

In The Frame

April 2026

Alpe di Siusi

Exploring Europe's largest
alpine meadow

Seljalandsfoss

Chasing the iconic summer
sunset in Iceland

Alpenglow

Planning and capturing this
subtle twilight phenomenon



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Welcome

Hi, Last month I wrote the introduction to *In The Frame* on the way back from Norway, and since then my feeds have been full of photographers posting their winter images from Lofoten. I always wonder who I almost crossed paths with on a photography trip, and I probably even said hello to someone whose photography I've been following, without connecting the person with the images.

It's been an inspiring time, though I should confess I still haven't gone through any of my own photographs. I've been deep in writing mode for the past month, and I'm putting the final touches on a new photography guide to Madeira, which I'm excited to release next month.



Welcome

I've also been enhancing my website, which now has an account system so that you can log in to check previous orders and download products. I always enjoy the process of designing a website and thinking about how to make it easy to use, and if you have any feedback on this update please do let me know.

This month in the magazine, we look towards summer in the northern hemisphere as many people begin planning for a break later in the year. We go on location at Alpe di Siusi in the Dolomites, an incredible spot for summer hiking and photography. Behind the Scenes explores a popular sunset view in Iceland, taken from behind the waterfall at Seljalandsfoss. Finally, we explore how to plan for and photograph alpenglow, in an article that goes in depth on this underappreciated natural phenomenon.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and thanks for reading.

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Alpe di Siusi | Dolomites



Peaceful hikes and misty scenes on a sprawling alpine meadow



Introduction

Alpe di Siusi doesn't feel like the rest of the Dolomites. Photographers come to these mountains for exciting peaks and epic light, and many images of the Dolomites show an atmosphere of adventure and rugged terrain. Alpe di Siusi is an unusual moment of calm, an enormous alpine meadow of gentle hills and rustic cabins surrounded by forests. It's also a fantastic place for photography.

The terrain of Alpe di Siusi is historic, but it's not natural. While the basic features of this landscape were carved by the same retreating glaciers that formed the more impressive valleys of the Dolomites, the rolling hills and extensive meadows are the result of hundreds of years of human land management. The meadow was formed by the alpine community that has lived here for centuries, created through the traditional movement of livestock to higher ground in summer.

Alpe di Siusi is Ladin country, home to a culturally distinct people with a long history of farming, woodwork, shepherding and seasonal festivals. The Ladin language almost disappeared in the 20th century, but preservation work has kept it alive and you can still see it on signposts around the Western Dolomites. During the world wars, the region of South Tyrol passed between the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then Germany, and later Italy, leaving a layered history that combines Ladin, Italian and German language everywhere you go.

Today, the historic landscape of Alpe di Siusi is protected by a combination of construction restrictions, strict rules on vehicles, and a network of planned walking routes that allow visitors to explore the meadows while limiting the impact on the character of the plateau. It's the perfect landscape to explore on a day of quiet and thoughtful photography, and a beautiful contrast to the rocky peaks that surround it.



The Landscape

Alpe di Siusi is a vast landscape, and you can explore the meadow for kilometres in every direction. Most of the area is covered in grassy hills that roll into the distance, with wooden huts scattered among them in different shapes and sizes. These traditional buildings were used for storage, livestock, and as homes for farmers that came and went from the meadow with the seasons. Now they're mostly accommodation for visitors exploring the Dolomites, kept to the same design to maintain Alpe di Siusi's traditional character.

The meadow is surrounded by mountains, though most appear distant as you look across Val Gardena to the north or towards further stretches of the Dolomites to the south. However, the dual peak of Sassolunga rises to the east and forms a centrepiece of Alpe di Siusi, and many images you see of this place feature the mountain as a backdrop to the rolling hills and traditional huts that make up most of the terrain.

Alpe di Siusi is a remarkably quiet and peaceful place to explore. Vehicles are largely banned on the meadow during the day, and there are very strict rules on construction that limit visitor numbers and impact on the landscape. Although this place sees plenty of visitors for skiing in winter and hiking in summer, it's so huge that you can often find yourself alone on a path or capturing a wide open scene with no other people in sight.



Seasons at Alpe di Siusi

Alpe di Siusi has a seasonal rhythm that reflects its cultural history and provides a constantly changing landscape for photography. The peak of summer brings hikers to the Dolomites, and Alpe di Siusi appears in textured meadows and shades of green, with storms in the afternoon and soft light in the early morning.

Autumn turns the meadow shades of golden yellow and brown as trees across the Dolomites change colour with colder, drier weather. The larch forests that cover parts of these mountains appear in patches across Alpe di Siusi, providing small bursts of colour among the fading green of the meadows.

Alpe di Siusi is high, so winter overlaps with autumn, creating spectacular scenes of autumn trees covered in white snow. My first visit to Alpe di Siusi caught this time perfectly, and the unusual colours and blend of seasons made it a stunning place to explore. Later in the year, the snow gets thicker as the black and white tones of winter in the mountains completely change the atmosphere.

Spring is a quieter visitor season, not suitable for skiing or hiking, but a culturally important time of regeneration and growth. Patches of snow remain across the meadow, gradually melting as the grasslands recover and turn this place from the white of winter to the green of summer.



