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Vol. 38 - No. 2

REVIEW

CANON RF
45MM F/1.2
STM LENS

TIPS AND TECHS

ASTRONOMICAL
EVENTS IN
2026 & HOW
TO PHOTOGRAPH
THEM

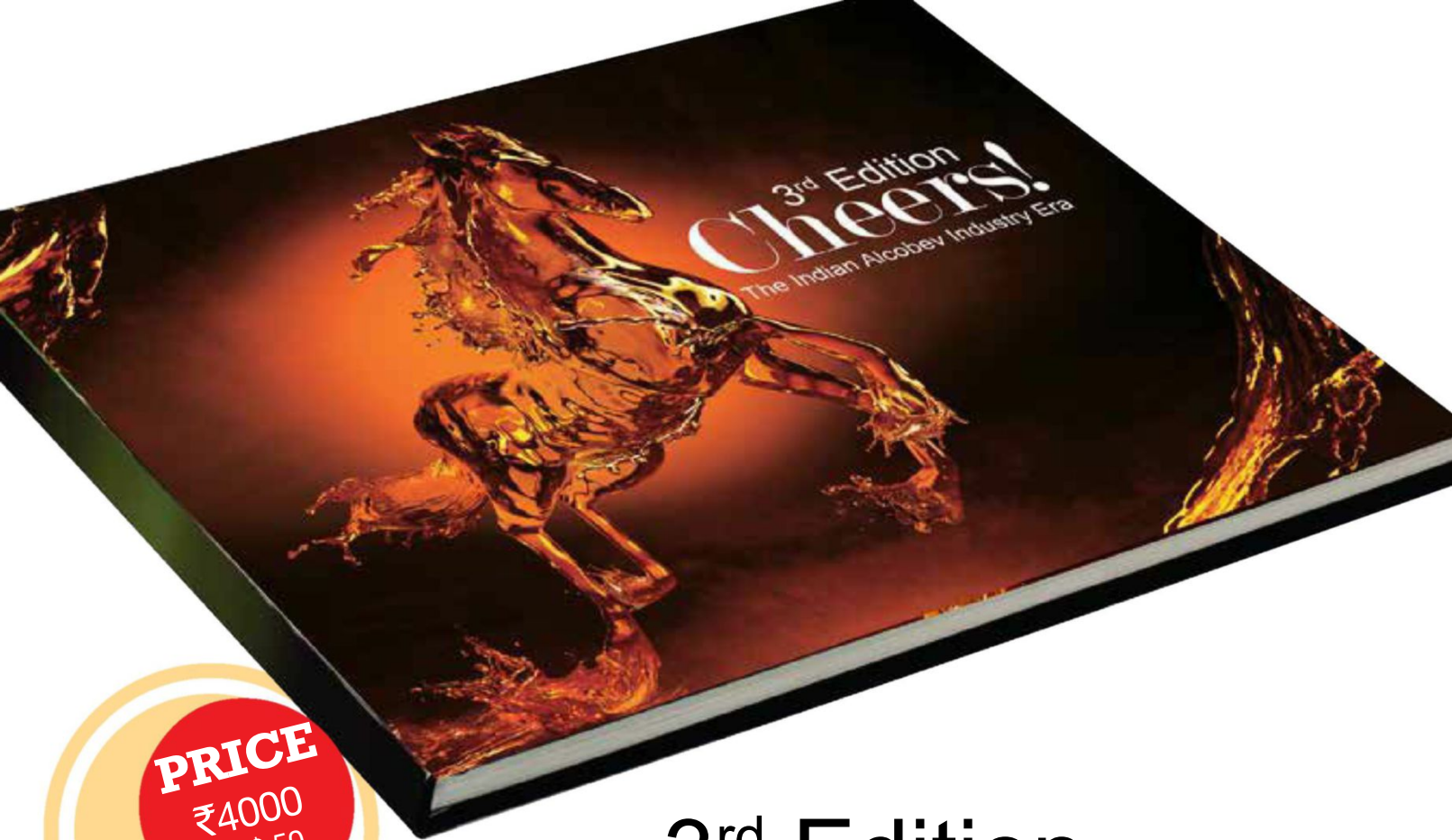
ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY
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HOW TO
CAPTURE
DEEP-SPACE
OBJECTS WITH
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PRO-PROFILE

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- Marsel van Oosten



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Photographing the Night Sky

Astrophotography is perhaps the purest reminder that photography is not merely about capturing what we see - it is about revealing what time, patience and curiosity allow us to witness. In an era driven by speed and instant gratification, pointing a lens toward the night sky becomes a deliberate act of resistance. It demands stillness. It rewards preparation. And above all, it reconnects us with a scale far beyond human urgency.

In this issue we've also featured a conversation with the renowned Marsel van Oosten — who underscores a powerful truth. That the night sky is not a separate genre, it is merely an extension of landscape storytelling. Astrophotography is less about chasing settings and more about cultivating patience.

The celestial calendar of 2026 offers photographers a rare invitation. Events like meteor showers, planetary gatherings and dark-sky windows that reward those willing to prepare.

We've also featured an article on Deep-space astrophotography, which pushes this philosophy even further. Honestly, astrophotography is an exercise in perspective. In my opinion it's a vast universe, where a photographer becomes both observer and interpreter. The result is more than an image—it feels like a reminder that photography, at its best, invites us to slow down, look upward and rediscover wonder. Something that more of us should do even in Day-to-Day Life.

Bhavya Desai

Bhavya Desai

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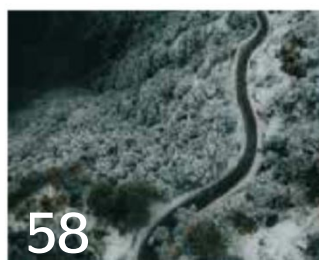


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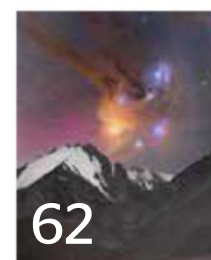
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LETTERS TO EDITOR

Readers' Comments and Suggestions...

Send your letters at apindia.feedback@gmail.com



Dear Sir,

I read the review of the Sigma 17–40mm F1.8 DC lens and really enjoyed it. It was clear, well-structured, and focused on the key points. Great review! I just wanted to say that the magazine is doing an excellent job.

**Regs,
Techno Heatlh**

Hi,

Thanks a lot for your kind words and also appreciating the work that we do. We always strive to do the best for our readers and also the viewers and we are happy to received feedback like yours.



Dear Sir,

I've started using the Nikon Z5 II and I'm finding that it has some focusing issues. Are you experiencing the same?

**Regs,
Kamal Yadav**

Dear Kamal,

In the review unit we used, we didn't experience any issues like this. The focusing was fine. Are there any specific instances where you are having this problem? You could also check the lens that you use. Focusing depends a lot on the lens rather than the camera body.



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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Hello Sir,

I currently have three phone options — (a) OnePlus 13, (b) iQOO 13, and (c) Xiaomi 15 — and my main priorities are:

Camera: Both front and rear cameras should be good. Photos should maintain strong detail. Portrait images should be impressive. Camera performance should be consistent in most situations. Video quality and detail should also be good.
Network Stability: The network should remain consistent. Especially across different areas, the phone should maintain good and stable network performance.

Speakers & Microphone: Output Speakers are an important factor for me. Speaker output should be clear, with good mids and lows, and a slight bass feel. The microphone quality should be good for calling.

Please suggest which phone I should go for?

**Regs,
Tech Myths**

Hi,

It's been a while that I've received such a long and detailed letter/question. And as big as your question is the answer is unfortunately pretty short since you need an overall performer. In this case the OP 13 is better for what you are looking for. Overall, it has a more consistent camera performance and overall output, which is well suited for what you are looking for.





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HIPA Announces Theme For 15th Edition - Family

The Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Award (HIPA) has announced “Family” as the main theme for its Fifteenth season competition, which launched on 13 January 2026 and will run until 31 May 2026.

This season includes five main categories: Family, Sports Photography, General (Black & White and Colour), Portfolio (Story-Telling), and a new category titled *Dreams Through AI*. Submissions must be made through HIPA's official website, www.hipa.ae, by 11:59 pm (UAE time) on 31 May 2026.

According to HIPA Secretary General Ali Bin Thalith, the Family theme aligns with the UAE leadership's designation of 2026 as the “Year of the Family”, highlighting the role of family in social stability, cohesion and quality of life. The theme is open to broad interpretation,

encouraging photographers to explore family both in its human sense and as a wider concept of connection and belonging.



The Sports Photography category continues to focus on capturing athletic performance and emotion, while the General category offers creative freedom across black and white and colour photography. The Portfolio category invites photographers to present a cohesive visual story through a series of images.

The newly introduced “*Dreams Through AI*” category combines traditional photography with artificial intelligence. Participants are required to submit an original photograph alongside an AI-generated image that represents a dream-like interpretation of the original work.

HIPA will also present its Photographer of the Year award, alongside special awards given by invitation only.

Viltrox launches its First L Mount Lens

Viltrox has announced its first autofocus-enabled L-Mount lens, the AF 16mm f/1.8 L, marking the company's official entry into the L-Mount ecosystem. The ultra-wide full-frame prime is aimed at landscape, astrophotography, and wide-angle video shooters.

Viltrox joined the L-Mount Alliance in September last year and says the new lens reflects its commitment to delivering high-performance yet affordable optics for L-Mount users. The AF 16mm f/1.8 was first introduced for Sony E-mount in 2023 and later for Nikon Z-mount in 2024, earning praise for its optical quality and value.

The L-Mount version retains the same specifications, offering a 105.6° field of view and an optical design with 15 elements in 12 groups, including three aspherical and four ED elements. Viltrox claims excellent sharpness, low distortion, minimal chromatic aberration, and well-controlled coma for clean night-sky images.

Autofocus is driven by an STM stepping motor, supporting eye and face detection on compatible L-Mount cameras, with minimal focus breathing. The lens also features a colour lens information display, weather resistance, two function buttons, a de-clickable aperture ring, and a 77mm filter thread.

In India, the Viltrox AF 16mm f/1.8 L is priced at approximately ₹48,000, with a limited-time launch price of around ₹45,700 on their official website.



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Canon unveils New RF Ultra-Wide L-Series Fisheye Zoom and 14mm f/1.4 Prime

Canon has announced two new ultra-wide-angle L-series RF mount lenses for its EOS R system, expanding options for professional photographers and filmmakers working at extreme wide perspectives.

