

SCOTT KELBY

IPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

10 PHOTO RECIPES



Table of Contents

Landscape Travel Shots	01
Exotic Travel Shots	02
Dramatic Cityscapes	03
Nighttime Cityscapes	04
Concert Shots	05
Window Light Portraits	06
Pet Portraits	07
Fine Art Style Patterns	08
Close-Up Flower Shots	09
Lifestyle Shots	10

Landscape Travel Shots



KALEBRA KELBY

Characteristics: A coastal shot where the seagulls are the subject and the beautiful landscape is the background.

(1) The key to this shot is timing. Notice how the seagulls are lined up so perfectly, so symmetrically with the mountains? How do you capture a shot like that? By shooting a whole bunch of shots using Burst mode (in the Camera app, swipe the shutter button to the left and hold it on newer iPhones, or tap-and-hold the shutter button on older ones) and being patient. This shot by my wife Kalebra is just one of many shots she took in this series, taken from a tour boat in Norway heading back to the dock. She has lots of shots where the seagulls aren't perfectly aligned, but that's why you need to take a lot of shots. She only needed one shot where they all lined up, but sometimes you need to take a lot of shots to find that special one.

(2) Compositionally, the horizon line is very low (following the rule of thirds), which takes the emphasis off the boring water and puts it on the mountains and clouds in the background. The image also has depth because the composition has layers—the water, then the seagulls, then the mountains, then the clouds—it keeps drawing you in.

(3) The post-processing secret here is bringing out the texture (using the Definition slider in the Photos app) and sharpening (using the Sharpness slider). Images with lots of detail soak those two filters up, giving them a sharp, crisp look.

Exotic Travel Shots



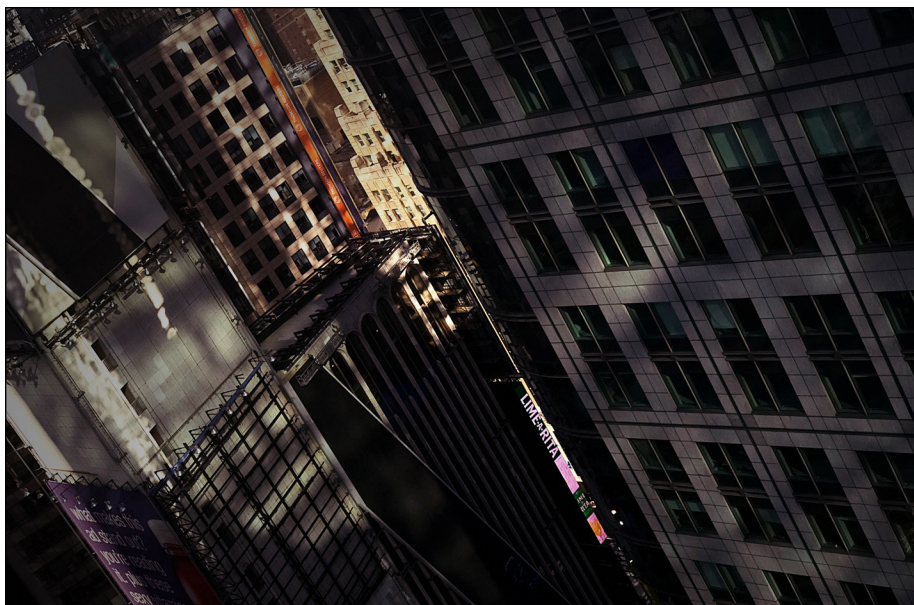
Characteristics: Still water, soft light, a dark and dramatic scene.

(1) The still water is a dead giveaway to when this shot was taken. It was taken well before dawn, which is your best chance for getting still, reflective water. As great and interesting as these wonderful Chinese fisherman are, with choppy water, you lose the stillness, you lose the reflections, and it's an entirely different shot. So, getting up well before dawn and getting into position, ready to shoot, is key. The soft light, the blue color (though I made it more blue in the Photos app by swiping the Warmth slider toward blue and the Tint slider a little toward magenta), the still water, this only happens one time a day—before dawn. This shot isn't as sharp as I would like it to be because I hand-held it. It would be sharper had I shot it with a tripod.

(2) You don't generally just wander up on a scene like this. We hired a local "photo fixer," who is someone you hire (usually in an area you're not that familiar with) to get you access to places and people you probably wouldn't get to any other way. They arranged the fisherman, they provided our transportation (including a raft to get out to the area where I took this shot), and even snacks once we got out there to shoot. A good photo fixer can set up incredible opportunities, and they're worth their weight in gold. All I had to do was compose the frame and shoot.

(3) At the end of the day, to get exotic travel shots like this, you have to invest—in traveling, in your time, and for photo fixers or guides to help you make the shot you're envisioning. Your iPhone will do the rest.

Dramatic Cityscapes



KALEBRA KELBY

Characteristics: A dark, shadowy Gotham City–like look.