Weather and Light

You can photograph Alpe di Siusi at any time of day, and it's an incredibly versatile location for both weather and light. The sun rises behind Sassolunga, creating beautiful skies above the mountains when the morning is clear. It sets in the other direction, casting warm light on the peaks as it drops below the flatter landscape to the west of the meadow.

During the day there's little shelter, so heavy rain can be tedious and direct sun can create harsh contrasts and wash out colours. However, any clouds in the sky create new shapes in the landscape as their shadows flow across the scene, and most days at Alpe di Siusi feature some variation in the weather, with ever-changing patches of light and dark to explore.

The dream conditions at Alpe di Siusi are dry mornings with low mist drifting over the scene. This is more likely in autumn, when warm, damp air meets cooler layers near the ground, and the mist over this landscape can last through sunrise and long into the day if the conditions are right. A little fog in the atmosphere helps to separate huts and trees, creating more depth to sweeping views of the scene.

With so much to explore and the flexibility to shoot in any direction, Alpe di Siusi is an all-day location where you can arrive for sunrise and find something to capture until the very end of the day. Traffic restrictions on the meadow make it difficult to come and go, but it's a great excuse to slow down and explore a single place more slowly and in detail.



Logistics

The only challenge of visiting Alpe di Siusi for photography is the logistics. Like many popular locations, it's easy to access this landscape as a general visitor, and there are cable cars running from the valleys to the north and west, with shuttle buses providing more options for anyone coming to hike or ski during the day.

Out of hours, it's more tricky. The cable cars start too late and end too early for first and last light, and the shuttle buses keep daytime hours which limit your flexibility. One of my favourite things about being a photographer is exploring the outdoors when everyone else has departed or has yet to arrive, but the disadvantage is that no-one is available to help you get around.

There are some options. You can drive close to Alpe di Siusi in the very early morning, provided you leave your car parked until the restrictions are lifted at the end of the day. You can stay on the meadow, though hotel options are more expensive than the surrounding towns in the valley.

My approach is always to arrive very early and stay all day. There are small restaurants and cafés scattered around the meadow, and the cable car station has good facilities for visitors. It's rare to spend all day at a single location when you are travelling for photography, but there is so much to explore at Alpe di Siusi that it's always worth the investment.



Capturing Alpe di Siusi

There are one or two spots around Alpe di Siusi where photographers like to gather, but no single great composition of the scene. The fun of this location is finding new combinations of the huts and trees on the meadow, exploring the mountains on the horizon, and building compositions using Sassolunga as a backdrop.

My favourite approach is to mark out a route on the trails and then slowly follow it while looking in every direction for ideas. Picking a route in advance takes some decision-making out of the journey, and lets you focus attention on finding subjects to explore. Alpe di Siusi has compositions everywhere, and it takes all your effort to consider different focal lengths, with options directly in front of you and on the distant horizon.

A slow walk is particularly rewarding in the mist, which separates the huts and trees, creating new arrangements that often don't work when the air is clear. Even small movements change the connection between different features on the meadow, and time quickly disappears at Alpe di Siusi, especially when you find something that works and get lost in composition.



A mountain peak emerges from the mist
above a traditional hut on the meadow



Clouds swirling around the mountains
in the distance, north of Alpe di Siusi



Subjects and Compositions

The most recognisable views of Alpe di Siusi feature layers of hills scattered with mountain huts, set against Sassolunga rising in the distance. These scenes can be beautiful, and it's incredibly exciting when you find just the right combination of huts and trees for a foreground. However, there is much more to discover when you consider other parts of the scene.

To the north of Alpe di Siusi, you can look over the valley to the Puez-Odle range of mountains, which includes Seceda Ridge and other popular spots for hiking and photography. From a distance, you can pick out different shapes in the rock, and the view through a long lens works brilliantly on a day with scattered cloud and patches of light on the peaks.

Nearby, you can explore texture in the walls of the cabins and shapes in clumps of trees. With the mass of Sassolunga constantly capturing your attention, it's always tempting to go wide and combine features into an expansive view. However, forcing yourself to look closer, especially in the mist, reveals different kinds of subjects to photograph.

As the conditions change through the day, light rays can appear on the horizon, or patches of mist blow through with rainclouds over the meadow. Alpe di Siusi is a calm and peaceful location, but it's constantly in motion and gradually shifts in appearance as you explore.



Reflections

Alpe di Siusi has been shaped by both geology and human history, and this peaceful meadow set among harsh rocky peaks has a character that's different from anywhere else I have photographed. I think it helps to see this not as a fully natural place, but a cultural landscape that tells a story of the mountains and people who have lived here for hundreds of years.

The peaceful scenes at Alpe di Siusi help you to slow down and explore while the conditions change around you. Getting on the meadow for the beginning or end of the day takes some planning, but the logistics force you to invest more time, and some of the biggest improvements I've found in my own photography have come from this calmer and more considered approach.

