

NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

Camera Settings

It is much easier to set up your camera indoors before going out into the dark.

File Type

Shoot in RAW if you have the appropriate software. RAW captures much more data and gives greater scope for post-processing.

ISO

Set quite low, about 200, unless you deliberately want a grainy image. The exception is when you are shooting without a tripod.

Aperture

f/8 or f/11 will be near the “sweet spot” of your lens. f/16 or f/22 may create star bursts around lights. Distortion can occur at the extremes (f/2, f/22)

Metering

Use either Matrix metering or centre weighted.

Exposure

Either use Aperture Priority and let the camera decide, or use Manual and start at say 10 seconds. Check the exposure indicator and increase or decrease until the indicator is at the centre or slightly under exposed. Either way, take a test shot and check on the preview screen. The image should look dark – it is night, not a sunny day!

Car light trails need an exposure time of 30 seconds up to a couple of minutes.

Tripod

Use a tripod if you have one. If possible, use cable release or remote shutter control. Consider using the “Mirror Up” setting. Cover the viewfinder to stop any light entering the camera.

Do not carry the tripod with the camera attached.

Tripods can be used in public places as long as you do not cause an obstruction.

Vibration Reduction

For long exposures, especially on a tripod, turn off VR.

Focus

Auto focus may not work in the dark (the lens may “hunt”). Set manual focus on both the lens and the camera.

Lighting

Use ambient light, street lights, car lights, spotlights on buildings, etc.

Built in flash units are unlikely to help, and will only illuminate the foreground, at the expense of the background. Consider light “painting” using a torch or an off camera flash unit.

White Balance

Sodium (orange / yellow) street lights miss out much of the colour spectrum. There is probably no WB setting that will give accurate colours. “Incandescent” is probably best for spotlights and car lights. You may find that final images are better in black and white.

Safety

Be aware of traffic. You are responsible for your equipment and yourself. Stay in groups.

And finally

Put all your camera settings back to normal when you have finished.