

Camera Buying Guide



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Introduction

Whether you're buying your first digital camera, or planning to upgrade, rest assured you'll find plenty of options to fit your budget and your career goals.

The world of digital photography has grown a great deal in the past 10 years. You'll find that models at all price points will be capable of producing high quality images suitable for all the markets, including stock, travel, fine art, portraiture, and editorial - whatever you plan to shoot.

There are dozens of manufacturers of good equipment and literally hundreds or thousands of different models to choose from. Figuring out what's right for you can be intimidating. In this quick guide, I'll try to simplify the selection process by giving you some recommendations at the different price points and letting you know some things to look for.

Remember, while your equipment is an essential part of the process, it isn't the most important element. Your knowledge of photographic techniques and composition, how to use the equipment, and how to approach each of the different markets, are far more critical to your success.

Features

I'll show you some cameras that will do a wonderful job for you at two price points, under \$600 and under \$1,200. But before we get to that, let's begin with a list of features to look for, regardless of price point:

- Choose an interchangeable lens camera, usually referred to as an SLR. This will ensure that you'll have a camera with a large sensor, which produces higher quality images, and you'll be able to use a wide variety of lenses to suit your needs in the future while keeping the same body. In addition, as your selection of lenses grows over the years, you'll be able to upgrade to the newest body in the future

without having to replace all your lenses - assuming you stick with the same manufacturer.

- While there are a number of high-quality manufacturers out there, four represent the bulk of the business in the professional or advanced amateur market - Canon, Nikon, Olympus, and Panasonic. Selecting one of these will mean you'll have a wide variety of lenses and bodies to choose from. Each manufacturer's lenses only fit their own brand, although Panasonic and Olympus share the same specifications making their lenses interchangeable. In addition, these four brands retain their value better than most if you choose to resell at a later date.
- Make sure your camera will capture video. This has become such a common feature that you'd probably have to work hard to find a high-end camera without it, but check anyway. It's a bonus if you have the ability to connect a separate microphone. In-camera microphones don't have the same quality as external ones, and a setup like that will allow you to use wireless receivers as well. Some will have a built-in plug on the camera body; some will have an add-on plug that mounts on the hot shoe. Either one works fine.
- Remember, since you'll be buying an interchangeable SLR, you need both a body and a lens. In my suggestions that follow, I'll recommend a kit that includes both. The lens that is most useful as a first lens is a moderate zoom, something in the range of 24-70mm at least. More on either end is fine. (Traditionally all lens specifications, that "24-70mm," are discussed as though they are going on a 35mm camera from the film days when the width of the frame measured 35mm. Digital cameras use sensors instead of film and the sensors vary in size resulting in confusing lens specs depending on your sensor size. It's easier to talk about the lenses as if they were all going on a 35mm, full frame camera. In the suggestions below, all my

recommendations will be for a zoom in that range, the numbers may be different based on the sensor size, but the lens will act the same. All this is a bit confusing, so feel free to ignore it!)

Models

I've broken down some suggestions for you by price point below. We'll stick with the four major brands and I'll include both a body and lens combination, so you have a complete kit. Don't feel you have to make your choice from my list. It's just a guide.

If it's possible for you to purchase a camera in person at a store, I suggest trying to handle as many of the below models as you can. Some will feel more comfortable to you than others, and there's a big difference in physical size and weight. These days, the brick and mortar camera stores are few and far between, and the Best Buys of the world have a limited assortment. Most of my purchases are from BH Photo (www.bhphotovideo.com) or Adorama (www.adorama.com) in New York. Both have an outstanding assortment with the ability to make returns.

Under \$600

Canon: Canon EOS Rebel T3i DSLR Camera with EF-S 18-55mm IS II Lens Kit. This setup meets all the requirements of the "features to look for," including the ability to hook up an external microphone. The lens is image-stabilized to reduce camera shake. In 35mm terms, this lens is equivalent to 28-90mm, a little more than our minimum.

Nikon: Nikon D3200 Digital SLR Camera w/ 18-55mm VR Lens.