The RF7-14mm f/2.8-3.5L Fisheye STM is Canon's first native RF mount fisheye zoom lens and the world's first lens to offer a circular 190° angle of view. With a wider 7mm focal length on full-frame cameras, it captures more of the scene than the EF8-15mm f/4L Fisheye USM, enabling distinctive circular and diagonal fisheye effects. The lens features an f/2.8–3.5 aperture for improved low-light performance, an updated optical design for better aberration control, and weighs approximately 476g, making it lighter than its EF predecessor. It also supports 2D 180° VR



image creation using Canon's EOS VR Utility software and uses equidistant projection for more uniform image compression.

Alongside it, Canon introduced the RF14mm f/1.4L VCM, its widest and fastest non-fisheye RF prime lens to date. Weighing around 578g, it is lighter than the EF14mm f/2.8 II USM while offering a brighter f/1.4 aperture. Designed as a photo-video hybrid, it features a VCM motor, iris ring, reduced focus breathing, and specialised optical elements to minimise coma flare and colour fringing. A rear filter holder supports sheet-type filters.

Both lenses feature L-series dust and drip-resistant construction and advanced coatings to reduce flare and ghosting. The RF14mm f/1.4L VCM is priced at ₹2,19,995, while the RF7-14mm f/2.8-3.5L Fisheye STM costs ₹1,52,995.

SmallRig launches Battery That Can Work in Sub-0 Temps

SmallRig has announced a new NP-F970-style battery designed to operate reliably in extreme cold, enabling photographers and filmmakers to continue working in temperatures as low as -40°C.

Lithium-ion batteries typically lose capacity rapidly in cold conditions, but SmallRig claims this new "Extreme Cold Endurance" battery is engineered to discharge power normally without the need for external heating solutions. The battery has a 7,500mAh capacity and supports fast charging via a 36W USB-C PD input, allowing a full recharge in approximately two hours. Charging, however, is not supported below 0°C.

In addition to the standard NP-F mount, the battery features built-in USB-C and USB-A ports, allowing it to function as a power bank. The two output circuits operate independently and can charge two devices simultaneously, with a combined output of up to 54W. An OLED display with touch controls provides real-time battery status information.

SmallRig also offers an NP-F battery adapter plate with DC output, expanding compatibility across different camera systems. The company states the battery uses high-quality cells and an intelligent power management system with multiple safety protections.

The SmallRig USB-C Rechargeable Extreme Cold Endurance NP-F970 battery is priced at approximately ₹8,300 (approx, \$99 US) and is expected to begin shipping on February 25.



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Nikon sues Viltrox over Z-Mount Patent



Nikon has reportedly filed a lawsuit against Chinese lens manufacturer Viltrox, alleging intellectual property infringement related to Nikon's Z-mount lens technology.

According to multiple reports, the case has been lodged with the Shanghai Intellectual Property Court, which handles patent and technology disputes. The lawsuit is said to stem from a royalties dispute during the provisional protection period of a Nikon invention patent. Under Chinese patent law, this period covers the time between a patent's publication and its formal approval, during which companies using the invention may later owe royalties if the patent is granted.

Nikon is reportedly claiming that Viltrox used protected Z-mount technology—likely related to autofocus or lens communication, while the patent was still pending. Now that the patent has allegedly been approved, Nikon may be seeking retroactive royalties for Z-mount lenses sold by Viltrox during that interim period.

The case could have wider implications for third-party lens availability and pricing for Nikon Z-mount users. Nikon is also said to be suing a local distributor, a common practice in China to establish court jurisdiction.

In a statement to *PetaPixel*, Nikon stated it supports third-party lenses from officially licensed partners and promotes technological progress through fair competition.

Fujifilm India launches Instax mini Evo Cinema

Fujifilm India has launched the Instax mini Evo Cinema, the latest addition to its instax hybrid instant camera Evo series. Designed to combine cinematic expression with instant photography, the camera allows users to capture both still images and short videos, which can be transformed into physical instax prints.

In India, the instax mini Evo Cinema Premium Edition will be available in a Combo Box priced at ₹47,999. The package includes the camera and two packs of instax mini glossy film. Pre-bookings will be open till the 27th of January 2026 on their website, with customers receiving two additional film packs as a pre-booking benefit. The product will be available for purchase from 28 January 2026.

The camera introduces video-to-print functionality, enabling users to convert up to 15-second videos into instax prints embedded with QR codes. Scanning the QR code allows the video to be replayed or shared digitally. A key feature is the new Eras Dial, offering 10 effects inspired by different time periods from 1930s all the way to 2020, each with adjustable levels for varied creative expression.

The design draws inspiration from Fujifilm's 1960s-era FUJICA Single-8 camera, featuring a vertical grip and analogue-style controls. A dedicated smartphone app supports video editing, clip combination, and direct printing from mobile devices.

According to FUJIFILM India, the instax mini Evo Cinema aims to offer a hybrid photography experience that blends digital creativity with the emotional appeal of instant prints.



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MASTER OF *MOMENTS*



Marsel van Oosten

Marsel van Oosten is an award-winning photographer known for his profound artistry, especially his striking wildlife portraits. His work often blends the grandeur of landscapes with the intimate presence of wildlife, revealing the delicate balance of nature. His photographic style and thought-process has earned him critical acclaim, as well as the Wildlife Photography of the Year award. **Asian Photography** spoke to him about conservation, AI vs authenticity, lessons from the field and more.





For Marsel van Oosten, the path to becoming one of the world's most recognised wildlife photographers was not paved with an early obsession for the camera. In fact, while studying art direction and graphic design at art school, photography was a medium he openly disliked. It was only after entering the professional world

as an art director at an international advertising agency that he began to appreciate the profound power of still images. Tasked with selecting photographers for global ad campaigns, he was forced to dissect various styles and visual languages. Over 15 years, he collaborated with hundreds of top-tier photographers, treating every interaction as a masterclass. Eventually, this professional observation turned into a personal pursuit, though his

first attempts during holidays were met with frustration. With a designer's eye, he knew exactly what a "good" photograph should look like, but he lacked the technical vocabulary to execute it. This led to a period of intense self-education through amateur photography magazines, where he mastered the fundamentals before a honeymoon to Tanzania—his first safari—permanently shifted his focus toward the wilderness.



When reflecting on the motivations behind his transition into wildlife and conservation, Van Oosten explains that his travels have allowed him to witness a world in a state of rapid decline. He notes that with each passing year, more species are pushed toward the brink of extinction while ecosystems are systematically destroyed or polluted. His work is fuelled by a desire to inspire a sense of urgency in the viewer, grounded in the belief that “the biggest threat to our planet is the idea that someone else will save it.” He describes a “*global narcissism pandemic*” fuelled by social media, where the hunt for “likes” has turned into a destructive force. He points to the Masai Mara as a tragic example of how greed, corruption, and unsustainable “selfie tourism” can lead to conservation disasters. While he acknowledges that social media has occasionally amplified conservation efforts, he remains wary of how the unhinged pursuit of a “*cool shot*” often overlooks the welfare of the animals and the integrity of the

“The biggest threat to our planet is the idea that someone else will save it”



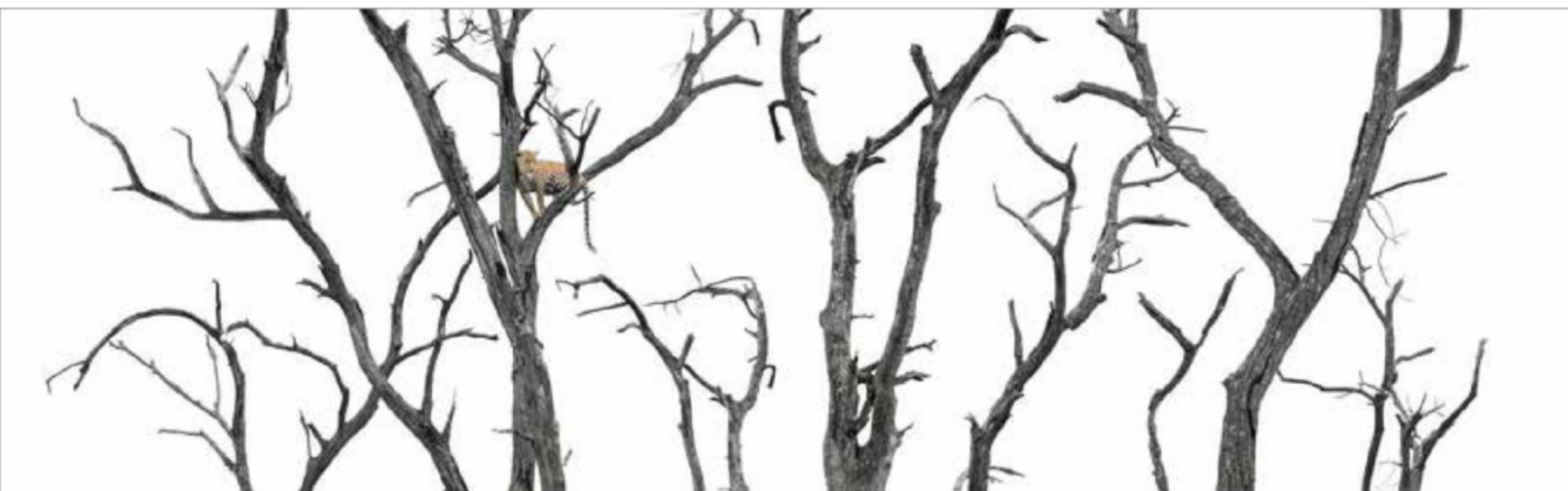
environment.

When asked how he would define his specific photographic signature, Van Oosten emphasises a rejection of current trends in favour of an internal creative compass. In a field as saturated as wildlife photography, he finds that staying true to reality while avoiding excessive processing is the ultimate challenge. His style is an extension of his character: a relentless pursuit of order within chaos and a deep-seated aversion to visual clutter. Drawing heavily from his graphic design background, he prioritises graphic shapes, balanced lines, and clean compositions. He avoids what is popular, choosing instead to document subjects that inspire him personally, which he believes is why his work often feels fresh to the public. Central to his signature is the “idea” behind the frame. Because photographers have little control over wild subjects, he invests heavily in research and previsualisation. Before a shoot, he studies existing

imagery of a subject specifically to ensure he does not replicate it, planning his trips with clinical precision to capture the specific image already living in his mind.

