

BOKEH

BLUEPRINT

For those who maybe don't know it, bokeh has been defined as the way the lens renders out-of-focus parts of an image. To put it simply, bokeh is the blurry background (or sometimes even foreground!) with a beautiful artistic effect.

Bokeh is very common in portraiture, product, and macro photography and it can easily make images more dramatic because it helps separate the subject from the background.

For starters, you should know that you don't need the most expensive lens in order to achieve a stunning bokeh. You can actually achieve it with a simple kit lens once you know how it works.

Bokeh is quite important composition-wise and it can dramatically change the viewer's perception of your image. Make sure that bokeh looks pleasing in terms of colors and combine it with other compositional rules such as the rule of thirds, leading lines, patterns and so on. In case you're really fond of bokeh, try to experiment with vintage lenses for truly unusual results.



Examples of images with beautiful bokeh

1 APERTURE

Before you start experimenting with bokeh, you should learn how to change the aperture of your lens. The aperture setting is very important because it controls the depth of field of an image, which means how much of the image is in focus.



Typical ranges of apertures used in photography are about f/2.8–f/22 or f/2–f/16. The smaller the f-stop, the shallower the depth of field will be and vice versa. In other words – the smaller the f-stop, the more prominent the bokeh will be.

TIP:

If you want to achieve a dramatic bokeh, you should use an aperture of around f/2.8. Some fast lenses have f/1.8 or f/1.4, which are ideal for stylish portraits.

2 FOCAL LENGTH

The quality of bokeh also depends on the focal length of your lens. The longer the focal length, the creamier the bokeh.



If you're wondering what's the correlation between the focal length and the bokeh, you should know that longer lenses have a compression effect where they pull in the background and make it appear magnified and closer to the subject. This compression effect is also magnifying the bokeh effect.

TIP:

This is clearly visible in portraits done with longer zoom or prime lenses, such as 70–200mm, 85mm or 135mm. These lenses will give your images a beautiful bokeh.

THE ESSENTIALS

3 DISTANCE

Another important factor that can easily affect the bokeh is the distance between the camera and the subject. The closer you are to your subject, the shallower the depth of field.



If you are able to get really close to your subject (if you're a portraitist that shouldn't be a problem!), you can achieve truly wonderful bokeh which will make your images rather poetic.

TIP:

The distance between the camera and the subject is very important in macro images. They are perfect examples of razor-sharp subjects and soft blurry backgrounds.