This slower atmosphere works brilliantly in contrast to the rest of the Dolomites, where it's easy to get absorbed in the search for intense colour and light over the peaks. Photographers are often drawn to locations with a reputation for striking displays, and this trend has been magnified because they make the most engaging online images. I love the excitement of an incredible sunrise or a vivid sunset, but those shoots are always a gamble on the conditions, and sometimes the lows are as strong as the highs.

Alpe di Siusi is a quiet and reliable place, where you can explore different forms and moods, develop ideas, and watch for changes in the landscape around you. I think it's important to consider how you feel after capturing different locations, and refine which kinds of places suit your photography and approach. A quieter landscape often holds up a mirror to your approach and helps you see your gaps and flaws, but it's also a great place to work through them and come out the other side a slightly better photographer.

Behind the Scene

Seljalandsfoss | Iceland



An unexpected opportunity to capture one
of the great scenes of Iceland



On Location One

Seljalandsfoss is a beautiful waterfall on the south coast of Iceland that comes into view as you follow the ring road, and lies just off the route, with a convenient parking area. It's just close enough to Reykjavík for a day trip, and this makes it a busy stop, with tours along the south coast stopping in for most of the day. However, it's an incredible feature in the landscape, and the falls themselves are powerful and exciting to explore.

Seljalandsfoss drops around 60 metres from the high ground that follows Route 1 along the south coast. Despite the constant stream of visitors, the area around the falls becomes gradually quieter near the end of the day as tour groups head off for their evening meals. Most people miss the incredible scene that appears in the summer, when the sun drops towards the open plains to the west and lights the water in a final burst of colour at the end of the day.

This image only works in the summer because you need access to the area behind the falls, which is closed off when the weather turns icy in winter. It also requires a clear patch of sky on the horizon for the light to get through, and looks most dramatic when the rest of the sky is overcast and dark. These conditions aren't exactly rare, but most cloudy days reach the horizon and block the sun completely from view.

Being on location for sunset on a day with the right distribution of cloud is a great opportunity, and I was lucky that it came together on this evening. For all the plans I had in Iceland on this trip, this moment was completely unexpected.



On Location Two

The realities of visiting Iceland in the summer meant I had never planned to capture this scene. July is the busiest and most expensive time to travel in the country, and the best reason to go is the chance to shoot the Highlands. The remote centre of Iceland is only accessible when the snow melts around June, and this trip represented a rare opportunity to explore the landscape of the interior.

The weather during this period of my trip was very variable. The day's forecast featured persistent rain and heavy cloud cover in every direction, but the following night would be clear throughout, and an ideal chance to shoot through the long hours of twilight colour. I decided to rest and spend the rainy afternoon exploring smaller features near my base.

One of the reasons I like researching photography trips is that it gives you more ways to be flexible and make good decisions. I could spend the day visiting new places around my base, but I always had in mind that I was close to Seljalandsfoss and that the right sunset conditions might appear. My research meant there was no pressure to find a good place for the end of the day, and I made my way towards Seljalandsfoss as the clouds gradually broke up.



On Location Three

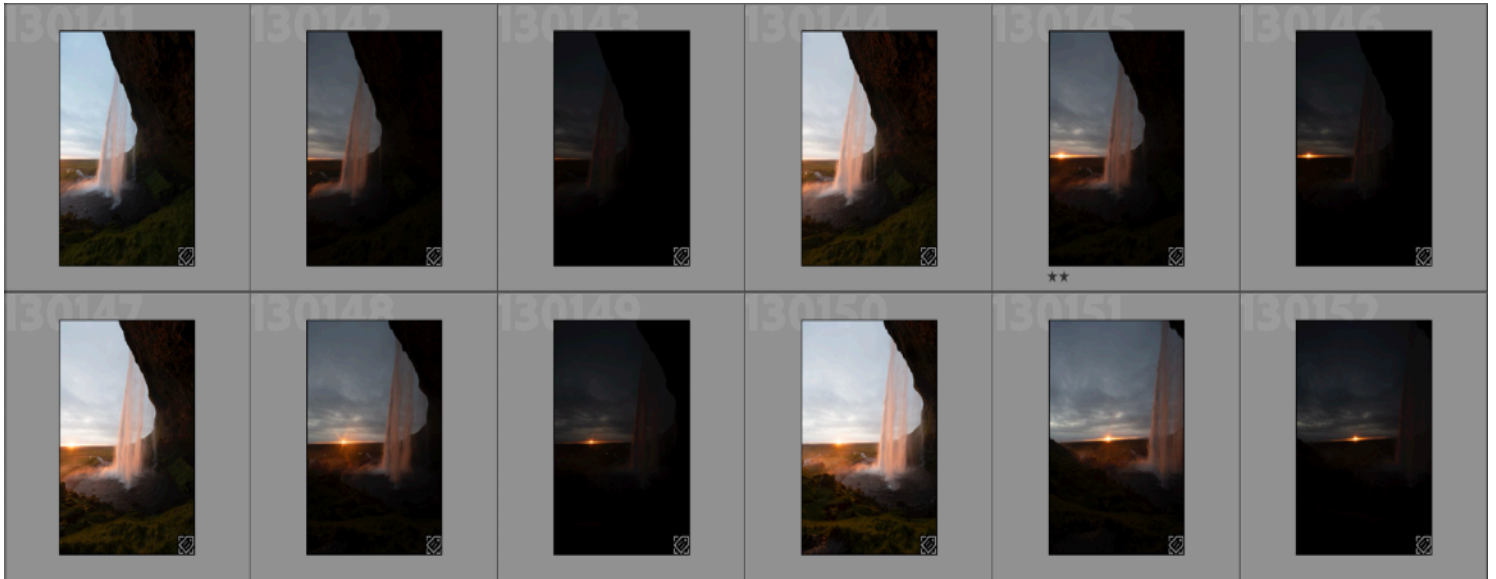
The paths around Seljalandsfoss take you behind the falls into a cove with overhanging rock and a clear view of the flat landscape beyond. It's a popular walk when the path is open, and most visitors take this route around the site to get a different angle on the falls. There are no complex hiking requirements as long as there is no ice on the ground, and this area is only a few minutes' walk from the parking area.

