



In The Frame

Madeira Edition

May 2026

Fanal

Wandering Madeira's ancient forest

Behind The Scene

Capturing movement and contrast

Photography and Weather

Staying flexible in changing conditions

In The Frame

May 2026

Issue 24

Mobile Edition

Copyright © 2026 Kevin Read

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any manner without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for the use of brief quotations in a review.

To request permissions, contact the author at
kevin@shuttersafari.com

First digital edition published May 2026.

Cover art, layout and photography by Kevin Read

Thanks to Rob Hadley for images of the author

Map data from OpenStreetMap

www.openstreetmap.org/copyright

www.shuttersafari.com



Welcome

Hi. Welcome to this special Madeira Edition of In The Frame. This issue contains the usual three articles on a location, an image and a technique, but each one is inspired by my photography experiences in Madeira.

Madeira is a beautiful photography destination, with variety in its landscape and weather that changes constantly as you move around the island. There's something really exciting about visiting a place that you can drive across in a couple of hours, but which also contains so many features that you could capture new scenes for weeks.



Whenever I'm exploring a city, I always like to visit small museums and galleries, and I'm often less interested in huge national collections. Madeira feels a little like a small gallery, just the right size for you to fully investigate the place and leave with a sense of completeness. Having endless terrain to explore feels exciting, but it's somehow more relaxing when you can see the edges of things.

The features that make Madeira so much more than a simple island are its geography and climate. Sheer cliffs rise directly from the ocean, and the landscape turns from rugged coastline, to tropical forests, to rocky mountains as you climb higher and further from the sea. The landscape catches weather patterns as they flow in from the ocean, one moment battered by storms, then shining under spotlights emerging from the clouds. Madeira is a land of microclimates, and you can often change the conditions around you with a short drive to a new location.



I've spent the last few months gathering everything I've learned about Madeira into a new photography travel guide to the island. It covers around 50 photography locations, along with the travel logistics, weather patterns and landscape details that help make sense of the place.

This month in the magazine, we start with a location article from the atmospheric forest of Fanal. Next, we follow the development of an image from the sea stacks at Ribeira da Janela, which also feature on the cover of the new book. Finally, we talk about how to make plans and decisions in photography, especially when you need to react to changing weather and unusual conditions.

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

Kevin

P.S. There's also a launch discount for the new Madeira guide, in case you are considering a photography trip to the island. 20 % DISCOUNT CODE: MADEIRA2026

Madeira

Photography Travel Guide



A new photography travel guide and map, with 50 locations, travel advice and practical notes for exploring Madeira with a camera.

www.shuttersafari.com/madeira-travel-guide

On Location

Fanal | Madeira



Wandering among the fog in Madeira's ancient forests



Introduction

Around 20 million years ago, southern Europe was covered in subtropical laurel forests that spread across the hills and supported hundreds of species that have long since vanished from the continent. As the climate gradually cooled from the late Miocene onwards, and later through the Ice Ages, the areas where these forests could survive shrank, leaving only a few pockets with the mild, stable conditions they needed. One of the few remaining places is Madeira.

The island still holds the largest surviving stretch of Laurisilva, mostly in the north and northwest, where the mountains trap moisture from the Atlantic and create the perfect conditions for this ancient environment. Fanal is a small part of this wider area, yet it has the perfect mix of forest, elevation and frequent fog to create atmospheric scenes that draw photographers from around the world.

There are stunning places for photography everywhere in Madeira, but Fanal is a distinctive location. It doesn't have the wide views or rugged terrain that you find elsewhere, but it has an incredible atmosphere, with scattered trees, a simple grassy landscape, and always the chance that fog will appear and add a layer of mystery and quiet. Capturing Fanal in the fog is a special experience for many nature photographers, and the hope of getting the right conditions in this forest is constantly on your mind when travelling in Madeira.

I don't spend much time photographing woodland, and often focus on the kind of seascapes you find at Madeira's coast. For me, Fanal was a chance to explore a new subject, and I have spent days wandering the damp forest looking for compositions. This article contains some of the hundreds of pictures I've taken of these trees, and the stories behind how I found them.



Visiting Fanal

The laurel trees in Fanal are sparse, more like an open field with scattered trees than a forest with clearings between them. There are denser areas surrounding Fanal, and you can explore trails that lead deeper into the forest, but the open space is better for capturing the simple, isolated scenes that have made this area so recognisable.

Moist air flowing in from the Atlantic is pushed upwards when it reaches the steep slopes of Madeira's coast, condensing into fog as it meets the cooler temperatures at higher altitude. This effect is important for the survival of the Laurisilva, which thrives in the damp environment created by moisture flowing from the sea. It also produces much more fog among the higher parts of the island, and Fanal is often shrouded in mist even when the coast below is clear.

Most woodland images work better with a little atmosphere to separate subjects and create depth, but mist transforms Fanal. The trees themselves are interesting and the open space is a pretty scene, but a heavy covering of fog turns the landscape into a blanket of white, with mysterious shapes emerging from the background.

Many of the trees in Fanal are centuries old, and their ancient branches create incredible shapes to explore with the camera. In the right conditions, each tree seems to stand alone, creating an effect that is mysterious and beautiful, just as exciting to see in person as it is to photograph.



First Visit

The first time I visited Fanal, I had no idea how likely it was that fog would appear. I had searched for weather forecasts that might help me decide when to go, but the strange combination of temperature and humidity required is very difficult to predict, and the only real approach is just to show up and hope for the best.

Fanal lies in the mountains above Ribeira da Janela, another great photography location in Madeira, where a collection of sea stacks sits just off the coast. This was a more reliable location for sunrise, so I began the day on the beach before heading up to Fanal to check the conditions.

My first experience at Fanal was inconclusive. There was some fog among the trees, but it was thin and scattered, occasionally covering the area in patches before drifting away and reforming. It was a useful visit to understand the landscape and layout, but I wasn't sure whether I should have expected more fog or less. Were those atmospheric images I hoped to capture genuinely rare, or was this just a place where the fog came and went throughout the day?

I had a flexible schedule and plenty of time in Madeira, so I found another opportunity and returned for a second visit. This time, the mist was thick and heavy the moment I arrived, and I quickly jumped from the car to capture some images before it lifted. As it turned out, I did not need to worry, and over the course of several more sessions, I managed to spend around six or seven hours at Fanal completely surrounded by heavy fog.



