

Buyer's guide

By David Phelan

In the great outdoors, choose your weapon carefully. The light, with luck, will be bright enough to allow you more freedom than indoors, and you won't be so reliant on flash, which is of less use outdoors anyway. There's more opportunity, then, to be inventive with your shots, so make sure you have a camera with plenty of elements you can control. There are digital SLRs (single lens reflex, which refers to how the viewfinder sees the image). All you need to know is that SLRs are the best, most configurable cameras on the market. Compact cameras, though, have the significant advantage of being smaller and often have scene modes so you can make use of the automatic settings built in. These settings know best how to compensate for dusk, bright sunshine and reflective water, for instance. Outdoors, of course, you'll want to be taking landscape shots, so make sure your zoom is wide enough to take in the whole

view, or at least has the facility for joining shots together seamlessly afterwards.

The more control you have over depth of field – that's the area of the picture that is in focus – the better, so you can make sure your subject is in sharp focus but nothing else is, if you want a dramatic result. Compacts rarely permit this, however: the depth of field is usually at its widest and can't be changed. Always try a camera out for size in the shop before you buy – if you're trudging about outside and you find it heavy or cumbersome, you'll regret your purchase. Also look for a focus lock – if your subject isn't central in the shot, for instance, point at the subject and half-press the trigger to lock the focus to that before framing and shooting. That way you won't end up with beautifully focused hills and an out-of-focus significant other in front of them.

Great
for
outdoors



LG KG920

You'll want to travel light, so something like the LG KG920 camera phone will save you taking two electronic devices into the unknown. Until now mobile phones haven't been able to cut it as cameras except for sending pictures. Until this phone arrived, the top pixel count was 3.2 million, enough for small prints. This is the first mobile to reach the UK with the same number of pixels as a cutting-edge compact camera. It has 5 million, which is enough for very decent-resolution shots. There are plenty of extras here, too, such as video recording, cute cartoon add-ons to make it look like your subject is enclosed in a love heart or clown make-up and more.

Where from: Carphone Warehouse (0800 925 925; www.carphonewarehouse.com)

How much: £269.99

Great
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outdoors



Sony DSC-W50

When you're taking pictures outside, it can sometimes be difficult to see an LCD screen in bright sunlight. Many cameras have the facility to increase the LCD's brightness, but you may also want to consider a camera with an optical viewfinder as well as an LCD screen, though these are now less common. The Sony DSC-W50 has both, and as it features the Carl Zeiss lenses that Sony's compact models favour, you can be sure it'll deliver sharp, impressive results. What's more, there is a wider than usual wide-angle zoom. It has 6 megapixels (that's six million pixels) and excellent build quality to boot. It's available for a very good price, too.

Where from: Sony (08705 111999; www.sony.co.uk)

How much: £199



***** Compact digital cameras *****



Fujifilm FinePix F30

This 6-megapixel compact has a sensor which is very sensitive so you can take pictures with shorter shutter speeds. This is ideal for one of the best uses of outdoor photography – sports shots. The sensor means there's less blur if objects are moving fast. And if you can't decide whether a situation would be better with or without flash, there's a Natural + Flash mode which takes two shots in quick succession, one with flash and one without so you can decide later which you prefer. All in all, a fantastic and versatile compact.

Where from: Fujifilm (0870 084 1310; www.fujifilm.co.uk)

How much: £279.99



Samsung NV3

Samsung's newest compact camera includes a special audio chip so that when you're bored with taking pictures, you can sit back and enliven the picnic by playing MP3 tracks through its stereo speakers (or keep it to yourself via the headphones that are included). It even has eight equalisers to improve the sound and plays video on its 2.5-inch screen, too. Its slim 17.5mm metal body makes it very stylish and its 7.2 megapixels and 3x optical zoom are complemented by its anti-shake system.

