Aurora Summit

After the Aurora: Enhancing your Night Sky Images in Editing

Jen Selwa • October 19, 2024

www.jenselwa.com

Basic Aperture Settings

- Aperture is the one setting that should be constant. You should always use the widest aperture possible on your lens (such as f/2.8). This allows more light to reach the sensor, meaning we can use a quicker shutter speed and lower ISO. The wider the aperture, the better it is.

- You can still get good aurora photos with f/4, but this means you need to either increase the ISO or extend the exposure time. Both of these options come with their drawbacks (depending on your camera model.)

- Always use the widest aperture your lens allows.

Best Shutter Speeds

- Shutter speed is a bit more tricky as you need to constantly adjust it. What works in one moment can look terrible just a few minutes later. The intensity of the Northern Lights is constantly changing.

- An easy guideline for choosing the shutter speed is that the faster aurora moves, the shorter your exposure time should be. Avoid a shutter longer than 15 seconds if possible.

- Using a slow shutter speed will lead to these things: Loss of detail in the aurora, becoming blurry, and turning overexposed, which is challenging to recover in post-processing (digital developing.)

Best ISO for Photographing the Northern Lights

- The optimal ISO for Northern Lights photos is between 1600 and 6400. On some occasions, such as during the full moon, you might get away with a value down to 800.
- If activity is low with no moonlight, you should start with ISO4000 & 15-second shutter speed. Next, look at the image preview. If it's still too dark, increase the ISO; if it's too bright, decrease it.
- If aurora is bright, start with 8 seconds and decrease to 5 until properly exposed. Keep checking the image preview. If the aurora is blown out, you need to use a quicker shutter speed.

PC Editing programs I use:

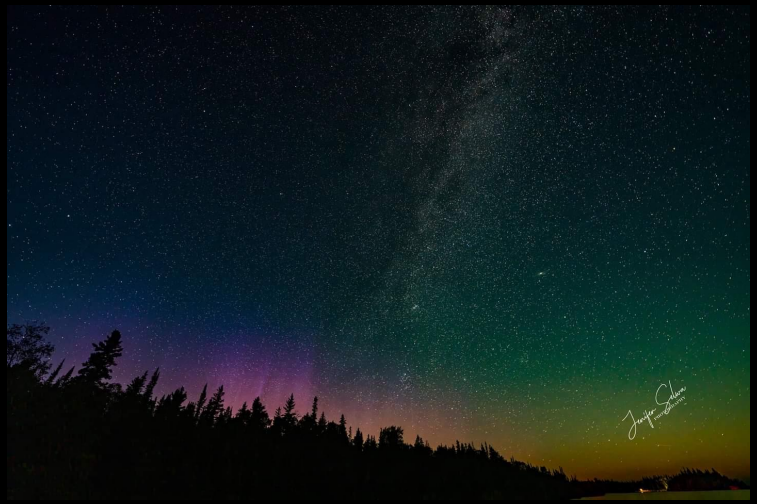
- Adobe Bridge / Camera Raw
- Adobe Photoshop
- Adobe Lightroom
- Luminar Neo
- Topaz DeNoise / Sharpen

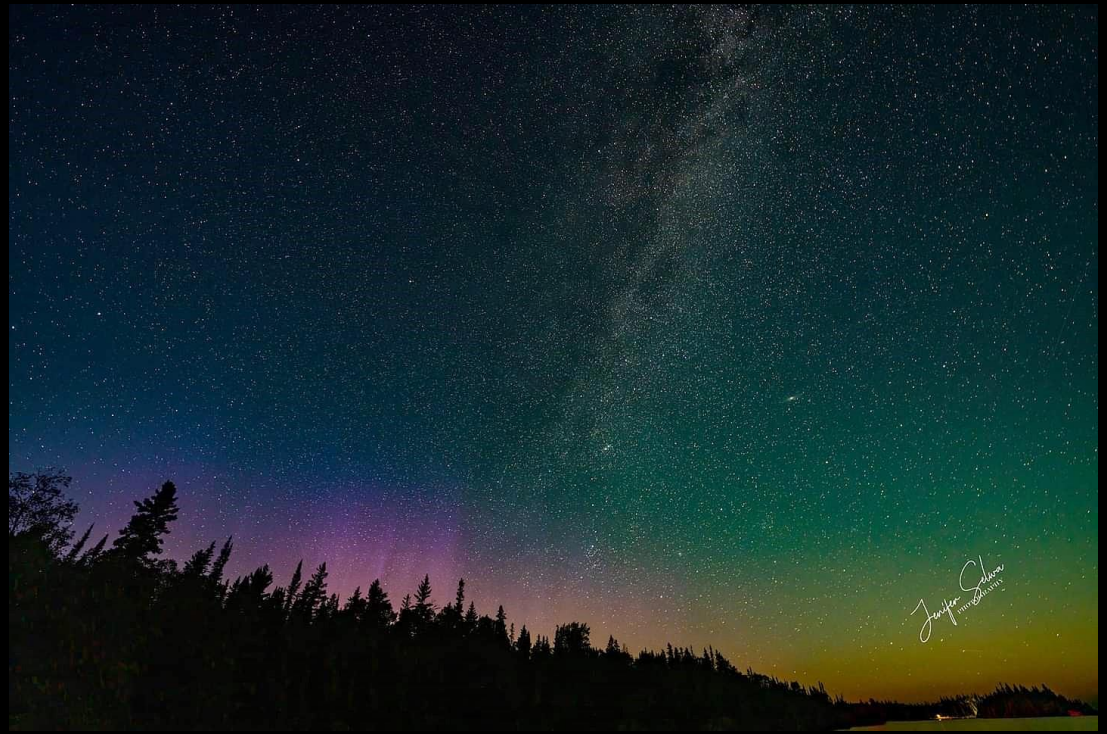
On the smartphone (Android):

- Snapseed (photos)
- Lightroom (photos)
- ON1 Photo (photos)
- Gallery (built-in on Android)
- Capcut (video)
- GoPro Quik (video)

Examples of Before / After Images

Examples of Before / After Images





Examples of Before / After Images

Jen’s Workflow Using Bridge, Camera Raw, Photoshop, and DeNoise

- Open Adobe Bridge and select desired photos
    - Right Click
    - Open Camera Raw
- Crop as desired
    - Minimum crop size 1800x1200 for prints up to 11x14
    - The larger the size, the better
- Click Auto and make the following adjustments
    - Temperature adjust for desired effect
    - Tint adjust as needed
    - Highlights between -90 to -70
    - Shadows between +30 to +90
    - Texture +8
    - Clarity +15
    - Dehaze between -5 to +5
    - Saturation between +7 to +13

Jen’s Workflow Using Bridge, Camera Raw, Photoshop, and DeNoise

- When happy click OPEN to go to Photoshop
    - Utilize Dodge tool for brightening eyes, droplets of water, etc
    - Utilize Burn tool to tone down bright whites
    - Click Image -> Adjustments -> Shadows & Highlights
        - Set Shadows Amount around 5% +/-
        - Set Shadows Tone 30% +/-
        - Set Highlights Amount, if needed 0-4%
        - Set Highlights Tone, if needed 30%
- Select File -> Topaz Labs DeNoise
    - Click Low Light
    - Remove Noise between 15-30
    - Sharpness between 79-90
    - Recover Detail 70-90
- When happy, click Apply
- Save file

Questions? Email selwaphoto@charter.net or http://www.jenselwa.com