(1) The recipe here is to keep an eye out for interesting light in the city. This often happens late in the day when the sun is lower in the sky, and the light begins to make its way through the buildings. This shot, taken from a New York City hotel room window, is all about how the small shafts of light are hitting the buildings.

(2) Another compositional thing that makes a shot like this interesting is that it's taken from up high. That alone gives it a more interesting dimension because most city shots we see are taken from the ground looking up at the tall buildings, not from within the tall buildings themselves. A great way to get this type of shot is to Google “rooftop bar” for any city you’re going to, plan to go late in the day, and then, if your iPhone has it, use the 2x telephoto lens in your Camera app to zoom in on a particular part of the city with interesting light. Don’t be afraid to crop in the Photos app if the 2x lens didn’t get you in close enough.

(3) Images like this, with lots of detail and angles, look great when you bring out texture and sharpness, so in the Photos app, tap Edit, swipe over and tap on Definition, and then swipe the slider to the left to bring out detail. Then, tap Sharpness, and swipe the slider to the left to get a nice, sharp, crisp look to your image. Lastly, resist the urge to brighten the photo. If you want this dark, dramatic look, it starts with dark. If anything, darken the exposure, and then increase the highlights.

Nighttime Cityscapes



Characteristics: A nighttime cityscape shot from up high.

(1) Tap on the brightest part of the scene on your iPhone's Camera app screen to lock your focus, and then bring the brightness up a bit by using the Exposure Compensation slider (tap on the upward-facing arrow at the top of the screen to reveal the camera feature icons right above your shutter button. Tap on the Exposure Compensation icon [the circle with the plus and minus signs], and then tap-and-drag the slider to the left/down to increase the exposure) or by dragging your finger upward. You want to bring out the lights in the city.

(2) When you shoot from up high (this was taken from a balcony outside a restaurant), it gives the image a more epic feel. So, take any chance you can get to shoot from up high like this because it will make the scene look bigger and more open.

(3) This is the type of image where going to the Photos app and increasing the amount of Definition (tap Edit, then swipe over and tap on Definition, and then swipe the slider way over to the left) really makes a big difference. If the lights are too bright, swipe over to the Highlights icon, and then swipe the amount slider to the right to recover those highlights. If the lights don't seem bright enough, do the opposite: swipe the amount slider to the left. Lastly, night shots like this look great with lots of sharpening, so make sure you apply a good amount (using the Sharpness slider).

Concert Shots



Characteristics: A live concert shot, with the rare instance that a bunch of other people aren't holding up their phones.

(1) I hate to say this first part, but it's true—the key to making really compelling concert shots is to either get seats where you can sit up close, or quickly walk down near the front of the stage during the concert just long enough to grab a few shots before the usher comes and asks you to return to your seat. Do this when the crowd is on their feet, and you'll blend in better. Your iPhone can only get so close with its built-in optical lenses, so the closer you are, the better shots you'll come home with.

(2) You're sitting in the dark, out in the audience, but the stage might have 100 or more super-bright 1000w lights aimed at the band. It doesn't need one more light (the light from your flash, which won't reach the stage anyway, and will only light the heads of the people right in front of you), so make sure you turn your flash off (this will also help when you're trying to shoot on the sly without an usher ushering you back to your seat).

(3) This is when it's really important to tap your screen to lock focus on your subject. Also, right after you lock focus, shoot! The lighting and your subject's position on the stage can change quickly (unless it's James Taylor. I love James Taylor, but he's a non-moving object on stage). Also, shoot in bursts (see page 1), and you'll have more sharp shots to choose from. Compositionally, you get to decide to include the crowd or to crop them away, and don't be afraid to crop later (in the Photos app), rather than using the digital zoom (pinch-and-zoom), which gives you cruddy quality. Cropping is king. Digital zooming is the jester.

Window Light Portraits



Characteristics: Soft, natural light on the side of her face closest to the window, with soft shadows and a nice rim light on the opposite side.

(1) Start by not having your subject face the window directly—you want them parallel to the window (in this shot, the window is to the far right). Then, you want your subject to stand back a few feet from the window (maybe 6 or 8 feet), so any harsh sunlight coming through isn't hitting them directly.

(2) For most window light shots, I "short light" my subject so the side of their face that is closest to the camera is the one with the most shadows, and the side farthest away gets the main light. You do this by having them turn their body toward the window (as seen above), and then look back at the camera (without moving their body). This helps to make your subject's face look thinner and is generally more flattering as most folks have a roundish face.

(3) Your shoot angle should be a little higher than your subject's eyes, so you're positioning your iPhone to where you're shooting a little down on them, again for a more flattering look. Posing-wise, for a more flattering look (one that makes your subject look less wide), don't have your subject face the camera directly, instead have them turn to the side a bit (like you see above), so their body takes up less space in the shot.

Pet Portraits



KALEBRA KELBY

Characteristics: Beautiful natural light backlighting our subject (that's our son's dog, Naminae. She's a Belgian Tervuren and sweet as she can be).

