

THROUGH THE LENS

A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts. After the click of your camera, you're only half done!

Shooting with three legs!

by Lynda Buske

As with any photography gear, tripods come in a large variety of sizes, weights and features. Selecting the best fit for you and your photographic activities requires a bit of thought and planning.

So, let's first think about when you would use your tripod. The following are some common scenarios:

- 1) You have a long telephoto lens for nature photography and want the extra stability offered by a tripod.
- 2) You are shooting in low light such as dawn or dusk and your shot requires a long shutter speed. It is difficult to hand-hold a camera steadily with the use of telephoto lens so using a tripod ensures a steady platform with no shake. For sure, you could adjust your ISO to get a faster speed but it will increase graininess or "noise".
- 3) You specifically want a long exposure to obtain a certain effect like a silky waterfall or elongated fireworks.
- 4) You want to avoid getting your body's shadow in a shot. You can either use a remote trigger or set a delay on your shutter mechanism and then step aside.
- 5) You are taking portraits and you either want to draw the poser's attention away from the camera lens or you need your hands free to distract a child with a toy. A remote trigger would be essential in this situation.
- 6) Some people simply enjoy the discipline required when using a tripod to think about their shot a bit before setting it up rather than just thoughtlessly clicking away.



As with cameras, the tripod characteristics that are most important to you may well differ from others. Typically, the heavier the tripod, the steadier it is in windy situations, sand, etc. However, as a woman, I prefer to trade off steadiness for a lighter load when hiking to a locale. But a lighter weight tripod does not necessarily have to be flimsy if you ensure it is made with carbon fibre or aluminum rather than plastic which will most certainly bend at the longer extensions. Travel tripods that tend to be lighter weight may have issues with flimsiness and maximum height, all due to the aim of keeping weight to a minimum.

As with everything, prices will vary depending on the brand and quality. As a minimum, I recommend spending at least \$150 on a tripod to get sufficient sturdiness. You can, however, easily spend over \$500 for top brand names and high quality.

Other features that can be very handy are: the ability to take vertical shots; being able to pan smoothly; loosening, readjusting and tightening quickly (e.g., pistol grip); having a level bubble, etc. You may also want to purchase an extra small tripod (see below) with flexible legs for gripping onto objects or for getting shots very low to the ground.

Make sure the tripod comes with a practical carrying bag, preferably one that can go across your body. As a rule, when operating the tripod, extend the legs out starting from the top end and resort to the last extensions only if necessary since they are smaller and therefore introduce greater chance of movement.

If you are unsure if you need a tripod, you may wish to initially purchase (or borrow) a unipod for just a bit more steadiness in low light situations. Especially if you can brace it against another object like a wall or fence. However, it may not provide enough stability for your lighting situation and the degree of zoom (focal length).

