

LENS REVIEW

Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 DI VC USD

We took the latest – and most impressively versatile – budget-priced all-purpose zoom from Tamron for a spin. Words and images by **Ewen Bell**.

“The Tamron 24-70mm is very light in hand – and on the wallet”

Buying advice

Canon, Nikon and Sony may make superior versions of this lens – but if you want to save money for a better body, this is a superb option

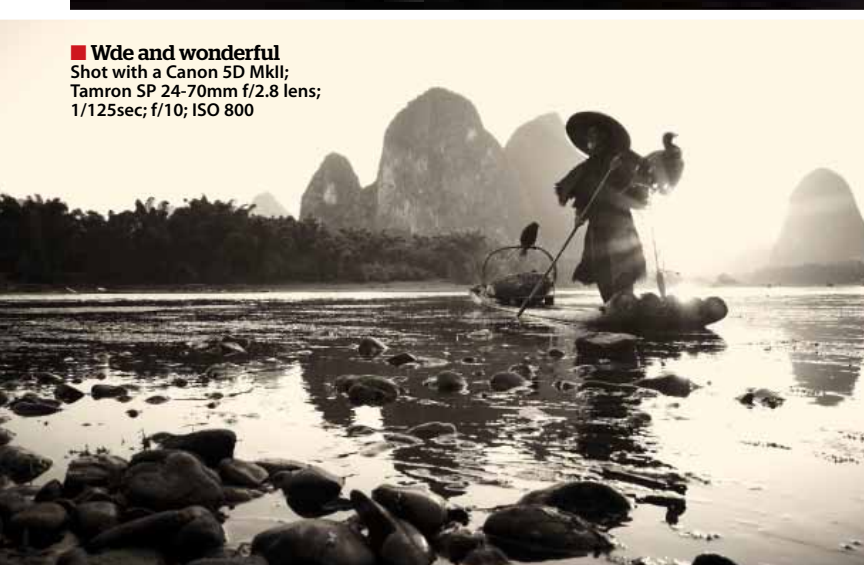
We road tested this lens on a 15-day journey around China, a familiar route for me and one that lends itself to the flexibility of a zoom lens but the joy of a wide angle perspective. The new Tamron lens is aimed at people who want an affordable solution for a full frame camera, such as the new Nikon D600 or the older D700. As demand for more affordable full frame DSLRs grows, so will the demand for a fast 24mm lens and some access to telephoto. This Tamron lens fits the role nicely and delivers where it counts. For the money, it offers a genuine option for photographers who'd rather spend on a new camera body than a professional lens.

Zoom baby zoom
Canon and Nikon have offered superb quality 24-70mm f/2.8 lenses for some time, with Canon having recently upgraded their version to improve optical performance in line with the increased demands of contemporary digital sensors. You pay a hefty price for either model, however. The Tamron delivers similar specs, shooting wide open at f/2.8 right through the zoom range, but aims for a more modest image quality when working at the margins. The most obvious compromise in design comes from the extending barrel, which exposes the shaft to dust and weather in ways that aren't ideal. In general, the zoom action is a little coarse and you struggle to drive the zoom with any precision or confidence. In most cases you'll want to shoot at either the 24mm or 70mm end of the barrel anyway, but for those times when somewhere in between is preferred, this lens can be frustrating.

The Tamron design packs away inside your camera bag without claiming a lot of space, while being very light in hand – and on the wallet. Tamron have opted for the wider 82mm filter thread, which is becoming increasingly popular – the more glass at the front, the more light that gets shunted back to the sensor. The wider diameter of glass is a key part of the f/2.8 design, but can be a problem if you lose the lens cap.

Of all the places to lose one, I managed to send mine tumbling down into the pits at The Terracotta Warriors in Xi'An. Security guards there take a dim view of trying to climb down among their national treasures to retrieve a lens cap.

The autofocus on the 24-70mm performed adequately and never gave any trouble on the road. It's not super fast, but neither is it super slow. Back in the studio we compared it on a »



■ **Wide and wonderful**
Shot with a Canon 5D MkII;
Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 lens;
1/125sec; f/10; ISO 800

■ **Slow boat to China**
Shot with a Canon 5D MkII;
Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 lens;
1/60sec; f/13; ISO 100



■ **Low light winner**
Shot with a Canon 5D MkII;
Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 lens;
1/125sec; f/13; ISO 100



lens but still enabling excellent detail shots and still life to add to your collection. For many travel, expeditions this is the only lens you'll ever need.

