TIPS & TRICKS

How to Photograph Snow by Mary Doo



Winter transforms the world into quiet elegance, where snow blankets the earth and frost decorates the trees. Some of the most breathtaking winter landscapes I have ever experienced are in the Canadian Rockies and Yellowstone National Park. Their vast, untouched wilderness, combined with extraordinary wildlife, makes them a dream for photographers. Now that I live in Cape Cod, I also find ample opportunities - if I get my butt out of the house. I am sure you will find plenty of opportunities as well.



Winter's extreme cold tests your patience, preparation, and passion for photography. Dressing appropriately is crucial; warmth is key, but so is mobility. Bulky clothing can hinder movement, so layering strategically is essential. When I was in Yellowstone, I remember wearing a RefrigiWear overall topped with an insulated jacket, with hand and toe warmers tucked inside my gloves and boots. Keeping spare batteries in an insulated pocket close to your body can preserve battery power.

Capturing the Best Winter Shot

Winter light is fleeting yet magical. Some of my best shots were captured at dawn, when the first golden rays painted the snowy landscape in soft golden light and icy blue. Mornings in the Rockies often reveal mist rising from frozen lakes, while the long shadows of late afternoon create interesting patterns in the snow. Overcast skies may seem dull at first, but they create soft, diffused lighting that enhances texture and eliminates harsh shadows. Snow itself acts as a giant natural reflector, bouncing light beautifully across the landscape. It also covers the clutter and distractions that we do not appreciate.

Photographing snow is a challenge because cameras often misread its brightness, leading to underexposed, grayish images. I rely on spot metering, focusing on the snow, then adjusting the exposure compensation to prevent it from appearing blown out. White balance settings also play a crucial role. While I typically use Auto White Balance, I usually tweak it in post-processing to maintain the crisp purity of the snow, without blowing it out.

Composition remains an important element in winter photography as well. Snow-covered landscapes can appear vast and featureless if not carefully framed. The usual compositional "rules" such as leading lines, winding rivers, tree formations, or trails in the snow guide the



viewer's eye through the scene. Natural frames like overhanging branches or ice formations add depth. I find that curves and diagonal elements, such as frozen streams cutting through snow, create a sense of movement in an otherwise still scene.



Winter is not just a season. I find the scenes almost melancholic - or maybe poetic? Maybe it's just me. Why not use winter photography to evoke emotional and nostalgic responses? Wildlife photography can be delightful as animals are framed by snow, which provides a stunning backdrop. Predators like foxes and coyotes become easier to spot against the white landscape. One of my favorite moments was capturing a red fox trekking through the snow, stopping every now and then and seemingly looking my way, ears perked. In all honesty, it might have been listening intently for hidden prey beneath the frozen ground. Behaviors like this make winter wildlife photography a storytelling moment.



If you're hoping to photograph wildlife in Yellowstone, bring a long lens. You may see elk, foxes, bighorn sheep, and even wolves. Bison roam the park as well. However, please maintain a respectful distance to avoid disturbing their natural behaviors - and for your own safety. If you want to view grizzlies and Arctic wolves up close, the Yellowstone Discovery Center offers a safe way to observe and photograph these amazing animals.



Finding Beauty in the Details

Winter isn't just about grand landscapes; it's also about the intricate details. The frost clinging to pine needles, the tiny snowflakes forming delicate crystalline structures, or ice encasing fallen leaves like nature's glass sculptures. Macro photography allows us to appreciate these small wonders that are often overlooked in the vastness of winter.

Winter is one of the best seasons for black-and-white photography. Snow creates stark contrasts, and the absence of color draws attention to texture, light, and shadow. A simple frozen lake with wind-sculpted snowdrifts can be quite dramatic when viewed in monochrome.

Final Thoughts: Winter photography is more than just capturing snow and ice - it's about witnessing a world transformed, where silence speaks and nature reveals its quiet beauty. Whether it's the mist rising from a frozen river or the determined bison braving the storm, winter offers photographers a chance to tell a story of survival, beauty, and wonder. So step out of your comfort zone, and venture into the frost-covered wilderness. Let your lens capture the magic of winter before it melts away.