Exploring the Landscape

You can find thousands of images of Fanal online and get the impression of a sprawling subtropical forest stretching across large portions of the island. In reality, Fanal is a compact location, and most photographs are captured in an area less than 500 metres across. It's large enough to offer plenty of subjects, but small enough that you can walk from one end to the other quickly.

Although the laurel trees of Fanal are the main subject, the grassy fields and mossy boulders scattered around the area are an important part of the scene. Images work in Fanal because small groups of trees are isolated by the fog, but the ground beneath provides a simple foundation, with the consistent texture and colour of an open field.

Around the edges of Fanal, where the forest becomes thicker and the ground is covered in a wider variety of ferns and other plants, you can capture more traditional woodland scenes full of shapes and patterns formed by the branches and leaves. The centre of Fanal is simple and minimal, with a few scattered boulders on a carpet of grass, and the gaps between each tree mean that the fog has a much greater effect.

In some ways, Fanal is more like a field than a forest, with cows wandering through and keeping the grass short and consistent. Occasionally they might leave something in the frame that you need to work through in editing, but they also make great subjects when they appear in the right part of a scene.



Approaching Photography

Each photography location requires its own approach, and the techniques that work in one place sometimes don't work as well in another. For many spots around Madeira, it helps to stay in place and watch the conditions change, especially on the coast, where each new wave alters the scene and reveals new ideas.

In Fanal, you need to keep moving. The fog is constantly in motion, thickening and thinning as it drifts to another part of the forest. As you explore, you soon realise that the trees are not consistently isolated from the background, and a little more mist can hide the surroundings just as a little less can reveal them.

You can walk towards and away from each subject to change how it appears through the fog, and search around each tree for different angles. The atmosphere at Fanal compresses everything into a two-dimensional shape that shifts as you study each tree from different viewpoints. Sometimes there's an optimal position where the branches separate and seem to work best, but other trees appear completely different as you move around them, allowing for more than one composition.

It's very difficult to plan a composition in such a dynamic environment, and I fell into a pattern of slow and deliberate movement that probably looked fairly pretentious or silly to anyone watching. Each loop around Fanal uncovered new shapes and patterns in the twisted branches of ancient laurel, and gradually some trees became familiar enough to help me navigate the obscured landscape.



One of the most interesting ways to approach photography in Fanal is to look for relationships between different trees



The thickness of the fog makes a huge difference to how the trees appear in the frame



The Challenges of Photography

In many ways, Fanal is a very easy location to capture. When the conditions are right, the trees naturally appear as isolated, atmospheric subjects, and the task is simply to choose the right settings and capture these shapes in the fog. However, there are a few challenges I hadn't considered.

The best foggy conditions often come with a damp atmosphere and showers of rain, and there's nowhere to shelter in the open landscape of Fanal. It's easy to spend several hours wandering among the clouds, gradually getting more soaked, and you need good waterproofs and careful handling of your gear to keep everything dry enough to use.

The main challenge was finding something original. Fanal is a great spot for creative photography, and the best approach is to wander and wait for new shapes to reveal themselves through the fog. However, many images from this location look similar, and it's a difficult place to apply your personal photography style or create a signature look.

I was lucky to revisit Fanal several times, giving me the chance to study other images in between sessions for new ideas. I found that whenever I thought I'd found an original composition or unusually shaped tree, plenty of other photographers had discovered it before me. Finding something genuinely new in a relatively small area was always a challenge, and part of the reason I kept wanting to return.



Environmental Issues

When I arrived in Madeira in 2023, wildfires were burning across parts of the island, including areas of the west and north coast, and access to some landscapes was restricted. At Ribeira da Janela, the sky behind the sea stacks was orange with smoke, and ash was falling onto the beach. Fanal itself appears to have escaped the worst of those fires, but the experience made the fragility of the landscape impossible to ignore.

Although Fanal appears to have avoided serious fire damage so far, there are still threats to this fragile environment. The Laurisilva survived in Madeira because the island kept the mild, humid conditions these forests need, but climate change now threatens that balance in a different way, increasing pressure from heat, drought and wildfire. Wildfires are becoming more common across Europe, and it would only take a single incident in the wrong conditions to lose this place.

On location, it's important to stay on the paths and avoid damaging the trees of Fanal. Fortunately, there are thousands of angles to explore, and it's easy to move around and create photographs without touching the trees, but it is a busy area now and somewhere you need to think carefully about where to stand as well as what to capture.

In the last few years, access to some of Madeira's classified trails and protected natural areas has become more managed, with fees, booking systems and clearer restrictions in sensitive places. At Fanal, this means photographers should expect more fences, marked paths and limits on where they can wander than in the past. It changes the experience slightly, but the reason is clear: this is a fragile place, and the pressure from visitors has become too great to leave it completely open.



Conclusion

Fanal is one of those distinctive locations that you can recognise from almost any image, and the unique atmosphere of this place is just as special in person as it is in photographs. Its position on the cliffs above the Atlantic Ocean is ideal for the creation of fog, resulting in a scene you could photograph and rediscover for days.

Wandering among the fog is a strange and beautiful experience, like being in a closed room that constantly shifts and moves around you. Trees appear through the mist, the air is often close to silent, and new subjects form as you move around the forest. Occasionally you might bump into a cow or another visitor, but there's a real feeling of isolation when the fog thickens at Fanal.

Locations where great compositions are possible, but not immediately obvious, make the best places for photography. A few particular trees have become favourites, and it's almost a surprise to come across these familiar shapes when they are revealed through the mist. There are so many textures and patterns to capture that you can still be creative and original within the simple arrangements of green and white shapes.

Fanal seems to get better the more you visit. You begin to recognise particular trees, learn the shape of the open ground, and develop an instinct for where you are even when the fog reduces your view to a few metres in any direction. Individual images from Fanal can look similar, but together they become stronger: a set of small variations on the same unusual and quiet place.

Behind the Scene

Ribeira da Janela | Madeira



How to capture a high contrast scene with movement



On Location

The beach at Ribeira de Janela is one of the most interesting places to photograph in Madeira. The sea stacks off the coast make brilliant subjects, and you can move around the shore to change how they appear and interact as a group. The pebble beach provides an endless set of foregrounds that you can adjust using different focal lengths and positions, and together they form the perfect set of features for developing your composition, timing and exposure.

The structure of a foreground leading towards a main subject is one of the most common blueprints for a landscape photography composition. However, it can be difficult to get these images right because even small changes to your position or focal length have a huge impact on the balance of the photograph.

