



SEASCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY EBOOK | 2018

A guide to capturing unique,
creative seascape photographs.

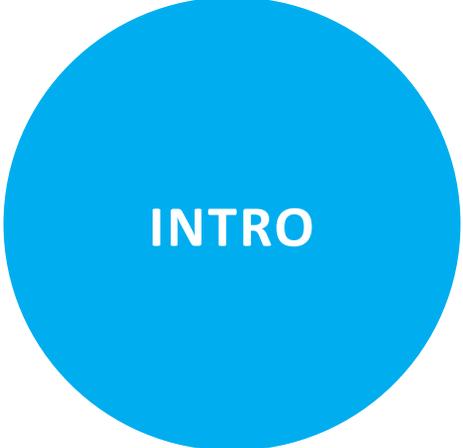
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
COMPOSITION	4
SHUTTER SPEED	6
ISO/APPERTURE	8
TIMING THE WAVES	8
FOCUS	9
EXPOSURE	9
DYNAMIC RANGE & FILTERS	10
EQUIPMENT	11
SHOOT PREPARATION	13
SAFETY	15



INTRO

Living on the Northern Beaches of Sydney I'm lucky to have access to some amazing coastline all within a short drive. This convenience plus an affinity with water has made me well versed in shooting seascapes. There is no better way to start or finish the day than to head to the beach, dip your toes in the water and get creative.

Here is a guide to how I shoot seascapes.

TECHNIQUE

COMPOSITION

When composing seascape images I will generally look for strong compositional elements such as leading lines and balance within the image. If I have the luxury of time I'll often take 10-20 minutes looking for the best compositions keeping in mind where the clouds are or where the sun might appear. I'll tend to favour a composition that points towards clouds, after all the clouds will make the sunrise or sunset over a cloudless sky.

Finding compositions and knowing the lay of the land can be hard when arriving at a location in the dark, especial those we know nothing of and with limited time before sunrise. This is where the likes of 500px and Google as research tools are essential. Where possible take a look at what other people have shot, see what information is out there and arrive at a location with a shot in mind or at least some knowledge of what to expect.

Even though this image is not balanced it has symmetry and as far as composition still works

Turimetta, NSW Australia
Canon 5DMkII. Aperture F9. ISO 250.
Shutter Speed 2/5 second
(0.6 and 0.9 ND soft grads)

COMPOSITION TIPS

1

Look for leading lines pointing towards a point of interest (other rocks) or cloud cover

2

Use the rule of thirds, placing the horizon on a third (usually the top third) and other elements on other intersecting thirds where possible

3

Use Live View with the thirds grid switched ON to aid composition and to ensure a level horizon. This is far quicker and more accurate than doing it by eye through the viewfinder and is safer for keeping an eye on the surf

4

Look for balance or symmetry in the composition

5

Use perspective (small movements left, right, up, down) to compress or expand the mid-ground and give elements space within the image

6

Choose to shoot only two or three compositions at a location, taking time to perfect each. Try not to spray and pray, slow things down

7

Ask yourself, what is the subject?

8

Level Horizons only please



CAPTURE

Shutter speed is everything in seascape photography. For me shooting seascapes is all about carefully selecting the correct shutter speed to achieve the right amount of movement. Too short a shutter speed and water doesn't appear to flow and can have too much distracting detail. Too long an exposure and the water lacks details and looks washed out. The 'correct' shutter speed isn't necessarily a fixed value, as there are a number of variables at play. For full control of aperture, shutter speed, ISO and the resulting exposure I only shoot in Manual mode.

