



**The Official Magazine of  
the Dapto Camera Club**

# **Viewfinder.**

December 2017

**A VERY HAPPY  
CHRISTMAS  
TO ALL OUR  
MEMBERS**



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## How to Photograph Christmas Lights

Holiday lights brighten the mood no matter where they are. They might be in a downtown area, at a mall, or even at your own home. For those who love taking pictures, those lights can represent an opportunity to capture beautiful, out of the ordinary images.

Taking pictures of holiday lights can be fun and exciting as well as a little tricky at times. So in this article, we will cover the most important things to know about photographing holiday lights.



Photo by [mgstanton](#); ISO 1600, f/2.8, 1/125-second exposure.

The best time to photograph outdoor holiday lights is after the sun goes down but before it is totally dark. When you take pictures of holiday lights when it is very dark, you will be able to see the lights, but the remainder of the scene will probably be too dark and lack detail in the shadow areas.

The solution to this would be to take the pictures earlier in the evening. Pictures that are taken right after sunset and before total darkness will show the holiday lights as well as details in the shadow areas of the rest of the scene.

That is because during that time period, there is still a touch of ambient light in the atmos-

phere. Yet it is dark enough so that the lights will not look dull or become overpowered by daylight. That time period is usually less than 1/2 hour, probably more like 15-20 minutes. Realistically, unless you plan it out, you might not be able to get to where you want to take your pictures of holiday lights during that time period. However, you can still get some good shots later in the evening. It will depend on your subject.

For instance, if you want to take pictures of a brightly lit Christmas tree late in the evening, and that is your main focus, then your pictures should come out fine. If the tree also happens to be in an area that is somewhat lit, the details of the surrounding area should be visible in your image.



Photo by [Alby Headrick](#).

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Gurushots - <https://gurushots.com/>

Free Lessons with Serge Ramelli - <http://photoserge.com/free-lessons/all>

Lastly, taking pictures of very bright lights that may be in trees or hung between buildings late in the evening should not be a problem. Especially if there are interesting patterns that look good by themselves. In fact a very dark sky might enhance the lighting itself.

The next item of concern when photographing holiday lights is the camera's shutter speed. Since it will be practically dark when you are taking the pictures, a slower shutter speed, often  $\frac{1}{4}$  second to 2 seconds or more will be required.

Pictures will come out blurred due to camera shake when the camera is hand held at those shutter speeds. The best solution to avoiding blur in your images due to camera shake is to use a tripod.

If there is no tripod available, try placing the camera on a steady surface when taking the pictures of holiday lights. It's also a good idea use the camera's self-timer feature to avoid camera shake that could occur just from pressing the camera's shutter release.

If neither of those alternatives will work for you, another solution would be to increase your camera's ISO setting. This will make the camera's image sensor more sensitive to light, which will allow you to choose a faster camera shutter speed. Hopefully it will be a shutter speed that is fast enough to allow you to hand hold the camera without the camera shake.

Although increasing the ISO setting allows you to use higher shutter speeds, it is preferable to use lower ISO settings around ISO 100 or 200 for better picture quality. Many cameras will begin to show digital "noise" and a decrease in color brightness once ISO settings above ISO 400 are used. However, if using a very high ISO setting is the only way to get the shot, then go for it.

Turn your flash off when taking pictures of outdoor lights. If you're very close to the lights you're photographing, it will tend to wash them out. If you're far away from the subject it will just be ineffective.

When taking pictures of holiday lights indoors, try turning the house lights down so that the holiday lights can stand out more and the effect will be more dramatic. Don't forget to use a tripod or steady the camera when taking the pictures.

On the other hand, using a flash to take indoor pictures of, let's say, a Christmas tree with lights won't necessarily ruin the shot. You will still have a beautiful shot of a nicely decorated tree, but the lights won't be as dominant in the image.

Also, quite often you might want to include someone in the picture with the lights as the background. Using a flash in that situation is probably the best way to avoid blur from subject movement, particularly with children or pets.



“Munch-kin” captured by [Amanda Y.](#)

Neither way of taking those inside pictures is better than the other. You will just have different looks.

As far as exposure settings for taking pictures of holiday lights, there is not a one size fits all solution since light intensities can vary from one scene to another. It is best to take a test shot first and make adjustments after you see the results.

