



The Dark Side of Photography

You ask yourself, what is Dark? Too some its the sun going down till the sun comes up. To me it's the really black of the night. This is a short article just to inspire you to go and have a go, the technical stuff will be kept to a absolute minimum.

We are surrounded here by great places, for early evening to late night photography with places close at hand, Cromer, Norwich, Sheringham, Gt Yarmouth but to name a few. Each has its own character, from the industrial, Holiday aspect, or just Architecture (new and old). Oh, and my favourite Venice. London is well down in the list but worth the effort of photographing.

So lets look at what's on offer, and how to go about getting images you will love.

What do you really need, A camera is a good start, it can be DSLR, 4/3rds, Hybred, Mirror less or a point and shoot. Its main feature should be that it can be used in Manual mode. As for a lens a basic 18-200mm is fine, a wider one say 10-20mm can work well too, as for speed f3.5-5.6 is ok, a faster lens is just fine too. Next, a steady hand or better still a Tripod. You can experiment with a ND filter and flash guns should you feel its the way to go.

Gt Yarmouth, Here is a venue with a lot going for it, often overlooked by photographers. There are the bright lights of the Arcades, the Sea Front Promenade, the narrow alleys in the Lanes, the Docks and not forgetting the Outer Harbour. There has been a lot of activity there the last 18mths but now its quiet as the offshore wind farm is now complete. Now they are building a platform which will no doubt make for some good images. Images 1&2 where shot on a very dark night, What you get is no background Distractions, your mind concentrates on the structure.

The tec stuff. This applies to most of your night photography. If you are new to night photography a good starting point is to take a image with your camera set on Aperture, ISO 100 (or the lowest it can do), and say f11 for a good depth of field, this will give you a guide as to the exposure time in seconds. Now you can go to Manual Mode and set it up with your preferred settings now with a idea of the exposure time. Take your shot and adjust the exposure time accordingly. Shooting in RAW will ensure you are able to make good adjustments later. Another good point is to have your Auto White Balance set to Auto, scenes like these Have a great mixture of light sources from Tungsten, Sodium, LED and Fluorescent. This will aid correcting your WB easy to suit yourself. A feature I use when using a tripod for night Photography is Time Delay, I set it too 2secs. You can use a remote trigger or a cable, its just reduces the risk of camera shake.



Image 1
Details: Taken at 140mm, lens 18-140mm, at f16, ISO 100. Exposure 6sec. Camera: Nikon D7100 on a tripod.

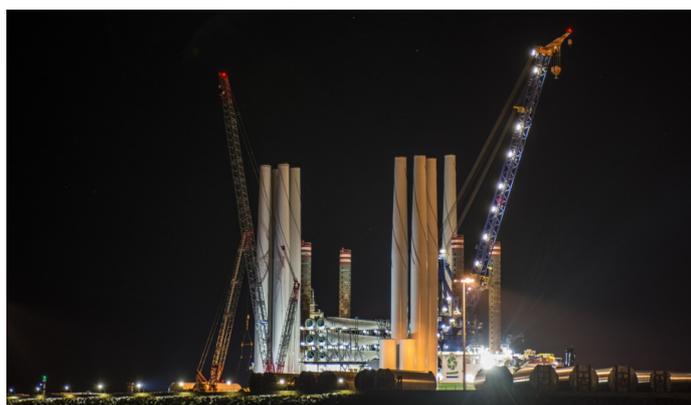


Image 2
Details: Taken at 35mm, lens 18-140mm, at f4, ISO 100. Exposure 30sec. Camera: Nikon D7100 on a tripod.



Above: ISO 100, Exposure 30secs at f22, Auto WB. Lens 18-140 set at 48mm, Nikon D7100



Above: ISO 100, Exposure 30secs at f22, Auto WB. Lens 18-140 set at 18mm, Nikon D7100

We will leave Gt Yarmouth now but there is a lot more there to photograph. As for timing Late September is a good time to go as the tourists are now fewer, most of the lights are still on and the nights start to get darker earlier, But do not rule out the cold winter nights.

One thing I have not mentioned so far is Personal Safety. Some locations are far more safer than others so please take this into account when doing late night photography, best advice is go with a friend or as a small group. I often go on my own but to locations I feel safe at.

Cromer: Cromer is unique as a location for wonderful images. From the sun rise to sun set, but it does get crowded in the summer. Even in the winter there will always be other photographers (fools like yourself freezing to death on or around the pier or town streets).



The promenade as the sun sets.



Cromer pier used for a BBC Xmas advert, The above image was only fully lit for a few minutes over approx 20mins, just so lucky.

I mentioned experimenting and ND filters plus flash guns. Well here you can have a go in the winter with almost no one to bother you or get in your way. Below are a few examples of thinking differently.



Above: The entrance to Cromer pier lit by 6 flash guns, all with coloured gels. And a little work in Photo Shop to remove the flash guns. Here I had to fire the guns multiple Times during a long Exposure.



Above: The use of a Variable ND filter to make the sea look smooth and soften the image. The bonus is you can experiment to see which level of ND works best. Used with a variable one.



Above: Again the use of two flash guns on what is a hand rail for the steps leading to the pier entrance.

Cromer has more to offer than the sea front, its narrow streets, its Church even the railway station. Other times of the year have photo opportunities, ie: the fair ground at night during carnival, Fire works display, and the Xmas lights which light up the town.

Norwich: Norwich with its medieval streets and modern Architecture has a lot going for it at night, not to mention events held throughout the year. Here again the old and new live side by side. The rules for night photography remain much the same, but be aware of the buildings you are photographing and from where, see London for clarity.



