

HAVING A HOLGA-RIFIC TIME

What is a Holga anyway?

Holga is for those who want to create truly unique images - for those who appreciate light leaks, enjoy slight soft focus and welcome retro vignetting. Due to its simple and inexpensive design, Holga is categorized as a toy camera. The very features that personify the Holga would be considered defects in any other camera. Holga's lo-fi attributes create distinctive images not created with any other conventional camera. These are the reasons the Holga camera has gained a huge cult following.

Holga History

The peculiar name Holga comes from its Chinese heritage after the term "ho gwong" meaning very bright. With a Western twist one gets the name Holga. The origins of Holga began in China in 1981. At the time, photography was skyrocketing in popularity and the 120 film format was most pervasive. Holga was introduced to the Chinese public as an inexpensive medium format camera. Unfortunately for Holga, no one could have predicted the enormous impact 35mm film would have on the Chinese market. In only a few short years, Holga was overrun by its smaller format competitors. Word of an all-plastic camera spread west and its popularity grew. Tens of thousands of cameras were sold in twenty different countries with almost no change in the original design.

By 2001, over a million Holgas had been sold worldwide. A micro industry emerged with some making a living by simply modifying and accessorizing the Holga. Today, the array of Holga cameras and accessories available reflects its continued popularity.

LOADING THE HOLGA 120

Remove the clips from the sides of the camera to open the back.

Select the mask for either 16 images (6 x 4.5cm) or 12 images (6 x 6cm) and insert into the camera. Shooting without a mask also yields 12 images and can lead to more intense vignetting.

If the Holga has a built in flash unit, install 2 AA batteries under the film mask on either side.

Slide the arrow on the back cover to point to the corresponding image count for the mask that was inserted.

Make sure there is a take up spool on the right side of the camera and break the seal on the new 120 roll of film and insert on the left side of the camera.

Place pressure on the bottom of the new roll of film and pull out the paper backing. Insert the tapered edge into the slot in the take up spool.

Turn the film advance knob a couple of turns keeping the film tight to prevent any slack.

Please note that it is important to keep 120mm film tight to the spool. This protects the film from exposure since it is not in a canister. If you have an older Holga or the foam padding has fallen off, inserting a piece of cardboard under the film spool can keep the film tight.

Replace the camera back and make sure the clips are in place. It is recommended to put a piece of tape over the clips to prevent the back from slipping open.

Turn the film advance knob until the number 1 appears in the counter window on the back of the camera. Holga is ready to shoot.

Loose Film: Unlike 35mm film, 120mm film spools have no light-tight canister to protect them from exposure; the only guard against the sun is its thin paper backing. If your film is not rolled tightly, light can sneak in under the loose paper causing light leaks or even fogging.



HOLGA FEATURES

PLASTIC OPTICAL LENS

What really defines Holga is its plastic lens. The focal length is approximately 60mm for the 120 format cameras and 47mm for the 35mm format cameras. To focus, rotate the barrel of the lens to the icon displayed that best corresponds to the shooting situation. The focal length ranges from 3 feet to infinity.

FILM ADVANCE AND SHUTTER

Since Holga is a completely manual camera, film advance is all up to the photographer. After the first shot, advance the film one full frame to the next image or shoot limitless times on the same frame to create a multiple exposure. By advancing only partially, you can create panoramic or overlapping images.

SHUTTER SPEED

The shutter speed of a Holga is approximately 1/100 of a second. There is the added option to put the camera in “B” bulb setting. The bulb setting allows the shutter to stay open for as long as necessary for long exposures. This makes it possible to do night photography, getting images without a flash in low light situations or even painting with light. Both a tripod and cable release are recommended when using the Holga in the bulb setting.

VARIABLE APERTURE

Holga has essentially two apertures, $f/11$ for sunny days and $f/8$ for cloudy days. There are some that say these f-stops are so close that they are undistinguishable from one another but try them out and see.

UNLOADING THE HOLGA 120

After shooting the last frame, either 12 or 16 depending on the mask used, turn the film advance knob until the film and paper is completely rolled onto the take up reel. Open the back of the Holga. The exposed film should now be in the right film chamber. An empty film spool will be in the left film chamber. Save the empty spool, as this is now the new take up reel for the next roll of film.

Extract the full take-up spool from the right side of the camera. Make sure that the film is wound tightly around the spool. Fold the tapered end under itself as directed on the paper backing then seal the film with the provided adhesive tab.