Regarding the specific image that might define him as a photographer, Van Oosten points to the cover of his book, *MOTHER*, which features an elephant standing at the very edge of Victoria Falls. This particular shot, which was one of his first publications in *National Geographic*, serves as a bridge between his two primary passions: wildlife and landscape. He notes that while both genres require vastly different skill sets, his favorite work often exists at their intersection—a landscape image with a strong wildlife element. For him, the Victoria Falls elephant represents “perfection” and acts as a visual manifesto for his entire career.

The conversation naturally shifts to the technicalities of the digital darkroom. When asked about the





“Social media has unleashed a global narcissism pandemic that has turned millions of people into relentless hunters for likes and followers”

extent of his post-processing, Van Oosten compares the role of a photographer to that of a Michelin-starred chef. A great chef uses the best ingredients, but the mastery lies in creating a dish that is more than the sum of its parts—achieved through a “*creative sauce*” of herbs and spices. In his world, post-processing is that sauce. However, he strives for a result that looks entirely unprocessed and natural, a feat he describes as being much harder to achieve than applying a standard filter or preset. He is obsessed with subtle details that most viewers may never consciously notice. His process is one of patience; he refuses to publish an image immediately after a first session, knowing that a fresh perspective the following day will inevitably reveal necessary refinements. He critiques photographers whose styles are built entirely on heavy colour treatments, arguing that if one removes those filters, the underlying images are often mediocre. For Van Oosten,

a truly memorable image must stand on its own without the crutch of digital manipulation.

The rewards of such a high-stakes career are often tempered by unforeseen consequences. When discussing his most rewarding moment in conservation, he recalls winning the overall title of “Wildlife Photographer of the Year” for his image of golden snub-nosed monkeys. At the time, the species was largely unknown to the general public. The image went viral, appearing in newspapers and exhibitions across the globe, successfully generating the awareness needed to secure funding for their protection. Yet, he speaks candidly about the “*double-edged sword*” of such fame. The surge in awareness created a massive demand for tourism in a fragile Chinese ecosystem that could not sustain the influx, ultimately forcing the area to close. This realization has changed his approach, making him far more secretive about the locations



of fragile ecosystems to prevent his own work from inadvertently causing their downfall.

In the modern era, the conversation inevitably turns to technology. When asked how he promotes authenticity in the age of Artificial Intelligence, Van Oosten offers a perspective that often sparks heated debate. He leans on his art school education, asserting that in art, there are no rules. He distinguishes between “functional” photography—such as forensic, scientific, or news photography—which must adhere to strict reality, and photography as an art form, which includes nature. While he personally prefers to stay close to the scene as he witnessed it, he holds no grudge against those who use AI or heavy manipulation to realise a creative vision. He predicts that many genres will lose the “battle” against AI because it allows creators to achieve what wildlife photographers never could: total control over the subject. While many argue that AI-generated images



lack soul or connection, Van Oosten is more pragmatic, stating that for him, it is always about the end result. He views the “trust” people place in cameras as a historical accident, noting that we don’t

question the integrity of a Rembrandt painting just because it isn’t a literal photocopy of a scene.

Finally, when asked about the most important lesson he has learned while





shooting in some of the harshest conditions on Earth, his answer is surprisingly simple. Beyond the technical mastery, the gear, and the conservation goals, he has learned to enjoy every single moment spent in the wilderness. He acknowledges the privilege of existing in a world of such spectacular biodiversity. Even on the days when the light is poor, the animals are elusive, and he doesn't capture a single frame, he remains deeply grateful. For Van Oosten, the primary goal is never to take those moments for granted, recognising that being a witness to nature is a reward in itself.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY FEATURING HISTORICAL SITES

There is a profound, almost dizzying irony in pointing a high-tech digital sensor at a 4,000-year-old stone circle to capture light that has been traveling through the vacuum of space for millions or billions of years. When we practice astrophotography at historical sites, we aren't just taking a "pretty picture". We are performing a feat of cosmic archaeology. We are aligning three distinct timelines: the deep time of the universe, the ancient history of human civilization, and the fleeting millisecond of the camera's shutter click. For the modern photographer, these sites offer more than just a foreground; they provide a tether to our ancestors who looked at the same constellations—albeit in slightly different positions—to navigate, harvest, and worship.







The Philosophy of the Frame

Why go to the trouble of hauling thirty pounds of gear to a remote ruin in the middle of the night? Because a photo of the Milky Way over an empty field is a science experiment, but a photo of the Milky Way over the Great Sphinx of Giza is a narrative.

Historical sites provide scale and context. They remind us that while empires crumble and languages fade, the celestial dance remains the one constant. It's a humbling reminder that we are part of a long continuum of sky-watchers. Plus, let's be honest: a crumbling Roman aqueduct just looks significantly cooler under a canopy of stars than your backyard fence.

Technical Foundations: The Gear and the Math

Astrophotography is one of the few niches where “*spraying and praying*” will leave you with nothing but a black screen and a cold cup of coffee. You need a specific toolkit to bridge the gap between the dark earth and the bright stars.

The “Rule of 500”

To avoid “star trailing” (where the stars look like little sausages instead of points of light), photographers use the Rule of 500. This formula helps you calculate the maximum

shutter speed before the Earth’s rotation becomes visible in your frame.

If you are using a 20mm lens on a full-frame camera (crop factor of 1), your max exposure is 25 seconds. Any longer, and those stars start to smear.

Planning: The Digital Scout

You cannot simply show up at Stonehenge and hope for the best (mostly because security will tackle you, but also because of the weather). Success in this field is 80% planning and 20% execution.

Light Pollution Maps: Use tools like Dark Site Finder to ensure the ruins aren’t drowned out by the orange glow of a nearby city.

Celestial Alignment: Apps like PhotoPills or Stellarium allow you to use Augmented Reality (AR) to see exactly where the Milky Way core or the Moon will rise relative to the monument.

Permits and Legality: This is a candid peer advice: Do not trespass. Many historical sites are protected UNESCO heritage zones. Shooting at night often requires special permission, a paid guide, or attending “Star Parties” organised by the site’s conservators.

Iconic Locations and Their Challenges

1. The Pyramids of Giza, Egypt

The ultimate prize. The challenge here isn't just the desert heat; it's the haze and the light pollution from nearby Cairo. To get a clear shot, photographers often have to use light pollution filters or wait for specific atmospheric conditions that clear the dust.

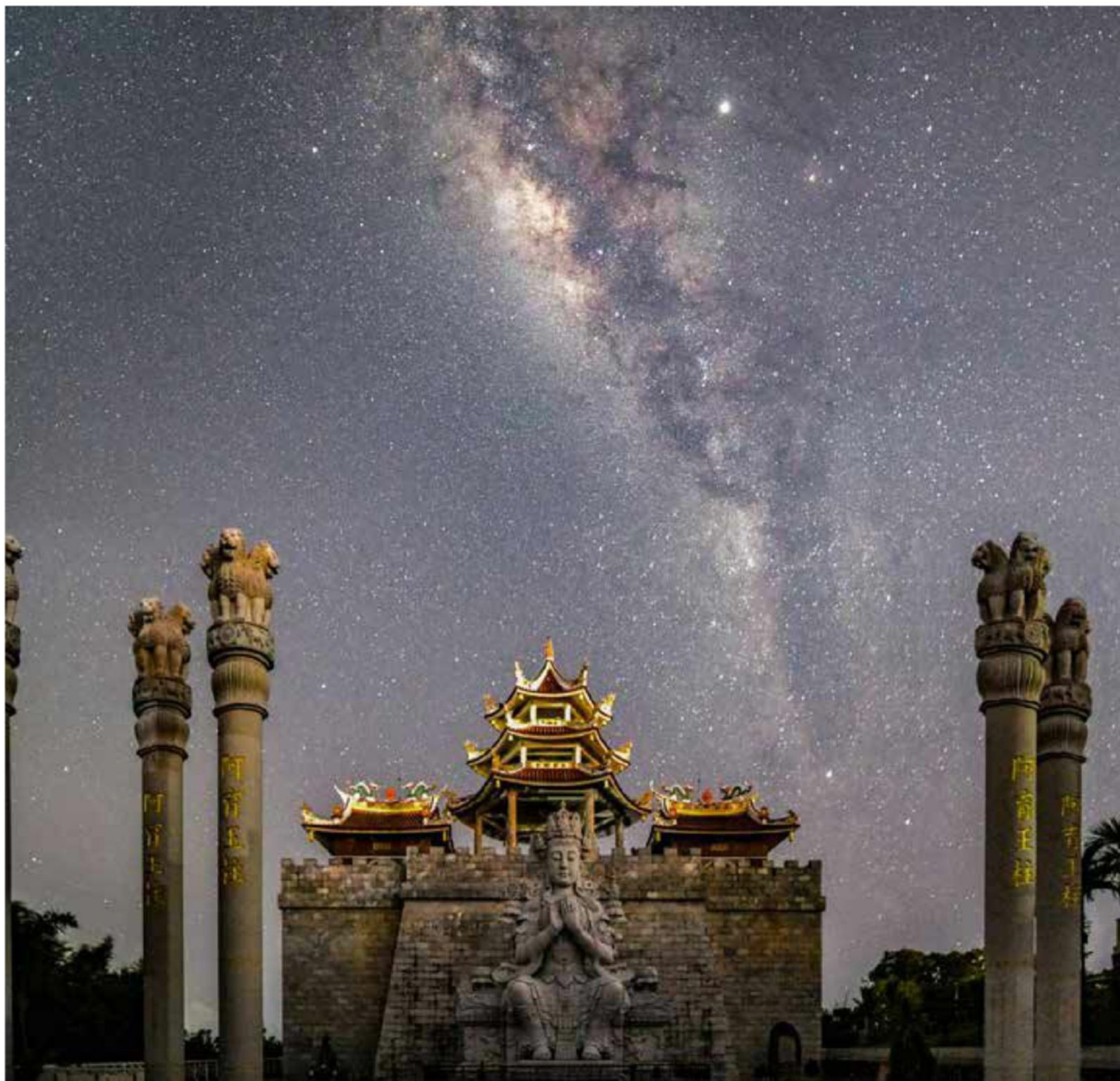
2. Stonehenge, United Kingdom

Stonehenge is notoriously difficult to access at night. However, the alignment of the stones with the solstices makes it a masterclass in archaeoastronomy. Capturing the North Star (Polaris) centered over a trilithon creates a "star trail" image that feels like a portal through time.

