Doing More with Photoshop

Topic 5 – Using The Spot Healing Brush

Learning Outcomes

In this lesson, we will look at one of the quickest ways to create better portraits by removing distractions in our photographs.

Using the Spot Healing Brush

Let's examine this photograph. The first thing that really stands out is the rubbish and washed up wood pieces on the beach. We need to get rid of those. To do that, we need the spot healing brush. The spot healing brush is a great tool for dealing with problems in the image.
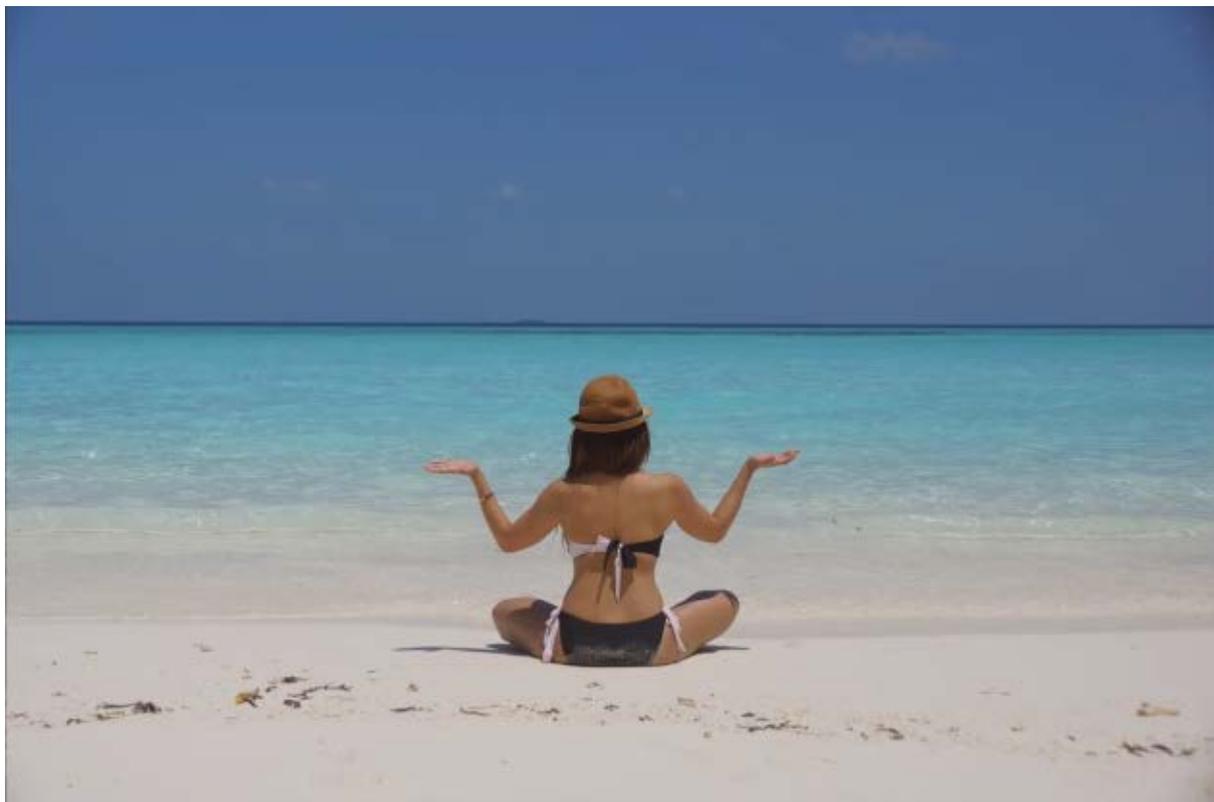
Using The Spot Healing Brush

When it comes to retouching, often you want to do your retouching work on a separate layer. This gives you flexibility in case you make a mistake or you want to undo something that you've done by mistake. To create a separate layer, click on the new layer icon, then double click the layer name, let's call this one spot clean.

Now, let's pick the spot healing brush. In the options bar, it's important that you turn on this option to sample all layers. This allows us to do the retouching on the layer above. So, we have created a new layer, and we have renamed it. Now, we have selected the spot healing brush, and we've turned sample all layers on, which, is very important. At the moment, our brush size is a bit big for removing the distractions that we have on the sand. We should make the brush smaller by tapping the left bracket key.


You can also simply press and hold that left bracket key, and this allows you to make your brush size smaller. Okay, when you begin cleaning up distractions, generally, you should begin with the bigger objects. In addition, it greatly helps if move around the photograph so that you're not just retouching one area and ignoring other areas. This will stand out in your final product and you don't want that. Remember, the best photoshop work is often the unnoticeable subtle changes or adjustments.

