

Photographing Waterfalls

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Waterfalls are one of the most beautiful and inspiring natural wonders, and as such, they are popular with photographers. Like most subjects, there are many ways to photograph them and I encourage you to experiment. This article focuses on the most popular way to capture a waterfall.

The light

As with all photographs, light is the most important factor. Waterfalls are best photographed when there is no direct sunlight on them (e.g. on overcast days or in shaded areas). Direct sunlight will increase the glare from the water and will detract from the scene you are trying to capture. A polarizing filter will help reduce any glare and also allow you to decrease your shutter speed (see below).

Shutter speed

A slow shutter speed will give you that soft “cotton candy” effect. A minimum of 1/4 second should be used, but the longer the exposure, the softer the water will appear. You will definitely need a tripod for waterfall photography.

Depth of Field

The depth of field necessary will depend on the scene. The greater the distance between your foreground and background, the greater the depth of field required. For example, if you found a patch of flowers or some interesting rocks that you would like to place in the foreground, you will probably want to use F22 to give you more depth of field. A larger depth of field permits less light to reach the film, which allows you to use a slower shutter speed.

Exposure

Be sure to take your meter reading from a middle-toned object, such as grass or a tree trunk that is in the same light as the waterfall. Metering off the water will yield underexposed images. If you have any uncertainty, bracket your images. It's a lot cheaper and easier to use a few extra rolls of film than to return to the waterfall (especially if you had to travel far to get there).

ISO (film speed)

A slow film speed (or ISO setting on your digital camera) will also allow you to slow your shutter speed. I am partial to Velvia 50 because of its fine grain and the rich greens it produces.

Composition

See how many different ways you can compose your images. Try shooting the entire waterfall including the pool at the bottom, as shown in the first image. Then zoom in and shoot just a portion of the waterfall, as shown in the second image. Find something

interesting that you can include in the foreground, such as the moss-covered rocks in the first image.