3. Moai of Easter Island (Rapa Nui)

Remote, dark, and haunting. The Moai statues offer a vertical element that perfectly complements the vertical band of the Milky Way. Because there is almost zero light pollution, you can capture the "Aurora"—a faint emission of light from the Earth's atmosphere—that adds eerie greens and reds to your sky.

Note: When shooting at these sites, "Light Painting" (using a flashlight to illuminate the ruins) is a controversial subject. Many purists prefer using "Low Level Lighting" (LLL) or simply mask in a separate foreground exposure taken during blue hour to maintain a natural, moonlit look. You may go either way depending on the level of effort you wish to put in.





The Art of Post-Processing

The raw file coming out of your camera will likely look flat and underwhelming. The magic happens in the digital darkroom.

Stacking: Taking 10–20 identical shots and using software (like Sequator or Starry Landscape Stacker) to average out the digital noise. This makes the “sky” look silky smooth while keeping the “ruins” sharp.

Colour Balance: Ancient stones often look best with a slightly warmer tone, while the night sky usually benefits from a cooler, deeper blue. Learning to mask these two areas separately is the hallmark of a pro.

Enhancing the Nebula: Use “Dehaze” and “Clarity” sparingly on the Milky Way core to bring out the dust lanes without making the stars look like neon glitter.

Ethics: Respecting the Ancestors

Beyond the technicalities of sensors and shutters, night photography is an exercise in quiet endurance. It demands a brand of discipline that extends far beyond your gear; it is the persistence to stand in the cold for hours, waiting for a single cloud gap that may never come. We don’t just capture these scenes; we enter into a silent contract with the environment.

Leave No Trace

This philosophy is our primary directive. As temporary



Image: Samir Belhamra



guests in these spaces, we must treat the landscape with profound reverence. Scaling ancient masonry or fragile rock faces for a “hero angle” is more than just reckless; it is a betrayal of the site’s history. True creative mastery is found in discovering a compelling perspective within the boundaries of respect, ensuring the location remains pristine for those who follow.

The Responsibility of Light

In a world of long exposures, our light is our footprint. While high-powered lasers are useful tools for celestial navigation, they can be remarkably intrusive. A single stray beam can ruin a fellow photographer’s twenty-minute exposure or, more critically, interfere with established flight paths—which if we might add, may land you in jail. We must manage our light with extreme caution, prioritising the “dark sky” experience for both the lens and the community.

Honouring the Midnight Sanctuary

There is a spiritual stillness that settles over a site at 3:00 AM. When the world is asleep, these locations offer a rare, raw atmosphere. Honour this by moving with intention and keeping your voice to a whisper. By embracing the silence, you aren’t just being a polite observer; you are allowing yourself to connect with the site’s true character. This connection often results in work that feels grounded, timeless, and deeply resonant.



Image: Jin Zuckerman

Conclusion

Astrophotography at historical sites is more than a technical challenge; it is an act of preservation. By capturing these monuments against the backdrop of the cosmos, we document their survival through the ages. We see the handiwork of humans who are long gone, framed by the light of stars that might no longer exist. It is the ultimate long-exposure—a snapshot of our place in the universe.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

Editor's Note:

Deep-sky astrophotography is often romanticised as a pursuit reserved for pristine dark skies and remote locations. The reality is far more encouraging. Even under heavy light pollution, faint galaxies and nebulae can be recorded with patience, discipline and smart technique.

Working from Jaipur under Bortle 8 skies has shaped one of our readers workflows—and in this issue we invited him to share this practical experience with others. His workflow is something that is deliberate and efficient and we hope that these tips help you learn how to extract meaningful signal from imperfect skies—one photon at a time.

Practical Tips for **Deep-Sky** Astrophotography under City Skies





1. Treat Time as Your Primary Tool

Deep-sky imaging is fundamentally about integration time—the total duration your camera collects light. A single exposure reveals very little. Hundreds of carefully captured frames, when stacked, allow faint structures to emerge.

Under urban skies, longer integration isn't optional—it's essential. The signal from distant objects builds faster than noise, improving clarity and colour fidelity.

Practical takeaway:

Aim for cumulative exposures rather than chasing a single “perfect” frame. Even 4–6 hours can produce noticeable improvements, while 15–20 hours unlock subtle dust lanes and outer halos that city skies try to hide.

2. Plan Around Your Sky, Not Against It

Light pollution isn't just a limitation—it's a condition to design around. Sky glow rises quickly, atmospheric haze reduces contrast, and usable nights are unpredictable. Efficiency becomes your biggest asset.

Practical takeaway:

Image targets when they are highest in the sky. Use exposure lengths that balance brightness and dynamic range. Capture data across multiple nights and accept that progress may be gradual. Consistency beats perfection in urban astrophotography.



3. Filters Are Your Allies

Dual-band and narrowband filters improve contrast under light pollution by isolating specific wavelengths emitted by nebulae. They don't remove sky glow entirely—but they significantly tilt the balance in your favour.

Practical takeaway:

Emission nebulae respond especially well to filtered imaging. Combine filter use with long integration to produce clean, high-contrast data even from city environments.

4. Calibration Frames Are Non-Negotiable

Deep-sky imaging isn't only about capturing light—it's about removing artefacts introduced by your equipment. Dark

frames reduce sensor noise. Flats correct uneven illumination. Bias frames stabilise readout patterns.

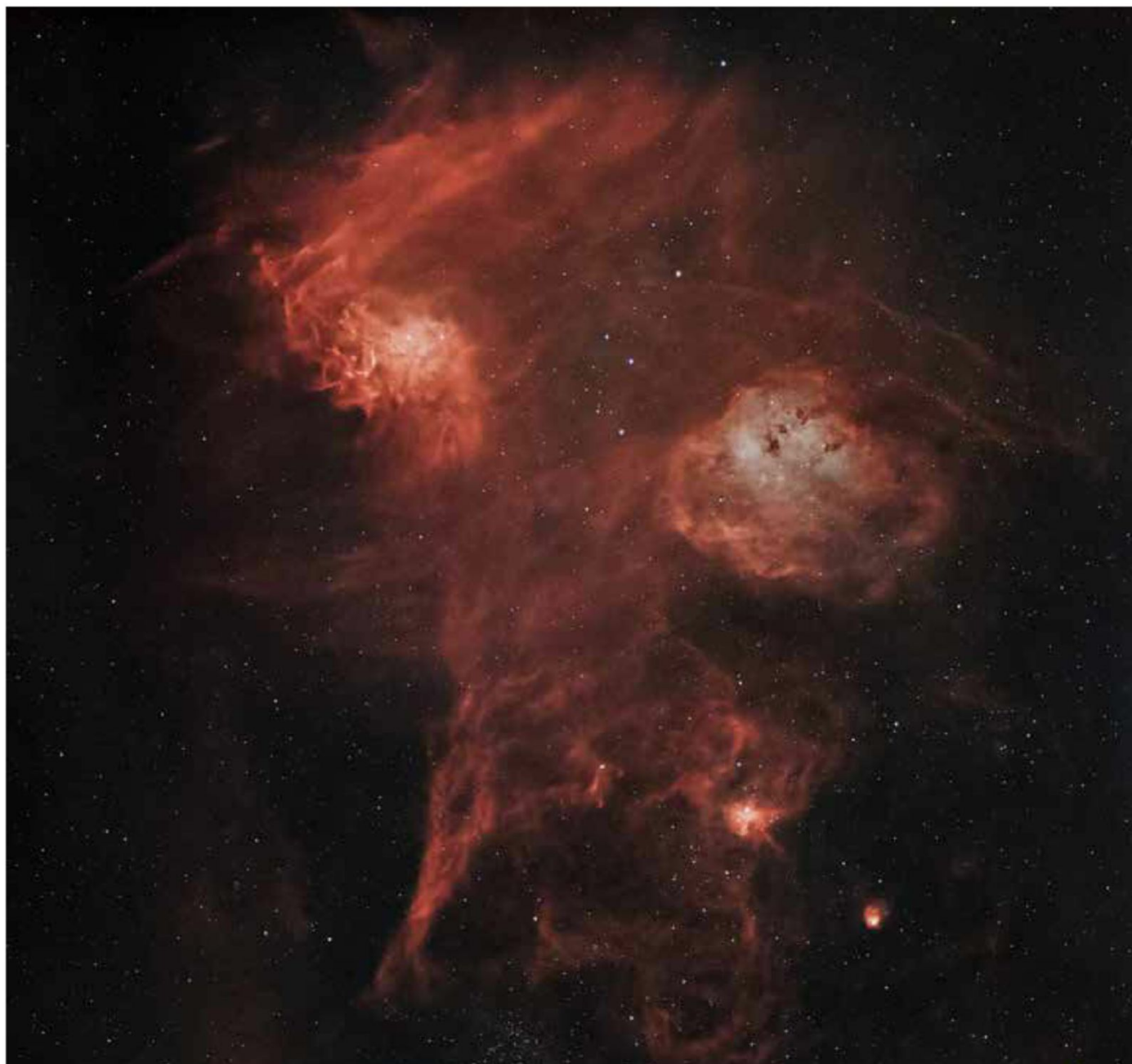
Practical takeaway:

Treat calibration as part of the imaging session, not an optional step. Clean data reduces the need for aggressive processing and preserves natural detail.

5. Process to Reveal, Not Decorate

Post-processing is where hidden signal becomes visible—but restraint matters. Over-stretching or exaggerated colour can bury real structure beneath aesthetics.

Practical takeaway:







Let subtle transitions guide your edits. Preserve star colour, manage background noise carefully, and always ask: does this adjustment reveal information, or simply add drama?

6. Portable Gear Can Go Surprisingly Far

You don't need an observatory-class setup to produce meaningful results. A compact mount, modest optics, and a reliable camera can perform exceptionally well when paired with thoughtful workflow.

Practical takeaway:

Prioritise portability, stability, and consistency. Urban astrophotography often rewards gear that is easy to deploy and dependable night after night.

7. Let Limitations Teach You Discipline

Urban astrophotography trains patience. Clear windows are rare, conditions fluctuate, and progress is incremental—but constraint sharpens intention.

Practical takeaway:

Value every usable hour. Document your sessions, refine your technique, and treat imperfect nights as part of the learning curve.

Finally

Deep-sky astrophotography isn't reserved for remote mountaintops. With planning, integration time, and disciplined workflow, even heavily light-polluted skies can reveal extraordinary cosmic structures.

The universe does not rush—and neither should the observer. When approached with patience, city skies become less of a barrier and more of a proving ground. If this encourages even one photographer to step outside, set up their gear, and attempt to connect with the night sky, then the effort is already worthwhile.

