

# Creating panoramic views

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Sometimes, you'd like to have a photograph that's much wider than your camera can produce - perhaps as much as 180° from left to right. Examples of these 'panoramas' can be seen in the pictures at the tops of some of the pages on this website - for example, the pages for the photo gallery and for "Weekend & summer evening" walks. To create these with a single shot would normally need a very special lens and, even if your camera accepts such lenses, it would be a very expensive luxury. Fortunately, there is a much cheaper way that's easily within the ability and budget of all camera users. All you need is a steady hand, a camera (digital, preferably) and some suitable software - more of which later.

To start with, choose a viewpoint that gives you a good, clear view as you scan the landscape from left to right. It works best on a bright, sunny day with good visibility between you and the horizon. Look straight ahead, at the centre of the desired panorama. Then, look through the viewfinder (or at the screen on the back of your camera) and view the scene as you rotate your upper body from left to right.

You now have to imagine that the panorama is split up into individual frames that you are going to capture on your camera. This is where the steady hand - and a bit of memory work - comes in! Take the first photograph (frame 1) with your body rotated to as far left as necessary to capture the left-most part of the scene. Then, remembering where the right-hand boundary of frame 1 ended, turn sufficiently to the right and take the next frame, such that there is a small amount of overlap between the right of frame 1 and the left of frame 2. It's important to aim at the same vertical angle, as best you can, as before (a tripod is desirable, but few people have such a luxury, so a human tripod will have to do).

Continue until you have a set of frames, all neatly overlapping. Just in case you made a mistake, do it a couple of more times so that you have some spare sets of pictures from which to create your masterpiece. As an example, here is the set of pictures I used for the "Weekend & summer evening" page:



They don't align perfectly in the vertical direction, but that's not important. What is important is that they overlap horizontally, as you should be able to see.

The next, and final, stage is to merge the pictures into a panorama. This is the tricky bit, as the software for this purpose gives very variable results - either not combining the images precisely enough, or failing to adjust the relative colours of overlapping areas, making it all

too obvious that the panorama has been 'stitched' from smaller images. This can be particularly evident in the sky area - notice that in our example, the sky gets progressively darker as we progress from left to right because of the changing direction of the sun.

Many digital cameras include panorama features with the software provided by the manufacturer. My Olympus software has just such a gizmo, but the results are hopeless. Early versions of Adobe Elements worked quite well, but version 7 (which I've got) just crashes and freezes my PC. Others seem to work OK, but are quite techie to use and may require manual intervention to get the best results. That's why I was delighted to stumble upon "Windows Live Photo Gallery", which can be downloaded from <http://download.live.com/photogallery>. It's really intended for photo-sharing (like Picasa and others), but it includes an excellent panorama feature. This is how I used it:

- Put copies of the pictures in their own folder on your PC (always best to use copies!)
- Choose this folder with "File/Include a folder"
- Select all of the pictures you want to use for the panorama
- Click on "Make/Create panoramic photo ..."

And here, after about 10 seconds, is the result:



The ragged edges are caused by my less-than-perfect alignment as I turned. So, I put the ragged pic into my favourite (and free) picture editor, Irfanview, and cropped it to get this:



... and you can barely see the seams! If you want further info, have a chat with me on a walk sometime.