Taking pictures of waterfalls offers a number of possibilities for the types of photos you can obtain. You can use a fast shutter and stop the motion of the water – freezing it. Or you can use long, longer, and really long exposures to get different effects. You’ll want to consider using Neutral Density filters in daylight situations and especially if the sun is shining brightly. An ND filter will cut the amount of light reaching your camera’s sensor and allow you to keep the shutter open for longer exposures.

1. Your goal – slow shutter speed
   1. Use a slow shutter speed of several seconds or longer to create a “ghosting” effect, making the subject appear smooth and blurry.
   2. Taking pictures using different shutter speeds will give you different results. A picture with a 1/125 shutter speed is very different than one with a 5 second shutter speed.
2. Use a tripod
   1. If you want to capture water and make it look smooth and soft, you need to use a tripod because it is nearly impossible to hand-hold a camera without introducing camera shake when using slow shutter speeds.
   2. You can use alternatives to a tripod, like setting your camera on a rock or a fence rail.
3. Consider using some type of cable release if you’re using a tripod. That can prevent camera shake.
4. Use the lowest ISO
   1. Lowering the camera’s ISO to the smallest speed not only increases image quality. but decreases the shutter speed.
5. Stop down / Change aperture to a large number
   1. Stopping down, or increasing the f/ number, decreases the amount of light that passes through the lens.
   2. Changing aperture is the last thing you can try on your camera, if you do not want to spend money on a good Neutral Density (ND) filter.
6. Use a Neutral Density Filter
   1. If you’ve already tried decreasing the camera’s ISO to the lowest number and you have already adjusted the aperture to the largest f/ number and you still cannot get to multiple seconds of exposure, it means you’re most likely shooting in bright-day conditions and there is too much light entering through the lens.
   2. The only way to decrease the amount of light going through to the lens is to use a filter in front of the lens that blocks a large portion of incoming light.
   3. Neutral Density (ND) filters are specifically designed for this purpose – to only let a small amount of light into the lens in order to decrease the camera shutter speed.
   4. There are many types of ND filters available and have numbers associated with them, like ND3 or ND10. These numbers represent the amount of light the filter stops. ND filter kits come with several ND numbered filters – try each to see what you like best in your photos.
7. Use Wide-angle and Telephoto Lenses
   1. Take both these lenses, if you own them, to photograph waterfalls. Depending on the waterfall and the amount of spray coming from the waterfall, you may want to back off and not get too close. Wet and soggy camera gear isn’t a good thing.
8. Composition
   1. Don’t forget the most important piece to any photo – composition. Adding some foreground elements can create a sense of depth. Adding colors can also create nice photos.

This article talked about some tips for taking pictures of waterfalls. These tips can also be applied to any moving water – like a stream or river. Practice will probably get you better pictures in the long run. Experiment with your gear and the settings on your camera. Take lots of pictures and once back on your computer and looking at those pictures – you might just be surprised at the photos you took and how good they really are.