



10 Beach Photography Tips for Gorgeous Images

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 100.7K



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TIPS FOR BEAUTIFUL BEACH PHOTOGRAPHY

In this article, I share 10 easy-to-follow tips and tricks for stunning beach photography.

Specifically, I explain:

- How to create beautiful beach compositions

- When to head to the beach for the best photos

How to select the right beach photography settings for plenty of stunning detail

Much more!

By the time you're finished reading, you'll know how to capture beach shots like a professional.

Let's dive right in, starting with my first tip:

1. Look for focal points



If you want to capture beautiful beach photos, you must pay careful attention to your **composition**. In other words, before tapping that shutter button, you should think about *what* is in your frame and how it is positioned.

Composition is a complex topic, but the basic advice is simple:

Include an interesting *focal point*, something that draws the eye and acts as a compositional anchor.

A focal point can be anything eye-catching, from boats on the horizon to people splashing in the water to a monumental wave. I often go to the water's edge and then turn completely around to see what's in my frame; that way, I can see colorful umbrellas, lifeguard stands, interesting buildings, and much more. Note that a focal point doesn't need to be big, either; even intimate compositions can have focal points, such as a pattern in the sand, a set of footprints, or a crab on a rock.

Once you've found a focal point, carefully consider where to position it in the frame. A central composition – where the focal point sits smack-dab in the middle of the shot – often looks boring and static. If you can adjust your camera so that the point of interest sits off to one side, your photo will look much more dynamic.

2. Head to the beach during the golden hours

The **golden hours** – that is, the hour or two just after sunrise and the hour or two just before sunset – are some of the absolute best times for beach photography.

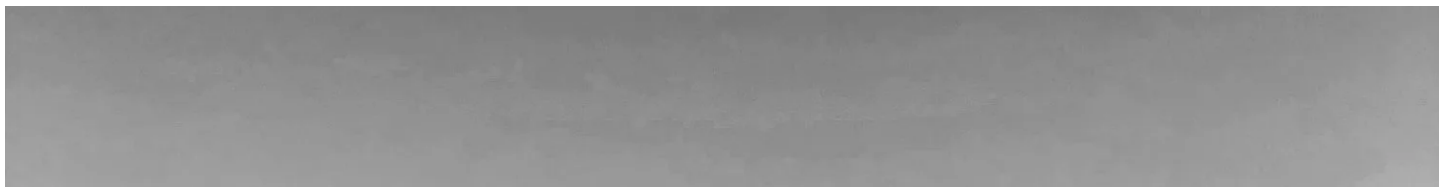
For one, there are fewer people at the end of the day, which means you can capture plenty of beach landscapes that *don't* feature distracting sunbathers and swimmers.

And the golden hours offer amazing light; the low sun blankets the beach with lovely warm colors, plus it creates interesting shadows (which can act as a focal point – see the previous tip!).

Of course, if you go out with your camera in the late afternoon, stick around for the sunset. You might even hang around for the hour *after* sunset when the sky turns a lovely blue. (Be sure to bring a **tripod**, though; otherwise, you'll risk image blur due to camera shake.)



3. Keep that horizon straight





It's a common beach photography mistake, and one that you should avoid at all costs:
A tilted horizon.

You see, when you're faced with wide-open space and a long, unbroken horizon, even the slightest camera tilt becomes immediately apparent – and it looks *terrible*.

Fortunately, once you know to look out for a crooked horizon, it's pretty easy to prevent. For one, you can make sure your camera has its gridlines turned on, then – when out in the field – line up the horizon with a gridline.

Alternatively, you can use your camera's in-built level (if it has one), *or* you can buy a bubble level that mounts to your camera hot shoe.



And in the worst-case scenario, you can level the shot in post-processing, though you'll lose a bit of edge detail that way, so it's best to get it right in-camera whenever possible.

4. Head to the beach when the weather is bad

Beaches look great on sunny days, sure – but did you know that, if you head to the beach when the sky is dark and stormy, you can get stunningly *atmospheric* images?

For instance, check out this beach photo, in which the stormy sunset and choppy waves create a foreboding mood:



Of course, you'll need to take steps to stay safe, and if rain starts to pour, be sure to protect your camera with a waterproof cover.

But if you're willing to head out when everyone else heads inside, the photography opportunities are often *amazing*!

By the way, stormy weather isn't the only way to capture moody images. You can also head out in fog or even snow, both of which can look incredible when incorporated into a **minimalistic beach composition**.

5. Bracket your exposures

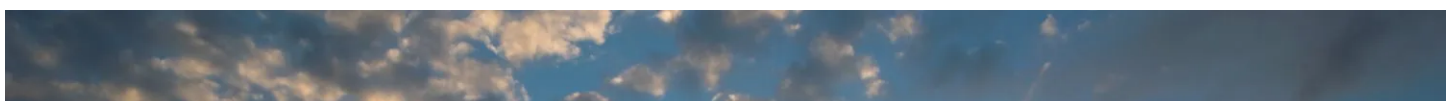
One of the biggest challenges of beach photography is the brightness.

