



Tiny Strand of Sand, Rock Islands Nat'l Park, Palau

OCEANIA



Moreaki Boulders at sunrise

Coastal Rock Formations of the South Island – New Zealand

On opposite sides of New Zealand's South Island, two distinctive geologic formations provide substantial and unique landscape photography opportunities. The Pancake Rocks of Paparoa National Park are the coastal expression of a vast interior of spectacular and rarely photographed limestone canyons and rock formations. Guided trips inside these little-known but stupendous locations are widely available. The Pancake Rocks themselves are a drive-in location at the national park: beautiful wedges of ocean-sculpted limestone that look only slightly like the breakfast food. This West Coast location is best at sunset, with overlooks that afford magnificent vistas down the coast.



Sculpted Limestone, Paparoa Nat'l Park

With little to stop the wind and waves as they travel around this part of the Southern Hemisphere, the gales here can be very strong. I couldn't use my 4x5 camera and had to downsize to the 6x7. Over the mountains and rivers and through the woods, you will find

yourself at the small town of Moreaki on the East Coast of the South Island, where a short drive will take you to a magical area of natural globes, or concretions to be more precise, that have eroded from the headlands and now litter the beach like ponderous beach balls. A low tide with sunlight at dawn is best. Don't expect your subjects to be the same each time you visit. Many huge round boulders I shot in the late 1980's were sunk fairly deep in sand in 2007.



Mitre Peak morning reflection

Milford Sound, Fiordland National Park – New Zealand

My memories of Fiordland are intimately tied to my family. With my wife and children, we braved days of pouring rain to stay in our camper van on the shores of Milford Sound. For trekkers, Fiordland is well known for the Milford Track, but for most people, Milford Sound on a clear summer day, an anomaly, is the goal. I didn't know how lucky I was to have the sky perfectly clear and the Sound without the tiniest ripple as I set up my 4x5 view camera, just a few hundred yards from camp. The only drawback was the constant biting of sandflies, which, except in the Southern Alps, plagued us for our entire three week trip. The bites of these horrid insects didn't heal quickly, and my children, especially, were covered in red bites for weeks after our return home. If you plan to visit in summer, you should consider some kind of mosquito hat. The pests were plentiful and could always find a way into the camper.

Besides shooting from the shore towards Mitre Peak at sunrise, the other charms of Milford Sound involve countless waterfalls—including some of the highest in the world—when, not if, the rain comes. Some of the largest plunge

directly into the Sound. These can be seen and photographed on the boat tours. The most vigorous rain storms come in the summer months. To get a different take on Milford Sound, try winter when the road is rarely closed; there are more clear days, and snow can reach down to ocean level. Best of all, there are no bugs.

Milford Sound is accessible by car. Cold winters and cool summers are the norm in Fiordland. Some services are available.

Other photogenic fiords worldwide include the world's only desert fiords on the Musandam Peninsula in Oman. Imagine the ocean with coral reefs, surrounded by desert walls thousands of feet high. It's so reminiscent of Lake Powell in Utah and Arizona that you have to keep reminding yourself you're on the ocean, not an inland lake. Though the Musandam fiords are best seen by boat, there is road access to beautiful viewpoints.