Let's zoom in a little bit by pressing Command + plus sign, or CTRL and the plus sign for Windows users. You can tap the left bracket key, in order to make our brush smaller. This is a portrait, so we want to create an image which has doesn't have any distracting features in the foreground. This woman should be the centre of attention. We want to create an image which draws the viewer into her, rather than anything else in the frame.

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So, you can see here with the spot healing brush, it isn't only just for clicking on those little problems. Sometimes we're going to click and drag over a large area.
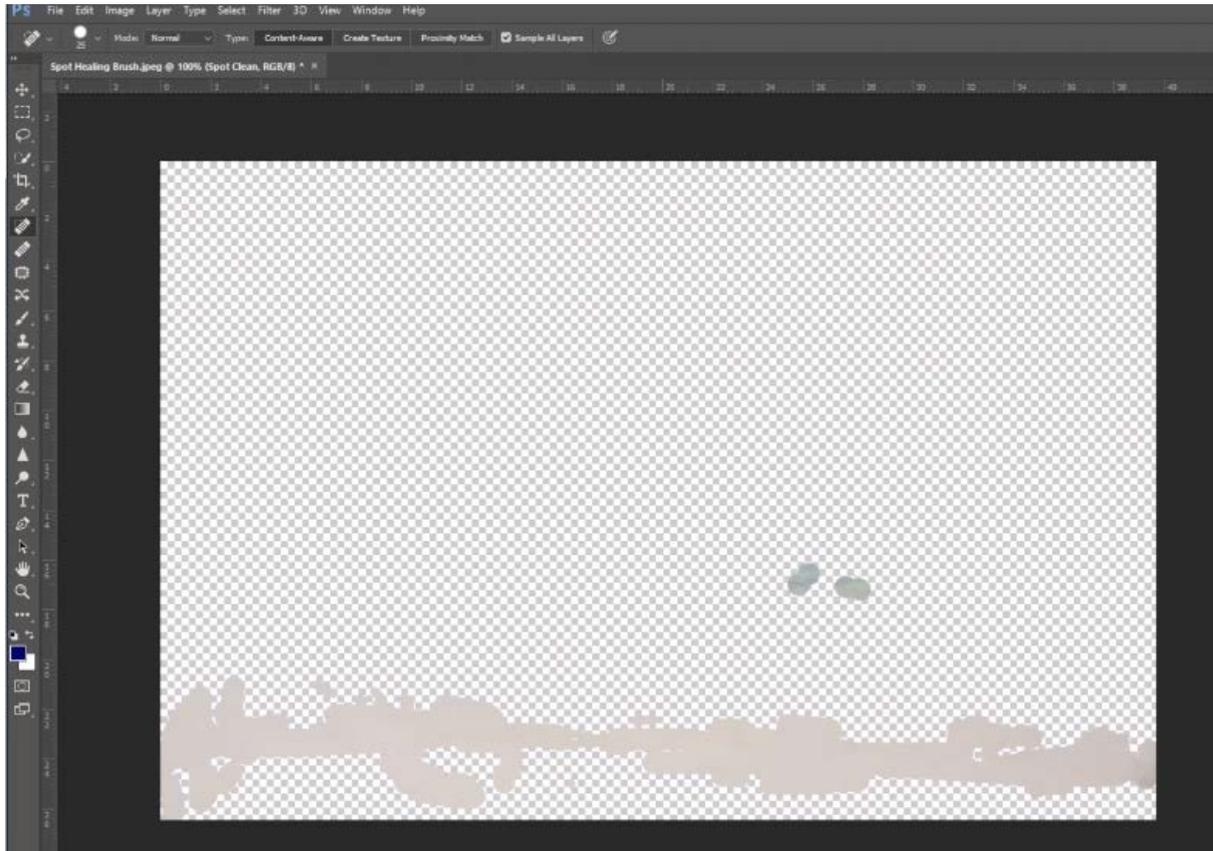

You can see here that without a lot of effort, we have been able to achieve professional-level results over a very short period of time. That's what this tool does for you. It allows you to decide what you want to be the main focus and it really makes your work look good. The area that we've retouched away is practically seamless and it looks much cleaner. There may be a few other minor things to remove, but we're very close to being finished. Let's just take one or two more seconds to remove anything that is bothering us.

