

Canon EOS 30D to China

John Henshall went up the Wall with the new Canon EOS 30D on a recent trip to Beijing



A recent trip to China seemed like the ideal opportunity to try out one of the new Canon EOS 30D DSLRs for real.

I packed a lot of kit into a Lowepro Mini Trekker AW backpack: the 30D, a 1Ds MarkII body, Canon 18-55mm, 24-105mm and 75-300mm zoom lenses and Sigma 10-20mm and 12-24mm zooms. Taking all Canon mount meant that most lenses would be interchangeable between the two camera bodies. Oh, and I also had a Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX1 tucked into my shirt pocket.

A walk up the Great Wall of China at Simatai was similar to walking Snowdon in Wales. You have to be dedicated to do it with all that kit but, as you can see in the photograph taken by my daughter Annelies, I did it with a smile, declining kind offers to carry the old man's bag.

No pain no gain.

Canon's first DSLR was the D30 – not to be confused with the 30D. That was five years ago and there have been many Canon DSLRs since then.

The Canon EOS 30D was introduced earlier this year. It is an evolution, rather than a revolution, of Canon's superb EOS 20D which was introduced towards the end of 2004.

The 20D impressed me as a near-perfect DSLR. The sensor has 8.2 megapixels – perfectly adequate for most applications – the camera handles beautifully and isn't too bulky or heavy and the controls on the back of the camera are a joy to use.

There's no 'press and hold this while turning this or pressing that' like the 1Ds MkII and others.

Press the Menu button and the 'Quick Control Dial' thumbwheel allows scrolling through the entire menu in one.

Press the > button (bottom left) for Playback. The thumbwheel then allows scrolling through successive images.

Press and hold the Enlarge (magnify) + button (top right) and the image zooms in and in until the button is released.

Press the Joystick button (to the right of the viewfinder) and move it left or right, up or down, and panning across the magnified image is intuitively easy.

Rotate the thumbwheel again and successive images are brought up at exactly the same magnification in exactly the same place – ideal for checking focus or details in a series of similar shots.

I could go on eulogising about this interface. In short, it is the best, most intuitive, I have yet come across. A classic. I like it better than any other – including the too-complex 1Ds MkII's.

Best of all, it's exactly the same in the EOS 30D. Canon has left well alone.

Even the 8.2 megapixel sensor is the same. This is evolution, not revolution, and that's good to see. It underlines the fact that Canon got it right with the 20D.

In fact the only thing I could really criticise in the EOS 20D was its postage stamp sized LCD screen.

Someone told me that this is the only part of the 20D which Canon don't themselves make. The rest of the 20D was so close to perfect that I want to believe this to be true.

In China the EOS 30D performed perfectly. The camera is unobtrusive and doesn't make you conspicuous as does the 1Ds MkII.

I had one problem with the camera, however: its attractiveness. My daughter Annelies asked if she could try the Canon 30D on a day when I'd just left it in my bag because it was dull and misty on the Great Wall at Mutianyu. She immediately took to the 30D and I had great difficulty wresting the camera away from her.

beautiful Chinese girl would want to photograph an old (being modest) Englishman, she said, "Because you have a beautiful smile." I immediately fell in love and photographed her for the next twenty minutes! She is a student of journalism at Beijing University.

No one in China minded being photographed or photographing their beautiful children. In fact they positively enjoyed being asked. It is like England before the current age of paranoia.



Canon clearly thought the same, because the most obvious difference between the 20D and 30D is the rear of the camera, which now sports a new LCD monitor almost twice as big as that on the 20D.

I've photographed both cameras side-by-side so that you can gasp in utter amazement at this significant change. My pictures on the backs are overlaid simulations – as accurately as possible of course – because the full sunlight in which I made the photograph rendered the images almost impossible to see.

Over the past two years I must confess that I've become used to the small LCD screen. Don't misunderstand me – I'd choose the larger screen like a shot, if only to avoid buying more powerful glasses. But the thing is, I've been seduced by large, bright, glossy colourful screens on other DSLRs, only to be disappointed by the exposures when I've looked at the images on a computer.

So now I always rely on histograms (press the Info button twice), reserving the big picture for framing decisions and hopefully to impress clients.

I was disappointed that the weather wasn't crystal clear and that put me off taking pictures that day. But when I saw Annelies' pictures (next page) I realised that I'd missed an opportunity to capture the Great Wall in a completely different mood. Annelies just used 'P' mode (Program AE) for ease of use but the exposures were beautiful, with nice neutral greys. (There sure was a lot of grey that day.)

