

APPRECIATING LIGHT

The quality of light brings so much to the character of a photograph, and much will depend on the location, the time of year, and the time of day. If your travels have taken you to a previously unvisited destination, and an “exotic” one at that, in all likelihood you will find the quality of light and the way it behaves during the course of a day very different from your experiences at home. While this may take a couple of days to adjust to, you’ll soon be appreciating the opportunities it affords you.



FOR GENERAL OUTDOOR shooting, probably the most favored natural light for photographers is moderately low sunlight, as at midmorning and midafternoon. This is the lighting that dominates, for instance, travel brochures. Variations and extensions of this are when the sun is quite close to the horizon, although here the shooting window is much shorter, which means fewer images. The reason for the commercial popularity of bright-sun-but-not-too-high light is that this is tourist weather—the conditions in which most people like to travel for pleasure.

Some photographers, however, think that you can have too much of a good, or at least a predictable, thing. Certainly, given the constant demands of publishing and advertising to come up with striking, different new images, travel photographers are under pressure to find different light treatments. The aesthetics of “nice lighting” are, after all, quite fashionable. And fashions change.

EXACTLY SUNRISE

Sunrise photography depends on clear air for the full red effect, but the moment lasts just a few minutes. Sunrise is often most effective when used for a silhouette, as with the rock formations known as The Mittens in Monument Valley.

In this section, we’ll look in detail not only at how light behaves and the effect it will have on your photographs during the course of a day—from sunrise to sunset—but also how this behavior and resulting impact on photography is governed by where you are in the world. In addition, it’s also important to understand of the significance of the direction of light in relation to the subject—whether the subject is lit from behind, from the side, or from the front—as this will drastically alter the quality of the image.