If you're using a basic compact camera outdoors, try using one of the camera's scene modes such as Night Landscape. That type of setting will keep the shutter open long enough for a good exposure. Once again, remember to use a tripod or steady surface when taking the picture.

If you're using a DSLR or some other type of camera in which you can control the exposure settings, take a test shot in one of the semi-automatic modes or in the manual mode. Check the image in your viewfinder and then tweak your aperture and/or shutter speed settings to find an exposure you are satisfied with.

Overall, getting a good shot of holiday lights can sometimes be a challenge, but it can also be fun and rewarding. Just like everything else in photography, being prepared and practicing will get you to your best shot.

*About the Author:*

For more information on photography related subjects, Keith Jones writes for <http://easybasicphotography.com>. There are plenty of other photography tips and topics at the site to help you better understand the basics of photography.

## Street Photography Tips at Night

Taking pictures at night gives an image a completely different feel because it captures different stories of daily life—sometimes more dramatic than the ones captured during the day. There is also a whole new cast of characters at night that make taking pictures on the streets after dark an even more adventurous experience in street photography.



Barcelona, Spain © Juan Jose Reyes

Just by decreasing the available light, we increase the element of mystery in the image. Don't get me wrong, it could still be an average image. Just because it was taken at night the picture won't magically become a great photograph, but it might become a little bit more interesting. It may make the viewer ask just a few more questions. And depending on where you are, it may even add an element of danger.

“You don't have to go looking for pictures. The material is generous. You go out and the pictures are staring at you.” –Lee Friedlander

### **Here are a few tips for taking street photos at night:**

#### **1. Don't use flash**

I think this is key for several reasons. First, the ugly artificial light that results from the flash is just too harsh and unnatural. It also calls way too much attention to the photographer, and the idea in street photography is to blend in, not stand out like a lighthouse. Also, people expect

the flash to go off after you take a picture at night; when they don't see the bright light coming from the camera that was pointed at them, they think that you didn't take a photo and they probably won't question you. I never use flash when I shoot at night (or day or ever, for that matter). It might take some practice but in a short time you won't miss it.



Barcelona, Spain © Juan Jose Reyes

## **2. Increase the ISO**

More than a suggestion, this is a necessity. Unless you increase the ISO, the shutter speed might become too slow and the whole picture will be way too blurry to even see what's going on. As I wrote before, a little bit of motion blur is fantastic and makes for great street photography shots. But if the photo's too blurry it loses the effect and is just confusing.

High ISO will also give the image some "noise" and it will look grainy, which is a great look for street photography. Make grain and blur your friends, not your enemies.

"New images surround us everywhere. They are invisible only because of sterile routine convention and fear." –Lisette Model

## **3. Use available light to your advantage**

Find a bright corner or a storefront window and position yourself in a way that it will light your subject's face. Or maybe you want the light to their backs to make them silhouettes. Either way is fine, the choice is yours. It's all a matter of moving around the light. Find what works and wait for an interesting subject to walk by. Try pointing the camera into the inside of storefronts or brightly lit buses; the light may be just enough to capture great scenes of people unaware that you are capturing the scene.





Barcelona, Spain © Juan Jose Reyes

#### **4. Use fast lenses**

Fast lenses, with maximum apertures such as  $f/2.8$  or  $f/1.4$  are great for low light situations. The same thing applies to full frame cameras. Any lens or camera is fine but full frame cameras or fast lenses make things easier because they have a better sensitivity to light. Use what you have and practice and look at the results before you invest your paycheck in a more expensive camera or lens.

“Anything that excites me for any reason, I will photograph; not searching for unusual subject matter, but making the commonplace unusual” –Edward Weston

#### **5. Avoid isolated areas**

It's not necessary to go to a dangerous area to get interesting pictures. Any crowded area will do, especially if you are just starting.

Taking pictures on the streets at night is not the usual thing to do, but if you want to give your street photography a little extra excitement consider going out for a walk after the sunlight has been replaced by street lamps.

#### *About the Author*

Juan Jose Reyes is a street photographer based in Miami, Florida ([juanjosereyes.wordpress.com](http://juanjosereyes.wordpress.com)).