In the summer, the sun drops over the plains in the distance and will appear in your frame if you stand just behind Seljalandsfoss to the left. While there are some amazing waterfalls in Iceland, there are few places where the terrain is aligned in just the right way to capture an open view of the sunset in the same scene. The unusual layout of the landscape and ease of access to the falls has made this a well-known composition, and you can find thousands of images of beautiful skies above Seljalandsfoss online.

However, it's less common to find the perfect set of dark clouds overhead and gaps on the horizon to produce the contrast of bright sun against a dark sky.

Early in the evening, a clear opening appeared in the clouds just as I had finished exploring the area, and I waited in position behind the falls for the light to break through. When the sun sits this low on the horizon, the cove glows in shades of green and subtle reds, and the water catches the light as it rushes over the cliffs into the pool below. It was a great start to the session.

However, I hoped that the sun would appear again when it got closer to the horizon. A lower sun would produce even more dramatic light, with the potential for a sunburst and beautiful red light on the flowing water. This would rely on the clouds sticking around for another hour or so, and then another gap appearing just over the horizon, so I watched the sky carefully, though without much hope.



Capture One

I studied the sky while exploring more of the area around Seljalandsfoss, hoping to find other compositions while I waited for the sun to drop further. For the sake of this article, I could have pretended that I had taken a calm and professional approach, staying in position and carefully checking settings to make sure my camera was ready for the brief moment of light. However, in reality, I had been greedy with the afternoon and had to run back to the falls to get in position.

The sky cleared along the horizon and the sun started to drop below the clouds, and the light had already appeared as I ran up the stairs behind the falls. This didn't set me up well for a technically complex shoot, and I had to work quickly to capture a moment of light that wouldn't last more than a few minutes.

The sunset view at Seljalandsfoss is a tricky image to take. The scene is too wide to capture with even an ultra-wide lens, so you need to create multiple shots and stitch them together as a panorama. Direct light in the scene creates extremely high contrast, so you need to bracket images and make sure that your darkest frame includes all the detail in the sun.

Adding to the challenge, the spray from the waterfall is constantly soaking your lens, and you must wipe off the droplets between each frame to have any chance of neatly stitching them together. If you get a frame wrong and capture a water drop on your lens in the wrong place, it can impact the entire panorama, and each set of images takes so long that there's little time for multiple attempts during the brief period of light.



Capture Two

I had enough time for several attempts while the sun remained visible on the horizon, and my desperate attempt to keep the lens clear had worked in most of the frames. My mad rush to get in position is pretty clear from the angle of my tripod, which was leaning to the side enough that my panorama ended up slightly sloping downhill.

However, my bracketing had caught all the detail in the bright and dark areas, I had included enough of the scene on both sides, and there were several full sets of frames with no water droplets in sight. Combining my raw images into an HDR panorama in Lightroom produced this enormous file, and the result would be detailed enough to print at almost any size once the edit was complete.



Edit One

Increasing the brightness of the combined file gives a first hint of how the scene unfolded at Seljalandsfoss. The sun was lower than when it appeared in the cloud gap earlier in the day, and this created shades of red and orange as the sunlight passed through more of the atmosphere before reaching the falls. Earlier in the day, the water caught beautiful golden light, but here it glows pink in the low sun.

I had deliberately used a small aperture (f/14) to produce a sunstar on the horizon. Sunstars appear when we use smaller apertures (higher f-numbers), and it would have been even more clearly defined at f/16–f/22. However, lenses get softer at smaller apertures, and I needed to balance capturing detail while forming a sunstar.

Usually, we can take multiple images at different apertures and combine them for a good sunstar and sharp detail, but adding this requirement to the panorama and HDR frames would have been so complex that there was a real risk of ruining the whole image. f/14 was a compromise, and I improved the sunstar by choosing a moment when the sun was slightly blocked by a small cloud on the horizon.

Combined HDR files contain incredible detail in the shadows and highlights, but they still look very high contrast on the screen. My first global adjustment reduced some of the contrast so that detail is visible around the sun and colour in the cove behind the falls. However, the full edit would need to rely on local adjustments, targeting different parts of the scene with their own requirements.