SHUTTER SPEED: MOTION WITH TEXTURE

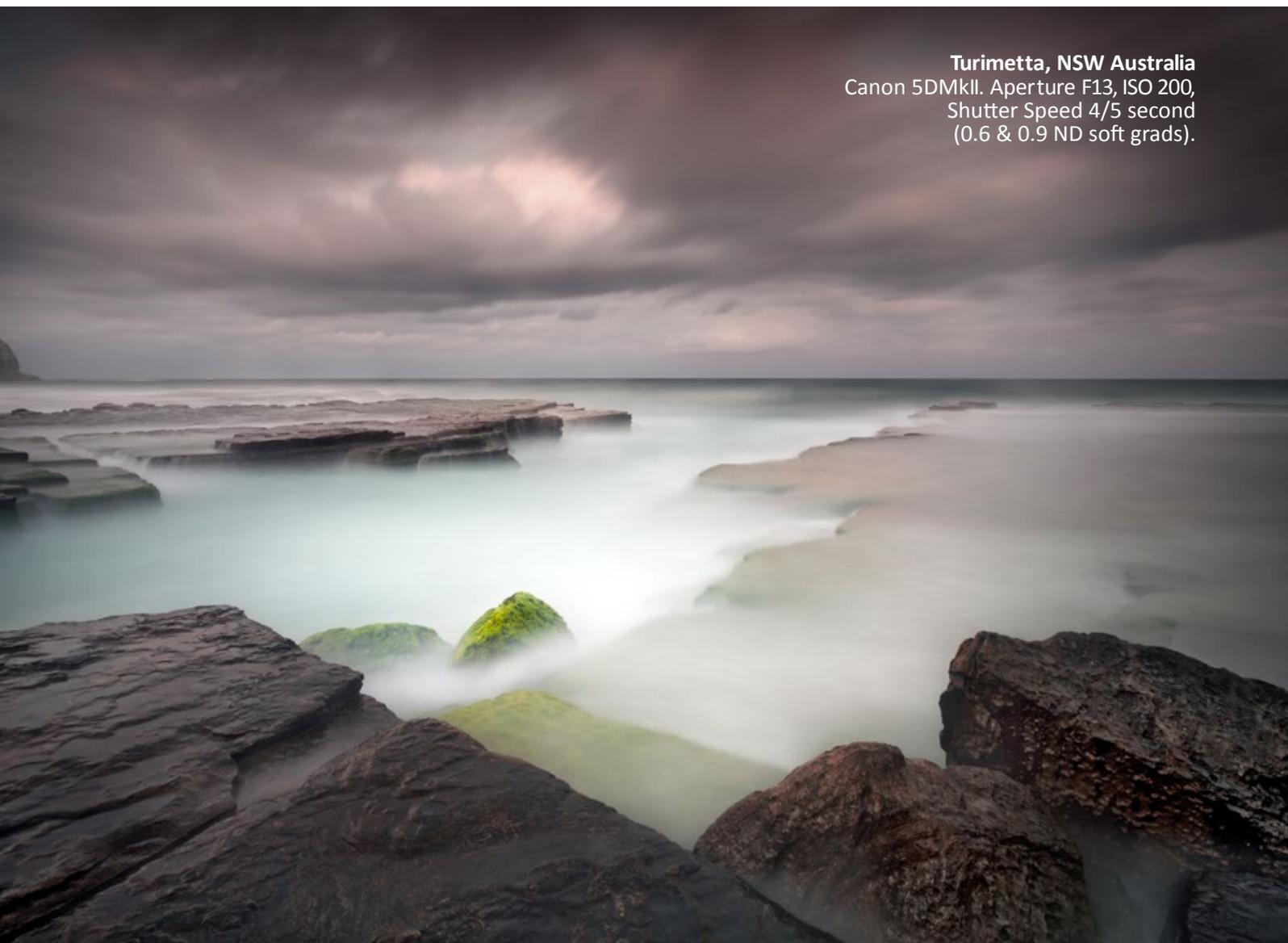
For a good amount of motion (as above) I'm quite happy to trade off ISO and aperture, gaining some noise in the image with a higher ISO or losing depth of field with a lower aperture. For this type of image a good starting point is a shutter speed of 0.5 to 1 seconds. This of course will depend on geography, the tide, what the swell is doing, and how the water is moving across the foreground. Obviously for slower moving water a longer exposure is required to achieve the same results as you would with fast moving water and a faster shutter speed. Take the photo, review it and ask 'do I like the motion in this shot?' and if not will a fast or slower shutter speed fix it?

