The Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens combines a very useful zoom range with image stabilization in a light and well-performing package.

Keep in mind that the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens is an "EF-S" lens and only works on EF-S compatible Canon EOS bodies such as the Canon EOS 20D, the Canon EOS 350D Digital Rebel XT and the Canon EOS 300D Digital Rebel. EF-S is Canon's moniker for Short Back Focus. The distance between the film (sensor) plane and the rear of the lens is shorter than in an EF lens. Many question the longevity of this standard. My expectation is that it will be around for a long time - easily long enough for most people to get their desired value from a lens.

There also seems to be confusion about how the 1.6x Field of View Crop Factor (FOVCF) relates to EF-S lens framing. The answer is that you still need to apply the "focal length multiplier" to get the conventional 35mm equivalent field of view. The focal length is based on physical design of the optics. Yes, even though the lens is designed for 1.6x FOVCF digital bodies, the framing is still equivalent to a longer focal length lens on a full frame body.

Why put Image Stabilization into a wide angle to short telephoto zoom lens? For the same reason you put it into telephoto lenses - to reduce camera shake. Since the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens has third generation IS, it can be handheld up to 3 f-stops lower than a non-IS lens at the same focal length. Granted, a wide angle lens can be handheld at lower shutter speeds than a long telephoto lens, but being able to hold them at even lower shutter speeds is a great benefit to me. It also compensates some for the slow/narrow wide open aperture. This lens can be handheld at slow enough shutter speeds to allow significant subject motion blur when desired - such as moving water. The moving water pictures in the 17-85 IS sample gallery were all shot handheld - down to 1/3 second.

IS on this lens also allows for a very large DOF (Depth of Field) while shooting handheld. Landscape photography is one style of photography that benefits from this feature.

Do not plan to use the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens to stop action unless you have plenty of light - or plan to use a flash for the main lighting (using the bright flash to stop the action). Also, getting a diffuse background blur is not easy with a lens that only opens to f/5.6 at 85mm. It takes a close subject and plenty of open space behind the subject to get a good background blur.

The background blur you do get with the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens seems nice. Curved aperture blades are partly responsible for this feature. Out of focus highlights retain round shapes even when the 17-85 is stopped down.

With ring USM, the 17-85 IS focuses very fast - and very quietly. IS on this lens is also very quiet. FTM (Full Time Manual) focusing is enabled in AF mode.

The Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens utilizes an extending but non-rotating front element. The non-rotating design feature is appreciated by Circular Polarizer Filter and split ND (Neutral Density) Filter users.

Although not a macro lens, the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens focuses down to 1.15'. Close enough to fill the lens with smaller subjects such as flowers.

Canon does not include a lens hood or lens pouch in the 17-85 IS box. Both are optionally available. I recommend getting the Canon EW-73B lens hood, but I would get a Lowepro Lens Case 1W for storage/transport.
Pictured above from left to right are the Canon EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 Lens, Canon EF-S 60mm f/2.8 USM Lens, Canon EF-S 10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 USM Lens, Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens and Canon EF-S 17-55mm f/2.8 IS USM Lens. The same lenses are pictured fully extended below.

Since the Canon EF-S camera bodies feature a 1.6x field of view crop factor, the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens has the equivalent field of view/framing to a 27.2-136mm lens on a full-frame camera body - nearly equivalent to the Canon EF 28-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM Lens. My observations are that this lens also performs optically similar to the 28-135. The two lenses are very similar in size and build quality as well.

The Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens has decent build quality. It has a nice quality feel.

Optical performance is not L-class, but it is not that far off. Center sharpness is very good at all focal lengths and improves very little when stopped down. Some corner softness is present at most focal lengths and apertures.

Light fall-off is noticeable until stopped down or zoomed out to 35mm or so. Distortion is very noticeable at 17mm and is also mostly gone by 35mm or so. I am seeing some CA (Chromatic Aberration) on wide open wide angle shots, but it has not been too bad.

Flare seems well-controlled. Vignetting is apparent on the wide end of the focal length range until stopped down.

The Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens is a significantly better lens than the significantly less expensive Canon EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 Lens, but it is not optically the equivalent of the Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8 L USM Lens, Canon EF 17-40mm f/4 L USM Lens or the Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8 L USM Lens. The Canon L Series Lenses will provide slightly better sharpness, color and contrast at equivalent apertures in addition to their better build quality. Light fall-off is not present in these lenses at 1.6x field of view. CA is better controlled...

But, the Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens is going to be the right lens for a lot of people. With its wide 5x zoom range, the 17-85 makes a great walk-around lens. There is a huge range of subject matter that fits nicely in this focal length range. And in addition to being relatively small and light, the 17-85's image quality is quite good.

The Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Lens is a lens I recommend for many situations.