Edit Two

To edit further, I used a series of masks to select the landscape around the falls, including the bottom and left edges of the photograph where the cove appears. This area was very dark compared to the sky and waterfall, but it was still catching the light when the sun reached through the clouds. I needed to bring out the colours and glowing light without overpowering the brighter parts of the scene.

I raised the brightness in this area and increased shadows to bring out more detail and texture in the rock. However, the additional light made the edges too vivid, so I lowered saturation to maintain a realistic representation of the colours in the grass and other parts of the foreground.



Edit Three

Next, I worked on the sky and the large bank of cloud covering most of the scene. The cloud cover was important because it provided a dark backdrop to contrast with the light in the foreground and set off the rich colours of sunset. I wanted to emphasise this effect, but it's important to remember that the sky is almost always brighter than the landscape, and adjusting the contrast too much would immediately make the image look unreal and over-processed.

I used a mask to select the sky and reduce brightness, carefully checking it against the rocks to make sure the whole frame remained balanced. This is the kind of edit that benefits from revisiting a few days later, making sure you haven't been too enthusiastic with the sliders and made the sky darker than the landscape.



Edit Four

The final set of edits focused on the sun and the falls, as the central features of this image.

Although my camera settings were right for the scene, it's impossible to capture full detail when the sun appears in your frame, and the very edges of the sun blended with the bright clouds around it.

A useful trick when the sun appears in this way is to enhance the glow around it, using a radial gradient to apply a slightly yellow white balance and a small increase in brightness. This produces a yellow glow and gives a more natural way to extend the sun's extreme brightness into the image.

The opposite approach involves darkening the bright sun to recover more detail in the cloud around it, and this always looks unnatural and strange. My theory is that we are used to avoiding looking at the sun, so adding a bright glow around it feels natural to our experience.

The final touch was to add a little brightness to the falls to bring out the colourful light catching on the water in this final moment of the day.

Full Edit





Conclusion

Sunset at Seljalandsfoss can be a real dilemma. It's a popular scene and a busy location, and there must be thousands of versions of this image in the world already. However, it's also a beautiful moment, and I'm always grateful that we can anticipate moments like this in advance with a little research.

On my first trip to Iceland, I had no idea that Seljalandsfoss looked like this at sunset, and I stayed nearby during great conditions without knowing that this scene existed. This time, I knew it was an opportunity worth planning for and could make the most of the weather on an evening when I otherwise might have struggled to know where to visit.

This was also a good lesson in perseverance in photography. I'd spent a damp afternoon looking for locations under a sky that felt heavy with cloud, and nothing about the weather that day suggested a beautiful sunset. However, we only need a small gap on the horizon for the sun to get through, and everything can change during the long summer days in Iceland.

The rest of my visit to Iceland included some incredible time in the Highlands and opportunities to explore new and creative compositions in beautiful landscapes. However, Seljalandsfoss in summer felt like a bucket-list photograph, and it was great fun to embrace a recognisable composition and put all my effort into capturing it in the best conditions.

Alpenglow



How to predict and capture this subtle burst of light



Introduction

Alpenglow is a very subtle phenomenon, a gentle glow on the landscape that appears gradually and can start to fade before you fully realise it's there. When I'm shooting alpenglow in the morning, my eyes are constantly adjusting to the light, my body is getting used to being awake, and it can be hard to track delicate changes in the scene. However, alpenglow is powerful, and it can have an incredible effect on an image.

Alpenglow photography can be underrated compared to striking scenes that feature the northern lights, vivid skies or dramatic sunsets. Just like witnessing the effect in person, you have to stop and explore a photograph with alpenglow, and the way many people consume images online encourages photographers to capture more dramatic effects. However, photos taken during this time of day can be more interesting and absorbing, especially in print.

Photographers often miss alpenglow because of when it occurs. In the morning, it appears before sunrise, and we're often aiming our arrival on location for first light, trying to preserve as much time in bed as possible. In the evening, you have to wait after daylight has faded, and many of us don't have the energy or enthusiasm to continue after an exciting sunset shoot.

However, alpenglow is as common as a great sunrise or sunset, more reliable than the northern lights, and more predictable than most weather conditions that affect our photography. This article explores alpenglow in depth, including how to forecast it, how to capture it, and how some small adjustments to your approach at the beginning and end of the day can help you get more out of the twilight hours.



Physics of Alpenglow

Alpenglow is indirect light, formed when sunlight is scattered through the atmosphere and redirected across the landscape. During alpenglow, the sun is too low to reach you directly, but as it filters through the atmosphere, it separates wavelengths of light, with shorter blue wavelengths scattered away and longer red and orange wavelengths continuing through the air.

This separation means that alpenglow appears as soft red or pink colours in the landscape, and doesn't cast the strong shadows we associate with direct light. Instead, features that catch alpenglow seem to light up from within, and this can be very powerful in the right conditions.

Where first and last light may pick out a mountaintop or highlight a small area of the scene, alpenglow produces a softer and more diffused form of illumination.

Alpenglow appears at the beginning and end of the day, typically when the sun is around 4-8° below the horizon. The exact angle that produces the strongest effect varies with atmospheric conditions, but the sun's position has such an important influence that the timing is relatively easy to predict. In most situations, you can expect alpenglow to appear roughly 15-20 minutes before sunrise or after sunset.

