

How to Shoot Stunning Silhouette Photos

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Create dramatic images with silhouettes of people, animals, buildings and objects, identifiable by their outline or black shape against a colourful or well-lit background.

- The key to a successful silhouette is backlighting. To create a silhouette, you place a subject against a bright background and expose for that background, leaving the subject in shadow. Sunsets are great for silhouettes because of their vibrant colours. You can also create silhouettes indoors by making sure there is more light on the background than on the subject. Another way to shoot silhouettes is in the studio. Set up lights to backlight a subject against a white background; for a fun look, add coloured gels to the lights.
- Whatever the background, you need to meter and correctly expose for that background in order to place your subject in shadow. Check on the LCD how the image looks, and adjust your exposure accordingly. You can also use exposure bracketing to shoot a series of shots with varied exposures, and then pick the best one.

- With silhouettes, the ideal spot on which to focus is the subject. However, since the subject of a silhouette is in little to no light, the camera may have difficulty locking on the focus. In this case, manually focus the camera on your subject. You can also try to focus on the subject's edge, where there will be more of a contrast difference between the darkened subject and the brighter background.
- If your camera has Active D-Lighting, make sure to turn it off, because otherwise it will try to force the camera to correctly expose for the subject that you want to be in shadow. Some COOLPIX and DSLRs have a Silhouette Scene/Effects mode which automatically turns off D-Lighting and selects the exposure for the scene's brightest area.
- Full-length silhouettes of people work best when your subject wears fitted rather than loose clothing. Whether you go for a full-length shot or a close-up shot of their face, shoot them in profile – this gives a more recognisable and interesting result than if you capture them face-on.

Quick tips

- The stronger the subject's shape, the more successful the image. While a silhouetted subject can show some detail, the less there is visible, the more punchy the end result.
- Ensure your subject is sharp by using as small an aperture as possible.
- In post-production, add more contrast to make the silhouette even more dramatic.