects.
7. For dramatic results, photograph during the 'Golden' or 'Violet' hours: these are the periods shortly after sunrise or before sunset during which daylight is redder and softer compared to when the Sun is higher in the sky.

Landscapes can also be Cities and Urban scenes:
here is Bangkok at the Golden Hour



In action: Thirds, Level Horizon, Focal Point, Colour changes lead viewer into scene, Filtered and Dramatic Sky (ish).



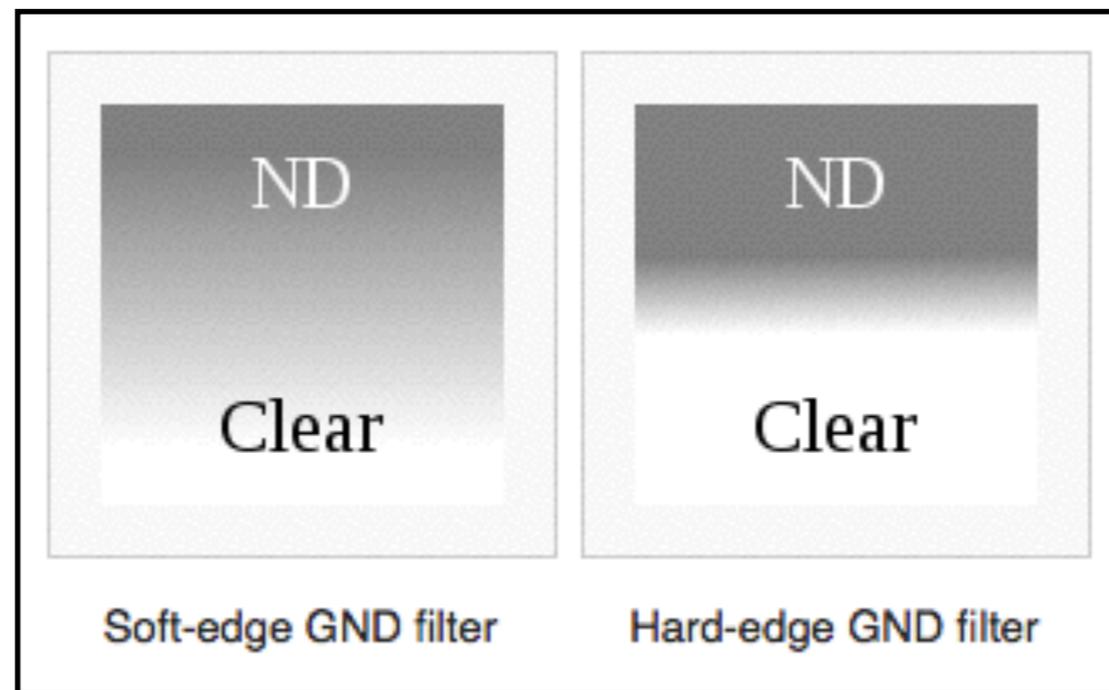
Filters

One of the great problems for landscape photographers is the difference in brightness between the sky and the land (the dynamic range).

While the human eye is capable of perceiving detail across this tonal range, a digital sensor isn't capable of recording it (all).

Using a Graduated Neutral Density (GND) will greatly assist in correcting this imbalance.

Their gradual transition from clear to dark neutral density allows the photographer to balance the exposure between the sky and the land to make a more even exposure in which detail remains in both the highlight and shadow areas.



For example, it can be used to darken a bright sky so that both the sky and subject can be properly exposed, as shown on the next slide.



A GND filter held up to the horizon. Note the poor contrast in the overexposed part of the sky not covered by the filter.

Graduated ND filters are still an important tool for landscape photography, because a digital sensor that is *clipping* ("blown out" or "washed out") captures no usable data in the clipped area. This cannot be corrected with post processing because data has already been lost.

Polarising Filter

These cut out reflections and glare from a scene and create increased colour intensity, saturation and contrast. Their effect is really noticeable in the colour of blue skies.

Using a polarising filter will reduce the exposure by about 1 to 3 f-stops, which in turn will reduce the shutter speed.



