

Nikon D500 Review

By Jim Decker

The D500 is Nikon's long awaited update to the D300. With blazing shooting speed and Nikon's first dive into 4K video, see how this camera performs in the water in our full review with images and video.

This camera is pro level in every sense. The tough as nails build quality is designed to take whatever extreme conditions that you're going to throw at it. Will it survive a total flood? No, but with the weather sealing it can stand quite a few splashes.

The speed of shooting is very impressive. Shooting at 10 frames per second in RAW with a lossless RAW buffer of 200 shots puts this level performance in the category of the Nikon D5 and Canon 1Dx Mk II which have 200 and 170 shot RAW buffers respectively-but at around 1/3 of the cost of these flagship cameras. In the underwater world where getting the perfect shot with uncooperative subjects requires spur of the moment reaction times and lots of shots to get "the one" perfect shot. The Nikon D500 makes this possible where few other cameras can.

The Nikon D500 inherits Nikon's latest and most advanced autofocus system, with 153 focus points, 99 of which are cross type focus points for



greater accuracy and speed. For wide angle moving subjects, it's no problem to set to AFC, hold down the AF-ON button and fire at will, even for small depth of field super close focus wide angle shots. In looking at the resulting shot sequences of the super close wide angle shots, the photos were all in focus despite continuously changing distances.

The auto focus with the 105mm macro lens was ridiculously quick and accurate. Even when a critter unexpectedly moved and I focused on the background, the focus snapped back in instantly. This level of performance continued to work with a super macro wet lens. Usually a super macro wet mount lens will make it tough for the camera to achieve autofocus due to the extremely small depth of field and extreme amount of defocusing. Most times looking



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For this turtle shot I used AFC with 153 point focus. I was able to hold down the AF-ON button and fire away at will while the camera tracked the focus of the nearest focus point, keeping everything super sharp as the turtle moved throughout the frame. This allowed me to fire shot after shot rapidly to give me lots of great shots to choose from for that 1 perfect shot.

Tokina 10-17 mm Nikon | ISO 200 | 1/125 sec at f/8

throughout the viewfinder shows no discernible objects due to the non-existent depth of field, just showing a blob of color, but the D500 had no problem focusing even in these extreme conditions.

With all the recent mirrorless cameras that have come out in the past couple of years I haven't really had a chance to shoot SLR too much. I have to say that I have missed

having an optical viewfinder for wide-angle photography. Framing a highly backlit scene with an optical viewfinder is much easier too see as your eye is physically looking at the scene throughout the lens as opposed to a mirrorless camera that composes off the screen. In a heavily backlit situation the screen on the mirrorless will show objects in the foreground as dark silhouettes, making it difficult to



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Framing through an optical viewfinder allowed me to accurately see the exact edges of the image as opposed to black outlines normally seen with mirrorless or compact cameras.

Tokina 10-17 mm Nikon | ISO 100 | 1/160 sec at f/11



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Even shooting at a ratio of 2.25:1 macro with paper thin depth of field, the Nikon D500 had quick and accurate autofocus, with minimal hunting. The Aquatica flip diopter holder on the port of the Aquatica AD500 housing made flipping in a diopter for super macro a cinch.

Nikon 105mm VR | ISO 250 | 1/250 sec at f/40 | AOI UCL-09 Close Up Lens

tell your exact composition. Also the focus is faster than I have seen with recent mirrorless cameras, making getting the shot easier.

4K Video

About the only disappointing aspect of the D500 is the video implementation. While it does shoot 4K video, it does it on a much smaller area

of the sensor. It's a 1.5 crop factor, making the total crop 2.25 from a full frame camera. This makes the resulting video much less wider than in photo mode. While this won't work for serious video shooters, I can say that anyone wanting to pick up some video at a spur of the moment will be able to pull off decent looking videos. I was able to pull off a custom white balance even as deep as 45 feet

This stingray was traveling quickly across the sand and difficult to chase down. When it settled down to search the sand for food, it was only there for seconds. The speed of shooting the Nikon D500 allowed me to pull off a series of shots in quick succession to before it took off again.

Tokina 10-17 mm Nikon | ISO 100 | 1/250 sec at f/11



and have accurate looking color, but sometimes it took multiple attempts, sometimes many, to execute the white balance.

Conclusion

Pulling off successful underwater photos requires lots of shots on the spur of the moment to get the one shot that works. High performance photography is what this camera is all about. Super fast focus and fast rapid fire shooting with an almost limitless RAW buffer are the difference between getting the shot and not. At 10 frames per second and a 200 shot RAW buffer, you'll hardly ever run out of speed or capacity with this camera. The Nikon D7200 is only 6 FPS with a 18 shot RAW buffer,

and while the Canon 7D Mark II can match the speed with 10 FPS, you'll quickly run out of shots with a relatively small 31 shot RAW buffer.

On top of the great performance, the image quality is top notch compared to just about any APS-C sensor camera on the market, and will stand up against a few full frame cameras too. Could I pull off the shots in this review with a lesser camera? Sure, but the chances of actually pulling it off are greatly increased with the high performance of the D500.

Jim Decker
www.backscatter.com



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