(1) Two things are going to make a great shot of your pet: great lighting and waiting for the right expression. The lighting part is easier. Here, Naminae is posing by a set of windows after the sun has moved away from that part of the house, so there are no harsh beams of light coming in on her. She's mostly getting soft light from the side and behind her, since the window in front of her (out of frame) is about 10 feet away. The light to the side and behind is providing that nice rim light around her face, and the rest of the light on her is soft and flattering. Okay, that's the first part; the second part is harder.

(2) Getting your pet to stay still (especially if they are a dog) is not always easy (depending on the pet, of course), but after you have great light, what will get you a great shot of your pet is patience. Remember, we're not paying for film, right? So, spend as much time as it takes to get your dog to give you a great expression. One trick top pro dog photographer Kaylee Greer uses is to put your dog on a leash outside (in the shade) and get them to sit, and then remove the leash in your editing app. You could use the excellent TouchRetouch app (for iOS and Android), for example, to remove it pretty easily in most cases.

(3) Lastly, for a more intimate photo, don't shoot down on your pet. Get down to their level and shoot from there for a better angle and more connection with them.

Fine Art Style Patterns



Characteristics: A fine art, repeating pattern shot taken straight down from overhead.

(1) People love patterns, and this shot is a great example of a shot that has graphic appeal. The subject isn't really the coffee cup, it's the pattern of coffee cups, and without that repeating pattern (if there was just one cup), it would make for a really boring shot.

(2) The lighting here is key. These cups were on a tray in a hotel conference room where we were having a business meeting. After taking a couple of shots with the overhead room lights on and seeing how bad they all looked, we turned off the overhead lights, picked up the tray, and moved it over by the window—not getting too close to it or the light streaming in would make the lighting look harsh. We positioned it just outside the direct light.

(3) You're shooting down, directly overhead, but if you don't do this right, the perspective and angles will look...well...weird is the only way I can describe it, which is why you want to use the leveling feature in your iPhone's Camera app that is there precisely for these overhead shots. When you're shooting with your iPhone flat like this and have the Grid feature turned on in your Camera Settings, two little plus signs appear in the center of your screen. Line those up, so all you see is a single plus sign, and now you know your iPhone is perfectly flat. The other compositional part here is to zoom in fairly tight. You don't want to see the tray, or all the cups. The idea is that there is an endless row of cups. The viewer won't know where it starts or ends because you just gave them a piece of the scene—their mind fills in the rest.

Close-Up Flower Shots



Characteristics: A natural light, close-up shot, with post-production that focuses the viewer's attention on the flower.

(1) This is one you can literally shoot in your backyard, but of course, not everybody has a flower garden, which is why you might want to consider picking up a few fresh flowers from your local florist. They're very inexpensive (you can usually get a perfect rose, cash and carry, for about \$1.00). Make sure you tell the florist you're buying it to photograph it because in my experience, they will hunt you down an absolutely pristine subject. Place this flower in a low vase (you don't want to see the vase in the shot) and place it in your yard, so you'll have green plants or shrubs or trees as your out-of-focus background.

(2) Compositionally, shoot from a low angle. This gives you a different angle than we normally see, so get down low and shoot across at the flower(s), not down at it. The flower you see above was actually at eye level, up on a rose bush, aiming right at me (in the Princess Grace Rose Garden in Monaco), so I wasn't able to, and really didn't need to, get down low, but I think it still works. Sometimes we have to improvise for the situation we're in. Also, avoid shooting in the midday sun, which is harsh and generally unflattering to flowers (or to pretty much anything, for that matter). Wait until much later in the day when the sun is lower in the sky and the light creates softer shadows and smoother light. Lastly, zoom in tight. You can show one flower or a small group, but you avoid distractions and ugly backgrounds when you get in tight.

(3) To focus the attention on your flower, darken the edges all the way around the image by adding a vignette in the Photos app using the Vignette slider.

Lifestyle Shots



KALEBRA KELBY

Characteristics: A shot taken while you're out living life. This one's of a soda we were served at the counter at a local Johnny Rockets.

(1) The key is separating your subject (the soda glass) from the background. You do this using Portrait mode in your iPhone's Camera app—it blurs the background and makes your subject stand out, without obliterating the background (just tap-and-swipe over to the left, right above your shutter button, until Portrait is selected). You can still see that it was taken in a restaurant, on the counter, so it's not just a soda glass on a blurry background.

(2) Shooting with your iPhone down on a counter or table itself does two things: It helps keep the phone very still, so you're going to have a sharp shot even though you're not outside in bright light (where the iPhone gives you its sharpest shots). And, shooting from this low angle makes the glass look really big. This low perspective really makes the shot.

(3) There's a lot of detail in this shot, from the bubbles in the glass to the Coca-Cola logo on it, and these will look even better when you bring out their texture and sharpness in the Photos app by increasing the amounts of Definition and Sharpness. Lastly, to focus the attention on your subject (in this case, the glass), while you're in the Photos app, darken the edges all the way around the image by increasing the Vignette amount.

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