In this case, capturing the scene was even more challenging because the sky was bright and the foreground was constantly changing as waves washed against the shore. I needed to make sure I had detail in the bright sky, but also preserve detail in the dark rocks and flowing water that would appear in the foreground.

This is the story of how to deal with movement and contrast in a photograph, and how a simple scene can be surprisingly difficult to capture. We'll explore a technique for photographing dynamic scenes like this, before looking at how to edit the image so it keeps a natural balance between the bright sky and dark foreground.



Capture One

Sunrise is perhaps the best time to visit Ribeira de Janela, as the light appears over the ocean and fills the sky with colour. However, the sun doesn't catch the front of the sea stacks from the angle I wanted to photograph them, so morning light introduces very high contrast on the beach, with dark rocks and a bright sky.

High-contrast scenes can often be easy to handle in digital photography. Modern cameras have a very high dynamic range, which can capture detail in both the bright and dark parts of most photographs. If the contrast is too high, we can take multiple images at different exposures, and blend them in software to create a high dynamic range (HDR) image, combining details from across the scene.

However, movement and high contrast together make this process more difficult. This scene at Ribeira de Janela needed more than one exposure to capture all the detail in the foreground and the sky, but the movement of the water meant that every frame I took would be different. HDR processing works best when the frames closely match, so detail from the darker and brighter exposures can be combined into a single photograph with full detail.

Automatic exposure blending can handle a few differences in the component frames, but my light and dark images would be too different, as the flowing water changed the foreground between shots. I'd need to take separate images exposed for the sky and the foreground and blend them manually in software.



Capture Two

When we take multiple exposures for blending, we usually try to take at least three images in quick succession to capture a dark, medium and bright version of the scene. Camera bracketing makes this easy by automatically changing the exposure between frames, and allows us to quickly take the different exposures and minimise how much the scene changes between shots.

However, with so much movement in the foreground, we know the dark and light frames won't match because the waves will be in different positions, so we don't need to worry about keeping a short gap between frames.

Usually, we'd want to keep the time between frames to no more than a few seconds, but manual blending gives us the flexibility to combine shots taken minutes apart.

This option is helpful for a difficult shot like this. It means that we can take our time getting a good exposure of the sky, carefully adjusting the settings to make sure that we've captured every detail. We can set our focus for sharpness in the background, and check the histogram to make sure that no area is too bright.

Switching to the foreground, we can adjust our settings and focus, and wait for a good wave to appear. It doesn't matter if a wave doesn't come immediately, and we can take multiple foreground shots knowing that we'll choose the best one later.

Using this process, we can concentrate on the foreground, taking multiple shots until the water falls in the right place. Occasionally, we can adjust settings and focus to capture a shot of the sky, updating our background image as the clouds and light gradually change. Without the pressure to capture the three HDR frames as close together as possible, we can capture the full scene in fewer frames and take care over the settings.



Edit One

At Ribeira de Janela, I waited in position, capturing different options as waves flowed up the beach and surrounded the pebbles in a carpet of white foam. Every so often, I would adjust my settings and capture a single shot of the sky to ensure I had something to blend with my foreground, but most of my time could be spent finding the right wave.

Later in editing, I chose the foreground frame above, where a large wave had covered most of the rocks in front of me, separating them into a neat arrangement that I thought would work as a foreground. I planned to crop away the bottom of the frame, which was still dark in areas the waves hadn't reached, and allow the white area covered by the wave to lead us into the scene.

My image was bright because I wanted to capture detail in the foreground, and I edited the scene to recover the textures in the rocks and sea stacks. Brightening parts of the foreground also revealed some beautiful patterns in the rocks and would make the finished photograph more interesting.

I also edited the sky, bringing back details and checking that the white balance, contrast, and textures looked right. This left a huge white smudge where the photograph was overexposed, just as we would expect from a frame where the settings were chosen for the dark foreground.

I could have ignored the sky in this shot, but getting the whole image right would help later in blending, and I focused on the top left corner to guide the sky edits.



Edit Two

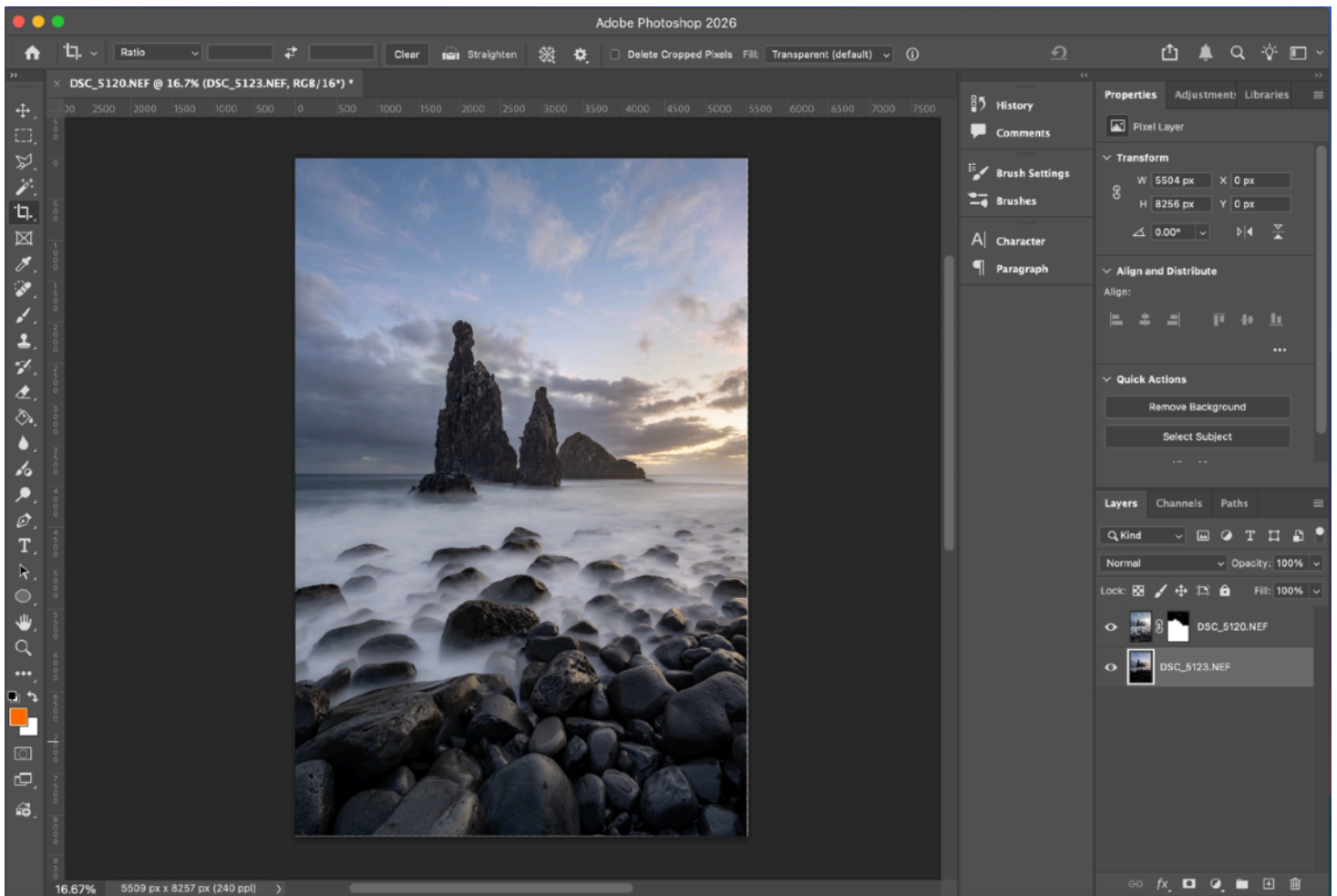
On location, I had taken multiple foreground shots with a brighter exposure, then one for the sky with a darker exposure. After I had selected my bright foreground image, I chose the nearest dark image in the set, to make sure that there was minimal movement in the sky between my two frames.