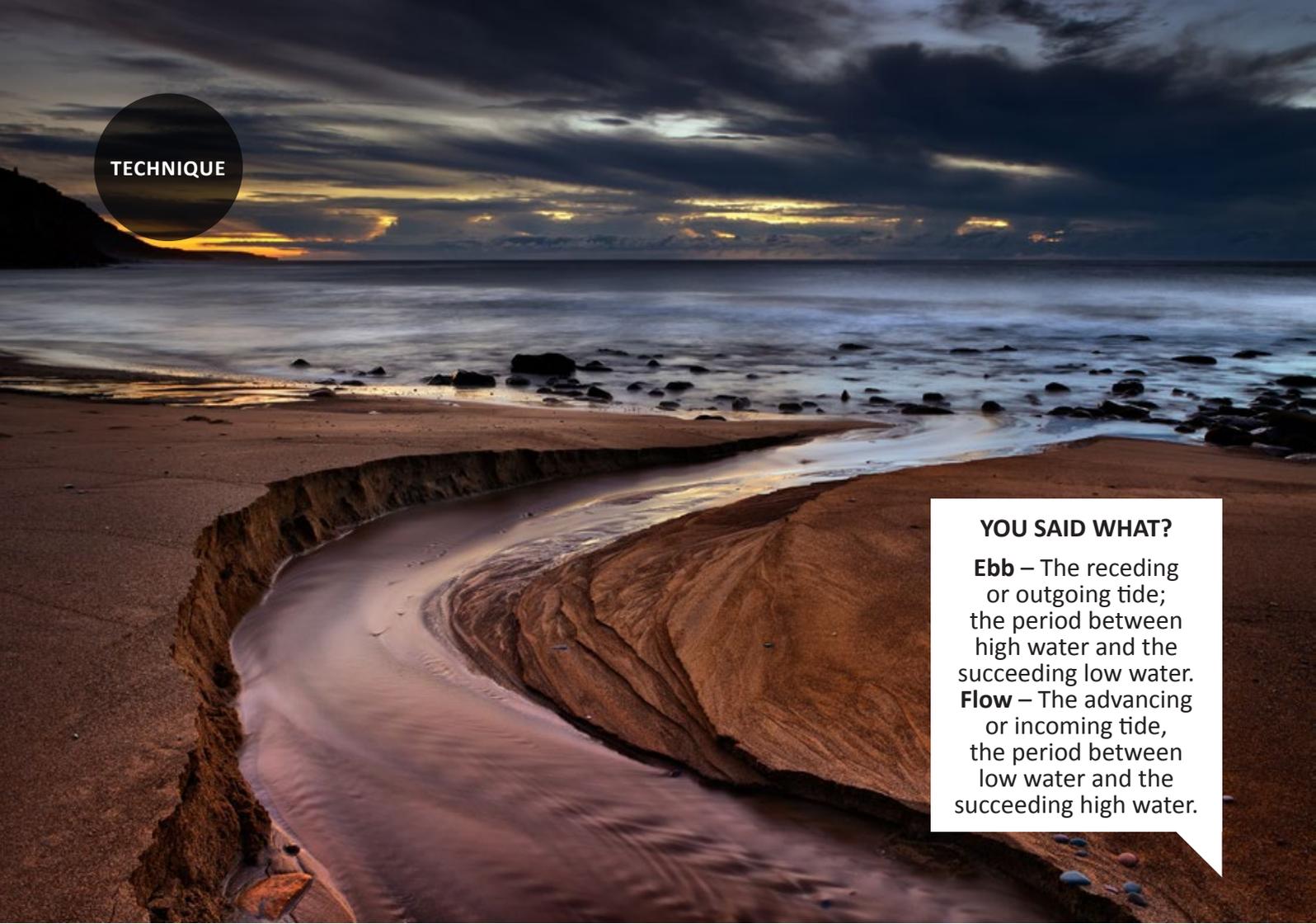
SHUTTER SPEED: GHOSTLY

Getting that flat ghostly appearance where there is no detail in the water (as below) we need a shutter speed of about 10 seconds or above. Depending on the available light I find setting the cameras ISO to 50 or 100, aperture F18 (full frame camera) can give me a sufficiently long enough shutter speed to achieve this.

I tend to photograph this sort of shot after the sun has set or before it has risen using a 3 stop (0.9) Neutral Density filter to further extend the exposure. This effect can also be replicated during daylight with a stronger Neutral Density filter e.g. 10 stop (3.0).

Turimetta, NSW Australia
Canon 5DMkII. Aperture F13, ISO 200,
Shutter Speed 4/5 second
(0.6 & 0.9 ND soft grads).



**YOU SAID WHAT?**

Ebb – The receding or outgoing tide; the period between high water and the succeeding low water.
Flow – The advancing or incoming tide, the period between low water and the succeeding high water.

ISO / APERTURE

For ISO, shooting at sunset I generally start at ISO 100 then increase it as the light drops up to a maximum ISO 400. For aperture, I start at F16 and increase it up to F8 or even F5.6 as the light drops. I do this at the expense of depth of field (less depth at lower aperture) and have a slightly noisier image to maintain an optimal shutter speed and desired texture in the water. It should be noted that on a cropped sensor camera F11 will achieve a similar depth of field as F18 on a full frame camera. For those with cropped sensor cameras F13 is a good starting point.

For sunrise the above will work in opposite (so starting with a wide aperture/high ISO and decreasing as it gets lighter).

TIMING THE WAVES

For the best results there are two optimal times to shoot the surf in terms of the waves ebbing and flowing. Of course this is only true if the water is very oxygenated (it has lots of bubbles). It's the white of the bubbles that showing movement in the resulting photo.

