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Vaseline
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Photography for free

This could be the most valuable thing you'll read all year – our look at what's available to the enthusiast photographer that doesn't cost a penny. **Martyn Moore** is your guide

That word 'free' seems to be everywhere these days. Maybe we only noticed it as we started to tighten our belts? That, and our shoes needed cleaning.

Let's look at what's out there for the photographer for the princely sum of nothing.

The free Internet party benefits digital photographers most. But there are treats for traditionalists online, too. And we've also tracked down a few freebies in the real world that benefit all types of photographers.

So put your money away. This lot's on us.

Let's look at free stuff in the real world first. Think about what you can photograph for free –

people and places close to you and your heart. It costs nothing to create portraits of family and friends, yet you will be creating priceless pictures.

Locations don't have to be far flung either. You might have to work harder to see beauty that has been dulled by familiarity. It's not easy, so it will be rewarding. Moving around on foot or by bicycle will reveal more, save you a fortune in fuel and get you fit.

Think about all the places you can visit for free: churches, hotels and pubs, shops and shopping centres, parks, farms, harbours, railways... you get the idea. Always get permission where necessary and don't trespass. →

Free photographic kit

Photographers are an ingenious bunch – always dreaming up new ways to modify light or achieve new creative effects using odds and ends lying about the house.

Vaseline on a clear filter

Smearing a thin layer of petroleum jelly on a skylight or UV filter gives a fantastic soft-focus effect. OK, Vaseline isn't free, but you probably have an old tub tucked away in a drawer somewhere, next to the chocolate body paint.

Card, cotton or foil reflectors

Any white or metallic surface can be used to control light, bouncing it back to fill shadows. Dedicated improvisers will spray an unwanted umbrella silver and lash it to a lightstand and flashgun with cable ties.

Beanbag

Sew your own. Choose from poly beads, rice or dried peas. Make a double skin using close-weave material to prevent dust leaks inside your gadget bag.

Pinhole camera

Why, in this modern age, would you want to make a pinhole camera? Because you can and it's fun. You'll enjoy the satisfaction of achievement and learn about the principles of photography.

Pinhole cameras project an image onto the inside of a light-tight box or cylinder. They require long exposure times and provide infinite depth-of-field. The image can be recorded on film or photographic paper. That's when it stops being free, unless you have a stockpile that you will otherwise throw away.



Forget dry, chapped lips, Vaseline is for filter effects.

Free advice and downloads



The Internet isn't just for digital photographers. Support and advice communities, free websites to present your work and optical calculators that work on your iPod or iPhone serve traditional photographers too.

Free software

Downloading free software from the Internet is risky. Viruses, malware, adware, trojan horses and, probably, swine flu can bring misery to you and your computer. Have computer virus protection installed, up to date and running. *Photography Monthly* might be to blame for encouraging you to

get up to all kinds of camera-related shenanigans, but we're not going to be held responsible for anything that happens in this bit.

Software download sites include Download.com, Tucows.com and Brothersoft.com, which host or link to thousands of programs. But for the rest of this feature we'll stick with the best-known names and popular programs.

ABOVE Too hard-up for Photoshop? Image-editing software, such as GIMP, cost zero pounds. Developed by the free-lovin' open source movement.

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Free editing software

The daddy of photo-editing software is Photoshop. It's amazing and costs hundreds of pounds. BUT, you can try it for free for 30 days and we think you should.



Get your work online without paying a bean using free web galleries such as Weebly.

Free web space and prints

Free websites

If you want the world to see your work, and maybe pay you to do some more, you need a website. There are hundreds of providers and the services they offer are getting smarter and easier to use all the time. Look for photo gallery features.

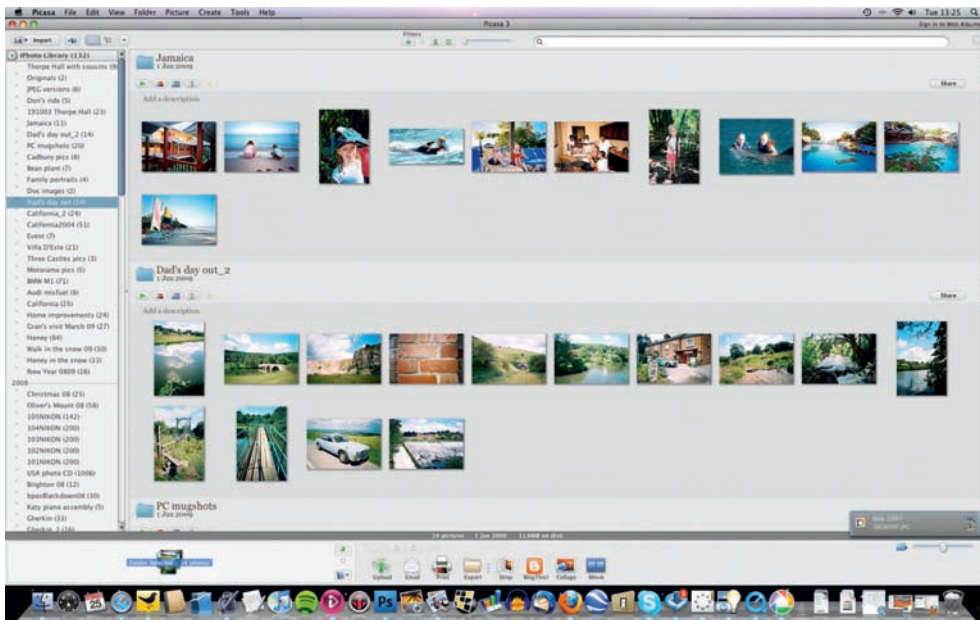
Two examples of smart and easy are Wordpress.com and Weebly.com (see left).