## How to Use Lens Aperture to Demonstrate Importance and Tell Stories

Single lens reflex cameras have interchangeable lenses that allow photographers to change the aperture of those lenses. The aperture is the hole inside the lens whose size is determined by you, the photographer. And that is as long as you're using your camera in Manual or Aperture Priority Mode.

You may wonder why the size of the aperture matters to you as a photographer, but be assured that it does. The size of your lens aperture determines the depth of field in your photographs.

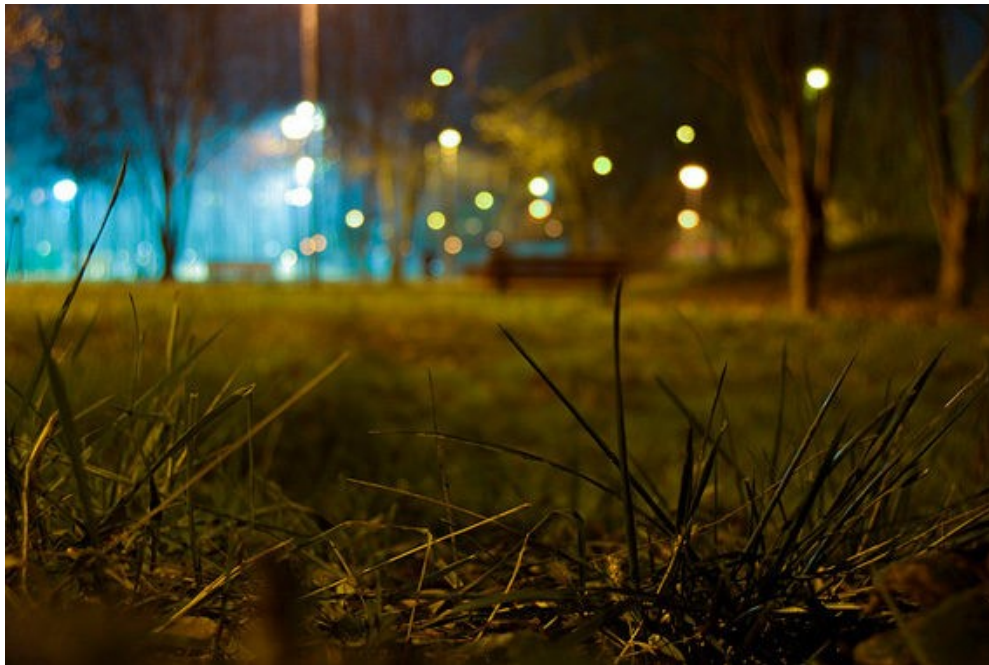


Photo by [Luca Serazzi](#); ISO 100, f/5.6, 8-second exposure.

And... it is the depth of field that will determine:

1. where your viewer's eye is drawn in your photograph, and whether or not your photograph is telling a story.

These are the two ways you can use your aperture setting to control the depth of field in your photos, creatively. Let me explain in a bit more detail, but first things first.

### **Aperture Size**

Aperture is determined by the f-number on your camera, and there is an inverse relationship between the f-number and the size of your aperture. A small f-number (let's say f/1.4) means that you are using a large, wide open aperture. A large f-number (let's say f/22) means that your aperture is small and has a narrow diameter. So I will use the term "large aperture" to mean wide open, indicative of a small f-number and "small aperture" to mean narrow, not-so-wide open, indicative of a large f-number.

Here's a statement to remember: **the larger the aperture, the shallower the depth of field.**

## Depth of Field

So what is depth of field? The best way for me to explain is to try and get you to picture in your mind a row of parked cars in a parking lot. Walk to the end of the row of cars, kneel down and then look straight down the row. Imagine taking a photograph of this row capturing the rear end of the first to the very last car. The depth of field is the distance that everything is in focus both in front of and behind the focal point. Every photograph has some level of “depth” thanks to the third dimension in our world. Notice I said depth and not depth of field.

The amount of “depth” in your photograph depends on your camera angle. If you take a picture of a sunset while standing, there won’t be much depth in the image. If you take the same photograph lying down, the photograph will have much more depth with the presence of the pebbles and stones in the immediate foreground and the sun being distant over the horizon. Remember this distinction between depth and depth of field.

