

A winter wonderland

for photographers

Winter in Switzerland presents some unusual and dramatic photo opportunities: The monochrome simplicity of a snowy landscape; the stark contrast of ice-coated branches against a bright blue sky; frost-covered windows; mist clearing from the lake. How can you take advantage of the season and capture it in your photos? Here we share a few ideas and tips to inspire you.

By Kellie Nolan & Bryon McCartney | Even the most breathtaking landscape won't make a great photo if the light isn't right. Controlling exposure is the key to creating an image that truly captures what you see. Spend time observing before you start shooting. Notice how the colours change throughout the day: A snowy hillside reveals soft shades of grey, white and blue under overcast skies, but under full sun, brighter colours reveal themselves.

Winter exposures

It takes practice to capture the light properly. Digital SLRs and many pocket point-and-shoot cameras allow you manual control over aperture (f-stop) and shutter speed – settings which affect exposure.

First, take a few shots in automatic or programme mode. Check the images in your camera: Are the whites too bright? Is there too much or not enough contrast? Now switch to a manual mode and make small changes to aperture or shutter speed, taking a shot with each change. Compare results as you go until you find the setting that produces the image you want.

To shoot on overcast days or in low light, adjust your ISO setting to a higher number (ISO 400 or 800). Conversely in bright light, ISO 100 or 200 will give you the best results. Early morning and late afternoon light is the warmest light, with soft red, yellow and orange tones. Bright sun at midday is the harshest, creating stark contrast and strong shadows.

Compose with the elements

The dramatic contrasts of objects against the backdrop of bright, white snow are best captured in simple compositions. Look for shape, line and texture to find strong graphic details that make for interesting composition. These bright and dark contrasts can also make for moody black and white images. For best results, take the original shot in colour and make the adjustments on your computer to get just the right black and white effect.

Silhouettes: Bright, clear skies or snow-covered hills create a blank canvas and the strong lighting needed to put your subject into silhouette. Expose for the light in the background and focus on your subject, which will now be in darkness.

Landscapes: If you usually shoot landscapes with a horizontal orientation, take a few in vertical format and see at how it alters the dynamics of your composition.

City scenes: Focus on a small part of the scene and let the snow and frost serve as a background. Move around your subject to find the most interesting angle and to clear clutter from the scene.

Staying warm

Cold weather demands special care for your gear. Battery power fades quickly on a cold day, so start with new or freshly charged batteries. If possible, keep your spare batteries warm by carrying them in an inside coat pocket.

Pack a large Ziploc® bag with your gear and use it to protect

Top tips

Use **manual settings** to find the best exposure. For example, to let more light into your lens use a slower shutter speed or a lower aperture setting.

Control your **depth of field** for dramatic effect. A lower aperture number – f5.6 or lower – will soften or blur the background, leaving only your subject in focus (as in portraits or detail close-ups), while a higher aperture number, f8 or higher, will put the whole scene in focus (as in landscapes).

Beware of **unwanted shadows**. Long, dark shadows can be dramatic composition elements, but look carefully to be sure they don't interfere with your subject.

Simplify composition. Decide what you want your image to be about and compose the scene to emphasise your subject.

Get to **know the area.** Visit a location often, at different times of the day, and you'll have a better chance of discovering just the right shot. Get outside and shoot. Don't wait for good days; bad weather often pays off with shots that go beyond the ordinary.

Learn to use photo software to **edit and organise** your images. Some of the most popular include Adobe's Photoshop®, Photoshop® Lightroom®, Photoshop® Elements (available for PC and Mac) and Apple's iPhoto® (Mac only).

your camera from snowy weather and freezing rain, as well as condensation. Seal your camera in the plastic bag before you head indoors and keep the bag sealed until the camera returns to room temperature. Condensation will dissipate on its own – do not try to wipe it off.

Layering clothes is the best way to stay warm and move around comfortably while you are shooting. Look for thin gloves that give you a sure grip on your camera. Liner gloves or fingerless gloves are good options.

Inspiring locations

From dramatic, panoramic Alpine scenes to the detail of picturesque villages, Switzerland is a natural wonderland for winter photography. Mountains, lakes, waterfalls, wildlife, snow-covered rooftops, church steeples, castle ruins, and so on ... You only need to step outside to discover something worth shooting.

Here are some of our favourite locations:

- Discover landscapes and nature: the Jungfrauoch, Lauterbrunnen, Rigi and Pilatus, Flumserberg, Vals and Zermatt
- Explore the lakes in Zurich, Geneva, Lucerne and the Bodensee (Lake Constance)
- Follow rivers as they wind through towns (the Rhine river in Basel and the Rhine Falls, the Limmat and Sihl rivers in Zurich, the Aare river in Bern), and cut through mountains (the Lütschine river in the Berner Oberland, the Reuss river at the Gotthard Pass, Lavertezza river above Lugano, and the Rhone river from Valais through Geneva)
- Capture the winter character of Swiss cities and villages, such as Lucerne, Stein am Rhein, Lausanne, Montreux, Bellinzona, Lugano and St. Moritz



Discover your passion for photography

Photography is both a passion and a profession for Bryon McCartney and Kellie Nolan. With the **ViewFinder Center for Photography** – now located in Zurich – they offer classes, workshops and customised group events conducted in English that are designed to help beginner and intermediate photographers improve their skills and find more enjoyment in photography. As an award-winning fine art and commercial photographer, Bryon specialises in photography, video and visual media consulting for business and industry.

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