Where from: Available from leading retailers now. For more information, contact Samsung (0800 521652; www.samsung.co.uk)

How much: £229



Casio EX-Z1000

It's not just slim and sleek – the EX-Z1000 is a 10-megapixel camera in a small, well-built case, for sure – but it also has dozens of scene modes to make sure that your time outside is well spent. Landscapes are catered for, as well as a portrait in front of a landscape. Then there are settings for sports events, autumn leaves, backlit shots and even fireworks. Plus, there's an anti-shake option. All of them accessible at the touch of one button, viewable on a large, bright screen, and very intuitive and pleasurable to use.

Where from: Amazon (0800 279 6620; www.amazon.co.uk)

How much: From £237



Kodak V705

This is the latest of Kodak's hugely successful twin-lens series. Like the previous ones, it has two lenses so you can take regular or wide-angle shots without the need for a hugely protuberant lens. Indeed, the styling here is sleek and thin and Kodak claims it's the world's smallest wide-angle zoom digital. It's certainly ideal for outdoor use because it slips into a pocket or bag almost unnoticed. A neat stitching mode means you can connect landscape shots together in the camera to give panoramic images. Out in September.

Where from: Kodak (0870 243 0270; www.kodak.co.uk)

How much: £279



Pentax Optio T10

There's a 3-inch LCD monitor on the back of this sleek compact, but what makes it special is that the monitor is a touchscreen. Just jab your finger at the screen to choose and activate features. So, there are fewer buttons and a pleasingly simple interface. You can customise shots by drawing on the images with the camera's stylus or add decorative frames to pictures. It's a 6-megapixel camera, and has excellent build quality. It takes a little time getting used to the touchscreen, but it's pleasing once you're familiar with it.

Where from: Pentax (01753 792731; www.pentax.co.uk)

How much: £299.99



Olympus Mju 810

When you're outdoors, a light shower is no problem if you have a weatherproof camera. Olympus was the first company to deliver weatherproof digitals and this one is small and stylish. It has a stainless steel case and a very healthy 8 megapixels. Olympus also pioneered BrightCapture technology which brightens the LCD in night shots, for instance, so its 2.5-inch screen works well. Then there's Digital Image Stabilization Mode which can detect and compensate for camera shake.

Where from: Olympus (0800 072 0070; www.olympus.co.uk)

How much: £330



***** Digital SLR cameras *****



Sony Alpha 100

Sony's first digital SLR is a triumph. It manages to combine splendid classic SLR looks with great innovations. Like the large, bright viewfinder which knows when you're looking through it and autofocuses for you. Or the sensor which is made with materials which resist dust and which vibrates every time you switch on to shake off any dust that does stick. It's beautifully balanced to fit the hand, and the price includes an 18-70mm lens. Deeply impressive.

Where from: Sony (08705 111999; www.sony.co.uk)

How much: £699



Pentax K100D

This is the latest D-SLR from Pentax, whose *ist range has impressed because of its small size but big firepower, all for a low price. Along with 6.1 megapixels, this model has a series of scene modes to make SLR photography as simple as a compact. The autofocus, for example, is more sophisticated than you'd get on a compact. There's also Pentax's own auto-sensitivity to set the sensor for the environment. And, there's the flexibility of changing lenses that SLR cameras offer.

Where from: Pentax (01753 792731; www.pentax.co.uk)

How much: £420



Nikon D50

The D50 was one of the first cameras to bring digital SLR photography into a price range that was accessible to most people. It offers amazing lens and build quality, mixed with a user interface that is easily accessible. There are seven automatic exposure settings for when you're getting started, and lots of manual overrides waiting for you when you're ready. Excellent focusing and a pleasing absence of shutter lag are among a range of strong attributes.

Where from: Argos (0870 600 1010; www.argos.co.uk)

How much: £399.99



Olympus E-500

The E-500 has 8 megapixels and a compact and lightweight design including a more comfortable handgrip. Olympus was the first company to include a sensor that shakes to rid itself of dust that can settle on it when you change lenses. There's also a filter to minimise noise levels (the speckly bits of a picture caused when the sensor can't decide what colour a shadowy area should be). It has 21 scene modes to let the camera do the work for you, if you wish.

