

DIGITAL PHOTO TIPS

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Five Ways to Safeguard Your Digital Camera

BACK WHEN DISPOSABLE cardboard cameras were a popular vacation accessory, an unexpected disaster meant losing only your \$15 investment in film and processing. But these days, a digital camera mishap can set you back hundreds of dollars—not to mention the value of all the photos locked on your precious memory card. If your camera is equipped properly, though, you can take it out in the rain, over treacherous trails, and even underwater. Whatever your lifestyle, accessories are available for your camera that will let you snap photos almost anywhere, without worrying about whether your camera is tough enough.

Prevent lens scratches: Scratch or scuff your lens, and your photos will suffer—regardless of how well you care for the rest of your camera. That's why many photographers attach a protective Skylight filter to the front of their camera. Such filters are available at any photography store for as little as \$10. And if you ever ding it, just replace the filter—it's a lot cheaper than buying a new lens. Not all digital camera lenses will accept screw-on filters, but all interchangeable lenses for digital single-lens reflex models will.

Protect the LCD: Your camera's other prime danger zone is its display. Delkin's Pop-Up Shade (\$20 to \$40, find.pcworld.com/57083) is a protective cover that shields your camera's display, preventing damage that might otherwise break the screen. In addition, it pops up to provide shade from direct sunlight, improving the screen's visibility. Pop-Up Shades come in a range of sizes that are suitable

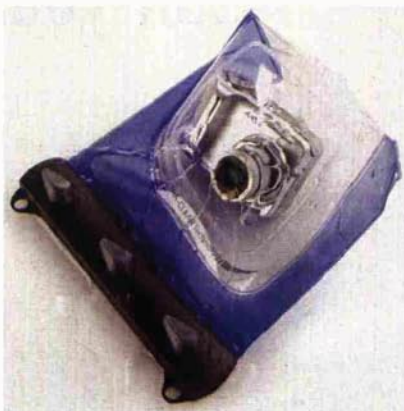


FIGURE 1: PROTECT YOUR camera when underwater with Aquapac's airtight bag.

for many popular camera models.

Add a second skin: If you put your camera in harm's way—such as by taking it on hiking trips through the mountains—

consider encasing it in a protective skin. Camera Armor (\$50 to \$80, find.pcworld.com/57085) completely envelops select camera models (including Canon and Nikon Digital SLRs) in a rugged, rubberized, shock-absorbing covering. In the package you also get an LCD shield and a flexible, elastomeric lens hood.

If you can't find Camera Armor for your model, try a Snug-It camera skin (\$15, find.pcworld.com/57086). Designed with point-and-shoot cameras in mind, Snug-It coverings protect the camera body and the lens—whether it's retracted into the camera body or extended for use.

Keep the water away: Digital cameras and water don't get along. If you're trekking outdoors and want to shoot in any weather, consider dressing your camera

in a rain cape. Ewa-marine offers various capes for large and small cameras that protect the body but leave the lens exposed (\$20 to \$200, find.pcworld.com/57087).

A rain cape will deflect drizzle away, but it won't help you if your camera takes a plunge while you're kayaking or snorkeling. If you want your camera to survive short- or long-term submersion, get a watertight enclosure. Traditional watertight camera housings cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars, but Aquapac sells an inexpensive, flexible, plastic bag case (\$30 to \$120, find.pcworld.com/57088; see **FIGURE 1**) that keeps your camera safe to a depth of about 10 feet.

Safeguard your photos: No matter how careful you are, accidents can happen. Though you might lose your camera at the end of a long trip, you can make sure that your photos aren't a casualty as well. For extended journeys where lots of photos are at risk, consider using a pocket-size external hard drive to back up your shots. One of my favorites is Digital Foci's Photo Safe (\$149 with 40GB, find.pcworld.com/57089; also in 80GB and 120GB capacities). The device's multifunction USB 2.0 memory-card reader supports all common formats. And you can carry fewer memory cards, because you can transfer each day's images from a single card. ■