Sand reflects light all around and the sun beats down, so you'll often end up with images that lose detail in the highlights and/or the shadows (due to **overexposure and underexposure**, respectively). In fact, beaches are one of those places where camera Auto modes go on the fritz; they try to make the sand a neutral gray color, and in the process, they underexpose your entire shot.

My recommendation is to switch over to your camera's **Manual mode** or **Aperture Priority mode**, both of which allow you to adjust the exposure to compensate for any issues. Simply take a test shot, check the image on your LCD (the **histogram** can be very helpful, here!), and make any necessary changes to your **camera settings**. (I find that I get the best results when I overexpose by a stop or two, but this really depends on the situation.)

Anyway, in addition to the above advice, I highly recommend you **bracket your exposures**. In other words, take multiple shots of the same scene at slightly *different* exposure levels (for this, you can either adjust the **shutter speed** manually or you can use your camera's **exposure compensation option**).

That way, even if one of your shots doesn't look great, you'll have a very nice backup or two!





6. Use spot metering

Cameras generally offer several **metering modes**, which tell the camera how to evaluate the light for a detailed exposure.

And if you're struggling with under- or overexposure, *spot metering* is often the way to go.

You see, a spot metering mode directs the camera to analyze *only* a small spot in the center of the image. That way, if you're trying to photograph a distinct subject – such as a person or a bird – you can position the center of the frame just over your subject and use that meter reading to set your exposure.

The background might turn out incorrectly exposed, but the subject will look perfect, and that's often what counts!

This is particularly useful when you're shooting in bright light but you want to properly expose a person in the shade (or with their back to the sun, as in the image below). Position the center of the frame over the shaded person, lock the exposure, then recompose and hit the shutter button.



7. Try fill flash on sunny days

If you photograph people at the beach on a bright, sunny day, then you'll often notice heavy shadows on your subjects' faces and necks (cast by hats, glasses, noses, and chins). These can be pretty unflattering, plus they tend to be accompanied by harsh, unpleasant highlights.

And while it's difficult to completely eliminate harsh shadows and highlights when working in direct sunlight, you can easily mitigate them:

Just activate your on-camera flash, then let it fire! (If your camera doesn't have a pop-up flash, you can always bring an external flash and mount it to your hot shoe.)

The flash will add a bit of **fill light** to your subject, reducing the harsh highlight-shadow contrast, and you'll get a much more pleasing result.

This is an especially important technique when shooting *into* the sun; if you photograph without a flash, you risk turning your subject into a silhouette. (And while it's possible to handle this problem through careful exposure – see the previous tip – flash will give you a more balanced photo.)





8. Use neutral density filters for beautiful long-exposure images

Beaches feature plenty of moving water, and moving water is great for **long-exposure photography**. A lengthy shutter speed will get you a water-blurring effect just like this:





But there's a problem:

Beaches tend to be very bright, and the brighter the scene, the *faster* the shutter speed you need to create a well-exposed image.

So what do you do? Simple! You put a **neutral density filter** over your lens, which blocks out the light (just like sunglasses). That way, you can slow the shutter *without* risking overexposure.

Now, neutral density filters come in different strengths, but a 10-stop ND filter will usually do the trick, especially if you shoot early or late in the day. Bear in mind, though, that a **good ND filter** might cost some money – and while there are plenty of cheap options out there, image color and sharpness will often take a hit.

9. Use a polarizer to deepen colors and handle glare





Neutral density filters are great – see the previous tip! – but there’s another type of filter I wholeheartedly recommend for beach photography:

The *polarizing filter*, which mounts in front of your lens and blocks reflected light.

This might not seem like a big deal, but it makes a *huge* difference in certain situations. For instance, if you want to photograph crystal-clear water, a polarizer will let you cut through the glare to capture the ocean floor (within reason, of course!).

A polarizer is also very helpful when shooting blue skies; it can make them look richer, especially when the polarizer is pointed at a right angle to the sun.

Fortunately, polarizers aren't super expensive – you can grab a solid-quality option in the \$60 range. And as soon as your polarizer arrives, put it on your lens and go take some test shots. You'll be amazed by the results!

10. Test out black and white

Most beach photographers shoot in color, but if you're interested in moody-looking, fine-art style images, why not try a [black and white conversion](#)?

I've been doing a lot of black and white beach photography as of late, and the effect is often very cool. The lack of color emphasizes the textures and tones of the sand, and subjects that previously seemed boring come alive.

You don't need to switch your camera over to its Monochrome mode, by the way; you can always convert to black and white in post-processing (and if you don't like the effect, you can switch back to color with the press of a button!).

One tip: Black and white works especially well on shots taken with dull and overcast light. If your images are looking a bit drab or colorless, switch over to Monochrome and see what you think!





Beach photography: final words

As you can see, beach photography isn't hard – and it's a lot of fun!

So the next time you go to the beach, bring your camera. And test out some of the tips I've shared today.

Now over to you:

Do you have a favorite beach for photography? When is your favorite time to photograph beaches? Share your thoughts and photos in the comments below!

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