



9 TIPS FOR TAKING *Brilliant Nature Photos*

WITH YOUR MOBILE PHONE



Nature doesn't have time for you to go home and get your fancy camera! Nature wants to dazzle you with its mind-blowing magnificence right now! Guess you better learn how to take great nature pics with your cell phone, huh?

Follow these 9 tips and you'll always be ready to capture stunning, unexpected outdoor moments of the sort that might, say, inspire someone to realize that nature is in fact beautiful, essential, and worth fighting to preserve. We here at the Student Conservation Association aim to inspire as many such epiphanies as it takes to save the planet, which is why we're offering this secret formula for excellent cell phone photography.

Now get out and shoot! Then share the results in *SCA's Capture Conservation photo contest* for a chance to win a roundtrip flight for two...

1. SHOOT WHEN THE LIGHT IS RIGHT.

- **Your best, most effortless captures will happen in the "golden hours"** just after dawn and just before dusk, when the low-angled sun bathes everything in gentle, golden hues. Visit www.golden-hour.com to determine when the golden hours are each day, as they vary by season and latitude.
- **Overcast days are nice**, as cloud cover dampens the sun's rays, providing soft, even lighting.
- **Just after a light rain** is a good time to shoot landscapes for extra bold colors and stirring close-ups of droplets on petals.
- **Always take advantage of natural light.** If you have control over your subject, set them up in a gently sunlit spot.
- **Use flash as a last resort.** Exception: if you're shooting into the sun with your subject in the foreground, try using flash to illuminate your subject and prevent silhouetting.

2. PLAY WITH DISTANCE.

- **When stuck with a boring, poorly lit, or overly distracting background**, get close and let your subject dominate the frame. Note: This advice does not apply when your subject is a wild animal. Always keep a safe distance from wildlife.
- **For dynamic action shots**, back up to a medium distance, just enough to get your subject's full height into the frame.
- **To showcase a spectacular background**, try backing up even more and using a person, animal, or object in the middle distance to create a sense of grand scale.

3. CONSIDER COMPOSITION.

The placement of your subject within the frame can have a dramatic effect on the look and feel of your photo.

- **For horizontally composed photos, follow the “rule of thirds.”** Imagine that your photo is divided, tic-tac-toe style, into 9 equal parts. Place your subject and other points of interest at the points where these dividing lines intersect, and your horizon on one of the two horizontal axes.
- **When shooting a square photo, disregard the rule of thirds** and try centering your subject or main point of interest. Centering sometimes works in shots that display a high degree of symmetry, too.

4. CONSIDER HEIGHT.

- **Shoot your subject from eye level** for a more inviting shot. For a commanding feel, try shooting from a bit lower.

5. TAKE AN ABSURD NUMBER OF SHOTS.

You rarely get the shot you want on the first try, especially when your subject is alive and moving.

- **Shoot a rapid series** so you can go back later and pick out the best.
- **Try talking, joking, making faces**—whatever you need to do—to get the expression you want from your subject. A genuine smile is always better than a forced grin.

6. INVEST IN A TRIPOD.

Your hands will never be as steady as the ground beneath your feet.

7. FOCUS! OR NOT.

- **Make sure your subject is in focus** by tapping it on the screen before you shoot.
- **Experiment with bokeh, or “artful blurring.”** Hold your finger on your viewfinder for a sec to lock a point of focus (pick something far away for a blurred foreground, extremely close for a blurred background), then shoot away for gauzy, dreamlike textures.

8. PAN TO CAPTURE MOVING SUBJECTS.

To pan, steady your phone with both hands, frame your subject, and move your phone at the same speed as your subject to keep it centered as you shoot. The result should be a crisp subject with a beautiful, motion-blurred background.

9. PERFECT YOUR SHOTS WITH FREE AND LOW-COST PHOTO EDITING APPS.

We like Snapseed, VSCO Cam, and Afterlight. If you’re willing to spend a few bucks, you might try ProCamera or Camera+.

- **In VSCO**, try minor adjustments to contrast, brightness, and sharpness before applying filters. Remember to adjust filter strength!
- **In Snapseed**, tweak structure and sharpness in the “Details” tab then finish by adjusting contrast, brightness, saturation, and ambience in the “Tune Image” tab.
- **Subtlety is key.** Your goal should be to create the impression that you haven’t adjusted anything at all...



Tag your photos #LightTheLand and @the_sca on Instagram to enter them for a chance to win some fun SCA swag.

We'll share our favorites on our Instagram account!