

Selecting a Tripod--Tripod Suggestions and Prices

By Efraín M. Padró

Tripod styles and features change so often it's hard to keep up. However, I do have some suggestions for selecting a tripod. They are subjective, of course, but they come from years of field shooting. They are listed in no particular order.

1. **Height.** Most photographers try to save weight when buying a tripod (including me), but if it's too short it will be uncomfortable; it does not have to be eye level (a little crouching is OK), but it should be comfortable. Also, measure the tripod while it is NOT extended. I usually hesitate to use the extension pole because it makes the tripod more unstable.
2. **Leg sections.** Most tripods have either 3 or 4 sections per leg. I prefer the 3-section tripods because you have fewer lever locks or twist locks to deal with every time you open or close the tripod. Some like 4-section legs because you can make them smaller (good for travel), so this might be more attractive to you. I just figured I am in the field a lot more than transporting my tripod, so field convenience trumps transport convenience.
3. **Lever locks vs. twist locks.** I much prefer lever locks than twist locks to open/close tripod legs. They are easy to handle, even in cold weather. I have a tripod with twists that I never use. I even got some tennis elbow when I first got it. They are very popular with some photographers; not me.
4. **Aluminum vs Carbon fiber.** I have a carbon fiber tripod because it is light, stable, and not too big. It also does not feel as cold when the temperature drops. This is more of a financial issue because carbon tripods are more expensive. Aluminum tripods are very sturdy, though, so if weight is not that big a factor, it's a good choice.
5. **Brands:** I like Manfrotto (Bogen) because they are a good value and they offer a wide selection. They also have lever locks.
6. **Ballheads:** I have what's called an Arca Swiss type of attachment for my tripod, and use ballheads from Really Right Stuff and Kirk Photo. If you like to shoot video, though, I would suggest getting a pan and tilt head, which allows you to

pan smoothly when shooting movies. NOTE: The levers can be cumbersome in the field, as it takes time to get used to all the movements. If you do get one, make sure you get lots of practice before any important shoot.

7. Regardless of what you get, do practice not only the video movements but also getting the camera off and on the head.
8. **Where to buy.** I buy most of my gear from either B&H or Adorama, both in New York City. Good prices, good service. Other photo shops in NY and elsewhere promise lower prices but they are usually scams. Trust me on this.

If you are still unsure of where to start, here are a couple of suggestions:

Tripods and Ball Heads

[Manfrotto 290DUA3 Tripod Kit with Compact Ball Head Manfrotto 290DUA3 Trip](#)

Price: \$239

Comments: Legs and ball head kit, flip locks, 3-sections legs, probably best value in this group.

[Manfrotto MK294A3-D3RC2 294 Aluminum Tripod Kit with 3-Way Head with Quick Release](#)

Price: \$169.88

[MeFOTO A1350Q1T Aluminum Roadtrip Travel Tripod Kit \(Titanium\)](#)

Price: \$189

[Manfrotto 190CXPRO3 Carbon Fiber Legs](#)

Price: \$409.88

Comments: Carbon fiber, legs only, flip levers, lighter than others of comparable size.

[Really Right Stuff BH-40 Mid Sized Ball Head](#)

Price: \$356

Comments: Ball head only, capacity about 13 lbs., beautifully finished, top quality.

[Kirk Photo BH-3 Mid-Sized Ball Head](#)

Price: \$285

Comments: Ball head only, capacity about 15 lbs., beautifully finished, top quality.

Where to Buy:

B&H Photo

www.bhphotovideo.com

Adorama

www.adorama.com

Hunt's

<http://www.huntsphotoandvideo.com/>

Comments: Great web sites, prices and service.