TEXT AND IMAGES: AQUIB ALI ANSARI
INSTAGRAM: @CAPTUREDBYAKUIB



Image: Eric Sussenbach

ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS IN 2026 & HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH THEM

The night sky is a dynamic arena, a celestial ballet that has captivated humanity since we first looked upward. While every year offers its share of planetary alignments and meteor showers, some years stand out for hosting truly spectacular, once-in-a-lifetime astronomical phenomena. The year 2026 is poised to be one such year, offering enthusiastic amateurs to seasoned professional photographers incredible opportunities to capture the cosmos.

However, the modern world presents a significant hurdle to astrophotography: light pollution. The encroaching glow of urban sprawl has washed out the heavens for much of the global population. Therefore, planning for the events of 2026 isn't just about knowing when to look, but where to look. This guide explores the key astronomical events of the upcoming year and weaves in essential techniques for capturing them, emphasising the crucial role of certified Dark Sky locations in achieving breathtaking results.

The Foundation: Seeking True Darkness

Before diving into specific dates, it is essential to establish the importance of location. You cannot photograph faint celestial objects if the atmosphere is glowing with artificial light. For the best possible imagery in 2026, you must seek out true darkness.

This is where International Dark Sky Reserves play a pivotal role. Designated by DarkSky International (formerly

the IDA), these are regions surrounded by populated areas that possess an exceptional quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, and cultural value.

Visiting a Dark Sky Reserve—such as Aoraki Mackenzie in New Zealand, NamibRand in Namibia, or regions in the American Southwest and rural Europe—does more than just let you see more stars with the naked eye. For a camera sensor, it means a significantly better signal-to-noise ratio. The absence of artificial light allows you to use higher ISO settings and longer exposures without washing out the image frame with orange or grey haze. When planning your 2026 celestial travels, prioritising proximity to a Dark Sky Reserve will exponentially improve your photographic output, especially for faint targets like meteors or the Milky Way's galactic core.

The Main Event: The Great European Total Solar Eclipse (August 12, 2026)

Without question, the anchor event of 2026 is the total solar eclipse on August 12th. While total eclipses happen



Image: Alexander Andrews



Image: Nick Iliasov

somewhere on Earth roughly every 18 months, they often occur over inaccessible oceans or remote tundras. The 2026 path of totality is unique because it crosses highly accessible areas of the Northern Hemisphere during peak travel season, specifically touching eastern Greenland, western Iceland, and cutting a swath across northern Spain.

A total solar eclipse is perhaps the most dramatic natural event a photographer can witness. The moon completely blocks the sun's brilliant photosphere, plunging day into an eerie twilight, dropping temperatures, and revealing the sun's magnificent, wispy corona.

Photographing the Eclipse

Capturing an eclipse requires preparation and, crucially, safety equipment. You cannot point your camera at the sun during the partial phases without a certified solar filter; doing so will destroy your camera's sensor and can instantly blind you if you look through an optical viewfinder.

The photographic workflow involves two distinct stages. During the partial phases, where the moon slowly takes a "bite" out of the sun, a solar filter must be on your lens. You will need a telephoto lens, ideally 400mm or longer, to get a detailed disk size. Spot metering on the sun itself will usually yield a correct exposure, resulting in an orange or white sun against a black sky.

The magic happens during the brief minutes of totality. As the final sliver of sunlight disappears—creating the brilliant "diamond ring" effect—you must swiftly remove the solar filter. This is the only time it is safe to view and photograph the sun naked. During totality, you are photographing the faint solar corona. You will need to drastically change your settings, opening your aperture and slowing your shutter

speed. Because the corona's brightness varies significantly from its inner edge to its outer wisps, the best technique is "bracketing". Take a rapid sequence of photos at different shutter speeds (ranging from perhaps 1/1000th of a second down to 1 or 2 full seconds) to ensure you capture the full dynamic range of the sun's atmosphere. As soon as the diamond ring reappears on the opposite side, the filter must go back on immediately.

For those targeting Spain, the eclipse occurs very late in the day, near sunset. This offers a unique, albeit challenging, photographic opportunity to capture the eclipsed sun just above the horizon, potentially incorporating landscape elements—a rare composition in eclipse photography.

The Summer Spectacle:

The Perseid Meteor Shower (August 2026)

August 2026 is a powerhouse month for astronomy. Just days around the solar eclipse, the annual Perseid meteor shower will reach its peak. The Perseids are beloved for being bright, frequent, and often producing dramatic fireballs.

Crucially, the moon phase for the 2026 Perseids is incredibly favourable. Because the new moon occurs on August 12th for the eclipse, the peak nights of the Perseids (around August 12th-14th) will feature moonless skies for most of the night. This is the ideal scenario for meteor photography.

Photographing Meteors

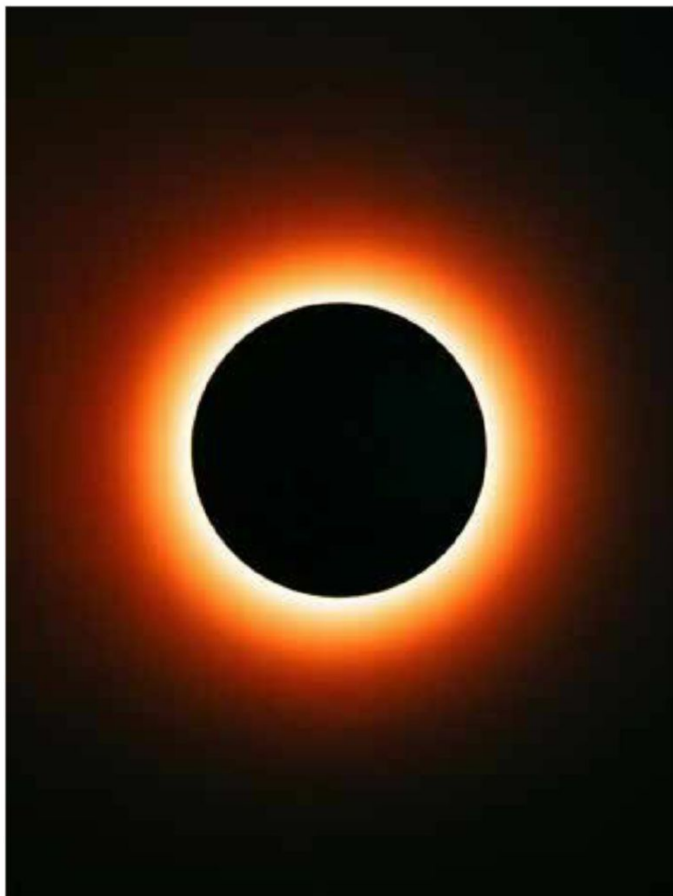
Unlike the eclipse, which requires telephoto precision, meteor showers are about wide perspectives and patience. You need a camera with good high-ISO performance and your widest, fastest lens (ideally f/2.8 or faster).





Image: Clay Banks





Source: Astrobackyard.com

The technique involves setting up your camera on a sturdy tripod in the darkest location you can find—again, a Dark Sky Reserve is the gold standard here. Set your lens to its widest aperture and manually focus on infinity using a bright star. Your ISO will likely need to be between 1600 and 3200, depending on your camera’s noise handling.

You want to take continuous long exposures. A typical exposure time is between 15 and 25 seconds. If you expose longer than that, the stars will begin to trail noticeably due to the Earth’s rotation (unless you are using a star tracker). Use an intervalometer (either built-in or an external remote) to lock the shutter down, taking back-to-back photos for hours.

Compositionally, while the meteors radiate from the constellation Perseus, they can appear anywhere in the sky. It is often best to compose a shot that includes an interesting foreground element—a mountain range, an interesting tree, or an old barn—and point the camera generally toward the radiant point, but including a vast expanse of sky. The goal is to capture as many frames as possible in hopes that a bright meteor streaks through one of them.

Planetary Giants: Jupiter and Saturn at Opposition

Throughout late summer and autumn of 2026, the gas giants Jupiter and Saturn will reach opposition. This means they are opposite the sun in our sky, rising at sunset, staying visible all night, and appearing at their brightest and largest for the year.

While dedicated planetary cameras and large telescopes provide the best views, impressive photographs can be taken with standard DSLR or mirrorless gear. A long telephoto lens (even a 70-200mm with a teleconverter) can resolve Jupiter as a distinct disc and easily capture its four Galilean moons as tiny pinpricks of light lined up beside it. Saturn’s rings are also resolvable with sufficient focal length.

The key challenge here is exposure. The planets are much brighter than the surrounding stars. If you expose the stars, the planets will be blown-out white blobs. You must use a fast shutter speed and low ISO, spot-metering specifically on the planet to capture surface bands on Jupiter or the definition of Saturn’s rings.

The Lunar Finale: Supermoons in 2026

While the year begins with a flurry of celestial activity, it saves a double-header of lunar brilliance for the winter months. In 2026, after the initial supermoon in January, the final two major lunar events occur back-to-back in November and December.

1. The Beaver Supermoon (November 24, 2026)

This moon marks the time of year when beavers traditionally prepare for winter. As a supermoon, it will appear roughly 14% larger and 30% brighter than a standard “micro-moon” (when the moon is at its farthest).

2. The Christmas Eve Cold Supermoon (December 24, 2026)



Image: Abed Ismail

The final supermoon of the year is particularly poetic, occurring on Christmas Eve. Known as the Cold Moon, it will be the closest full moon of the entire year, reaching its absolute peak brightness against the crisp, clear winter sky.

How to Photograph the 2026 Supermoons

The primary challenge in supermoon photography is the sheer intensity of its light. To the naked eye, it looks massive and detailed; to a camera, it often looks like a glowing white hole in the sky. To get a professional result, you must take full control of your exposure.

The Technical Recipe

Manual Mode is Mandatory: Switch your camera to 'M'. The moon is essentially a giant rock illuminated by direct sunlight, so it requires settings more akin to daylight photography than night photography.

Low ISO: Keep your ISO as low as possible to preserve the fine details of lunar craters and "seas" (maria).

Narrow Aperture (f/5.6 to f/11): This range is typically the "sweet spot" for lens sharpness. Using a narrower aperture also ensures that if you have distant landscape elements, they remain relatively sharp. But you can use as wide as F/5.6 to let in more light while keeping the entire moon in focus.

Fast Shutter Speeds (1/125s to 1/250s): Surprisingly, the moon moves quite fast across the sky. A common mistake

is using a long exposure (e.g., 5 seconds), which results in a blurry, oblong moon. Use a fast shutter to "freeze" the moon and capture its texture.