To capture the optimal movement I will take two or three shots in quick succession as the waves ebb and flow to see what works best. As a preference I try and shoot when there is less water flowing rather than more so I can capture detail without having a big white mess. When to shoot:

1. As the tide reaches it's highest point and ebbs away.
2. As the tide flows inward and over the foreground of your composition.

FOCUS

I generally always set focus manually, especially when shooting landscapes. Make it routine to set focus with every new composition. Why not Auto focus? Auto focus doesn't work well in low light, manually focusing is often quicker, more accurate when using Live View and I don't need to move the camera to set focus with the camera mounted on a tripod.

At high apertures such as F16 and with a wide focal length (17mm approx) a general rule of thumb is:

Focusing one third of the way into the image, everything halfway between the camera and the focal point and everything out to infinity will be in focus.

With the lens set to manual focus, using Live View and digital magnification, view the scene at 100%, and manually focus about 1/3 into the image. It is obvious when you have focus even without glasses on, great for blind old me.

EXPOSURE

Shooting in Manual mode I will balance the aperture, and ISO to get the desired shutter speed with and exposure. Ideally the aperture will remain quite high, around F16 on a full frame camera or F11 on a cropped sensor camera, and an ISO of 100. It might take a few shots to get the settings right. Ideally I want the brightest exposure possible without overexposing the highlights. This is often referred to as 'shooting to the right' of the histogram. Doing so will give us the best possible starting point to take into post processing with maximum detail in the highlights and shadows.

I enable highlight alert via my camera's settings so I can quickly see any overexposed areas during image review. If there are any overexposed areas, I'll reduce the exposure using ISO, aperture or filters. Usually I want to keep the shutter speed at 0.5 to 1 second so prefer to adjust aperture/ISO first.

It is OK to have very small areas overexposed however try to correctly capture as much detail as possible. Highlight recovery can look very ugly and is not very effective. If needed use filters or multiple exposures to capture the entirety of the scene.



DYNAMIC RANGE & FILTERS

As the contrast between the foreground and sky is high at sunrise/sunset I tend to use graduated neutral density filters to balance exposure. I will stack both a 0.9 and 0.6 soft edge graduated neutral density filter for almost all my shots. That's a reduction of 5 stops for the sky giving me sufficient time to expose for the foreground without over exposing the sky. I will then further extend the dynamic range in Photoshop by bringing out detail in the shadows and darkening down the highlights.

If you aren't comfortable blending multiple exposures, better to capture the entire dynamic range in one exposure using filters or modern high dynamic range cameras (Canon 5D MkIV, Sony A7rIII, Nikon D810). If there is lots of sea spray or the filters are fogging I will remove them completely and opt to shoot bracketed exposures (so one or more exposures for the sky and foreground).

To extend the exposure time and obtain more movement or to flatten out water I will use a solid 3 or 10 stop neutral density filter in addition to graduated ND filters. This is especially effective if there is movement in the clouds.

EQUIPMENT LEE'S LIST

Photography is another hobby that you can purchase endless amounts of gear.

I tend to only use a few essentials when shooting seascapes however I will try to give a more concise list of items you may wish to invest in.

NEUTRAL DENSITY (ND) FILTERS

My Kit: 0.6 and 0.9 Soft edge Lee ND Graduated filters (grads), and 0.3 and 3.0 Solid Lee ND filters.

I prefer to use soft edge grads as they give more natural results and are more flexible. I find hard edged ND filters a bit restrictive and only good for unobstructed horizons. With all things photographic I suggest buy right, buy once, so you need to invest some money here to get good quality filters. Cheaper filters will introduce unwanted colour as they tend not to be neutral. I also suggest purchasing the larger 4x6 filters as they work best on wide angle lenses. Brands such as Lee, and Nisi are good options.

REMOTE RELEASE

My Kit: Canon TC-80N3 Intervalometer.

This is an expensive remote release however it allows me to do time lapse and dial in times for long exposures over 30 seconds (Bulb mode). Exposures of over 30 seconds are achievable with cheaper cable releases, all you need to do is lock them on and time the exposure on your phone or watch.

BOOTIES

Fisherman/Canyoning shoes are essential for walking across sharp, wet, slimy rocks. My canyoning shoes have lasted me well but don't offer much grip. I would recommend some spiked rock fishing shoes or cleats for extra grip. They don't look cool but will keep you safe.

LENS CLEANING CLOTH

Essential for wiping off sea spray or water. Probably best to grab a couple of these, one to soak up the majority of the water and the other to clean and polish with.

TRIPOD

My Kit: Benro Travel Angel Carbon Fibre tripod

Essential if you want to get that nice soft water look with long exposures. The Benro Carbon Fibre tripod has only a few metal parts reducing the likelihood rusting as well as being light in weight.