Alpenglow can be stronger or weaker depending on what is happening in the atmosphere. The factors that affect how much light is scattered and redirected are complex and hard to forecast, and you'll often notice that the strength of the effect varies significantly from one day to another. The important factor is not the sky above you, but the atmosphere over the horizon towards the sun itself, so the conditions at your location don't always indicate whether alpenglow will appear.



Recognising Alpenglow

As a new photographer, it was a long time before I recognised alpenglow as a distinct phenomenon and noticed how it appeared in images. There are so many ways for light and colour to influence a photograph that alpenglow felt like one of many potential conditions that could change the atmosphere of a scene. However, once you notice it, you start to spot it everywhere.

Alpenglow is most common in mountain images because of how it travels through the atmosphere. Although the light is scattered and diffused, it still arrives from a low angle, so it's more noticeable on large vertical surfaces facing the position of the sun below the horizon. Features that point away from the sun don't catch alpenglow, just as they wouldn't receive direct light.

Horizontal and smaller features can still catch alpenglow, but it's harder to notice because the light is soft and diffused. Direct (first) light on a textured landscape can look incredible, as small features both catch the light and cast shadows, giving the scene strong contrast. Alpenglow is more subtle, so the effect is a gentler shift in brightness and colour, without the same level of contrast or shadow detail.

The easiest way to recognise alpenglow is to look for areas of the landscape that are softly illuminated while everything else remains darker. This is often most visible on mountain peaks or cliff faces, where the separation between light and shadow is clear but not dramatic. You may also notice the effect in low clouds, where the colour shift can sometimes appear more obvious than on the landscape itself.

You can start exploring alpenglow by looking through other photographers' images. You'll notice pink hues on snowy mountains, cliff faces that seem to glow brighter, but with less colour shift, and similar changes on some low clouds in the scene. Direct light appears more yellow, with more contrast in bright areas as smaller features cast shadows among the light.



Planning for Alpenglow

One of my favourite features of alpenglow is how predictable and reliable it can be. Shooting the northern lights requires a clear sky, aurora activity, and a composition that includes the right part of the sky. It may be strong and dramatic or disappear without warning, and can happen at any time of night. Alpenglow arrives at a consistent time in a predictable place, and the main variable that we can't control is the weather.

It's best to treat alpenglow as part of the sunrise and sunset window, allowing 20 minutes before sunrise or after sunset when planning your shoot. A common mistake is not appreciating the potential of alpenglow, so photographers often plan their shoot for the moment the sun crosses the horizon. When alpenglow appears in the morning, we might still be setting up for sunrise. In the evening, we may be packing up after a sunset shoot. Alpenglow appears and fades quickly, so we must treat this as the moment to already be in position with a composition that will work.

Planning an alpenglow composition is also relatively simple. Light always catches features that face towards the sun, and the effect is more noticeable on large vertical surfaces like mountain peaks. Higher terrain can improve visibility of distant peaks and light, and we can use services like The Photographer's Ephemeris to predict where alpenglow will appear and choose locations with clear views in that direction.

The likelihood of alpenglow is determined by the weather forecast, and this is similar to planning for any other conditions we might hope to see on location. If the sky is clear above the horizon in the direction of the sun, alpenglow is likely to form as light travels through the atmosphere uninterrupted by cloud. However, I rarely bother to try to predict alpenglow as a separate phenomenon, and always try to be on location during the right time window if I'm already out for sunrise or sunset.



Photographing Alpenglow

There are no complex techniques or optimum settings for capturing alpenglow, though a few practices will give you a better chance of a successful photograph.

The most important factor is flexibility in your composition, since alpenglow might not appear exactly where you expect. Although we can predict the angle and surfaces that are likely to catch the light, clouds can block alpenglow and limit it to certain parts of your scene. For example, you might hope to catch it on a set of mountains, but find it only appears on one. Alpenglow will draw attention in your composition, and you may have to adjust as it appears to maintain the right balance of light and dark.

Alpenglow is also hard to spot, appearing and fading gradually in the scene. Cloud cover affects its peak intensity, so it's impossible to say at any moment whether a patch of alpenglow is about to get brighter or fade away. It's worth shooting frequently during alpenglow; don't wait for an optimum moment or you may miss it altogether. My approach is to start shooting the moment I suspect alpenglow is appearing, then not stop until the images show that it has faded away. It also helps to quickly scan through your frames, where sometimes changes are easier to spot. Usually, you don't notice the brightest moment until it's already gone.

The landscape can be quite dark during alpenglow, as it happens when the sun has not yet come up or has already set. However, it's not bright enough to create a high-contrast scene, and you'll rarely need to bracket exposures to capture the full range of light and dark in the scene. You may need a tripod to capture enough light, and it's important to check your histogram for overexposure, especially in the morning if you have been shooting the darker stages of twilight before alpenglow appears and adds more brightness to your frame.



Editing Alpenglöw

I have a theory that more unusual conditions and light are harder to edit because even subtle adjustments can make them seem unnatural and over-processed. Alpenglöw creates a gentle form of light in a scene, and a little editing can enhance its effect, but it's not a familiar sight to many people. When you start from a position of novelty, it's very easy to push it too far.