Conclusion: Preparation Meets Opportunity

The year 2026 offers a compelling itinerary for the astrophotographer. From the high-stakes drama of the Spanish or Icelandic eclipse to the serene, all-night vigils for Perseid meteors, the opportunities are vast. Success in astrophotography, however, rarely happens by accident. It is the result of meticulous planning—scouting locations, understanding the specific phases of the event, practicing with your gear in the dark beforehand, and crucially, respecting the need for true darkness. By aligning your travel plans with certified Dark Sky locations and mastering the techniques required for these varying phenomena, you can ensure that 2026 is the year you capture the universe in all its glory.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

HOW TO CAPTURE DEEP-SPACE OBJECTS WITH BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES

For decades, astrophotography was split into two camps. On one side, you had the landscape photographers capturing the Milky Way arching over a lonely pine tree with a wide-angle lens. On the other hand, you had the deep-space specialists – the “*faint photon hunters*” – who used massive telescopes to track nebulae and galaxies from their backyards. But recently, a new discipline has emerged that bridges the two: The Deepscape.



A deepscape is a photograph that pairs a distant, high-detail deep-space object (DSO) – like the Orion Nebula, the Andromeda Galaxy, or the Pleiades – with a terrestrial foreground. It is the “*final boss*” of night photography. It requires the precision of an astronomer and the eye of a landscape artist.

Here is your comprehensive guide to capturing the universe without losing the Earth.

1. The Gear: Moving Beyond the Tripod

When you’re shooting at 14mm, the Earth’s rotation is a minor nuisance. When you’re zooming into a nebula at 200mm or 400mm, the Earth’s rotation is a violent blur. To bridge this gap, your gear list needs an upgrade.

The Equatorial Mount

This is the most critical piece of kit. An equatorial mount (or star tracker) compensates for the Earth’s rotation by moving the camera at the exact same speed as the stars. Without this, your stars will trail in seconds.

The Lens Choice

Forget the wide-angle glass. For deepscapes, you want telephoto lenses.

-> **70-200mm:** Perfect for large targets like the Orion Molecular Cloud or the Andromeda Galaxy.

-> **300-500mm:** Ideal for smaller nebulae or “compressing” the moon/planets against distant mountains.

The Camera

While a standard DSLR or mirrorless camera works, astromodified cameras are the gold standard. These have the internal IR-cut filter removed to allow the deep red light of Hydrogen-alpha (H α)—the stuff nebulae are made of—to reach the sensor.

2. The Planning: Aligning the Heavens

You can’t just show up and hope for the best. Deepscapes require “celestial alignment”. You need to know exactly where a galaxy will set behind a specific mountain peak.

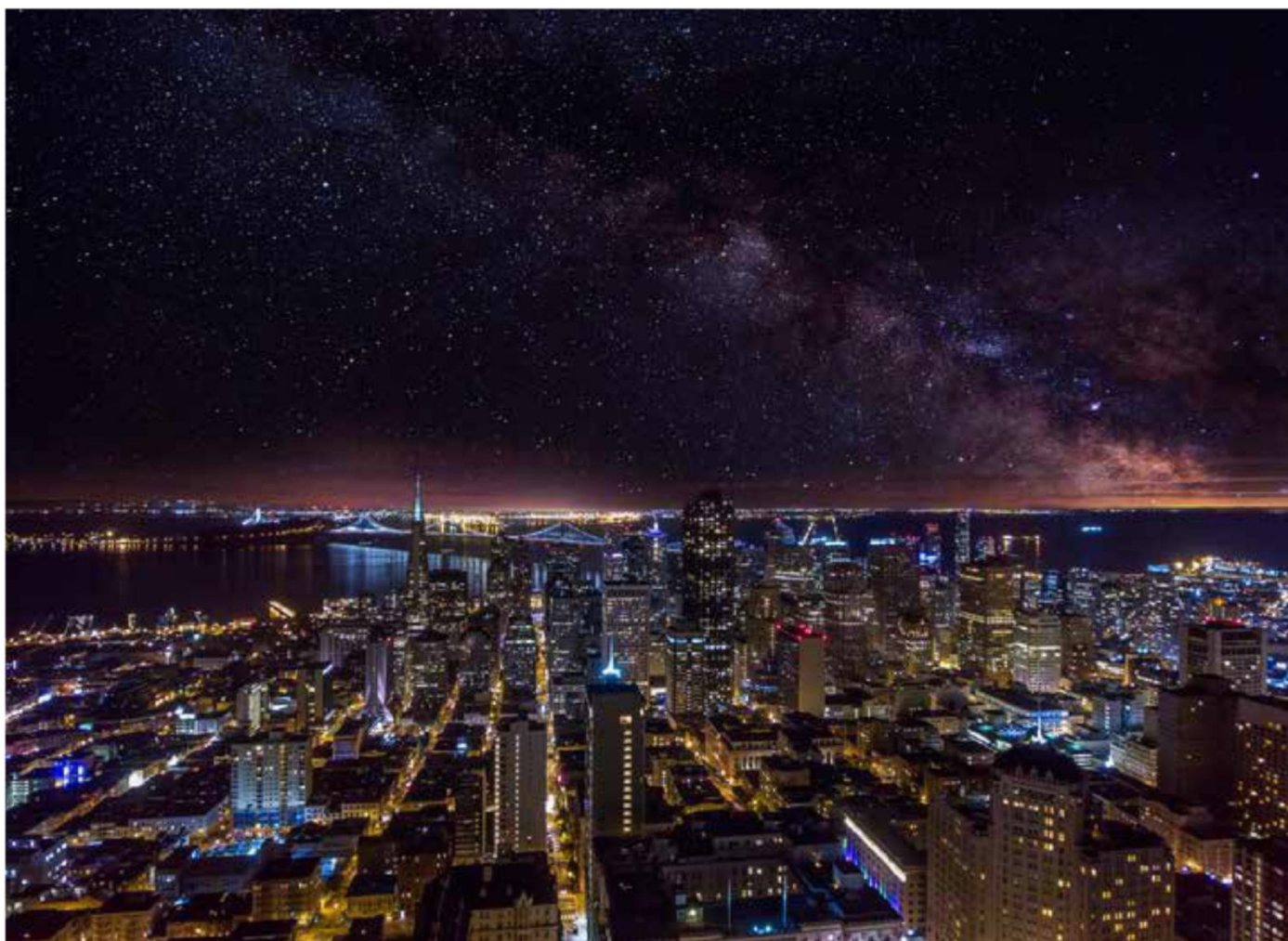
Essential Tools

PhotoPills or Stellarium: These apps allow you to simulate the night sky at any date and location. You can use the “Night Augmented Reality” mode to see exactly where the Lagoon Nebula will be at 3:00 AM.

The Bortle Scale: You need dark skies. Aim for a Bortle 1-3 location. In a Bortle 8 city, the faint dust of a nebula will be drowned out by the orange glow of streetlights.

The Moon Phase

Unlike wide-field photography where a little moonlight can illuminate the landscape, deep-space objects are easily





Source: New Zealand Hooker lake Milky Way Astrophotography

washed out. Schedule your shoot during the New Moon phase or after the moon has set.

3. The Technical Execution: A Tale of Two Exposures

Because you are using a tracker, you face a physical paradox: if the camera moves to follow the stars, the ground will be blurred. If the camera stays still for the ground, the stars will trail.

The solution? The Composite Method.

Step A: The Sky Frames (Tracked)

Once your mount is polar-aligned, take multiple long exposures of your chosen DSO.

Settings: f/2.8 or f/4, ISO 800-1600, and exposure times of 60–120 seconds.

Stacking: Don't just take one photo. Take 20 or 30. By "stacking" these images in software, you improve the Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR).

You'll have to try this multiple times in order to find the perfect exposure balance and optimise SNR.

Step B: The Foreground Frames (Untracked)

Turn off your tracker. You need a rock-solid, sharp landscape.

Blue Hour Secret: The best deepscapes often use foregrounds shot during "Blue Hour" (just after sunset or before sunrise). This allows you to capture detail, texture, and colour in the landscape that is impossible to get in pitch blackness.

Long Exposure: If you must shoot at night, take a 5–10 minute exposure at a lower ISO to keep the foreground clean.





Having experience with landscape photography helps a bunch here, and you can practise this a bunch in daylight.

4. The Challenges of Long Focal Lengths

As you increase your focal length, two enemies emerge: Atmospheric Turbulence and Flexure.

Seeing Conditions: On hot nights, the heat rising from the ground creates “shimmering” (atmospheric seeing). This ruins deep-space detail. Aim for cold, stable nights. You can mitigate this by researching the place and weather conditions to make sure the temperature is low and winds are calm.

Wind: At 400mm, a light breeze acts like an earthquake. Use

a heavy-duty tripod and hang your gear bag from the centre column for stability.

5. Post-Processing: Bringing the Nebula to Life

This is where the magic (and the hard work) happens. You will likely use software like Adobe Photoshop, PixInsight, or DeepSkyStacker.

The Masking Process

You must carefully mask the tracked sky and blend it with the static foreground. The goal is “believable transitions”. If you see a hard, glowing line around the mountain, the illusion is broken. Use a soft brush and match the colour temperature



Image: Matteo Strassera

of the sky's glow to the light hitting the landscape.

Colour Balancing

Deep space isn't just black. It's filled with colourful gases.

Oxygen III: Blue/Green

Hydrogen Alpha: Deep Red

Sulfur II: Deep Orange/Red

Avoid over-saturating. The most breathtaking deepscapes feel like a window into a reality we can't see with the naked eye, rather than a neon light show.

6. The Ethics of "Faking It"

There is a healthy debate in the community about deepscapes. Is it "real"?

The Rule of Realism: Most pro photographers insist that the DSO must have actually been in that position at that time. Taking a photo of the Andromeda Galaxy in the North and pasting it over a South-facing mountain is generally considered a "digital art piece" rather than a photograph.

The Focal Length Match: Ensure your foreground and sky are shot at the same focal length. If you shoot a mountain at 35mm and a nebula at 400mm and combine them, the scale will look "uncanny" and wrong to the human eye.

Final Say

Capturing a deepscape is an exercise in patience. It is a hobby of failures—forgotten batteries, foggy lenses, and alignment errors—which is bread & butter for landscape and astrophotography—and the only thing you can do to avoid mishaps is practice.

