

Notes on light in Landscapes

Front light. The light source shines on the object as seen by the photographer. So the light source is more or less behind the photographer. Images may tend to appear flat.



Side light. The light source shines on the object from the side. So the light source, object and photographer more or less form a right angle. Images may appear to have depth.



Back light. The light source is behind the object. So the object is more or less between the light source and the photographer. The photographer is shooting into the sun. This is good for silhouettes. Dramatic effects may be achieved with the sun low to the horizon but out of the frame of the shot, for example in forests, canyons etc. Be wary that lens flare is not excessive.







Soft light. This is the light of overcast skies but can be evident in some full shaded places. Forests are places in which benefit is gained by shooting on dull and/or foggy days. Shadows are virtually non-existent. (Forests are difficult to photograph in bright midday sun, “that’s because they are already a chaotic place with patches of bright light and dark shadows created as the light pierces through the treetop canopies.” Australian Photography August 2016 p.64)



Midday light. At midday the light is strongest and shadows deepest so contrast is great. Avoid glare. Drama may not be achieved by light so concentrate on composition, sharpness and clarity. Beach scenes (with water) may be best captured at midday. The high contrast may be used to effect by conversion to black and white.



Reflected light. In canyons, gorges or between buildings light may be bounced off walls onto the subject. “It is soft and often drapes the scene with colour and warmth.” (A P Aug. 2016 p. 66)

In the dark. Modern cameras are capable of capturing light where there appears to be none. Work out composition while it is still light. Use a high ISO, but be aware that the higher the ISO the more noise you will get. Use a tripod.

You may not always achieve the effect you want. It takes patience and persistence and maybe a return to the location a number of times.