For many images, the best way to apply edits to alpenglow is with a radial mask covering most of the area you want to change. Since the effect is a gentle glow, we don't always need to use a mask covering the subject with complete precision. The main exception is when we have a distinct subject (like a mountain) against a dark background, when making the peak exactly is easier and more effective.

Alpenglow is a slight shift in colour and brightness, so its most effected by changes in white balance and brightness. I often use the Whites slider in Lightroom to add brightness, and will try different variations in white balance to find what works for the scene. Often, adding a little warmth to the white balance has a subtle but beautiful effect. The riskiest approach is using saturation to enhance the colour, which can easily look unrealistic if too much is applied.

The most effective technique for editing alpenglow can be to not adjust the area of light at all, but instead make edits to the surroundings. First, use global edits to enhance the whole image, focussing on the appearance of the alpenglow without masking it directly. Next, mask the area around the alpenglow by either inverting a radial filter or brushing features nearby, and gently lower exposure or whites while making cooling adjustments to white balance. The contrast will draw more attention to the alpenglow, but the areas outside the light may be able to withstand more editing without looking unrealistic.



Conclusion

Alpenglow is underrated, not because we don't appreciate its effect on an image, but because photographers don't always plan for it or make the most of it. Its effect in person is subtle, but it can still have a dramatic impact on a photograph, and I think it should be just as valued as aurora for its ability to transform a scene in a completely novel way.

It also has real advantages for planning, appearing at consistent times at both ends of the day.

Alpenglow is never guaranteed, but it is more likely when the conditions are clear enough for a good sunrise or sunset, so it should fit neatly into our existing plans for the light.

In a previous article, I made the case for twilight photography, and how the colour just before sunrise or just after sunset can be a more rewarding time to photograph than the direct light we often chase when the sun is low in the sky. Alpenglow always appears during civil twilight, so it works as an additional feature at a time when the landscape is already full of the richest colours of the day.

The main adjustment you need to make for more alpenglow opportunities is a simple shift in mindset, especially when shooting in the mountains. Treat 20 minutes before sunrise as the deadline for a morning shoot, aiming to be in position with composition ideas well in advance. At sunset, think of alpenglow as the encore of the show, and remain in place until the last of this additional light has faded.

Shooting alpenglow doesn't require a completely different approach, but it does reward a more conscious approach to composition. A little more discipline at the beginning and end of the day is often all it takes to be ready when it arrives.