Where from: Olympus (0800 072 0070; www.olympus.co.uk)

How much: £600



Canon EOS 350D

The hugely popular EOS 350D is comfortable and perfectly weighted. It's also exceptionally easy to use and is a good value, fully-featured SLR. The 350D is an 8-megapixel machine that can shoot three frames per second. It's certainly a handsome unit, feature-packed, comfortable to hold and relatively light. And there are around 60 lenses available which fit this model. Most importantly, it delivers rich, detailed photographs and is ready to go a fraction of a second after you switch on.

Where from: Canon (08705 143723; www.canon.co.uk)

How much: £520



Samsung GX-1S

Samsung has been making cameras for years, but this is only its second foray into the world of digital SLR. Like its first attempt, the camera is based on Pentax technology, in this case the *ist DL – itself a great camera, so no bad place to start. The 6-megapixel GX-1S has 11 point precise focus so you can point and shoot easily, although there are lots of functions available. Picture quality is good, and this is a great choice for those seeking their first digital SLR.

Where from: Pixmania (www.pixmania.co.uk); Samsung (0800 521652; www.samsung.co.uk)

How much: £505 with 18-55mm lens included

***** Camera accessories *****



Kodak G600 printer dock

This brand new printer is eminently portable, with an optional battery pack so you can take it anywhere. It's a thermal printer, so prints arrive dry and colours are sharp. It's fast, delivering photos in 60 seconds, and you don't even need a computer. Pictures can be printed in up to 4x6ins size and the prints are tough, fingerprint-safe and durable. A printer pack includes all you need for 100 prints for £29.99. It will work with any camera that is Pictbridge-enabled.

Where from: Kodak (0870 243 0270; www.kodak.co.uk)

How much: £129.99



LowePro Slingshot 200 bag

Large enough for a digital SLR and accessories, the Slingshot hangs on your back like a rucksack but on a single strap so it's easy to swing it round to take your camera out without removing the bag from your shoulders. With digital users in mind there's even a memory card pouch, not to mention a microfibre cloth to keep the LCD screen clean. LowePro offers a huge range of bags in lots of different sizes, so there's bound to be one that suits your needs.

Where from: LowePro (01902 864646; www.lovepro.com)

How much: £69.99



Epson P-4000 Multimedia Storage Viewer

Cameras are sold with small-capacity memory cards. But even when you've bought a decent one, it'll always fill up at the worst possible time. This hard drive has a capacity of 80GB and a 3.8-inch LCD screen. You transfer the contents from the card into the hardware, so you can erase your card and be ready to shoot again. The images can be viewed on the screen and you can print directly to compatible Epson printers.

Where from: Epson (0800 220546; www.epson.co.uk)

How much: £450



Manfrotto 190PROB tripod

If you're taking photographs of landscapes, especially, a tripod is an invaluable accessory. You will find cheaper tripods than this, but this is strong enough to ensure that your valuable digital SLR is safe on top of it, sturdy enough to stop it from wobbling in the wind, but still light enough to mean that it will fit in your bag without weighing you down. There's a spirit level on board to make sure your horizon is really level, and it's quick and easy to set up.

Where from: Manfrotto (www.manfrotto.com)

How much: £165



Teach Yourself Digital Photography

This excellent beginners' book by Peter Bargh is a great place to start – especially for those keen on photography but intimidated by gadgets. It explains everything from pixels to memory and more. It discusses image manipulation after the event and builds to advanced picture-taking. There are tips on how to take pictures with pets, architecture and more. There are clarifications of scanners and printers and how to save pictures.

Where from: Amazon (0800 279 6620; www.amazon.co.uk)

How much: £9.99



HP Photosmart 385 printer

Another easily portable printer aimed at easy printing of photographs. It can deliver borderless 6x4in prints and accepts a variety of camera memory cards, and you can even choose panoramic prints that are a foot long – ideal if you're using a camera which stitches prints together on board, and you can preview the results on a large LCD screen first. Print quality is excellent and the Photosmart 385 is a cinch to set up and use.

Where from: HP (08705 474747; www.hp.com/uk)

How much: £200