### **So how can you use depth of field to draw the viewer’s attention to a specific point in your photograph?**

By using a large aperture. This is very effective in portrait photography because large apertures are great when you want to blur out the background and bring only the subject’s eyes and face into sharp focus. And they do so because of their shallow depth of field. But is this a creative effect? Try it for yourself and see the effect a 50mm f/1.4 lens has on your portraits when shoot at f/1.4 or f/2 with bright lights or a colorful background.



Photo by [Khaleel Haidar](#); ISO 50, f/22, 102-second exposure.

There are many ways large apertures can be used creatively. In fact, Canon even makes f/1.4 prime lenses in their wide angle range because they know that professional photographers love large apertures. In wedding photography, professionals use 24mm and 35mm f/1.4 lenses with flash to blur out the beautiful background lighting and fill the dancing newlywed

couple in the foreground. Large apertures work very well in candle-lit scenes. They are much loved by professional photographers.

### How can depth of field tell a story in a picture?

This concept applies to landscape scenes where everything from front-to-back ought to be in sharp focus—there is no blurring going on. When everything is in sharp focus in the entire image, regardless of depth, the scene tells you a story about itself.

A wide angle lens used in the beautiful African Masai Mara tells me a story about the watchful attentive zebra standing a few meters in front of my Land Cruiser, the care-free grazing wildebeests further away, the distant Acacia (also in sharp focus) which is perhaps sheltering a pride of sated lions in the blazing afternoon sun, to yet the even distant hills farthest away. Small apertures provide a huge depth of field bringing everything into focus allowing you the opportunity to tell a story about your scene.

If you haven't yet invested in a Nikkor or a Canon 50mm f/1.4 then buy one as soon as possible. This lens should be a part of every photographer's kit. Also, a wide angle lens can help you achieve great story-telling landscapes.

#### About the Author:

By Cee Dhinjan (dhinjan dot com). The author is a photography enthusiast and enjoys educating others.



## 6 Reasons to Try Long Exposure Photography

The purchase of a nine stop neutral density filter two years ago changed my approach to landscape photography. It allowed me to take photos using shutter speeds of one minute or longer and gave me a new way of photographing the sea (I live on the coast at the bottom of New Zealand's North Island).

Long exposure photography is very enjoyable and rewarding, and if you haven't tried it yet, what are you waiting for?

### **Reasons to Try Long Exposure Photography**

- 1. Long exposure photography is easy.** It's a very simple and pure genre of photography. It's just you, the camera, a wide-angle lens, and a tripod. The success of the shoot comes down to the drama of the landscape and your eye for light and composition. If you shoot at dusk, a neutral density filter isn't required as the low light will let you use shutter speeds of 30 seconds or longer.
- 2. Longer exposures help you appreciate the beauty of the landscape.** One of the things I like about it is the natural slowness of the process. It gives me time to slow down and enjoy the beauty of the landscape and the light.
- 3. No reciprocity failure.** Long exposure photography has become popular since the rise of digital cameras. The instant feedback of the LCD screen, plus the lack of reciprocity failure take the guess work out of exposure, leaving the photographer to concentrate on light and composition.



17mm, 6 seconds @ f/5.6, ISO 400

**4.** If you have a nine or ten stop neutral density filter, **you can take photos during the middle of the day** during overcast conditions that traditionally are not considered suitable for landscape photography. Neutral density filters give you a new way of taking landscape photos, and extend the time in which you can create beautiful images way beyond the golden hour.

**5. Long exposure photography appeals to photographers who work in black or white or see themselves as fine art photographers.** The simple style and composition

of the best long exposure photos lends itself to the fine art approach.

**6. Long exposure photos are a new way of looking at the landscape.** When a non-photographer sees a long exposure photo, they know that they can't get the same result themselves on their compact cameras or smart phones.



40mm, 1.5 seconds @ f/11, ISO 400

The photos in this article are all taken from *Slow*, which explores multiple ways of using slow shutter speeds creatively; including panning, slow-sync flash, intentional camera movement and long exposure photography.

*About the Author:*

Andrew Gibson's ebook, [Mastering Photography: A Beginner's Guide to Using Digital Cameras](#), introduces you to digital photography and helps you make the most out of your digital camera. It covers concepts such as lighting and composition, as well as the camera settings like Programmed Auto you need to use to become a creative photographer.

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