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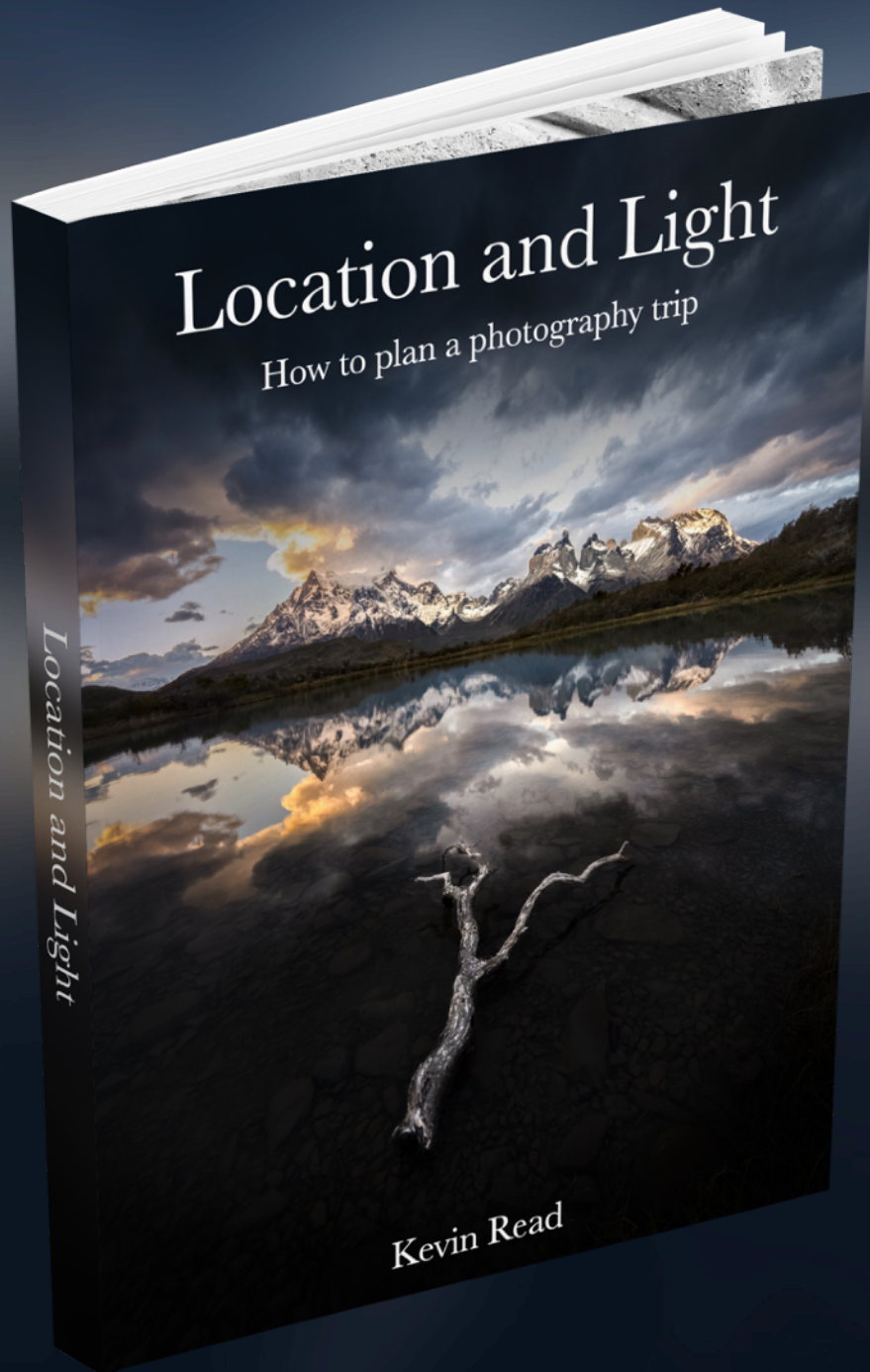
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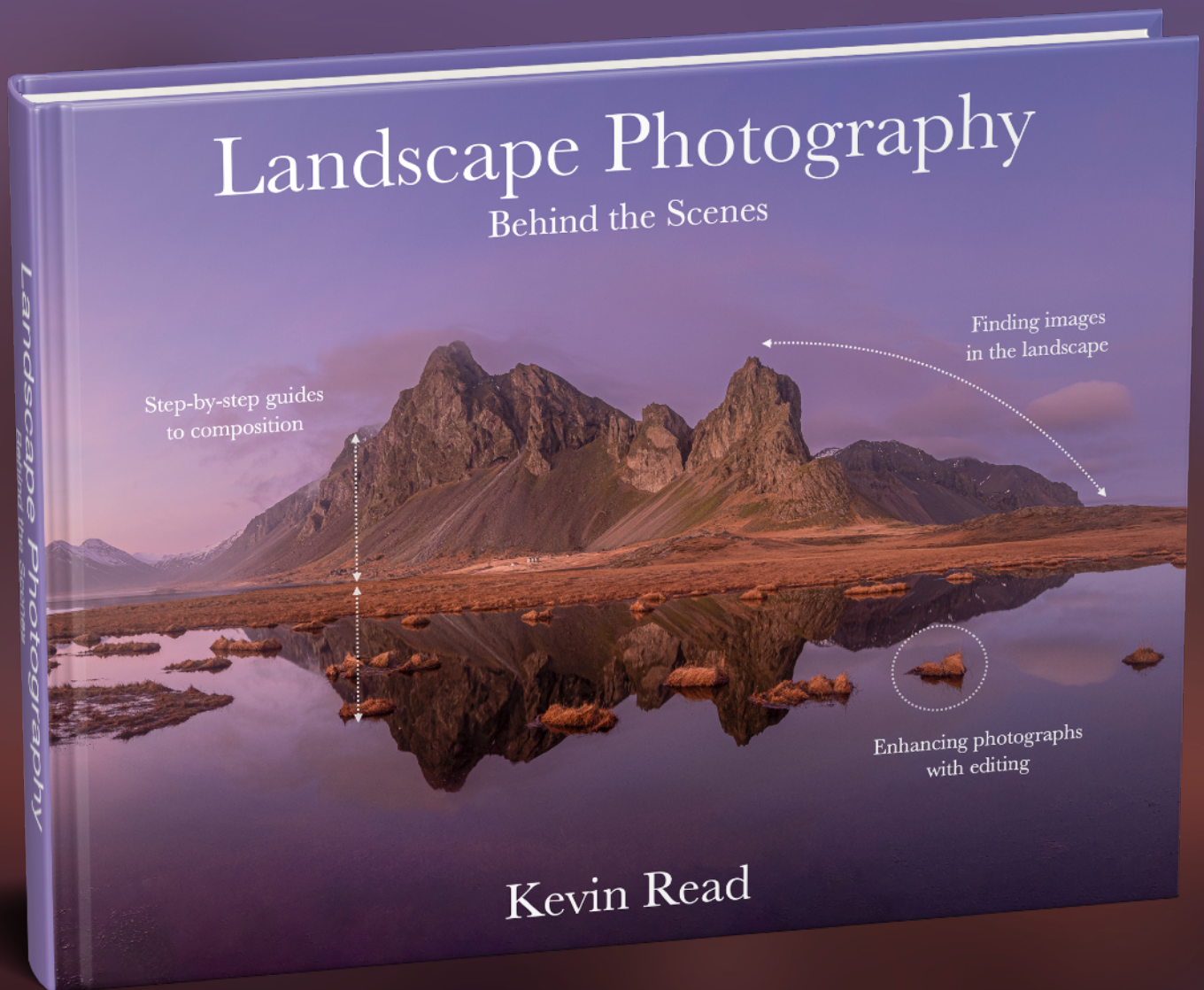


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