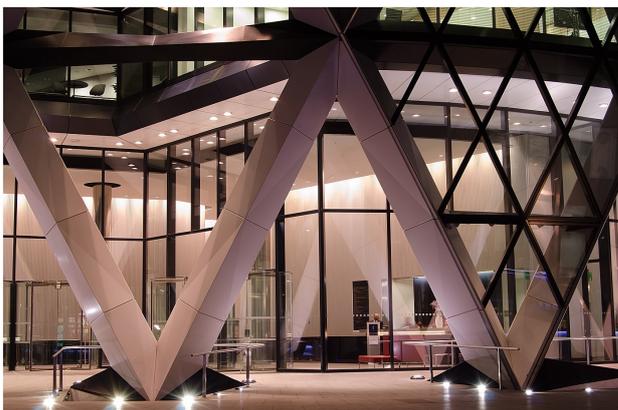
Above: Ye you can hand hold, ISO 1600, 1/10th Sec, at 10mm on a 10-20mm lens. Camera Nikon D7100

I have not spoken in detail about Norwich as many of you will know it well. Places to look out for include, The Railway Station, Norwich Cathedral, Elm Hill, The Lanes, Forum, Norwich Castle, The Arcade, Riverside etc. All are lit up at Night, be aware the car park in front of the Railway station is private.

London: A city which does not sleep. Its a little out of the way I know. Here is where I change settings and go to Aperture priority for the simple reason I find it hard to judge here with all the various light sources and shadows. Again shooting in RAW really is essential. This is a city where you need to be Careful at night. I made a mistake of walking across London on my own from Theatre land to St Pauls, thinking about it, it could have gone wrong but was lucky. Here you need to be in a small group. Later I met up with a few other photographers at St Pauls and stayed together till about 4am, then found a all night cafe doing a great breakfast.



Above: 1am at St Pauls. ISO 200, f5, 1 sec, lens 10-20mm at 15mm. On a tripod Camera Nikon D7100



Left: the base of the Gurkin

Right: The banking district. Hand held shot, ISO 6400, 1/10th sec, f5, lens 10-20mm at 17mm. Camera Nikon d7100. The down side here is ISO noise and camera shake.

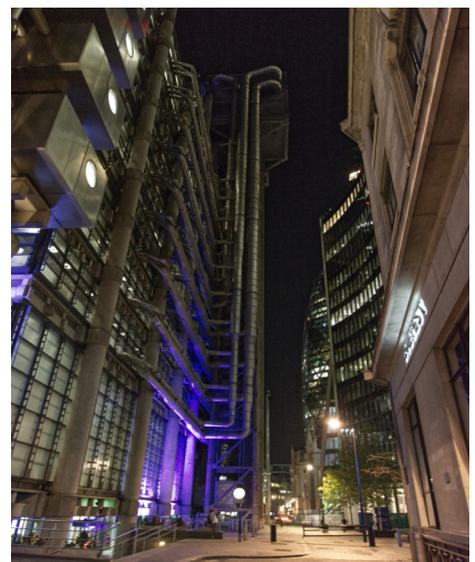
Left: Not quite dark. The building lights tell you the light is going.

Below: Christmas brings a new dimension, colour and spectacle. You will encounter many photographers as you walk around so look out an make sure they do not appear in your image. Details: ISO100, f13 comp -0.3, 16mm lens 10-20mm Camera Nikon D7000.



Should you go and do a shoot in London be aware of sensitive building, especially if you are close to them and don't be surprised to be politely ask not to take photographs.

If you look at the pavements in central London you might see studs set in the walkway. The area around the Lloyds Building, Gurkin and Cheese Grater are heavy with security and Cameras and well policed. The studs in the pavements so I have been told is a demarcation line between public foot path and private land belonging to the buildings. Should you be on the wrong side of the studs Security will tell you to move in no uncertain terms to the other side of the studs, I know along with a couple of fellow photographers been told to step back over the studs.



Congratulations for getting this far.

The last venue is my favourite.

Its not a short drive but for those who have been will know just how wonderful this city is.

Venice: Its a night photographers dream, especially during Jan-March except for the 10 days of Carnival. On a cold winter night by 9.30pm the streets are deserted with the exception of the Rialto Bridge Area and its restaurants . By Midnight you only have Ghosts and Police walking around. Most building stay lit till about 1am and some are lit throughout the night. This is without doubt one of the safest cities I have photographed in. Here are a few images to inspire you to go. As for the Technical stuff it still remains the same but you really need a wide angle lens as a first choice,(10-20mm), A GPS system fitted to the camera is invaluable when trying to work out where the image was taken, and a map, as I have found, there is no one around to ask when you get lost and you will at night.



Left: Looking across the grand Canal from the Santa Maria della Salute at about 11pm. There is very little river craft otherwise you would have long streaks of red and white lights through your image.

Details: ISO 100, f10, 30sec, 20mm.
Camera Nikon D7100
Lens 18-55mm.
Tripod with Camera self timer set at 2sec.



Above: The Doges Palace & Piazzetta San Marco.

Detail: ISO 100, f10, 25 sec, 18mm.
Camera Nikon D7100
Lens 18-55mm
Tripod with camera self timer set at



Above: Riva Degli Schiavoni.

Details: ISO 4000, f4, 1/50 sec 26mm
Camera Nikon D7100
Lens 18-55mm

Hand held and Auto Mode



Above: The Grand Canal at Rialto.

Details ISO 3200, f3.5, 18mm, 1/13 sec
Camera Nikon D7100
Lens 18-55mm

Hand held and Auto Mode

I hope you have enjoyed the short article on Night Photography, As for the technical side its best done live, as it is hard to explain, as it depends on so many factors. I hope this has inspired you to give it a try. I frequently go out during the winter mainly to Cromer and Gt Yarmouth. If any one wishes to join me you are more than welcome, but C19 rules and legislation will need to be followed .

Enjoy your Photography. John