

# By the light of day

Over the course of a distinguished career working with *National Geographic* and a number of leading international travel book publishing companies, PATRICIA LANZA has demonstrated brilliantly that mastery of natural light is the key to great destination photography

**H**ow did you get started as a professional travel photographer?

I was an anthropology and art major at college, and I began to take an interest in photography as an avenue for exploring the world in general and other cultures in particular. When I finally graduated from the University of Southern California, I went straight to the National Geographic Society — the publishers of *National Geographic* magazine — and applied for a job as a photographer. I had very little in the way of a portfolio, I was very naive, and the Society politely but firmly told me I had little chance of ever working there. But I was still interested in a career in photography so I found a job taking photographs for a silk-screen printer. Then eight months later the Society called me back and asked if I wanted to apply for a position as a photo researcher. That was the beginning of a relationship with the National Geographic Society which has lasted almost thirteen years and taken me to countries, cultures and situations I never would have seen were it not for my camera.

As soon as I started working at *National Geographic*, I was surrounded by some of the best destination photography in the world, and learnt a lot just by working constantly with such great material. I was also able to talk to some of the best photographers in the world about their techniques and their approach to assignments. Most importantly, I learned what was required for a successful photo essay. This is the



Nature provides all the spectacular lighting effects you could ever hope for, but capturing them on film is not always easy. This sunset is over the Okavango Delta in Botswana

real core of photojournalism, and something which even a lot of good photographers don't really seem to understand. If you're not careful, you can go on an assignment and get great photographs but there's not the right scope and balance to hold a photo-essay together. The trick is to consider carefully and in detail what the story is about, know exactly what shots you need, list all the shots you're taking and constantly refer back to your lists to make sure you have every aspect covered.

The Society really encouraged us to learn more about photography. Each year they had a two-day seminar, open only to *National Geographic* photographers. The top guys would show their work and talk about their assignments. At other times the equipment manufacturers would come along and give demonstrations. One thing that initially amazed me was the amount of film used in the course of a single assignment. The average minimum is about 400 rolls, and on some of the wildlife assignments they'd use 1000 rolls and more. It's essential that you carefully catalogue all those rolls —

Patricia Lanza

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