

Weather & Photography

by Daniel Usenko

Light—the heart of photography. If you want to be a great photographer, you absolutely must understand light. Because it is such an important topic, we will spend several lessons learning about light. We will begin with the question: What is the best weather for pictures?

The Problem

Not understanding light—that is the problem. Almost everyone I know thinks that the best time for taking pictures is a bright sunny day; during weddings, I often hear “Oh, how wonderful that the weather is so sunny—the pictures will turn out amazing”. The truth is that sunny bright weather is the worst time for photography.

Don't misunderstand, on sunny days pictures turn out very bright and colorful, so it isn't bad for all types of photography (For example, landscape photography looks quiet good in sunny weather). What I am concerned about, however, is photographing people. That is also what most people care about—taking pictures of their loved ones, friends and family. The problem with bright sunny weather is that the light it produces is awfully strong, which casts harsh shadows, especially on the face. The pictures may be colorful, but faces will look awful. For example, on sunny days at noon, there will appear large black shadows under the eyes of those you photograph.

The Solution

The key to great looking photographs is soft light. There are many ways to achieve soft light, but the easiest is to take pictures on cloudy days when the harsh sunlight is softened by the clouds. On such days, any time of the day works great. Even rainy days are not as bad as people think. Of course it's usually cold and wet, but as far as it comes to lighting, it is actually quiet good.

Sunny days are the worst days for pictures, but they are also the best. What do I mean by that? The worst lighting occurs in the afternoon hours of sunny days, when the sun is really bright and high in the sky. However, as the day progresses, the sun moves lower and the light it shines becomes softer. At about one or two hours before the sunset, the lighting is very good—the shadows on the faces are soft and gentle, and the skin tones look especially wonderful. The morning light, right after the sun rise is also very good for pictures, but of course you would have to get up quiet early, while the light is still soft.

Summary

This is what you should remember—best light is soft light. Sunny days produce very harsh light, unless you are taking pictures when the sun is very low, like early in the morning or late in the evening. On cloudy days the light is always soft, so it is actually a very good time for pictures.

When taking pictures of family and friends, always check the weather, the sunrise and the sunset times; this will help you know what to expect and when the lighting will look best.

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