Mastering Infrared Photography: Seeing the World in a New Light

Infrared photography opens a doorway into an unseen world, capturing light beyond the visible spectrum to render surreal, dreamlike images. With foliage glowing white, skies darkened, and architecture taking on ghostly tones, infrared is a creative avenue for bold visual storytelling.

What Infrared Photography Actually Involves

- Using a camera converted for infrared or attaching an IR filter.
- Blocking visible light to isolate near-infrared wavelengths.
- Shooting in bright sunlight for maximum contrast and IR effect.
- Post-processing is used to swap colour channels or convert them to black and white.

The Pros of Infrared Photography

- **Unique aesthetic**: Dreamlike white foliage and dramatic skies.
- **Artistic expression**: Offers surreal and striking visual narratives.
- **Crowd-free scenes**: IR often renders people less prominent or ghostlike.
- **Great for harsh light**: Midday sun, often avoided, is ideal for IR.
- **Works across genres**: Landscape, architecture, and portraiture all benefit.

The Limitations

- **Special equipment needed**: An IR filter or a converted camera is required.
- **Focus shift**: Infrared light focuses differently, affecting sharpness.
- **Long exposures**: Filters require slower shutter speeds without conversion.
- **Limited live view**: DSLR viewfinders won’t preview the IR effect.
- **Editing complexity**: Requires colour channel swapping and white balance correction.

How to Use Infrared Photography Wisely

- **Start with a 720nm filter**: It balances IR glow and visible contrast.
- **Use a tripod**, especially if using filters and long exposures.
- **Custom white balance**: Set on green grass or foliage for accurate previews.
- **Shoot in RAW**: Maximises post-processing flexibility.
- **Try black and white**: IR’s tonal range lends itself beautifully to mono.

Testing & Hands-On Experiment

1. **Filter Comparison**: Shoot the same scene with 590nm, 720nm, and 850nm filters.
2. **White Balance Test**: Set and compare custom white balances pre-shot.
3. **Contrast Check**: Photograph trees, skies, and water for IR-specific contrasts.
4. **Live View Limit Test**: Compare DSLR and mirrorless usability with filters.
5. **Channel Swap Editing**: Practice red/blue channel swaps in post-production.

Camera Manufacturer Symbols Table

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Manufacturer	Infrared Photography Mode/Setting Symbol	Additional Notes
Canon	🔴📷 (No native IR mode)	IR possible with conversion or external filters.
Sony	🔻📸 (Converted Alpha models)	Popular for conversions due to sensor sensitivity.
Nikon	🌫️📷 (No native IR mode)	Good results post-conversion; some DSLRs are prone to hotspots.
Fujifilm	🧊📷 (X-T series popular for IR)	Excellent for 720nm and full-spectrum conversions.
Panasonic	💡📸 (IR-compatible with modification)	Micro Four Thirds sensors are suitable for lightweight conversions.