But when you finally align your tracker, wait out the cold, and see the spiral arms of a galaxy hovering over a familiar mountain range, the perspective shift is profound. You aren't just taking a picture of a rock; you're capturing the Earth's place in an infinite, glowing neighbourhood, now frozen in time.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

Sentience:

A Manifesto for Modern Landscape Photography



The world of landscape photography is currently at a crossroads. For decades, the recipe for a “great” photo has been fairly rigid: find a famous mountain, arrive at sunrise, set your tripod to a specific height, use a wide-angle lens, and wait for the “hero light”. But in 2026, we are witnessing a quiet revolution. As artificial intelligence becomes capable of generating “perfect” sunsets with a single tap, the value of that technical perfection is plummeting.



If a machine can create a flawless vista of the Himalayas, why do we still trek for days to see them? The answer doesn't lie in the pixels; it lies in the presence.

The “Sentient Landscape” is a philosophy that moves away from the hunt for the perfect shot and toward a deeper, more visceral relationship with the world around us. It's about slowing down, embracing the “messy” reality of nature, and using your camera not just as a recording device, but as a sensory bridge. Here is how we redefine the craft for an era that values soul over sharpness.

Finding Poetry in the Small Stuff: The Intimate Landscape

We have been conditioned to think that “landscape” means “everything”. We reach for our widest lenses to cram as much of the horizon into the frame as possible. But there is a profound, quiet power in doing the exact opposite.

The Intimate Landscape is the art of extraction. It's about using a telephoto lens—the kind you'd usually use for birds or sports—to zoom into the patterns of the earth. When you remove the sky and the horizon, you remove the context of scale. A ripple in a sand dune can look like a vast desert; the bark of an ancient tree can look like a topographical map of a canyon.



Image: Mads Peter Iversen



Image: Eugene Golovesov

By looking for the “landscape within the landscape”, you stop being a tourist and start being an observer. You begin to see rhythms, textures, and shadows that the “hero shot” hunter misses. It’s the difference between hearing a symphony and listening to the vibrato of a single violin string.

Painting with the Cosmos: Astro-Landscape Impressionism

Astrophotography is often the most technical, rigid genre of them all. It’s usually about noise reduction, star tracking, and pinpoint sharpness. But the stars aren’t just cold dots of light; they are ancient, pulsing energy.

Astro-Landscape Impressionism – specifically through a technique called Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) challenges the “sharpness” rule. Imagine standing under a brilliant night sky, perhaps with Jupiter or the Milky Way burning bright above you. Instead of locking your camera down on a heavy tripod, you hold it. As the shutter stays open for a few seconds, you move the camera with a slow, deliberate rhythm.

The result is a dreamscape. The stars turn into streaks of light, blending with the silhouettes of trees or mountains. It looks less like a photograph and more like a painting by Van Gogh or Monet. You aren’t capturing the *geometry* of the night; you are capturing the *feeling* of standing under the



Image: Spencer Cox



Source: reddit.com/ErnestasPo12

infinite. It's a way of saying, "This is how the night felt to me," rather than "This is what the night looked like."

The Atmospheric Protagonist: When Weather Becomes the Hero

How many times have we checked the weather forecast, seen "cloudy and rainy", and decided to stay home? In the conventional world, rain is a nuisance. In the Sentient world, the storm is the story.

When we wait for the "perfect" light, we are essentially asking nature to perform for us. But the most honest moments in nature are often the most difficult. A mountain peak that is half-hidden by a heavy monsoon mist is infinitely more mysterious than one under a clear blue sky. A forest floor during a grey, drizzly afternoon has a depth of colour—a "neon" green to the moss and a deep obsidian to the wet rocks—that a bright sun would simply wash out.

"Weather as the Hero" means leaning into the low contrast. It's about realising that fog isn't hiding the landscape; it is the landscape. It adds a sense of "Soft Fascination", a psychological state where our brains can rest and recover by looking at the gentle, repeating patterns of nature without the harsh glare of a "hero" sun.

With all that being said, we'd advise not going out in bad weather, such that it can cause damage to your equipment or harm to you, just to try and get a "good" shot.



Image: Christian Hoiberg



Source: reddit.com/life_is_a_conspiracy

The Intentional Pause: The Psychology of Not Releasing the Shutter

The biggest barrier to great photography in 2026 isn't bad gear; it's the digital trigger-finger. We take thousands of photos, hoping that one of them will be "the one". This *"spray and pray"* method actually disconnects us from the very place we are trying to capture.

The most avant-garde advice for a modern photographer is simple: Stop shooting, or to be more precise, stop shooting as much.

Practice the "Five-Frame Limit". Go to a beautiful location and spend three hours there, but allow yourself only five clicks of the shutter. What happens to your brain when you do this is fascinating. You stop looking at your screen and start looking at the land. You notice the way the wind moves through the grass. You feel the change in temperature as a cloud passes. You hear the distant call of a bird.

When you finally decide to press the button, that frame carries the weight of those three hours. It isn't just a picture; it's a memory that has been carefully selected and refined

by your own presence. This is what it means to "shoot with intent".

PS: Film photography is totally not dead, try taking it up if you're struggling with the issue of the digital trigger-finger, and have got some coin to spare.

Vying For An Authentic Future

As we move further into a world of digital perfection, Sentient Landscapes offer a path back to what makes us human. It reminds us that photography isn't about the gear we use, it always has been about the way we choose to see.

By embracing the intimate, the impressionistic, and the atmospheric, and by slowing our pace to match the rhythm of the earth, we create images that are uniquely ours. They might not be the "cleanest" or the "sharpest" shots on social media, but they will be the most honest.

In 2026, the most radical thing you can do as a photographer is to stop trying to be a machine and start trying to be a soul in the wilderness.

TEXT: ANIRUDH IYER

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Canon RF 45mm F/1.2 STM Lens Review



2025 was a year of interesting lenses, and we have one of those to review today. THIS, is Canon's latest offering—the RF 45mm F/1.2 STM—which doesn't look or feel or even cost like an F/1.2 prime lens. Coming in at ₹40,495, this is a staggeringly low price point, ESPECIALLY for a F/1.2 prime lens with autofocus. In this article, we'll be reviewing this lens, exploring the pros and cons of using this lens, and whether we'd recommend this to you.

An interesting Focal Length

Before heading into the review, let's quickly discuss why it's 45mm and not 50. An easy answer would be cost and size, but there's one more interesting perspective. See we're told that the field of view of the human eye is equivalent to an image produced by a 50mm lens on a full-frame sensor, but technically, it's closer to 43mm. So this 45mm lens is closer to your vision's FOV. Nitpicking done, let's move ahead with the review.

Look, Body & Feel

Canon has learnt from Nikon last year, where they launched affordable F1.4 lenses with good image quality, and have tried to match up to them with this lens. The 45mm 1.2 is constructed using engineered plastic, with a metal mount, weighing at 364 grams, making it super portable. Paired with a body like R6III, the kit is lightweight and super portable. The lens features nine glass elements in seven groups with only one aspherical lens and a front filter thread upfront of 67mm. Naturally, it doesn't come with OIS.



Daylight

But mind you, this lens isn't weather sealed—which might be the first area where Canon has cut back on to save cost. But there's also no special coating on the front element, so the lens is prone to smudges and whatnot—we recommend a cleaning kit handy.

There's no bells & whistles obviously, there is an AF-MF switch, a focus ring and a control ring upfront which moves freely with a very light click. That's it, super minimal, super easy to use.

**Autofocus****Image Quality**

This is perhaps the most interesting section of the video you have been waiting for. The images this lens produces are not tack sharp at F/1.2—which is expected. The centers of the images aren't very sharp, but this sharpness falls apart even more when we go towards the edges. Stopping down the lens to F/1.8 and lower renders sharper detail, but of course, that comes at the cost of depth of field and the quality of bokeh.

Autofocus

This is where we find the second reason why this lens costs so little. The 45 F/1.2 features an STM motor for autofocus, which means it's marginally slower than USM or VCM motors in other Canon lenses. Another thing to observe is that the lens focuses internally and you can see the mechanism in action—which is another ingress point for dust & debris.

Paired with the EOS R6 Mark III, we could see that the camera could identify and track subjects in a wide-variety of scenarios but the lens couldn't keep up, leading to a lot of missed shots. The

focusing speed is okay for slow-paced/normal scenarios, and we'd recommend not using this lens for any fast-paced scenarios like sports, wildlife or action.

In videos, focus breathing is prominent, and is well-corrected by the R6 III we shot on. But for photographers who're looking to focus stack using this lens, it might be a dealbreaker.

And there is a slight delay when you engage the focus and when the lens actually focuses. You can actually

hear and sort of feel the focus motor engaging when it's working, but it's not loud enough to show up in the video you're shooting.

Bokeh

The bokeh out of this lens is its best characteristic, as you can see. At F/1.2, they're spherical in the middle with some cat's eye bokeh in the corners and the bokeh becomes less-round as we stop down the aperture. The texture

**Bokeh**

of the bokeh itself isn't too bad, no onion rings or any weird artefacts. But you can also see some weirdly shaped bokeh in the corners, which is an interesting touch.

Close Focussing

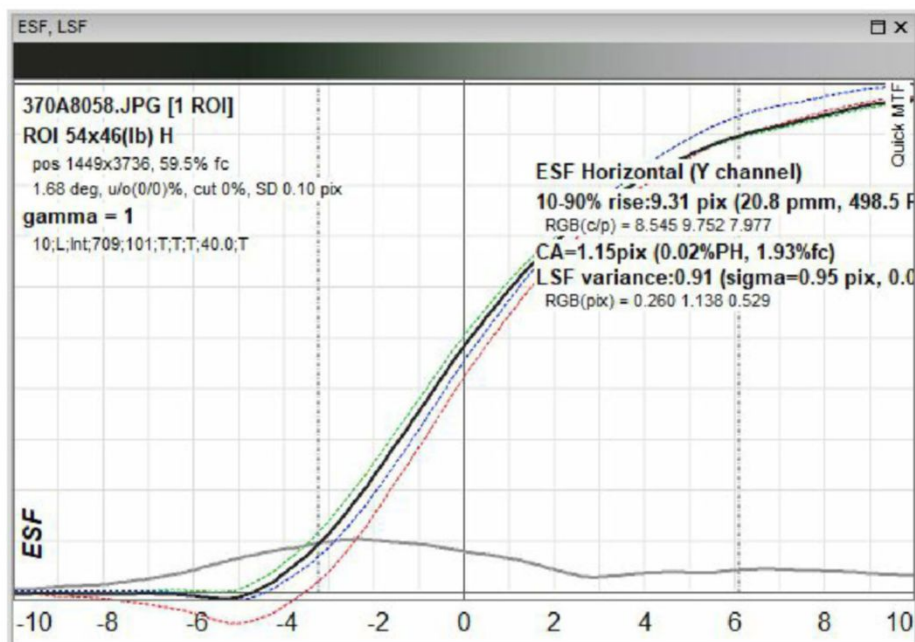
The minimum focussing distance (MFD) for this lens is not too bad at 45cm, giving it a very low magnification ratio of 0.13x. At minimum focus in wide aperture, the lens produces reasonably sharp images, at least in the centre, which of course becomes better as we narrow down the aperture.