The trick to this technique is to copy all the edits from the foreground shot and apply them to the sky shot. Next, we increase the exposure of the dark image by the precise exposure difference between the two frames. In this case, my bright image was taken at 10 seconds and my dark image was taken at 0.8 seconds, which is a difference of about 3.64 stops because each extra stop doubles the amount of light.

Copying the edits means that both frames have been processed in the same way. Increasing the exposure of the dark image by 3.64 stops offsets the difference in camera settings. So the tones in the resulting images (2 and 3) will match, and the only differences come from the limitations of the camera.

In the processed dark image (2), we see a beautifully detailed sky with colour in the bright areas, but the foreground and sea stacks look over-processed and strange. This is because the raw frame has no detail in the deep shadows, so the extreme changes to brightness produce weird textures, particularly in the sea stacks.

In the processed bright image (3), there is good detail and shadow in the foreground, along with a nice pattern in the wave, but also a blown-out portion of the sky. This happens because that bright patch was beyond the dynamic range of the sensor, so no detail was collected. Between them, we have the full scene.



Edit Three

The next stage is to blend the best parts of each frame to complete the photograph.

I opened both images as layers in Photoshop, and used the Auto-Align feature to make sure that the frames were perfectly lined up. Although I took the images only seconds apart and on a tripod, it's important that anything that touches the sky matches across the frames, and it's easy for a tripod to move slightly on an exposed beach.

To combine the images, I added a layer mask over the top image, which contained my finished foreground, and painted through the sky to reveal the layer below. This is easiest with the Brush tool, which gives the most control at the points where the two images combine, around the horizon and sea stacks.

This is the part of the process where my approach to settings in the previous stage becomes important.

Since I applied the same settings to both frames, it doesn't matter if I paint over the lines a little where the sky meets the sea stacks and ocean. If my mask reveals a little too much of the layer below, the features are similar enough that it's very difficult to spot the edge.

If I hadn't copied the settings across the images, the sea stacks in each frame would look too different, and any brush strokes that cut into them would be obvious.



Editing Approach

It's important to ask ourselves in complex edits like this whether we have moved too far from the reality of the scene. I think it helps to consider what we've actually done to create this image, and to decide whether this is a technique you might want to use.

Since the sky was too bright for the dark foreground, I needed to find a way to fit the full range of brightness in the scene into what the camera could record.

One way to do this is to buy a more expensive camera, as they often have more dynamic range. We certainly wouldn't consider that to be cheating, even if it is a big decision.

Another option is to use a graduated neutral density filter, which can darken parts of an image and lower the dynamic range of a scene. Applying filters is very common in photography, and even people who dislike any form of editing often consider a neutral density filter to be a reasonable accessory.

This technique uses a darker exposure of the sky to create a final image with more dynamic range than the camera could capture in a single frame. With a more advanced sensor, we wouldn't need to do it, but this software trick can give your camera enough dynamic range to capture all the detail in the scene, not the more limited range that the sensor can detect.

However, it does come very close to a sky replacement, which I don't like to use in published images because it is too detached from the reality of the moment. Not everyone feels that way, and our editing limits are a personal choice. For me, this image just falls within my acceptable range, since the camera saw that foreground and that sky at about the same time, even if it couldn't pick up all the detail at once.



Conclusion

The process of capturing multiple exposures and blending them manually in software is not as difficult or time-consuming as it sounds. I've explained the approach in detail to help you apply it to your own high-contrast and high-movement scenes. However, once you understand the principles and what your sensor is recording, each step is quick and easy.