Lupine curving along a creek near Mt. Cook

Lupine of the South Island – New Zealand

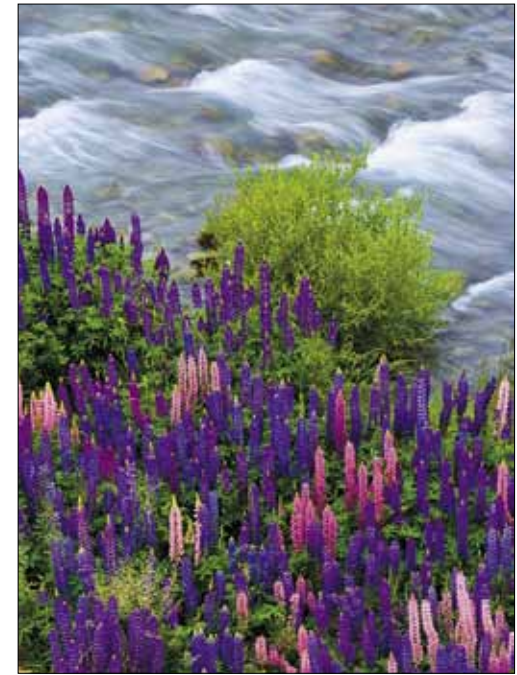
Though not a native plant, lupine produce one of the world's great wildflower displays in the mountain valleys of the South Island of New Zealand. If the scenery looks familiar, much of the region was used as a backdrop for the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. The cast often stayed at the town of Twizel. This is a good location for viewing and photographing the fields of lupine that take over the

lowlands each December, a few weeks before Christmas.

It's not uncommon to have a field of lupine, acres in size, with colors of every shade for a foreground, with the snowy peaks of the Southern Alps behind. Aoraki/Mt. Cook National Park is also nearby, and the glacial blue waters of Lake Tekapo with the snow-clad peak make a great combination. Don't look for lupine in Aoraki/Mt. Cook, as they have been removed as weeds. Another hot spot for the flowers is along the highway back to the east coast through Fairlie. Arthur's Pass is also a location for good blooms.

The flowers will be gone shortly after the new year, as they have a short life span. On a trip I made in mid-January, I found none of these engaging flowers.

South Island lupine are accessible by car.



Lupine fields & stream

Nugget Point Lighthouse – New Zealand

Perched on the southern end of South Island, with nothing but thousands of miles of ocean until Antarctica, Nugget Point Lighthouse has geographical significance. It is also a scenic treasure. With the leading lines of the trail guiding your eye up to the tiny structure, and the Nuggets sea stacks to the right, I can't think of a more beautiful lighthouse setting in the world.



Lighthouse at Nugget Point

After an easy drive from beautiful Dunedin, it's just a short walk to the view of the lighthouse. Sunset is the preferred time, as sunrise will create a shadow on the Nuggets from Nugget

Point itself. With light shining directly on the Nuggets at sunset, you'll have the best opportunities. In summer, with the sun in the south, the headlands behind Nugget Point do not block the sun, and therefore allow good side lighting. Weather changes quickly here and this location is often windy. Make sure your camera doesn't blow over—you may want to use your pack as a tripod weight—and be prepared to make several visits to capture good sunset light.

Lupine in various extraordinary colors line the road in early summer here, making great foreground for ocean views along the way to Nugget Point.



Along the Upper Navua River, Fiji

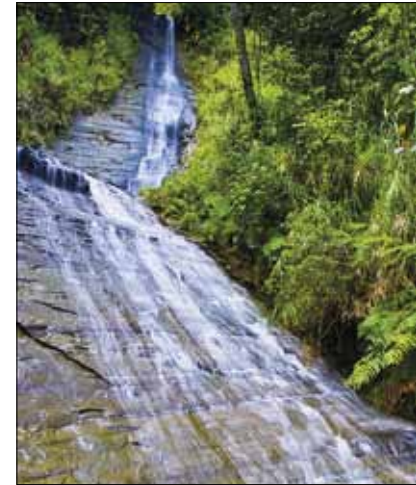
Viti Levu's Waterfall Canyons – Fiji

The fact that Fiji has dozens of stunning beaches is no secret. Lesser known are the jungle canyons that plunge down from the mountain heights to the sea on Viti Levu Island. They are unique in the world, with dozens of waterfalls cascading down the walls of the narrow gorges.