Chromatic Aberration Performance

This is perhaps the biggest con with this lens. Testing through quickMTF showed us why this lens costs so little. In the centre, the CA value was 0.79 and as we went to the edges of the frame, it went to 1.15—which is very high. This shows up in the out of focus areas in images, where you can clearly see some visible colour fringing in the out of focus areas, and this extent of chromatic aberration can't be removed in software either—and it can be distracting from the locus of the image i.e. your subject.



Close Focus



Chromatic Aberration

Flaring & Ghosting

For a lens with no special coatings, the flaring is surprisingly controlled and can even be pleasing in some cases. But you have to be careful with the front element as it can collect fingerprints easily. There is no lens hood in the box, but it can be purchased separately if needed.

Is This For You? Verdict

For a lot of photographers, Canon's "nifty-fifty" 50mm F/1.8 is their first prime lens. If you're new to the Canon ecosystem and you're not a professional, you could look into



Chromatic Aberration example

getting this lens as your first F/1.2 lens. The image quality out of this lens might be *interesting* to some users, who might prefer the look of an older, soft-focussing lens on a newer body with autofocus, but that does come at a price. At ₹40k this looks more like an experimental, fun lens rather than

a solid option for shooters looking for a small, light lens with good image quality.

The 50 1.8 is definitely a better option across the board in terms of image quality and autofocus, but what this lens gives you is access to super shallow depth of field and low-light

performance and if you can use the softness of this lens as a creative tool, then you can get some very interesting, but beautiful images.

TEXT AND IMAGES: ANIRUDH IYER

PHOTO SCAPE

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Name: Anirudh Shangari
Camera & Lens: DJI MAVIC 2 ZOOM
Focal length: 4.4mm
Shutter Speed: 1/50 sec
Aperture: f/4
ISO: 100
Instagram ID: ashangari95



Name: Arpan Sharma
Camera & Lens: Canon R5
 Mark II + Canon RF 100-500mm
 f/4.5-7.1L IS USM
Focal length: 360 mm
Shutter Speed: 1/2000 sec
Aperture: f/5.6
ISO: 200
Instagram ID: @arpansharma_01



Name: ChandrhasaHebbar A
Camera & Lens: Nikon D5600 + Tamron
 150-600mm F5-6.3
Focal length: Nearly 600mm
Shutter Speed: 1/1250s
Aperture: f/6.3
ISO: 800
Instagram ID: @storiesbyhebbar



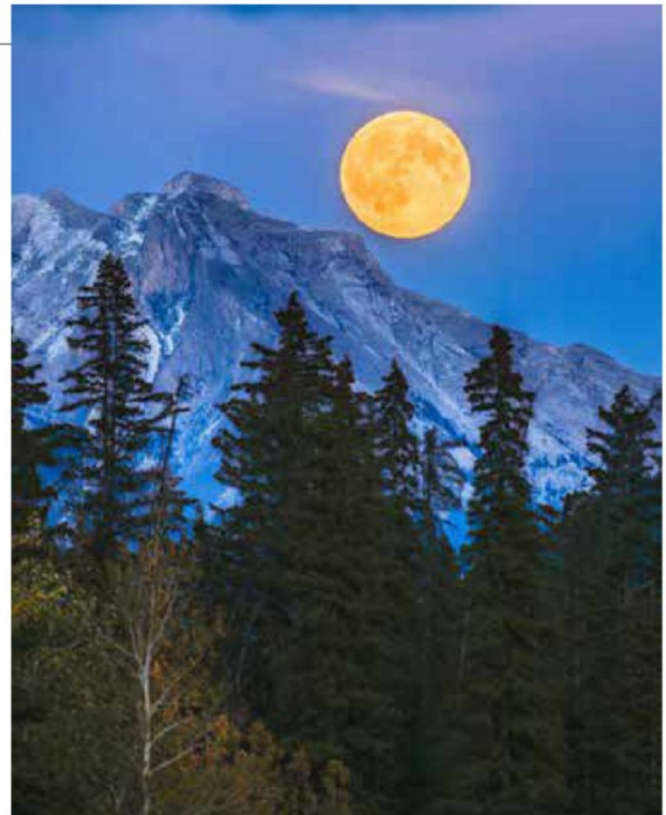
Name: Lucas Dortone
Camera & Lens: Sony A7 + William Optics Redcat 51
Focal length: 250mm
Shutter speed:
 – Land: 5 seconds, ISO 1600
 – Sky: 30 x 120 seconds, ISO 1600
Aperture: f/4.9
ISO: 1600
Instagram ID: @lucasdmdq



Name: G Kanthavelan
Camera & Lens:
 Oneplus 12
Focal Length: 70MM
Shutter Speed: 1/30
Aperture: f/2.6
Iso: 1600
Instagram ID:
 kanthavel_kv_



Name: Rakesh Baro
Camera & Lens: Nikon Z9,
 Nikkor 500mm f4
Focal length: 500mm
Shutter Speed: 1/125s
Aperture: f/8
ISO: 400
Instagram ID:@rakeshbaro



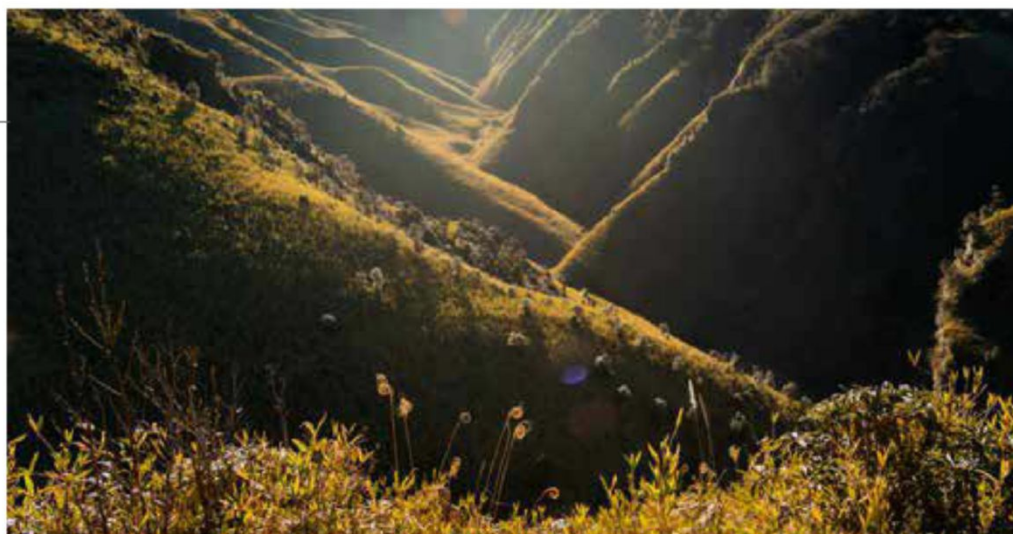
Name: Nilakkhya Dutta
Camera & Lens: Nikon Z8,
 50mm 1.8
Focal Length: 50mm
Shutter Speed: 3612 secs
Aperture: f4
ISO: 100
Instagram Id: @nilakkhya



Name: Sneha Chatterjee
Camera & Lens: sony a7cii
Focal length: 20mm
Foreground:
Shutter Speed: 1/160
Aperture: f13
ISO: 2500
Sky:
Shutter Speed: 13 secs
Aperture: f2.8
ISO: 5000
Instagram ID: @snehachatterj



Name: Soumyojit Sinha
Camera & Lens: a6700 &
 Tamron 18-300mm
Focal length: 25mm
Shutter Speed: 1/500 sec.
Aperture: f/5.6
ISO: 320
Instagram ID: theblack_hood



Name: Suvankar Patra
Camera & Lens: Nikon D7500 with
 AF-S DX Nikkor 18-140mm f/3.5-
 5.6G ED VR Lens
For Foreground:
Focal Length: 10 Vertical Frames
 at 112mm & 7 Horizontal Frames at
 80mm, Panorama Stitch.
Shutter Speed: 5 seconds for each
 frame.
Aperture: f/5.6 for each frame.
ISO: 100 for each frame.
For Stars:
Focal Length: 333 Frames at 40mm,
 Stacked to get the Startrail.
Shutter Speed: 10 Seconds for each
 frame.
Aperture: f/8 for each frame.
ISO: 50 for each frame.
Instagram ID : @suvaamnam



PHOTO MONTAGE

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I am Basudeb Chakrabarti, an Indian astrophotographer and nightscape artist, and my work explores the connection between the Earth and the universe. As a professional electrical engineer and a physics graduate, I bring a strong scientific foundation to my visual practice, blending technical accuracy with an aesthetic approach. My journey into astrophotography began during the COVID-19 lockdown, when long hours spent under the stars transformed curiosity into a sustained pursuit.

I work across planetary, lunar, deep-sky, and nightscape astrophotography, with a particular interest in deepscape imagery—photographing deep-sky objects in natural alignment with terrestrial landscapes. Rather than isolating celestial subjects, I strive to preserve spatial context, scale, and realism, allowing planets, comets, mountains, lakes, deserts, and ancient structures to coexist naturally alongside nebulae and star clouds.

Travel plays a significant role in my work. I have photographed under some of the darkest skies in India and Central Asia, including the Rann of Kutch, Ladakh, Nepal, and Kyrgyzstan. These locations enable long, data-driven acquisitions that reveal atmospheric depth, authentic colour, and subtle tonal gradations.

Beyond my personal projects, I am deeply involved in astrophotography education. Through Astronomads Bangla, my team and I conduct workshops and field sessions in remote dark-sky locations, mentoring photographers in both image acquisition and post-processing workflows. Through my work, I aim to evoke a sense of wonder and scientific curiosity, encouraging viewers to reconnect with the night sky and reflect on humanity's place within a vast and fragile universe.

Instagram: @
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