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Let's zoom out and take a look at what we've done so far. This is where we evaluate the magic. If we turn off the visibility of the background layer, you can see all of the retouchings that we have done on a separate layer, the layer above. Now, turn on the visibility of the background layer, and we can experience the before and after. This is very useful because it can help us identify if we have missed anything.
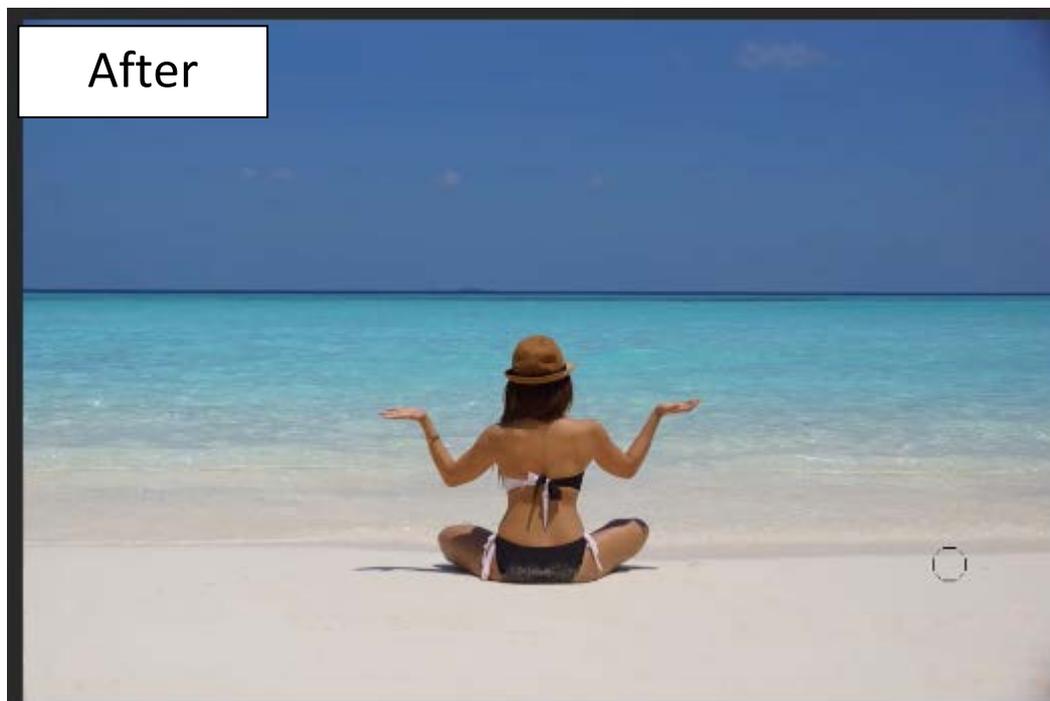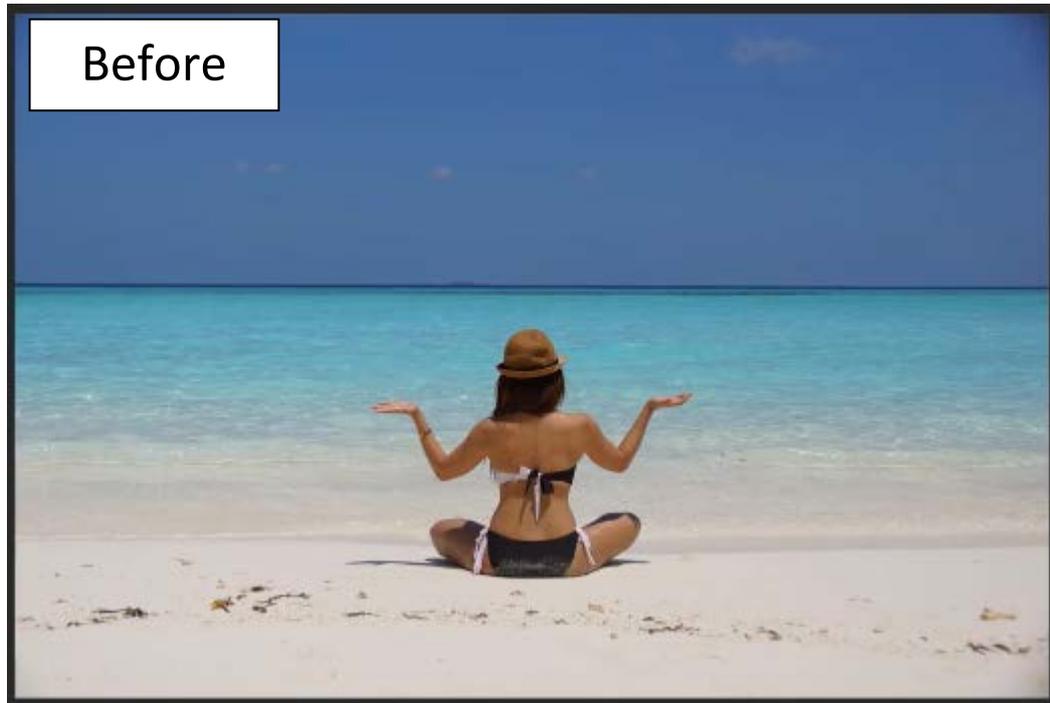
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What have we learned today? A Summary

We have had a good introduction into working with the spot healing brush. We have looked at how it works and the benefits associated with using it to remove distractions, in our photograph.