



Tripod Buying Tips

Recently I've had discussions with members looking for advice on buying a tripod, so I thought I'd list a few features that I find important to me in my photography. Remember though, these are my preferences, yours certainly will vary.

Tripod material:

There are 2 main tripod materials, aluminum and carbon fiber, the decision is a trade off between cost and tripod weight. Carbon Fiber being lighter, but cost more. I upgraded to a carbon fiber tripod after buying 3 tripods that didn't measure up.

Tripod height:

This is an important feature, you really want to have the tripod fully extended (center column collapsed) with the camera mounted on it and have the view finder at eye level. Otherwise you'll be bending over for every shot and won't be able to sleep the next night.

Tripod Head:

There are many styles, the main types are pistol grip and ball head. Again, this is up to what and how you shoot, the main criteria is to make sure the head you choose has a maximum load that comfortably exceeds the weight of your camera and biggest lens.

Mounting Plate:

While we're talking about tripod heads, we should discuss how to attach your camera to the tripod. The most common 'foot' is an Arca Swiss quick release plate, as they adapt to many tripod heads and can be purchased as an 'L' bracket clamp for portrait shooting.

Some brands of tripod heads use a proprietary mounting foot, again the choice is yours.

Twist lock or Flip lock:

This is really personal preference, there are 2 main type of leg locks, Twist and Flip. They're both good, but you need to be comfortable with you choice, I've had both and prefer the flip lock, although my current tripod is a Twist lock.

While we're discussing tripod legs, we should focus on on the number of leg sections, some tripods have 3 sections, some have 4. The 4 section tripod collapses smaller, but you have 3 more leg locks to deal with.

Bubble level:

Many tripods and tripod head have bubble levels to help you set the camera perfectly level with the curved world. I never use mine, but this again is up to you.

Center Column:

Many tripods are equipped with a center column, these can be handy to tweak the height of the tripod to match your height. Some center columns extend horizontally, this is neat for Macro work.

Personally the best feature on a center column is the handy hook on the bottom to offer your tripod more stability in windy situations. I never use the center, mainly because it introduces vibrations.