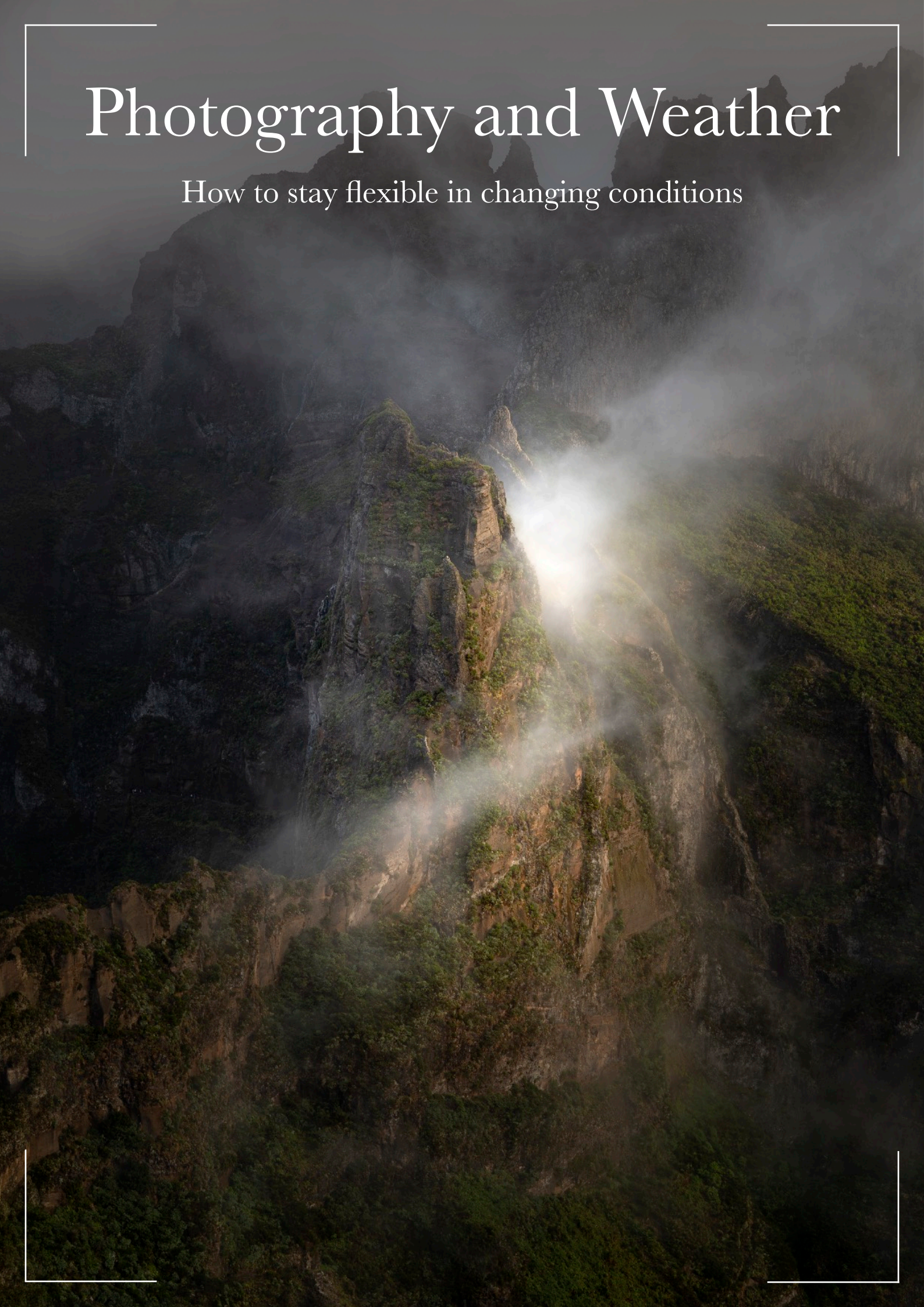
There are real advantages to using this approach compared with automatic bracketing and blending. You only need to capture one sky exposure for several attempts at the foreground, and that can save storage and processing time when you are trying to time your shot for the perfect wave. You also only need to edit one raw image. Once the foreground frame is complete, copying the settings and adjusting the exposure for the sky is very easy.

This technique doesn't work for every scene. I could use it on this image because the bright sky is fully separated from the moving part of the image, which is the water. When it came to blending the frames, I could easily paint through the sky without needing to work around areas where the water had changed position. If the waves had been crashing into the bright areas, the blend would have been much more tricky.

However, when this approach does work, the result is good detail throughout the image. All areas are properly exposed, and they are blended into a final photograph that uses the correct exposure for each part of the scene. You can practise this technique on any scene with a dark foreground and bright sky, and it is a useful method for moments like this when there are no other ways to capture the scene.

Photography and Weather

How to stay flexible in changing conditions





Introduction

Sometimes the most important techniques for photography are not about camera settings or editing tools, but about how we plan and make decisions in the field. This is especially true in Madeira, because its unusual terrain and exposed position in the ocean have a dramatic effect on how the weather behaves. Whatever our level of skill in photography, understanding the conditions can sometimes have the biggest impact on our images.

There are patterns in the weather wherever we travel. Some places have consistent conditions, and we might expect that the weather in the morning is a good indication of what might happen in the afternoon. Other locations have more variety, with less accurate forecasts and a higher likelihood that we'll experience lots of different weather in a single day.

Madeira is one of those photography destinations where the weather is highly changeable and difficult to forecast. There are some long-term patterns, such as the southern shores being generally more sunny and calm than the rugged coastline of the north. However, most days out with the camera are filled with uncertainty and excitement, where anything could happen at almost any time of day.

Adapting our approach to the local weather patterns makes it more likely that we'll find locations that suit the conditions. It also helps us decide when to give up on a shoot, and when to stick around and wait for the conditions to change. This article is about how to build weather planning and adaptation into your photography, and make better decisions about where to go and when.



Location and Light

Many photographers want to find great locations to shoot. Every photograph has to be made somewhere, and we want to have the best chance of capturing some great images when we get there. However, it's just as important to choose a location that suits the conditions. Even a great photography spot can fail completely if the weather doesn't match the features, whereas an uninspiring scene can suddenly transform in the right light.

Some kinds of light and weather work almost anywhere. Photographers get up early for sunrise or stay out all night to watch the northern lights because these conditions can elevate most images. A more flexible approach is to learn how to make the most of any conditions, and this will allow you to capture images in more places, and make better use of any time you have to explore with the camera.

Once you start thinking in this way, you see photography locations differently. It's not just about having a list of favourite places you want to go, but thinking about what each one will look like when you arrive. Your list of potential places to visit becomes more sophisticated as you add times of day and weather conditions that you want to experience at each one. In Madeira, this might be as simple as fog at Fanal or sunrise over Ponta de São Lourenço, but we can consider the best conditions at any location on our list.

The challenge then becomes working out how to structure your days and move around so that you can make the best use of the location and light for each shoot. To do that well, we need to consider planning, decision-making, and how they interact with the weather.



Weather Forecasts

Most days out with the camera begin with the weather forecast. We might have a great sunrise location in mind if the weather is clear, and backup plans for rain or cloud during the day. However, understanding the general behaviour of weather at your location can improve your planning and help you find better opportunities.

Weather forecasts tell us if a day will be sunny, cloudy, windy, hot or cold. But they also tell us about variation. Days when the forecast shows completely clear skies from sunrise to sunset are unlikely to suddenly turn to rain, but predictions of 50% cloud cover each hour can lead to a lot more changes. In a place like Madeira, that amount of variation can matter more than the headline forecast.

