
10 GLACIER BAY PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

By Alan Sanders and John D'Onofrio

Glacier Bay is one of the most dramatic places on Planet Earth. Opportunities to capture amazing images in this wild National Park are virtually limitless. The surrounding landscapes are humbling, with ice-encrusted peaks of the Fairweather Range reaching as high as 15,000 feet (4600 meters) above sea level. Vast tidewater glaciers descend the mountainsides to meet the shorelines, calving icebergs in thunderous explosions that sound like thunder. Beaches are raw, covered with mossy rocks and blue bergy bits, ideal subjects for the camera.



About the size of Connecticut, Glacier Bay National Park is almost completely devoid of human beings. But it's teeming with the kind of animals that stir the imagination: Whales,

grizzly bears, puffin, moose, mountain goats, eagles, seals, sea lions and porpoise are common sights. Great waterfalls stream down ice-polished cliffs to join the aquamarine waters of the Bay. In short, it's a photographer's paradise. In the interest of maximizing the experience of our time in this amazing place, we've compiled a list of ten tips to help you get the most from a photography workshop and tour in Glacier Bay



1. Tripod

After the camera and lens, the next most important tool in photography is a good tripod. When we are photographing from land in Glacier Bay (as opposed to from the boat or skiff), your tripod will be invaluable. Having a steady platform gives you so many more options for aperture and shutter speed. Controlling these variables is essential to making quality photographs and by having your camera affixed to your tripod, you have complete creative control over depth of field. This is especially important when using long lenses. Even in bright sunshine, the use of a tripod is an invaluable aide, as its use tends to stimulate more carefully-framed compositions.

Tripod legs and heads are often sold separately. Ball heads are far and away the easiest heads to use. Beware of ultra-lightweight models. While they're light to carry, they might not keep your camera steady when the wind blows. And the wind does blow in Glacier Bay.

Here are a couple of tips when using a tripod. Often pushing the shutter release button can cause the camera to shake



when shooting at slow shutter speeds, even on a tripod. The solution is to use a remote release. They can be either wired or wireless, depending on your preference and camera. An alternative is to use the two-second self-timer built into most cameras. Both allow you to release the shutter without touching the camera. A remote release will be very welcome.

2. Stabilization

Of course the tripod is of no use when shooting from a boat. Even though both the David B. and the skiff are surprisingly steady in the mostly calm waters of Southeast Alaska, you're still on a moving boat. This is where image stabilization comes in. Stabilization is most often a characteristic of the lens, but can also be built into the camera body. By using gear with image stabilization, you will be able to shoot hand-held more effectively (with less evidence of camera movement). Bracing yourself against the boat is not a recipe for success as you will simply be transferring the boat's vibration to your camera. Better to use your legs as "shock absorbers" and isolate the camera from the boat's movement. Never use image stabilization when the camera is on a tripod. It is counter-productive—and can result in blurring—when there is no camera movement.



3. Long Lens

When photographing from the boat, a long lens (with stabilization) will be your primary lens. While the David B can get pretty close to shore, you'll still want the reach of a long focal-length lens, especially to photograph wildlife or details on the windswept beaches. A long lens also creates compositional opportunities like tight juxtapositions, seeming to draw distant aspects of the landscape closer together for dramatic effect.



A long lens will also be appreciated to capture the epic once-in-a-lifetime sight of calving glaciers, bringing the viewer up close and personal to the tumult of ice and sea spray. Some photographers use 'prime' lenses (with fixed focal length) for their unmatched optical excellence. Others prefer the flexibility and convenience of zoom lenses. Modern zoom lenses can be very, very sharp. Generally speaking, a 100-300mm zoom works well, although there will be times when you may want more.

4. Wide-Angle Lens

For shore excursions, a wide-angle fixed or zoom lens will be extremely useful. We'll have opportunities to explore beaches littered with blue icebergs, carved into surreal shapes. These other-worldly sculpture gardens of ice are ideally captured using wide-angle lenses to add dramatic effect and emphasize their stark beauty. Typical wide-angle zooms are in the 28-70 mm range.



5. 'L' Bracket



An 'L' bracket makes switching from horizontal compositions to vertical ones a snap. Your camera mounts on the bracket and then the bracket mounts on the tripod. This allows you to use the camera either horizontally or vertically without tilting the head in an awkward and unsteady position. Most photographers have a default horizontal framing preference. Due to the ease of switching orientations, you'll find that you shoot more vertical compositions when using the bracket.

6. Horizon Lines

Something that often gets ignored by beginning photographers is the horizon line. It is stating the obvious to say that you want your horizon line to be level (draining the ocean is never a good thing!). And yes, a tilted horizon can be fixed in processing but sometimes at the expense of having to re-frame a composition to accomplish the task. "Minding the horizon" is an example of paying attention to everything that's in the frame, an excellent habit to form. Sometimes one can be so focused on our main subject that we lose track of everything else, resulting in a sloppy composition.



7. Mouse

When working on a laptop, particularly on a boat, a mouse will make your life a lot easier. A trackpad is fine for surfing the web but it's a clumsy tool for image manipulation. You'll have much more control with a mouse. We use lap-desks on the David B and they are perfect surfaces for the subtle touch of a real mouse.



8. Rain



It has been known to rain in Southeast Alaska, so some kind of protection for your camera is not a bad idea. It doesn't need to be elaborate or expensive. A clear baggie with a couple of holes, one for the lens and one for the viewfinder, could work. A somewhat more elegant and functional solution is a clear bag that's designed just for this purpose. It has a hole with a drawstring for the lens. It's best to cinch it around a lens hood (which will shield your glass from the elements). There's a hole for the viewfinder and enough room to get your hands inside to control the camera. These are typically in the \$10 range and well worth having.

9. Memory Cards

It's always good to have more memory cards than you think you'll need. When photographing wildlife, you might want to use burst mode. This is particularly true with porpoises surfing the bow wave. This kind of shooting fills up a card faster than you think. And in a situation like Glacier Bay, you'll want to avoid re-formatting your cards until you get home as they are essentially a "back up" should your laptop hard drive fail. Imagine how many shots you think you'll be taking and then double it. And then double that. Memory cards are cheap.



10. Laptop



You'll want a reliable laptop with Adobe Lightroom *Classic* installed. Not an iPad or Tablet. Adobe offers several iterations of Lightroom as part of its various Creative Cloud software plans. You want the Creative Cloud Photography Plan which includes Lightroom *Classic* as well as Photoshop and Lightroom CC. It's essential that your laptop and software are 100% good to go when you board the boat. During these workshops, you will be doing a lot of image processing and a stable, fully-operational laptop is essential.