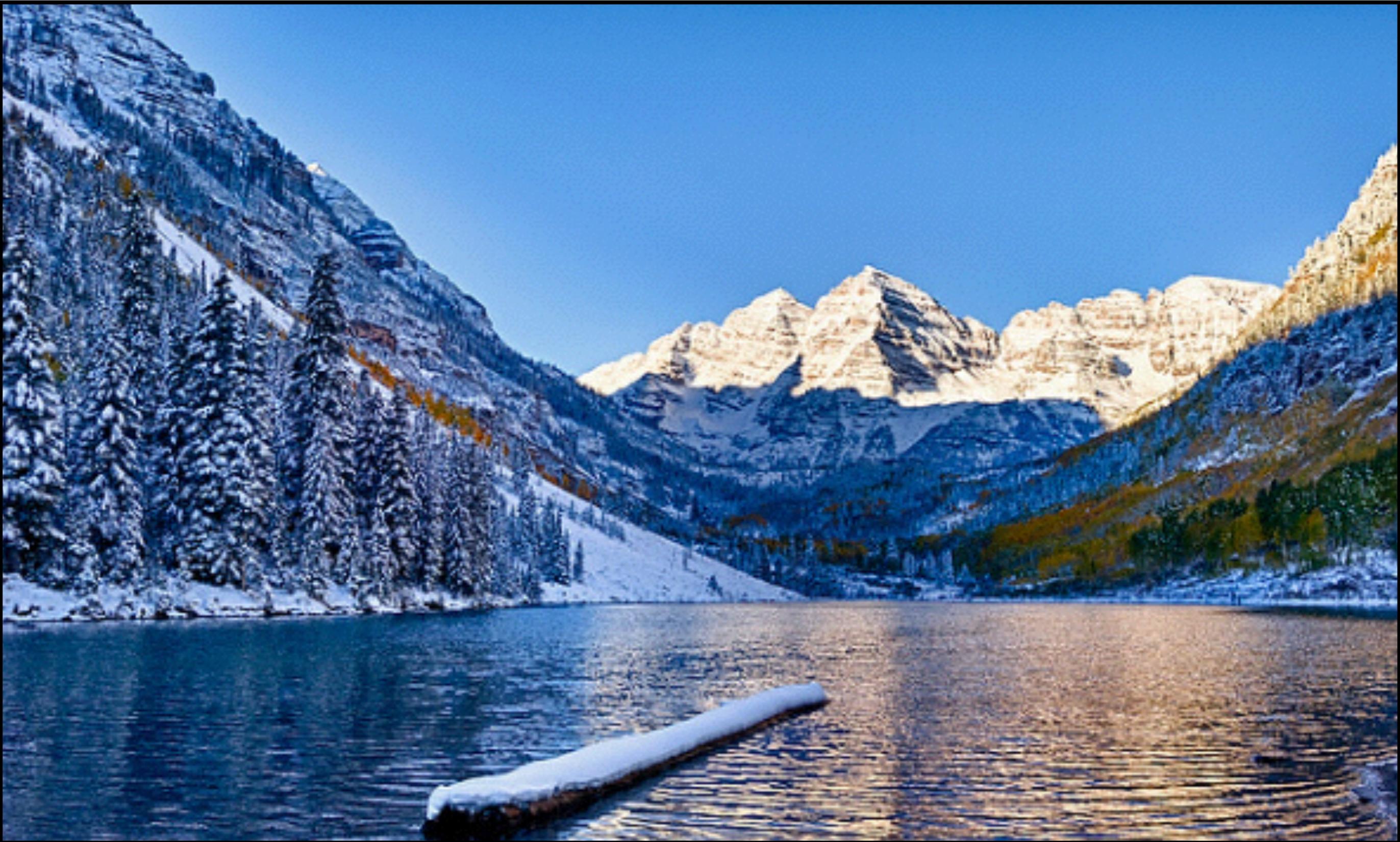
Post Processing

Even if you have put all this into practice, you may still find that you wish to change some settings:

- Exposure
- Contrast
- Saturation
- Sharpening
- Dodging (lightening)
- Burning (darkening)
- HDR (High Dynamic Range)

but of course you now know how to do all these effortlessly!

High Dynamic Range - HDR



This image of the Maroon Bells, near Aspen, Colorado, would be nearly impossible to produce with traditional photographic techniques

HDR is a combination of multiple exposures of the same scene shot at different exposures, and combining these in post-processing software such as Photomatix Pro and Nik HDR Efex Pro.

This technique reveals far more detail in the shadows and light than could be captured on a standard single shot due to the limited dynamic range of the camera sensor.

Camera settings:

- Shoot in RAW
- Aperture-Priority mode
- a fixed white balance setting
- Use auto bracket if your camera allows for best results
- Use a tripod and shutter cable release

- The traditional HDR sequence has five shots: -2, -1, 0, +1, +2EV

- Some scenes can be captured successfully using just: -1, 0, +2EV

- If you are shooting directly into the sun, you'll need a 9-shot series:
 - -4, -3, -2, -1, 0 +1, +2, +3, +4EV.

Hyperfocal Distance - what is it?

The most commonly used definition of *hyperfocal distance*, is:

'The hyperfocal distance is the closest distance at which a lens can be focused while keeping objects at infinity acceptably sharp.'

When the lens is focused at this distance, all objects at distances from half of the hyperfocal distance out to infinity will be acceptably sharp.

Perhaps the best way to optimise your focusing distance is visually. Try first focusing on the most distant object within your scene, then manually adjust the focusing distance as close as possible while still retaining an acceptably sharp background. If your scene has distant objects near the horizon, then this focusing distance will closely approximate the hyperfocal distance.