It's easy to miss this nuance when checking the weather, especially because many forecasts are broken into hour-long chunks. Small rainstorms moving quickly through an area look roughly the same on a forecast as persistent rain from thick cloud overhead, but they produce very different light on the ground.

Satellite and map-based views can often be better for spotting variability in the weather, even if you don't use them for accurate predictions. They show you how much the conditions will change through the size of rainclouds and the pattern of cloud cover, and these are often the factors that will affect your plans the most.



Planning

When planning a photography trip, it helps to combine information from the forecast with a wider understanding of how the weather generally behaves at your destination.

Many parts of Iceland experience a lot of wind and cloud, and the weather there can be persistent across a whole region. The forecast sometimes shows the same weather for hours, or perhaps days, at a time, so the best approach is often to choose a group of locations that are likely to work in the same conditions.

Madeira has a lot of variety in its weather and is also fairly small, so it's better to find a group of locations that work in different conditions so that you can move between them. Since things often change and the forecast is less consistent and reliable, building different options into the day gives you the chance to be flexible.

This approach works better when you have done more research so that you fully understand each location before you set out. Even spending 30 minutes moving between nearby places will slow you down and limit opportunities, so researching each location and the weather that might work there can help you plan sensible options in advance.

Most daily photography plans include some flexibility and a good list of potential places to go. However, knowing the general trends in the weather, not just the daily forecast, can help you prepare for frequent movement between spots or a slower approach where you stay longer in each place.



Decision Making

Planning gives us options, but the real test comes once we are out exploring. At that point, it matters less where we intended to go, and more whether the conditions work when we arrive.

The most difficult choice in photography is whether to stay where you are when the conditions aren't right, or move on to a new place and hope for something better. Even the most experienced photographers can struggle when deciding whether to wait longer or give up while hoping that light will break through onto a scene.

There's no certain way to make the right call, but we can use weather trends and daily variability to improve the decisions we make. Our planning and research also affect our choices and opportunities when we are deciding where we might go next to take advantage of the conditions.

If the forecast is stable and your destination is known for persistent weather, you should lean towards moving when the weather doesn't work at your current location. Waiting may not change much, so it often makes sense to look for a location that suits the conditions you already have.

If it's a day with high variability in a place known for changeable weather, waiting longer can be the more effective approach, especially if the location has several compositions and the scene is visibly changing.



Microclimates

Another important factor to consider when structuring a day of photography is the possibility of microclimates. Some destinations can have radically different weather in places that are relatively close together, and moving a short distance can be enough to change the conditions completely.

Microclimates often form around extreme terrain, and places with high mountains or an exposed ocean location, like Madeira, can experience large changes in weather over short distances. The Dolomites can behave in a similar way, and moving to a new valley often reveals completely different weather from the place you just left.

Microclimates make the decision to move more complicated. If you encounter fog, it can be tempting to head towards a location that seems better suited to those conditions, such as a forest. However, the fog may be localised, and by moving away you may lose that weather altogether.

Microclimates mean that trying to move to a location that better suits the current weather can fail, but they also make waiting more risky. Even on a day with very changeable conditions, you can get stuck in a valley that remains covered in cloud as the weather clings to the landscape around you.

Exploring a destination with microclimates often benefits from a testing approach, where you move quickly between several locations and then stop once you find somewhere that seems to work. Movement can be more productive in these landscapes, but only if it is balanced with the patience to stop when the right combination of location and light appears. The aim is not to adjust without a plan, but to have several researched options without being too attached to what you expect to find when you arrive.



Creativity and Changing Subjects

Before deciding to leave a place, it is worth asking yourself whether the conditions are wrong for the location, or only wrong for the image you expected to make. A good way to become a more flexible photographer can be to persist in places that don't initially seem to work, until you find a different composition that does.

To take a more creative approach, we might switch focal lengths and look for smaller details in places where we expected wider views. We can explore black and white images, focus on textures, or look for new subjects that we'd usually ignore.

Improvement of any kind often comes with some kind of resistance, and being disappointed with the weather can sometimes be an opportunity to grow.

There are a few different factors I consider when trying to decide whether to look for creative options or move on because of the weather. An important one is how much energy and enthusiasm I have that day. Learning something new always requires effort, but sometimes it feels much harder than at other times.

Another important consideration is the opportunity cost of the time spent exploring new ideas. The disadvantage of experimenting and learning is that you can't be sure of getting any good images from the process, and it's more of an investment in your development than a search for a great photograph. If I'm travelling in a new place without much time to explore, I might focus more on capturing reliable, well-researched locations in good conditions than gambling on unusual ideas.

Working with the weather and making good decisions about your movement can help you find the right combination of subjects and conditions, and this is usually the most rewarding way to both shoot and learn. I don't recommend deliberately seeking out difficult weather in unsuitable locations. However, reminding yourself of the option to stay and persevere can often lead to new discoveries, and you may be more proud of the results when they work.



Conclusion

The challenge with making decisions on a photography trip is that we are always working with incomplete information. Forecasts can help, research can give us options, and experience can improve our judgement, but we still have to make choices without knowing exactly what will happen next. Sometimes we stay too long in a place that never improves, and sometimes we leave just before the light breaks through.

This isn't something we can fully solve, and the most experienced photographers get these decisions wrong a lot of the time. Photography is full of judgement calls, and there is rarely a clear answer in the moment. The most useful approach is to review your choices later, ask whether you missed anything important, and try to improve your decisions next time. Sometimes the lesson is simply that you were unlucky.

We should also see uncertainty in photography as part of the fun. If every location behaved exactly as expected, and every forecast was correct, there would be less room for spontaneity and creativity. I like to use research to improve my chances of success, but it's important to know when to let go and accept that many things will be out of our control.

In places like Madeira, research, planning and acceptance can be more valuable than many of the photography skills we usually talk about. The weather moves constantly across the island and our plans need to leave space for the unexpected. We won't always make the right decision, but by understanding the conditions and building more flexibility into our photography, we give ourselves a better chance of being in the right place when the light appears.



Thanks for Reading

I hope you liked this issue of In The Frame, and I'd love to hear any feedback or ideas for what the magazine might cover in the future. If you'd like to support this project and help me continue to write about travel and photography, there are a few ways you can contribute.

Share: Help me grow an audience for In The Frame by sharing the magazine with other photographers.