The people in China are the friendliest I have met anywhere in the world. In Tiananmen Square on a holiday weekend everyone seemed to want to be photographed with my daughter. Then a lady asked to be photographed with me. That made my day. Our guide explained that she was from a village hundreds of miles away. It was her first visit to Beijing and she had never seen a foreigner before. And she chose me!

China is great for the ego of the older man. The young lady in green on the next page came up to me in a park and asked, in perfect English, "May I take your photograph?" She had a Nikon D50 around her neck. When I asked why a

The restoration worker was one of about thirty taking an early evening break. When I asked in sign language if I could photograph him, his colleagues roared with laughter. Embarrassed, he still agreed. I want to return to China.

The Canon 30D is a joy to use. It produces beautiful punchy shots with ease. Many of its facilities are also to be found on the cheaper EOS 350D but the 30D is a better bet for the professional.

The body has a more rugged feel and the shutter has been upgraded to expect 100,000 exposures without problem.

Other improvements over the 20D include a precision nine-point auto-focus system and a spot metering mode – not found on the 20D – covering 3.5% of the viewfinder at the centre.

As half-frame DSLRs go, this is one of the very best. And, from Canon, at least you have a choice of full- or half-frame.

The Canon EOS 30D is a gentle but worthwhile upgrade to an established classic. I recommend it most highly.

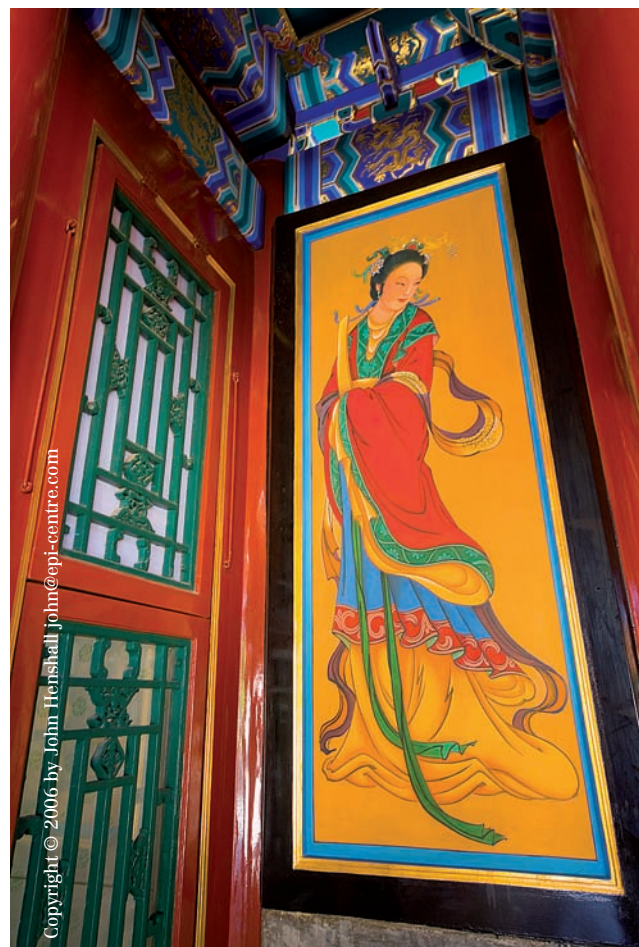
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ABOVE LEFT: Summer Palace door and ceiling. Sigma 10-20mm at 10mm. ABOVE RIGHT: Student in Beihai Park Canon 24-105mm at 73mm. LEFT AND BELOW: My daughter Annelies asked if she could try the Canon EOS 30D on a day when I'd just left it in my bag because it was dull and misty on the Great Wall at Mutianyu. She immediately took to the 30D and I had great difficulty wresting the camera away from her.



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TOP LEFT: Great character in this restoration worker's face in Beihai Park. Canon 24-105mm at 105mm. TOP RIGHT: Sitting in the front passenger seat of the car, our guide Kathleen turned towards us just as the sun hit the white antimacassar behind her and produced a beautiful reflected soft light. Canon 24-105mm at 75mm ISO 400 1/200 sec f/6.3 with camera set to Auto White balance and Program mode. The 30D is superb for this kind of 'see it - grab it' shot. LEFT: Detail at the restored Summer Palace. ABOVE: Wedding photography Beijing style. RIGHT: The team on the Great Wall of China at Simatai. John Henshall with Kathleen Xie, Annelies Henshall and Troy Lee, who works on calligraphy at the Forbidden City. His father is the editor of the Asia edition of Photo Imaging News.



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