Panasonic FZ300 Nature Photography Tips
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FZ300 Overview

Panasonic's FZ300 is a 12 megapixel splash-resistant superzoom camera with a 1/2.3" BSI-CMOS sensor paired with a Leica 25-600mm f/2.8 lens. It can focus on objects as close as 0.1 centimeter away at the wide angle setting or 1 meter away at full telephoto. The focus system is a contrast detect system and can capture images at 12 frames per second at full resolution. 4K video is available along with 4K photo modes that can boost the capture rate to 30 frames per second at 8 megapixels.
For what is asked of this camera, it does a remarkable job. While there are other cameras available with bigger sensors, higher megapixel counts and more advanced features, for many people the lightweight and relatively compact FZ300 may be the ideal nature photography camera with its ability to photograph close-ups, landscapes, and wildlife without the need to change lenses.

The FZ300 is my camera of choice while wandering around in nature. Being lightweight, I can hike through thick cover and over hilly terrain without lugging around a heavy camera and separate lenses. Here are a few ideas on how you may want to configure your FZ300 for nature photography. These tips can also apply to other cameras, although the exact settings may vary slightly depending on camera brand and/or type.

Establish a 'wander' mode
When I am walking around, I like to have my camera ready to go for instant action to capture wildlife. A flower or landscape will wait for you, but animals are usually constantly on the move and you may have only a matter of seconds for a photograph. The FZ300 has three custom modes, indicated by C on the mode dial. Here are the settings I have for my custom 'wander' mode:

Shutter Priority with 1/640 second
ISO limit set to 1600 (more on this later)
Center-point autofocus with the smallest focus point
Shutter type set to auto
High speed burst
File size set to RAW
-1/3 Exposure Compensation to protect highlights

Since I shoot in RAW format, these settings seem to work well. If you shoot in JPEG and want a higher framer rate, you can configure your 'wander' mode to 4K photo mode to capture 30 frames per second (slightly lower resolution at 8MP)

If 1/640 second is too slow for the subject, I can quickly choose a higher shutter speed with the rear control wheel.

Some reviewers have indicated that Panasonic's default JPEG noise reduction setting is bit aggressive and dialing it back to -5 (in the Photo Style menu setting) can help preserve fine detail.

Landscape Photography Settings
For photographing landscapes, I have found that f/4.0 and ISO 100 yield the sharpest results. I set the function button 2 (Fn2) to change the autofocus point. When composing a landscape, I move the focus point 1/3 the way into a scene to help get the entire scene in focus. Moving the autofocus point can also help to make sure your main subject in the landscape is in focus.

I also tend to use -1/3 Exposure Compensation in scenes with high contrast to protect highlights since cameras with small sensors have less dynamic range than larger sensor cameras.

Don't neglect the iZoom setting
The iZoom boosts the zoom from 600mm to 1200mm while retaining full resolution. While the image viewed at 100% on your computer screen might have some noise and artifacts, this can be a helpful setting when photographing animals in vulnerable situations (while feeding, with young, mating, etc.) Animals have a hard time merely surviving, so minimizing impact on their behavior is very important.

Autofocus with Manual Override
If you like to photograph birds, this setting can be of great help. Many times when trying to photograph birds in heavy cover, the camera will want to focus on a branch either in front or behind the bird. With this feature, you can quickly manually override the autofocus with the side control wheel to adjust the focus accordingly. This may take a little while to get used to, but my success rate has increased dramatically by using this often overlooked feature! This can be found in the custom menu setting.
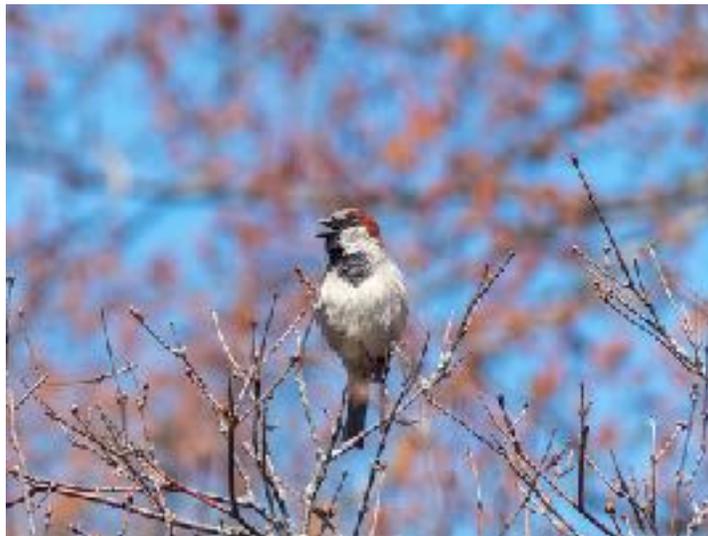
Consider a Polarizer
A polarizer filter is traditionally used to cut down on glare and reflections in a scene and to increase saturation, particularly in the sky. They can also help with taming the contrast in high dynamic range scenes. Polarizers can be adjusted, so by rotating the filer you can achieve the effect you desire.

Post-processing tips

Very often images need some optimization in image editing software before posting online or printing. It is worth experimenting with your editing software to get the most out of your FZ300 images. Here are some things that may help:

Selective noise reduction and/or sharpening
If your editing software has the ability to 'brush on' noise reduction or sharpening, this can help improve the ultimate quality of the image. Very often noise is most visible in skies, so applying noise reduction only in the sky area can help. There's no real need to sharpen a sky either, so by limiting the sharpening to other areas (either with sharpening masks or sharpening brushes) you can improve the image.

Low light images
Shooting RAW I set my ISO limit to 1600. I prefer to keep it below 800, but found that by using RAW I can get away with images as high as 1600. This is very helpful in low light conditions, but they need some special treatment. I have found that Lightroom's default 'Indoors and Low Light Sharpening' setting is a good starting point. Also be aware that even though images viewed at 100% on a computer monitor may show some noise, when printed and viewed at normal viewing distances, the noise is much less visible.