Accessible only on river trips, the native guides have contracted with American river tour companies to offer one of the world's most beautiful and photogenic short river trips. To photograph the waterfalls at their maximum, arrive during the summer rainy season, when daily downpours swell the small rivers and send the waterfalls down into the canyon depths. I did a trip on the Upper Navu

River and counted over fifty major waterfalls. Some were major cataracts, while others were like giant fire hoses shooting down the slot canyon portion of the trip. Take your tripod, of course, as the boat stops at some of the higher falls in the 300-400 foot range. Since the walls of the canyon make stopping at the narrows section of the trip impossible, you'll have to shoot from the boat in this area. Obviously, a waterproof backpack or camera is a necessity.

The same copious rains that charge the waterfalls also make the roads to the put-ins sometimes treacherous. The rainy season is also the time of typhoons. For these reasons, you might want to plan several days to shoot this subject. There are worse things than hanging out in Fiji in January, right?



Falls on Upper Navua River

Yasur Volcano – Vanuatu

Yasur is described as the world's only drive-in volcano. Getting there is a bit of a long process, but it's well worth it. I suggest you fly to Australia first, and then take the Qantas flight to Port Vila, on the island of Efate. There are a number



Eruptions of Yasur Volcano at Sunset, Tanna Island, Vanuatu

of nice beach hotels there and from that point you can take the short flight to Tanna, home of Yasur Volcano. Stay at the White Grass Ocean Lodge, run by friendly Australians, who will arrange your trip to Yasur. Since they require a three night stay, I suggest you plan to visit Yasur on all three nights. Both malaria and dengue fever can be found here, and although the Lodge's location next to the ocean helps mitigate the problem, take your own precautions to avoid mosquitoes.

The trip to the top of the volcano takes about two hours. As you approach, you'll see a large lava dam with some water pouring over it. During heavy rains, this can turn into a raging river, making the visit to the volcano difficult. Coincidentally, it also becomes one of the world's most photogenic waterfalls, with hundreds of ribbons of water pouring over the natural obstruction. Visiting in the dry season would reduce the chance of seeing and photographing this wonder. At the same time, the dry season reduces the likelihood of disease and the trip to the crater is easier. Perhaps the answer is to visit at both times of the year.



Yasur Volcano at Sunset, Tanna Island

view—another reason for multiple visits—but usually walking a short distance around the crater affords a clear vista. The amount of noise and constant tremors around the volcano zone can be quite unnerving. They were for me. After a short time, however, my fear subsided as I became mesmerized by the semi-trailer size rocks being blown thousands of feet in the air from below. As darkness descends, the show becomes even more spectacular. Horrible concussions are followed by huge bursts of thousands of flying red lava chunks streaking through the darkness. I suggest a series of 10 second exposures, or even 30 second shots to capture more than one eruption. Although Yasur is supposedly monitored continuously, sometimes it goes crazy—ramping up the size of its eruptions, considerably. Visitors are kept off the mountain when this happens. Although no one has been killed there for 14 years, and a New Zealand team actually climbed down into the crater recently, Yasur is unpredictable and dangerous.

To stand on the rim of Yasur Volcano, though, is a chance to experience and photograph one of Mother Nature's most violent and beautiful events.



Honeymoon Beach, Rock Islands Nat'l Park, Palau

Rock Islands National Park, Palau – Micronesia

This beautiful national park in Micronesia is better known to divers than photographers. I journeyed to Palau to shoot aerial photographs of the Rock Islands (hundreds of small islets covered in green), but the local airplane was temporarily down for repairs. With my planned shot impossible, I moved on to other opportunities the island offered, and there were many. Remember, whether you travel half-way around the world or shoot in your own back yard, your photography plans are not going to always materialize. It's great to be flexible enough to search for alternate scenes and ideas.

In this case, I was fortunate enough to come back with several great shots by renting a boat and exploring the Rock Islands by land rather than air. I found strands of beautiful white sand only a few feet wide, with turquoise waters all around. I discovered great beaches like Honeymoon Beach that I shot by wading my 4x5 and tripod out into the ocean, 20 feet or more from



Honeymoon Beach Afternoon



shore. I found downed World War II planes with their wings still sticking out of the ocean at low tide, and a magnificent arch with sea water underneath, that provided a frame for the islands.