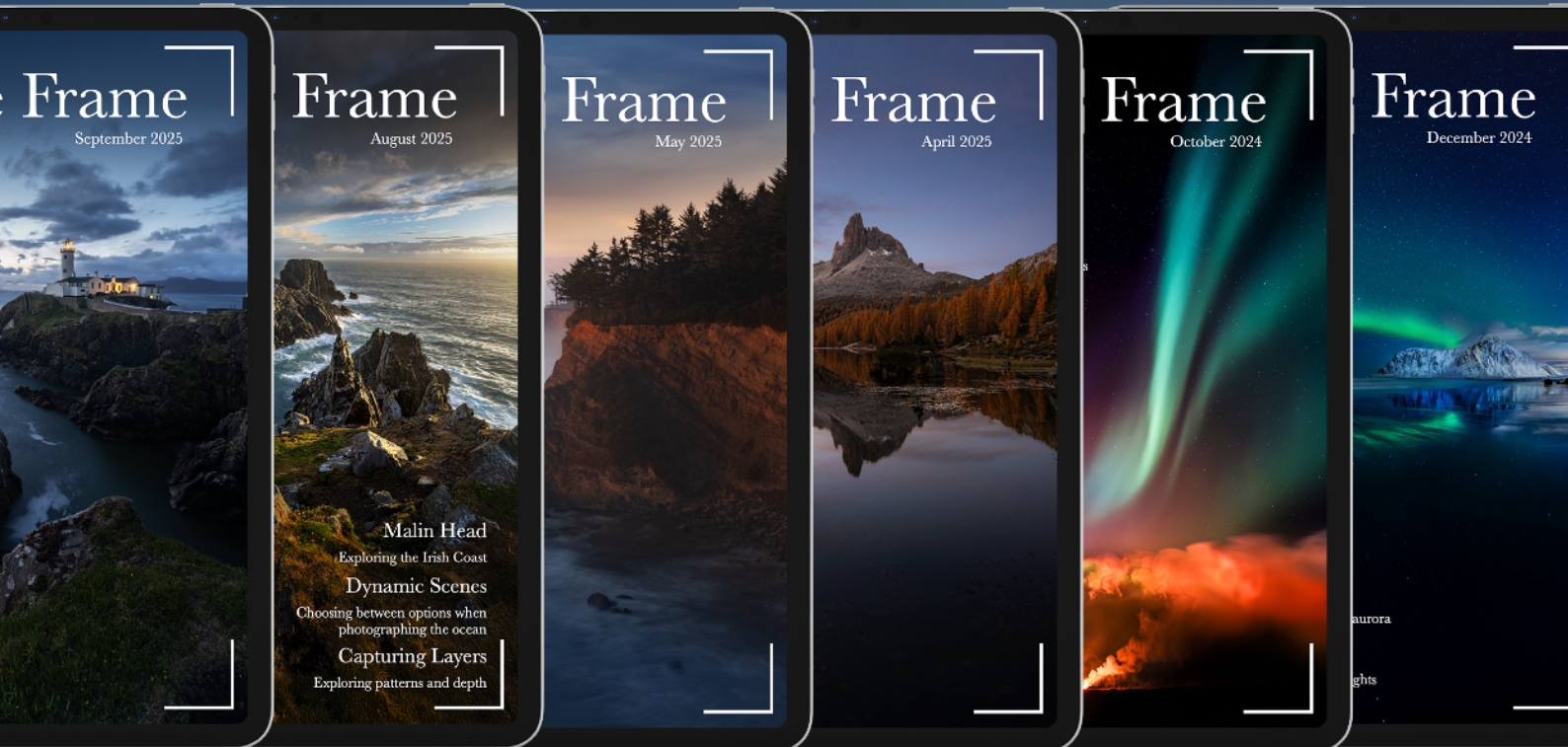
Support: I don't want to fill the magazine with adverts and distractions, so donations help me to cover production costs and keep the content honest and useful.

www.shuttersafari.com/in-the-frame#support

Shop: Check out my website for my guidebooks on photography and travel.

In The Frame

The Complete Collection



Discover more than 600 pages of travel and photography advice with the complete collection of *In The Frame*. The bundle includes every issue of the magazine ever released

Every purchase supports the project and helps me keep new issues free and independent.

www.shuttersafari.com/in-the-frame/previous-issues

Shutter Safari

Photography Travel Guides



Planning a photography trip can take a lot of research, and the information you need is often scattered across countless blogs and websites.

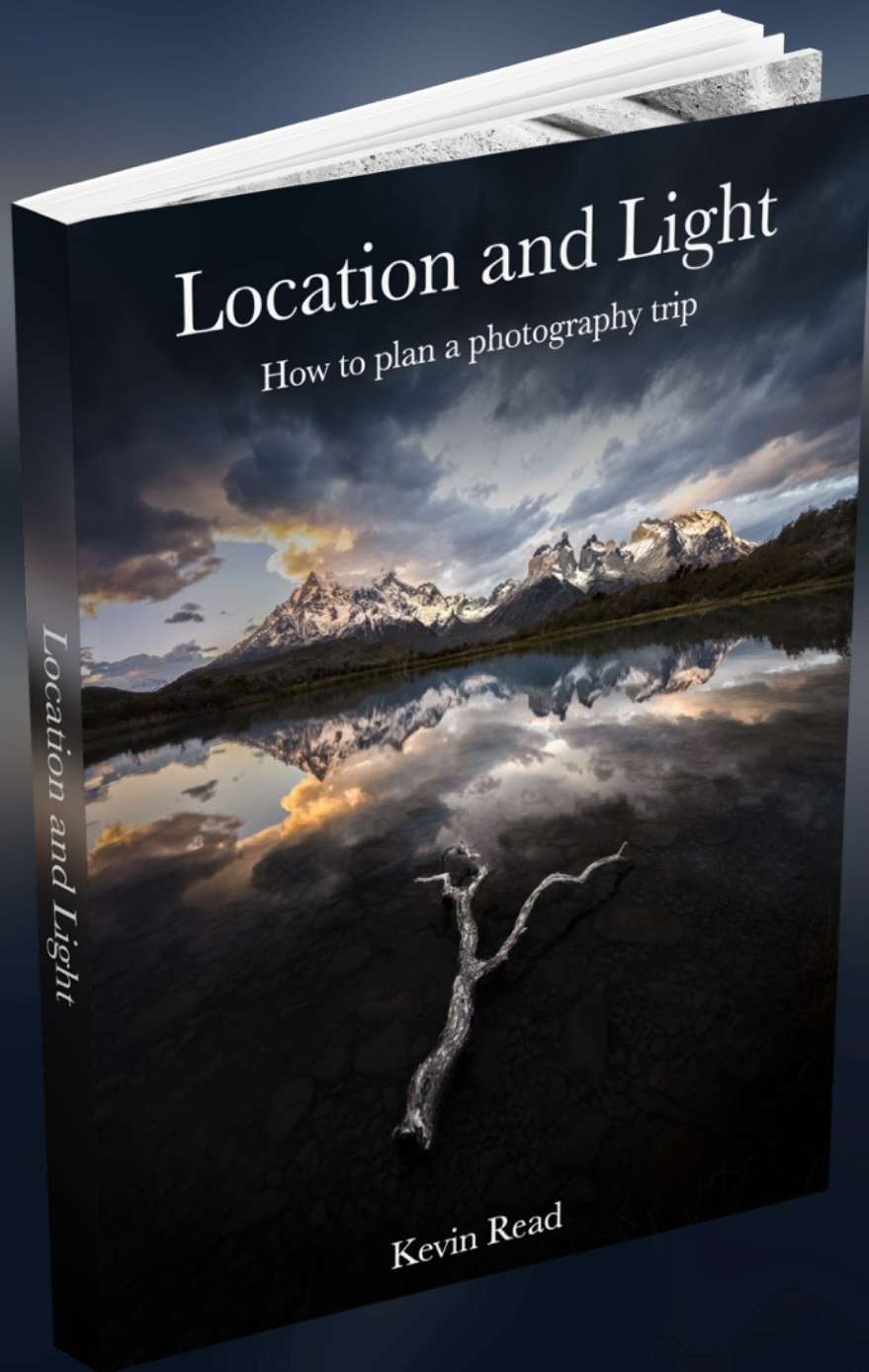
Photography Travel Guides put everything in one place, with structured information to help you plan both your journey and your photography.