LENSES

My Kit: Canon 17-40mm F4 L or 16-35mm F4 L Lens (on full frame Canon 5DMkIII)
A wide angle lens is the workhorse of most landscape photographers. For those with cropped sensor cameras (most dSLR cameras) an equivalent lens would be the Sigma 10-20mm F4-5.6.

HEADLAMP

My Kit: Black Diamond Storm

Head lamps are better than torches as you don't need to hold them. You will need your arms free when shooting and for balance whilst walking.

WATERPROOF PROTECTIVE COVER

A guaranteed way to keep your gear dry... unless you drop everything in the drink. There are a variety of options here, I don't use them so can't recommend any, however I would suggest getting one that gives you easy access to the cameras controls.

INSURANCE

My Provider: Professional Photographers Insurance Broker (PPIB)

Insurance has saved me a couple of times. I suggest reading the fine print of the policy very carefully. Many insurance companies don't cover damage from salt water.



SHOOT PREPARATION

Curl Curl, Australia
Canon 5DMkII,
Aperture F18, ISO 100,
Shutter Speed 135 seconds.

To prepare for a shoot I use the following apps and websites to research locations or find out what the weather and tides are doing.

Photography Ephemeris

With this I can determine the angle and time of sunset, sunrise, moon rise, moon set for a given location. I can view this information overlaid on a map or satellite view giving more information about the surrounding terrain. The app also provides information about the % illumination of the moon as well as Nautical sunrise/sunset times when there will be no light on the horizon, important for star shots.

Local Weather App or Website

Check the weather, tide times, swell, rain radars, cloud cover for your proposed shoot and line up the best conditions for that location. It's not an exact science, but better to be informed.

WindGuru

A great way of predicting a good sunrise, WindGuru will give you a localised forecast of percentage cloud cover. Remember clouds make a good sunrise so you need something above 0% but below 100%.

Flickr / 500px

Get an idea of what you can shoot and the layout of the land by searching for locations. Flickr also has an explore feature, which allows you to browse photos on a map from any location and it's surroundings.

Google Maps

If you are unsure how to get to or what to expect when visiting a location, the satellite view in Google Maps may give you the insight needed.



Coal Cliff, Australia
Canon 5DMkII,
Aperture F14, ISO 100,
Shutter Speed 2/5 second.

TIDES, WHAT'S GOOD

Getting the right shot might require some knowledge of the location and how it is effected by tides. For example high tide with a large swell might be perfect for one location but not another. The same is true for low tides and low swell. Read surf reports for your area and photograph a location that suits the conditions.

EQUIPMENT PREPARATION

Get in the routine of preparing your gear after every shoot, ready for next time. I personally have left the house without memory cards, photographed entire shoots at ISO 1600 or in jpeg only. Here are some

things to check:

- Reset camera settings to safe mode (Manual, RAW, ISO, Metering mode, white balance, etc.)
- Cleaning your gear
- Backup then formatting memory cards
- Batteries charged
- Bag packed

After shooting near salt water I suggest running your tripod fully extended under a tap or shower. Still fully extended leave it to dry naturally or pat dry with a soft cloth. This will ensure the metal elements won't corrode over time. It is also worth getting a damp cloth and wiping down your camera, lens and filters.

SAFETY

Photographing by the sea can be a perilous exercise so caution must be taken. Here are some tips to keep you somewhat safe:

- 1 Never turn your back to the ocean.
- 2 When arriving at a location stand back and watch the waves roles in to see where might be safe to stand.
- 3 Check the tidal information to see if the tide is coming in or going out. Don't get stranded by an incoming tide.
- 4 If it is wet then there is a likelihood it will get wet again, don't stand there.
- 5 Use Live View so you can monitor the waves as well as take photos. Looking through the view finder can be a big mistake.
- 6 Know your exit path, make sure you can escape an imminent soaking, quick and easily.
- 7 Let someone know where you are, this will make finding your body far easier.
- 8 Shoot with someone else (safety in numbers).
- 9 Bravado will only get you wet.
- 10 If a wave does come and you don't have time to get out of the way, turn side on and brace for the impact. You will be surprised how easily you are knocked off your feet.
- 11 Use spiked shoes or cleats for grip.
- 12 Leave your camera and save yourself. The camera can be replaced with the right insurance.
- 13 Take a head torch.
- 14 Tread carefully, rocks can be loose or sliperary so make sure a rock is stable before fully committing.

I'd love to hear from you...

If you liked this eBook, have any questions or are interested advancing your photography or post processing skills please don't hesitate to get in touch via email: **info@leeduguid.com**

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