Also, while on Palau, don't miss the lake of freshwater non-stinging jellyfish that you can swim with. With modern-day digital underwater cameras, this can be a magnificent photograph.

Guides are necessary to adequately explore the Rock Islands.



Rock Islands Arch, Palau

Beaches and Waterfalls of Upolu Island – Samoa

What's in a name, anyway? Labelled after a romantic film that was shot here, Return to Paradise Beach is Samoa's finest. Names have actually had a big effect on inspiring me to visit a location. They're part of the ethos of that place—and the trick becomes trying to capture the magic of the name in the image.

The beach itself is best shot in midday, but the sand is so white there, it really gave me problems with exposure when shooting film. HDR would be ideal to tame the dark aquamarines and blues of the sky with the extreme white of the beach—one of the whitest in the world. My composition included the length of the beach and the grove of palms at the far end. You can be the judge as to the success of the image, shown here.



Return to Paradise Beach, Samoa

Left: Sopo'aga Falls & Rainforest, Mulivaiifagatola River, Samoa



Fuipisia Falls & Rainforest

The island of Upolu has at least six major waterfalls, all ensconced in some of the greenest jungles I have ever experienced. Fuipisia and Sopo'aga Falls are very close to together and in good proximity to the road. Tiavi Falls is a long thin thread. Because of the thick jungle, photographers are forced to shoot from a few cleared areas where the falls can be seen unencumbered. The water flow in the falls is best during the wet season, lasting November to March.

American Samoa National Park, Ofu Beach

Great beaches are wonderful subjects by themselves. When they have a beautiful backdrop, they are elevated to the sublime. Ofu Beach fits this category as well as any beach in the world, and it's in an American National Park.

Just south of the equator, Ofu is part of the chain of islands that make up American Samoa, an American protectorate. The tidal wave of 2009 did not affect the park, and all facilities are open at this writing. Though temperatures don't change much through the course of the year, summer is very hot and humid and definitely more rainy.

On the island of Ofu, a short distance from the pleasant lodge there, it's a good chance you'll have Ofu Beach to yourself. The idea here is to shoot down



Morning light at Ofu Beach



Sunset light at Ofu Beach

the miles of beach to the spiky mountains in the distance, and although I prefer sunrise, sunset also works well. For shooting the beautiful turquoise water, mid-day light is best.

Several other islands of American Samoa offer beautiful tropical island landscape opportunities. Tufu Point on Ta'u Island is a great view at sunrise, and Tutuila, the main island, offers some interesting seastacks.

Bora Bora – French Polynesia

The classic atoll shape of Bora Bora, its remarkable inner lagoon, the center island with volcanic peak, its picturesque interior and fringing reefs all combine to create the world's most beautiful small island. There may be prettier islands in some corner of Fiji, or in some remote part of Micronesia, but I doubt it. Even the name's fun.

Bora Bora is easy to get to, but expensive unless you elect to camp, which is a possibility here. A cruise is also an option because a berth on most cruise ships will set you back far less than a Bora Bora hotel. The best light to capture the countless hues of blue in the water appear during the midday sun. There aren't any great beaches here, so your focus will be on the landscape, as you try to capture a little of the Bora Bora magic.



Ancient Polynesian 'Marae', Bora Bora

Probably the most remarkable scenic photos of the island are captured from above in a helicopter, where you can achieve a sense of wonder for what the island is. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, you should fly with a group tour to save money, shoot through the bubble and use a polarizer to cut glare. Many helicopters have windows which open wide enough to use up to a 16mm lens. And remember, an outside seat is best. Not all helicopter pilots will go high enough to see the entire island. This is something you might ask about before you book your flight. Chartering a helicopter will solve this problem, but again, it's not cheap.