I created these books from first-hand experience travelling with my camera to over fifty countries. Each guide combines travel and photography advice, so you can spend less time planning and more time shooting.

www.shuttersafari.com/photography-travel-guides

Location and Light

How to plan a photography trip

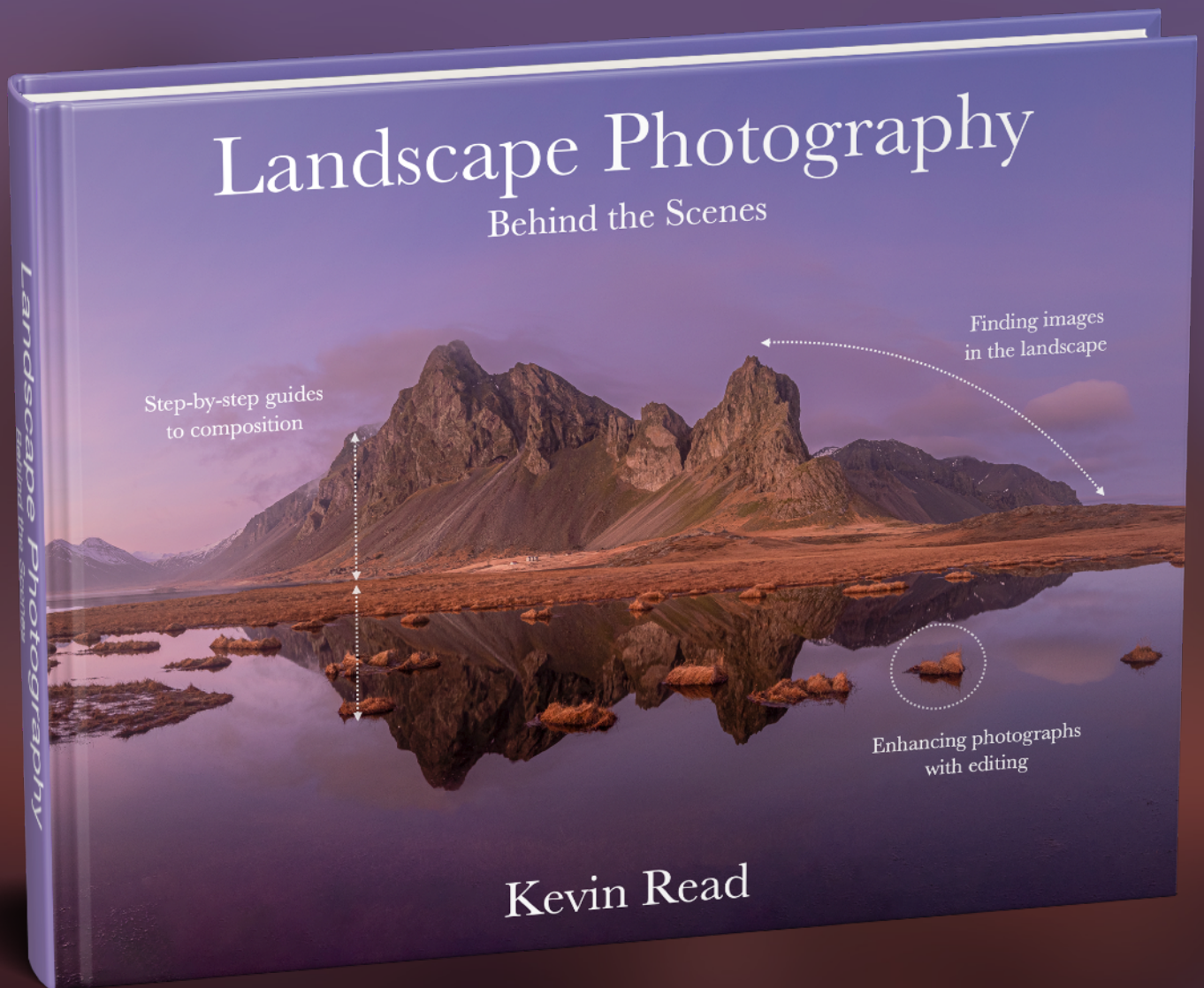


The ultimate guide to finding locations, predicting the light and getting the most from your photography adventures

www.shuttersafari.com/location-and-light

Landscape Photography

Behind the Scenes



My ebook on landscape photography takes a new approach to teaching the skills needed to compose, edit, and develop your own photographic style.

It follows the stories of twenty images from location to final edit, exploring how each was created and what they reveal about building an image.

It's a practical, behind-the-scenes look at landscape photography, built around real examples, mistakes, and decisions made in the field.

www.shuttersafari.com/behind-the-scenes