This setup also meets all our requirements, including an external microphone input and a lens equivalent of 27-82mm. This lens is also image-stabilized to help reduce the dreaded camera shake at slower shutter speeds.

Panasonic: Panasonic Lumix DMC-G6 Mirrorless Micro Four Thirds with 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 II Lens

This camera, as well as the Olympus below, uses a smaller sensor (micro four-thirds) than either the Canon or Nikon. And rather than use a mirror and pentaprism in the viewfinder, they use an electronic viewfinder, allowing them to make much smaller bodies and lenses and still maintain excellent quality in the final product. In addition, this model has an articulating screen that allows you to view it from multiple angles, the screen is touch-sensitive, so you can change settings, focus, and even shoot using the screen as you would on an iPhone. The lens is a 28-84mm equivalent and is image-stabilized. To give you an idea

about size comparisons, this camera and lens is about 1/3 less in both physical size and weight than either the Canon or Nikon models. All Panasonic lenses work on Olympus bodies and vice versa.

Olympus: Olympus E-PL5 Mirrorless Micro Four Thirds Camera with 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 II R Lens (Black)

This Olympus is even smaller physically than the Panasonic. The body has image stabilization that works with any lens put on it. It has the same features, including the touch screen, but doesn't



have the internal viewfinder, the tilt-touch screen is the only viewfinder. However, a viewfinder that mounts to the hot shoe is available as an optional accessory. All Panasonic lenses work on Olympus bodies and vice versa.

Under \$1,200

So what do you get when you expand your price range to \$1,200? Surprisingly you do NOT get higher quality photos! You do get a little better build quality. A faster autofocus system, a higher potential of frames-per-second shooting, and usually a better and/or more powerful zoom lens. While I generally believe the extra money is a good value for those reasons, I want to reiterate that the quality of your final product will be indistinguishable from its budget counterpart.

I think it's helpful to use an automobile analogy here. You can get from point A to point B in a car worth \$20,000 or a car worth \$40,000. You won't get there any faster, but you will have some significant options and accessories.

Canon: Canon EOS 60D Digital SLR Camera with 18-135mm
The major differences here are a fully-articulated tilt/swivel rear screen (although not a touch screen) and an excellent image-stabilized lens with an amazing zoom range of 29-216mm!



Nikon: Nikon D5300 DSLR Camera with 18-140mm Lens

Like the Canon above, the significant upgrade is the tilt/swivel

rear screen (although not a touch screen) and an excellent image stabilized lens with a 27-210mm zoom. It also has built-in WiFi and GPS that will integrate with your Android or iOS phone for remote viewing and shutter release.



Panasonic: Lumix DMC-GX7 Micro Four Thirds Camera with 14-42mm f/3.5-5.6 Lens



The major upgrade here is a tilting viewfinder and a tilting touch screen LCD monitor. This model also has image stabilization

built into the body, so it will work with any compatible lens.

Olympus: OM-D E-M5 Mirrorless Micro Four Thirds Digital Camera with 14-42mm Lens

This significant upgrade is an outstanding viewfinder coupled with the tilting touch screen in a compact body.



What About Over \$1,200?

You can easily spend over \$1,200 for a camera.

Both Nikon and Canon have superb cameras that sell for around \$7,000 for the body only, no lens included. Add a top of the line midrange zoom and your cost is about \$9,000 for a basic kit. Panasonic and Olympus top out their range at around \$1,600 for the body only. Add a great quality midrange zoom here and you're up to almost \$3,000.

To return to the automobile analogy, these are really top of the line units with the highest build quality loaded with every feature currently available. If you'd like to explore this territory, there are many websites that will go over them in great detail.

I reiterate, however, once you've passed a certain set of minimum requirements, your photographs don't automatically become better. I own cameras in this category but I assure you

while they're nice to have, they're not a necessity for success.

One Final Note

The cameras I've mentioned in this guide are representative of what's available at different price points. If you like a different brand or different model from one of these brands, that's fine. I'm confident that any of these models will do a good job for you, but I know there are hundreds of others that meet the same criteria. Don't feel intimidated by the camera you own. It's all about you; it's not about your camera.