

From Dusk to Dawn



This fast-paced time-lapse video shows Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur as you've never seen it before. We asked the expert how it was done.

Rather than taking the tried and testing route of pitching directly to clients, Singapore-based photographer Rob Whitworth decided to showcase his work by making online time-lapse films. The strategy paid off and Rob's videos went viral. His *Kuala Lumpur Day-Night* sequence has had half a million hits and his *Traffic in Frenetic HCMC* spot attracted over two million viewers. He says, 'It has made connections and opened up possibilities that no amount of networking could achieve. Every step of the process was exciting and I was contacted by news channels around the world who wanted to highlight my work.' Time-lapse movies have become Rob's favourite kind of photography, as he explains. 'I love the idea of showing the world around us as we cannot see it.' Maybe it's this ability to convey the bigger picture that has made time-lapse so popular on social media and with technical advances, even intricate videos can now be done with Nikon DSLRs and the relevant software.

THE EQUIPMENT

Rob works with a D800, D7000 and D3200 with standard NIKKOR primes and zooms. He says, 'The built-in intervalometers are essential to what I do. I shoot NEF and carefully assemble

sequences in postproduction. I don't use the camera's movie creation function for these type of videos, but it's a brilliant feature and has made making time-lapse movies far more accessible.'

PLANNING AND LOCATIONS

'Every shoot is carefully planned and researching locations and negotiating access is the most time-consuming part of the process,' says Robert. 'There also seems to be a correlation between how beautiful the scene is in front of the camera and how unpleasant it is behind it. I've spent a

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lot of time in tower blocks and by the side of main roads with large vehicles hurtling by.

'Generally the longest outdoor shoots are three hours maximum. I shoot with two or three cameras, so while one is busy, I can already start on a different shot. I enjoy working like this, because it allows me to really think the next scene through or even just watch the sun set.

'Sometimes when shooting nightfall I use auto functions, but on the whole everything has to be manual. It's essential to fix all settings, because undesired focus shifts or a change in grain can quickly ruin a sequence. I find the thing that spoils time lapse most often is me fiddling with the camera rather than sticking to the chosen values throughout the shoot.'

INTERVAL AND EXPOSURE TIME

The choice of interval and exposure time determines the feel and effect of the film. Using long intervals and short exposure times, creates a blocky, disjointed look, while using short intervals and long exposures create a blended,



but less dramatic effect. For most photographers it means a lot experimentation to get a feel of the right combination for each subject.

'By picking intervals and shutter speeds you can control what comes to life,' says Rob. 'Whether it's cars, people, clouds, shadows or nightfall. I've got a pretty good idea of the correct intervals, but it's always nice to be surprised.

'Neutral density filters are essential, as being able to use long exposures – even in bright daylight – is key for achieving my preferred look.'

TRANSITIONS

In this video, every shoot and transition is meticulously set up and often elaborate, but when watching, they are barely noticeable. On one occasion in the Kuala Lumpur film, the camera zooms into a screen with a cityscape, which then blends into a live shot of the same view. Or the view of a train track that zooms past turns into the train arriving at a station. Rob says, 'My aim was to throw so much activity at the screen in a short space of time, that the

transitions go almost unnoticed. I wanted the viewer to sit back, watch and enjoy the film, rather than try to work out what is happening.

'In some of the zoom shots, the footage switches from a static wide angle shot to a mid zoom view to give the effect of a seamless transition. There is so much you can do with some careful forward planning – it's lots of fun to play around with.'

TRACKING AND PANNING

What stands out most in Rob's films is the use of camera movement. As he explains, 'A lot of the time I shoot static shots then add the motion in post, using motion tracking in After Effects, which allows you to 'follow' a subject on screen. If you shoot D800 NEF files, you have 36MP images, which are then reduced to 1080p, or around 2MP, so you can zoom in and crop a lot in postproduction. Nikon NEF files are just amazing as they give me so much flexibility to pan, track, and explore a scene.

To get the extreme zoom shots though, like the

LEFT: Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia's capital as well as its cultural and financial centre. It is home to 1.6 million people and a dynamic and busy city, which is perfectly captured in this time-lapse film.

car or the pedestrian the camera follows through traffic, I shoot freehand or use a tripod to track subjects and then stabilise it in postproduction.

'At one point, the camera is spinning around the circular, centre of a shopping mall, which was done by smiling at the security guards and using the railings as a tripod. I moved around the atrium and again steadied the clip, using specialist software.'



POSTPRODUCTION

Rob uses Lightroom, After Effects and Final Cut Pro. Lightroom manages, files and batch processes large quantities of images, After Effects CS6 software has a motion tracker, that allows you to follow objects as well as stabilising any hand-held shots. Final Cut Pro is a video editing software to cut the film together.

'Finding the music is always a tricky part of making time lapse videos and having a strong soundtrack is an essential part of any film. Luckily the musicians have allowed me to use their tracks for non-commercial use, because they are fans of the videos.'

WHAT'S THE SECRET OF A GREAT ONLINE TIME-LAPSE FILM?

'With online videos you have around five to ten seconds to hook people, so don't be precious. It's a very different crowd to people sitting in a cinema with popcorn in hand – even if a shot is spectacular, not many people will want to watch it for 15 seconds. If you're aiming for a wide online audience make it fast and do something new.'

  To see the video search for Rob Whitworth on Vimeo or download the iPad version