Image stabilisation is an additional feature of this lens that you won't see on its Canon or Nikon equivalents. Tamron uses the VC moniker for Vibration Control, which equates to VR for Nikon or IS for Canon. It has just one mode, on or off, and is mostly aimed at adding a stop or two of light when shooting hand held. A word of warning when employing the Vibration Control: don't get too reliant on it. Just because you're carrying a stabilised lens doesn't mean you can afford to get lazy with your technique, and relying on the lens to keep a shot sharp for you can lead to disappointment.

There is a limit to what the stabilisation can achieve on any lens, and this is not a professional bit of kit. Don't expect to drop down to 1/10th of second in low light and still get pin sharp shots. In some ways this lens would be better without it, because you'll make use of the f/2.8 speed but won't be tempted to assume the stabiliser will take care of the rest.

Where the lens does fall short is the significant vignetting at lower f-stops. It's nothing that can't be corrected with RAW processing software if the effect doesn't appeal, but if shooting JPEG this might be more of a concern. Distortion when shooting at 24mm is far more of an issue and less appealing. This too can be addressed in processing, but represents the major failing of the lens and highlights where the money goes when buying a more professional model. Up against a 24mm prime lens the difference is obvious, and when shooting lead-in lines



■ **Good for detail**
Shot with a Canon 5D MkII;
Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 lens;
1/250sec; f/2.8; ISO 400



■ **Portrait work**
Shot with a Canon 5D MkII;
Tamron SP 24-70mm f/2.8 lens;
1/200sec; f/2.8; ISO 400

for architecture you'll need to spend a few minutes in Photoshop or other software to correct for the lens.

Aberrations towards the edges appear across the aperture range, not just at f/2.8. This isn't a perfect lens but does offer strong image quality in the middle of the glass where you most expect it. Only at the very far reaches do you get genuine degradation of sharpness or colour distortion. If you enjoy shooting at f/2.8 for that shallow depth

of field effect then this won't bother you much, and you can get lovely sharp responses precisely where you want them.

OLD VERSUS NEW

We reviewed the lens with an old and travel weary Canon 5D MkII, a capable full frame camera that has since been superceded by the march of technology. Not everyone can afford to migrate to a brand new D800 or 5D MkIII, so the older model represents a typical camera body that this lens is suited to.



LOW LIGHT, HIGH PERFORMANCE

The Tamron 24-70mm handled itself extremely well in even the toughest of low-light situations, ably assisted by its in-built image stabilisation – a feature that's not even available on the Canon and Nikon counterparts.

» **DETAILS**

- Price:** \$1399
- Manufacturer:** Tamron
- Website:** tamron.com.au, maxwell.com.au
- Features:** Canon EF, Canon EFS, Nikon FX, Nikon DX, Sony A-mount
- Features:** Maximum aperture of f/2.8 right through the zoom range
- Minimum focal distance:** x
- Filter thread:** 82mm
- Angle of View:** 84° 4' – 34° 21' (full-frame 35mm format); 60° 20' – 22° 33' (for APS-C format)
- Focus Engine:** USD (Ultrasonic Silent Drive) is mostly very quiet and efficient
- Size:** 116.9mm (extended) x 88.2mm
- Weight:** 825g

» **VERDICT**

Any limitations in this fine lens from Tamron are far outweighed by its price point and genuine image quality.

» **RATING** 8/10

Conclusion

You have to spend a lot of money to buy a better 24-70mm f/2.8 lens from either Nikon, Canon or Sony. There is very little wrong with the Tamron option, however, and with a little effort tuning up your RAW files the lens will deliver-publication grade images.

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Canon 1D MkIV and found it did pretty well to keep pace with more demanding autofocus systems. For the budget-minded full frames that this lens is targeting, it will perform just fine to deliver quick and confident focus locking. Most importantly, it performs nicely in the most demanding of low-light situations, the very conditions that a fast stabilised lens is likely to encounter.

Good news

The 24-70mm range has always been a great choice for shooting urban or culture on a full frame DSLR. Wide open at f/2.8 is very useful and, while 70mm isn't a huge amount of zoom, it does let you crop in-camera to compose street scenes. The Tamron also uses the 70mm end for close-up work, falling short of a macro