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Photography: Taking successful pictures at night



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Whether you are shooting in urban or rural settings or elsewhere, night time photography always has something magical to offer!

Slow shutter speeds and a bit of practice are the best recipe for successful pictures.

1.



1. Working with slow shutter speeds

Given the low light levels involved with night time photography, your camera's sensor will select shutter speeds that are often slower than 1/60s. But, with a less steady shot, you are likely to end up with blurred pictures.

- Avoid increasing ISO sensitivity to achieve higher shutter speeds: the image soon degrades beyond ISO 400 (except with newer high-end SLRs).
- Are you a dab hand at free hand photography? Enable the image stabiliser: it will work up to 1/15s.
- Exposure times for night time shots should not exceed 30 seconds.

You can steady your camera by placing it on top of your bag, a sturdy base or, better still, a tripod. When using a tripod, be careful of sudden bursts of wind: they will rock your camera. Above all, remember to switch off the image stabiliser.

Pro tip: watch out for vibrations from the shutter release button, which can also cause blur! Avoid this by using your remote control. If you don't have a remote control, use shutter delay mode.

2. Underexposing

Whether you are working in A, S or M mode, remember to set a lower exposure as night scenes are often darker than a middle grey.

As a guide, here are the exposure times recommended for various subjects. Feel free to adapt these to suit the light conditions or distance from the subject in question: the nearer or brighter the subject is, the more you will need to lower the aperture or shutter speed.

Subject	Settings for ISO 100	Settings for 200 ISO
Close-up of the moon	1/250s at f/8	1/125s at f/8
Streets with street lighting	1/15s at f/2,8	1/15s at f/4
Subject lit by a fire light	1/4s at f/2,8	1/8s at f/2,8
Lit-up buildings	1/2s at f/2,8	1/2s at f/4
Fun fairs rides	1/8s at f/2,8	1/15s at f/2,8
Town or city at night	4s at f/2,8	2s at f/2,8
Landscape lit by a full moon	4 mn at f/4	2 mn at f/4
Beach or snowy landscape lit by a full moon	2 mn at f/4	1 mn at f/4

- What if your lens aperture won't go below f/2.8? Remember the reciprocity rule and use it to calculate the exposure (see the section on the basics of exposure)
- Never take a light reading directly from a light source as, except for bright lights, the rest of your scene will turn out black.

Suggested products

Canson® Infinity Baryta Photographique



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All digital cameras have a built-in light meter or "exposure meter".

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