Aerial view of Bora Bora

Besides the amazing waters, I kept coming back to the interesting center peak. Though often bathed in clouds, the mountain ties the island together. One great foreground for the peak at dawn is the remains of a Polynesian temple, located along the road that rings the island. Not much is left except the lava walls, but they are evocative and feed into the King Kong mystique of the island.

Nearby locations: The island of Moorea is made up mostly of

mountains and is very picturesque. Particular areas of interest include Cooks Bay with tall peaks ringing the water, and Belvedere Lookout at the end of a curvy road which penetrates the heart of the island. Spiky peaks appear to the west of the lookout, above a deep valley. This is definitely a morning or sunrise shot.

Cathedral Spires, the Marquesas Islands – French Polynesia

I initially saw these peaks on the opening scene for the television series, *Survivor: Marquesas*. Several of the *Survivor* seasons have provided me with ideas about places to visit around the world. I'm really not into the show, but the folks who shoot the landscape imagery for the series do excellent work.

Certainly the spiky Cathedral Spires are unlike anything in the South Pacific, rising 4,000 feet right out of the nearby waters. Located on very small Ua Pou Island, there is no official viewpoint, or way to hike through the jungle to get a new perspective. I walked along the road near the hotel, one of the few places to stay on the island, and found a good vantage point there. The Spires (there are about seven on Oave Mountain) were at least partially obscured by clouds during my entire visit.

Nearby locations: Other islands in the Marquesas harbor some wonderful photographic subjects. On the main island of Nuku Hiva, helicopter flights allow you



Cathedral spires of Oave Mountain, Ua Pou Island, French Polynesia

to see and shoot the Vaipo Waterfall—the highest in the South Pacific at 1,148 feet. The falls come down a line of cliffs that is very reminiscent of the beautiful volcanic ridges of Kaua'i. On Hiva Oa Island there are a number of carved deity figures with a slight resemblance to the famous Easter Island Moai statues.



Moai statues at Rano Raraku, Easter Island

Rapa Nui National Park, Easter Island – Chile

Easter Island is another location I would really like to visit again. I found it to have great tropical light, and the legendary Moai statues are consummate subjects. Although wintertime (summer in the northern hemisphere) can be somewhat rainy and cold, January in the austral summer can be a great time to visit, with tropical clouds and brief rain showers.

Vehicles are for rent on the island, and even though the place is small, the many statues are too far to walk to in the hot tropical sun. One exception is the Moai on the western coast (facing east) right near the town. Other great statue sites include the row of seven at Ahu Akivi, just north of town. These make a great panoramic image.

Left: Moai statues, Ahu A Kivi, Easter Island





Moai Statues at Rano Raraku

By far the most amazing setting for the Moai is Ahu Tongariki. It is a great sunrise location with more than a dozen statues backed by high volcanic cliffs and the ocean. A number of shots are possible here, including a wide angle panoramic of the entire grouping to telephoto scenes of the statues with the setting sun. This amazing scene is a recent addition to the park, being restored in the 1990's. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle to get there if roads are bad or washed out.

All these Moai have been restored in recent years, but if you want to see Moai in their natural state, the nearby Rano Raraku quarry is the place to go. Plan to spend at least one sunset here, as there are dozens of heads in excellent shape covering the area below the quarry hill. Some are standing tall, while others are tilted or on their backs. If you're lucky, you'll have great clouds like I did every day. You may also be alone as I was, except for some horses, making for a great photographic and inspirational experience. Don't forget nighttime here. Using the fabulous Southern Milky Way and light painting, it's marvelous.

Besides the Moai, there are several other scenic locations on the island, most in proximity to the national park office near the cliffs where the "Birdman" rituals take place and the Rano Kau Volcano crater. Walk to the cliff's end, and you'll find a rock with large birdman petroglyphs you can use as foreground with sea-stacks far below. Morning is the best time for this location.

Guides are useful but not necessary.

