

Night Photography

A lot is made of the necessity of restricting evening photography to the golden hour – the time around dusk when the tonality of the sky matches that of the land but it is very rewarding to photograph after night has come. It takes around two hours for the sky to be completely dark and anywhere near civilisation there will be some spillage of artificial lights even at the darkest time.

Preliminaries

- Always plan your location beforehand by visiting in the day, choosing a pleasing composition and determining the positions of the moon and possible bright lights. Also check on hazards.
- Set Manual Exposure and Manual Focus **and familiarise** yourself with your camera controls in daylight so you can use them in the dark.
- Find how to set infinity on your lens so you can set this in the dark
- Use a wide angle lens and include some foreground as well as sky
- Shoot RAW
- Use a remote release if possible or timer if not.

What not to do

- Do not use long focal length lenses – difficult to avoid camera shake and star trails
- Do not include the moon or floodlit buildings in your image – the contrast range will be too great to capture and you will get flare spots from these light sources

What to do

A. If your scene includes artificial lights



- Use a small aperture (f16-f22) so that any light source is rendered as a star burst
- Use Manual Exposure mode.
- Use Manual focusing - focus on lit areas of the scene
- Adjust your camera's ISO setting remembering that increasing the ISO setting increases the noise.
- You may like to take two exposures – one for the lit area and one for the darker areas and then combine these in Photoshop.

B. If your scene does not include artificial lights



- Focus - setting the lens to infinity and bringing focus forward a bit usually works
- As a starting point try **30 seconds at f8 and ISO 800** or an equivalent combination .
- If there are lights in your composition, you may like to take two exposures – one for the lit area and one for the darker areas and then combine these in Photoshop.

Lighting the foreground

Using a torch or flash gun can be successful

Advanced

- Find the 'sweet spot' (sharpest focus) range of apertures for your lenses to maximise sharpness. This is usually between f/8 and f/16.
- 600 rule to avoid movement of the stars. Divide 600 by the focal length of the lens times the crop factor. So full frame camera with 24mm lens gives 25secs as maximum exposure before star trails evident; 1.6 crop factor camera 600 divided by (16x1.6) = 23.4secs. You will find you can get away with slightly longer exposure times before movement of stars is evident.