

Snow Photography- The basics.

Metering

Metering in a Snowy environment can be tricky at times, and to get the correct exposure you need to know how the camera meters.

All camera's are designed to meter 18% grey no matter what they are pointed at. So if you expose using a grey card then your shot will be correctly exposed. But many people don't carry one around.

The camera is blind and doesn't have a brain so all it does is average all the tones it see's and comes up with an exposure. The 18% grey is the mid range between black and white. Point the camera at a very black scene and the camera will try and make the Black grey and the same as a White scene. The black scene will be over exposed and the White scene will be under exposed.

I read the following sentence and thought it explained it well. You point the camera at the Snow scene and the camera says *'Holy crap, Batman, look at all that white snow, it's so bright I had better CUT the exposure to balance out the scene'* and now all your white snow turns grey



Metering Compensation

So you need to compensate for this by over exposing your shot 1-2 stops. If you are using a digital camera check the histogram. The reason to check is the over exposure will change depending on the conditions. If it is a very grey cloudy day you might only over expose by 1/2 a stop. On a clear sunny day you will need to over expose 2 stops or more because there so much light.

Metering Tricks – SLR's

Other ways to get the correct exposure apart from using something grey is meter of the palm of your hand, blue sky away from the sun or green grass. These are very close to a 18% grey.

Metering - Compacts

If you have a compact with a Snow function all that is doing it altering the exposure by 1-2 stops automatically and these days some of the newer DSLR's detect that the image is all white and can alter the exposure to give you a better image than a underexposed shot if shooting in an auto mode.

Also if you are shooting in Shutter or Aperture priority, you can use the EV setting in your camera to add the 1-2 stops over exposure. But remember to change it back to zero for the non Snow shots.

Metering in Manual –SLR's

Shooting in Manual I find the easiest. I can take a reading off the snow and then open the aperture up or slow the shutter speed down.

Example: Aperture is set to F16.
1 stop open is F11
2 stops open is F8

Shutter speed set at 1/125th of a second
1 stop open = 1/60th of a second
2 stops open = 1/30th second

I would also check the histogram to make sure I have the correct exposure.

Metering - Flash

If you use a flash during a snow fall it will freeze all the snow in the air and it will reflect light back and you end up with bright spots through the image



Metering - Colour Balance

The colour balance is another thing that can change in the snow, as we know sunrise and sunsets can give you nice warm colours. But during the day the colour temperature changes and you can end up with blue shadows or blue ice. So check the white balance on the camera and occasionally check the image on the back of the camera. And change it if necessary. I shot in daylight mode normally but I will check the image a few times during the day in case the daylight balance needs changing.

Metering – Dynamic Range

When shooting snow scenes try and take shots which are all in sunlight or all in shadow. The dynamic range especially in the snow is very wide so dark areas will be very dark or conversely you may get detail in the shadows but the snow & sky will be over exposed.

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