Look Down, Way Down the Grand Canyon

By Vincent Morban, IACC Member

First the safety talk ... When you are shooting the Grand Canyon, or at least part of it, you must remember some basics. If you drop something don't go after it; Don't grab shrubs for support because they will not hold; That big boulder you are putting your weight against may move; Beware of loose gravel; Keep to the wall side … you get the idea.

Rewind. Isn't this a photography newsletter?

My wife, Barbara, two friends and I hired a local guide/professional photographer (Adam Schallau) to help us find the best location for a sunset, night and sunrise shoot. We were given hands-on instruction on camera techniques, lens selection and composition while on site. We were pleased to be taken to sites that were basically tourist free.

My camera is an OM-D EM-1 with the Oly 12-40 f2.8 and OLY 75mm f1.8 lenses; and Barbara's camera is an OM-D EM-5 with a Pany 14-42mm f3.5–5.6. The following are some things we learned.

For day photography:

- The sky is bright and the canyon is dark. Use grad filters to even out the tonal ranges.
- Start by shooting wide in the early hours. You get the best shapes and interesting contrast.
- Shoot longer later in the day to pick out details.
- Watch the weather. The sky and clouds are ever changing. The colour of the canyon changes constantly.
- Use the tripod!!! And keep your hands off it while shooting (my bad habit). The winds in the canyon can cause the tripod to shake, so a heavier tripod is a good idea, or get someone to block the wind for you.
- Use the delayed release or a remote release.
- Many people use a rule of thumb, which states that you should focus roughly 1/3 of the way into your scene in order to achieve maximum sharpness throughout (if desired).
- Shoot right and process left. Huh? That means keep your eye on the histogram and push it to the right. Do not push the histogram over the edge. When shooting in RAW the images look washed out but when processed properly result in images with greater detail. Don't fear because basically what looks bad in the camera looks good when properly processed.

For night photography:

- The rule or 500 (500/focal length of lens) is a rule of thumb for calculating maximum exposure times before star trails begin to appear. This is due to the earth's rotation.
- The maximum exposure times will decrease proportionately as sensor size decreases.
- A wide angle lens with a very "fast" aperture, meaning the number under the "f" is small, will help you to pick up as much light as possible in the shortest amount of time.
- Higher ISOs reduce exposure times, at the cost of noise.
- Keeping in mind the rule of 500 for OM-D, I used the Live Time/Live Bulb feature, picked my ISO (100-200 to reduce noise), set my focus point, brought up the histogram and watched the image appear on the screen. In Live View, I watched the histogram move to the right and when the histogram stopped moving the image was complete. Time permitting, leaving the image exposing longer seems to capture more detail.

It was a great photo shoot (see photos on the next page), and one that we will remember for a long time. We would recommend Adam Schallau to anyone who is off to see the Grand Canyon.

Two photographs on this page © Vincent Morban