



PSNZ Help Sheet No 20

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Wide Angle Photography By: Breen Porter FPSNZ ARPS

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The wide-angle lens is one of the powerful lenses in your camera bag, and it's also the hardest lens to successfully master. When you do, you will find it rewarding and hopefully it will come part of your favourite equipment.

Many people who use wide-angle lens then see their images are usually disappointed; this is because their photos have no centre of interest, the whole scene is cluttered, and everything is distant and faraway. After you have read some tips about getting the most out of the lens, you will reach in your bag and pull out that wide-angle that hasn't taken an image for many months and click away with great enthusiasm.

First what do you call a wide-angle lens? I think anything from 28 mm downwards is in the category of wide-angle, not forgetting the fisheye. You can capitalize this lens barrel extortion to the benefit of the image. Probably one of the most popular is the 24mm although I think the wider the better. I have a 15 mm, 18 mm and a 28mm lens with a 16mm fisheye thrown in. There are many brands of wide-angle lenses and zooms and by reading photographic books you will be able to pick out the best of them, myself I prefer prime lenses for the simple reason that the quality is very good and the depth of field is superb. The zoom lenses in wide-angles are now excellent and are great for putting several lenses in one, especially in your overseas camera bag however if you want to focus down to a few mm to infinity, prime lenses have the advantage.

One of the biggest problems of wide-angle lenses is having the sun in your image; ironically this can be to your advantage. To do this close your f-stop to f16 or 22 turn 90 degrees and take a reading on your camera. Even the most sophisticated metering cameras will sometimes overexpose when shooting in the sun. To avoid this hold the reading return to your original position and you will have perfect exposure and the sun will be a star like effect. Be careful when using a Polarize filter, as you will get vignetting so purchase the new super thin Polarizer or a step up ring, look out for your lens hood that can vignette as well. Another problem that you cannot rectify with a Polarizer filter is the falloff across the sky deep blue to white, although sometimes you can get away with it. More often than not it could ruin your image, so keep your eye opened for this. Photographing tall buildings can also be a problem, as there can be a converging effect where the buildings end up like leaning pencils, so when possible try to photograph the buildings, with as little tilting as possible with your lens. This effect will also be noticed when shooting down, fortunately with the event of the computer both these influences can now be easily rectified. Photographing people is not very flattering at all with these lenses, but animals have a somewhat surreal effect. Cows horses or dogs with elongated faces can become interesting subjects.

If the lens you use gets wider it will come increasingly harder to accomplish good images, but with a little technique and perseverance you will create images that you will be proud of. When going out in the field with your trusty favourite wide-angle lens expect to get a little grubby (I always carry

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a plastic supermarket bag for kneeling on). Unlike the standard lenses, you don't get good images just standing there. The best effect is kneeling or lying on your tummy, your back being elevated or looking down.

Let's look at the tummy position, look around for a strong foreground it may be a rock, ground hugging plants grasses or shellfish on the beach. To frame a subject try looking through the legs of an animal or adult. This can provide an unusual shot, as can shooting up to the sky with a small amount of foreground. Include cloud formation in your image this can make a powerful photo. Lying on your back shooting up to trees, (the converging affect can be quite appealing here) Boulders. Cliff face. Buildings. When shooting in these positions throw away your inhibitions to obtain the great image that you require. When you in a church how about placing the camera on the floor in the middle of the aisle and looking down the aisle or slightly upwards, by putting the timer on bingo you will have a great unusual shot. Do the same on a busy footpath but keep your eye on your camera. Using the smallest f-stop not only gives you depth of field but the movement as well. Once you have got the idea there won't be any stopping you.

Very quickly you will come to realize that your wide-angle is one of the best of the lenses you will have in your camera bag. You may come home a little grubby with dirt on your shirt and knees, but very satisfied that you have some great images in your camera, that could lead to perhaps an honour or even a gold it has for me, good luck.

This PSNZ Help Sheet was written by:

Breen Porter FPSNZ ARPS
36 Cliff Road
Torbay
Auckland

E-mail: bporter@clear.net.nz

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