Magazines like this one offer you the opportunity to showcase your work online and the rich resources on the *Photography Monthly* website also include photo advice in the forums, camera reviews and the excellent *PM Podcast* – friendly photo banter to download and enjoy on your iPhone or iPod.

Free prints

Traditional players such as Kodak, Truprint, Jessops and Asda are offering up to 30 free prints when you sign up to their services. New companies abound: Pixum, Snapfish, PhotoBox. Yesterday Foto.com was boasting it had processed 616,433,226 pictures, today that number has increased by 85,471.

On average you can get around 25 free prints per household. Sign up at a digital printer's website, give your personal details, choose and upload a selection of digital images to your account. Might take half an hour. You order your free prints and charge the post and packing to your credit card (for security).



ABOVE Organise, edit, create and share your images for free using Google's Picasa.

You can try the cheaper Photoshop Elements for free, too, and Corel's Paint Shop Pro. Other time-limited trials include Aurora and Photoline. Run the trial versions to see what you're missing. Then, when you download permanently free programs like IrfanView, PhotoPlus SE or GIMP, you can judge them against the paid-for programs.

GIMP (sorry about the name, it's a dull acronym) deserves a special mention. GIMP has been developed by the 'open source' software movement, which believes that software code, like most language, should be free to access, develop and improve by anyone. This results in excellent software free of charge, but sadly it still isn't Photoshop.

The big technology companies offer free photo editing too: Google has Picasa for PC and Mac, Microsoft has Windows Live Photo Gallery for PC only. Apple offers iPhoto to Mac users. Camera, printer and scanner manufacturers supply free editing software with their products and latest versions are often available from their websites. Hewlett-Packard's excellent Photosmart Studio is a good example.

If you have the time and the inclination you can work your way through all the offers displayed at www.freephotoprinting.co.uk and get 300 to 400 free prints. You'll also get to compare the quality of service and then choose your favourite.

Free storage

Save back-up images using online storage. Microsoft provides SkyDrive as part of Windows Live, offering an impressive 30GB of storage space for all kinds of files and integration with Photo Gallery. Adobe has launched Photoshop.com, which allows you to store, share and edit images online, using a browser-based version of Photoshop Elements. This is quite brilliant, although the 2GB of free storage space isn't even enough for a busy day's shooting. You can upload an image, edit it and download it again for free.

Free organising software

Some free editing programs are basically image viewing and sorting programs with image enhancement features.

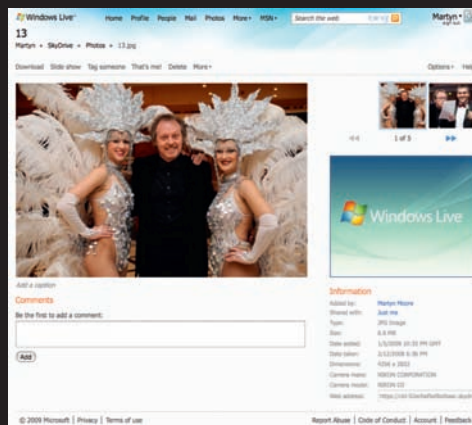
For instance, Nikon's ViewNX is good and can be downloaded for free by non-Nikon users, too. Photo-sorting software from brands like Wal-Mart and Post-It provide easy access to online storage solutions. Definitely worth a look.

iPhone apps

iPhone users will have heard of apps (short for applications). These are useful widgets to add functions to your phone. The three we've chosen are priceless (free) tools for all photographers. Keep checking the photography section of the App Store on iTunes for new additions.

Field Tools allows you to calculate hyperfocal distance for most SLR/lens combinations to get maximum depth-of-field at any given aperture.

Bokeh goes a bit further and calculates depth-of-field for focal length/aperture/focusing distance settings and Exposure Calc Lite is a handy exposure guide. ■



Microsoft SkyDrive is a free web storage site – part of Windows Live, offering 30GB of free web space. It's a useful place to back up precious images.

Useful web addresses

These links also appears on the PM website.

- **General download**
download.com
tucows.com
brothersoft.com
- **Free prints**
freephotoprinting.co.uk
kodakgallery.co.uk
truprint.co.uk
photo.jessops.com
asda-photo.co.uk
pixum.co.uk
snapfish.co.uk
photobox.co.uk
uk.foto.com
- **Free editing software**
adobe.com (free trials)
corel.com (free trials)
lightcrafts.com/aurora (free trial)
pl32.com (free trial)
irfanview.com
freerissoftware.com/software/photoplus
gimp.org
picasa.google.co.uk
download.live.com/photogallery
apple.com/uk/ilife/iphoto
hp.com/united-states/consumer/digital_photography/free/software
people.cs.ubc.ca/~mbrown/auto_stitch/autostitch.html
- **Photo organising software**
nikoneurope-en.custhelp.com/app
photos.walmart.com/photosoftware
3m.com/US/OFFICE/POSTIT/digital/organizer.html
- **Online storage**
skydrive.live.com
picasaweb.google.com
photoshop.com
- **Free websites**
weebly.com
wordpress.com
- **iPod and iPhone apps**
apple.com/uk/itunes/download
 Free galleries, reviews, advice, forums, podcasts
- **photographymonthly.com**

And finally...

Any guide to new technology, especially on the Internet, will date very quickly. New products and services will have appeared by the time you read this.

If we'd spent another month hunting down new software, we'd probably still miss a few. So *Photography Monthly* has opened up a forum on its website dedicated to your great free photography tips. Join in and tell the rest of us.