

Greece Through the Lens of Dimitris Tloupas, Dimitris Letsios, and Iasonas Apostolidis during the Early Period of Tourism in Greece (1950–1980)

Vasiliki Tsilimpokou (1), Vasileios Vlassas (1), Konstantinos Karamelas (2),
Aikaterini Koronaiou (1), Grigorios Vlassas (1)

(1) Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica, Egaleo, Greece

(2) Department of Graphic Design and Visual Communication, University
of West Attica, Egaleo, Greece

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Abstract: This paper aims to deal with the early period of tourism in Greece through the photographic image. The photographic gaze of some of the most important Greek photographers is studied. The focus is on Dimitris Tloupas, Dimitris Letsios & Iasonas Apostolidis. A qualitative research was carried out on the photographic material of these photographers. The results of the research showed that although the photographers intended to capture Greece in the era between 1950 and 1980 with a poetic gaze, they managed to highlight something much more important, to immerse themselves in the real life of the countryside and the Greek landscape, highlighting the charm of Greece, which formed the basis for the development of tourism in Greece.

Keywords: tourism, photography

1. Introduction

Tourism in Greece can be seen as an expression of a profound connection to the sea, a legacy dating back to antiquity with our distant ancestor, Odysseus. The sea, with its waves, guides us from one island to another, taking us to places that everyone dreams of. Modern tourism in Greece began to flourish during the 1960s and 1970s, with photography playing a key role in this development.

Today, tourism is a fundamental aspect of Greece's economic activity. Greece is a major tourist destination, attracting visitors thanks to its rich culture, history, and numerous islands with stunning beaches. Photography played a pivotal role in promoting the country's tourism sector, aided by many renowned photographers who significantly contributed to the nation's visual identity. Among these photographers, Dimitris Tloupas, Dimitris Letsios, and Iasonas Apostolidis stand out as key figures in shaping the early tourism period in Greece (1950–1980).

2. The Photographer Dimitris Tloupas

Born in Larissa on January 23, 1920, Takis Tloupas initially worked with his furniture-making father from a very young age, and as he grew up, he became involved in woodcarving, carving the pediments of mansions and church altarpieces.

His relationship with photography began in 1938, when he visited Mount Olympus with the Larissa Mountaineering Association. He recalls: “It was a unique experience. Until then we had known nothing else, apart from going to the stadium, jumping over the wall because we didn’t have the money for the ticket, and watching a match. Suddenly, I found myself with people who had completely different interests. I was excited.”

As a self-taught photographer with only a darkroom as his equipment, he acquired his first filters after a bombing, when he selected pieces of yellow, blue, and red from the broken stained glass windows of Agios Achillios. Tloupas' involvement with photography on a professional level was done genuinely and creatively, since he was

not influenced by commercial competition and the needs dictated by the conditions and means of survival at that time.

His creative instinct and the interpretive power of his lens, successfully and with unique lyricism and tenderness, outline the Thessalian landscape, the life and occupations of the rural inhabitants, their customs and traditions, as well as the nomadic life of the Vlachs and Sarakatsani. His subjects are rendered with dynamic simplicity and are distinguished for their expressive structure, parading before the viewer's eyes as irrefutable testimonies of a civilization that no longer exists. Within the faint mountain peaks with the strong outlines of the foreground, hunched figures of ordinary people stand out, with faces dug by time and the hardships of life, plowing or reaping their fields. These are day laborers who, with sweaty foreheads, struggle daily to win the battle of survival.

Tloupas is the photographer who does not approach his subjects to impress by creating a flashy atmosphere, stealing the viewer's interest. On the contrary, he is a modest artist who chose the language of photography to express through his work, his inner impulse, shaping the face of post-war photography in Greece. He is a photographer who is inspired by free thought, freed from the alienation caused by the compromises and concessions. His subject matter moves between the dreamy and the real, between the beauty of nature and the struggle of life. The high peaks of Olympus and Kissavos, the wild and rocky shores of the Aegean, the boats bobbing in the clear blue waters, and the rushing streams of the mountain slopes constitute pure and vivid images that deal with the beauties of the place with deep quality and sensitivity.

Tloupas is the visionary who faithfully immortalizes his visual visions, without limiting himself to their superficial representation. His deeper approach makes the communication with the viewer more substantial, seeking something beyond the mere depiction of the subject on the surface of the photographic paper. "He is not interested in capturing the graphic. He captured the certainty of a world and a way of life that changes little with the succession of generations. There was a beauty and a cosmic simplicity because the seasons and the expressions of the people were harmoniously tied with the gaze and soul of the artist. His way of life resembled a destiny that he wanted to fulfill, avoiding anything that could divert him from his goal." [1]

The portraits of Takis Tloupas lead the viewer into an immediate dialogue with the hidden aspects of the individuals and characters depicted. Portraits of Seferis, Zervos, Aparti, Karagatsis, as well as ordinary people, such as the knife-maker from Skopelos, the folk painter, the gardener, the Arakhovite, and others, impose themselves as they can individualize the elements of the personality of the portrayed figure. The gaze is sometimes contemplative and frontal, sometimes absent with a three-quarter tilt, and sometimes pure and clear, chiseled by the wrinkles that life has bestowed upon it as an invaluable dowry. All the faces he immortalizes—famous or unknown to most—are treated with the same respect through his lens and the photographer's intention, defending the life stance expressed by his protagonist.

Another element of Takis Tloupas' activity was his role as a collector of items, primarily from the Prehistoric period. As a skilled hiker, exploring the banks of the Peneus River and the lands of Thessaly, he discovered lithic tools and figurines from the Neolithic period. Holding a collector's permit, he preserved several of them, cleaned them, photographed them, and placed them in a special display case he had set up in his workshop. His love for prehistoric and not only art highlights the extent of his respect for tradition, but at the same time provides many researchers and archaeologists the opportunity to encounter and study these unique findings up close. George Chourmouziadis, Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, states: "The earth is silent, and to find the information within it, you must get muddy, bleed, become one with it, and finally, its silence must remain deeply embedded in your consciousness, like a stiletto in your tired side. The image, on the other hand, changes from moment to moment; you must chase it, search for it, as modern Greeks say. Because the image is light, and light cannot be caught. You must be a master to imprison it as it is in your eyes, in your camera. And Takis Tloupas was, and still is, a skilled master who had and has a thousand and one ways to capture light. Not only as a natural phenomenon but as a historical and social material, and with this material, he 'tended' to the human form." [2]

The significant photographer Takis Tloupas passed away on May 8, 2003, at the age of 83. His monumental body of work and vast photographic archive serve as invaluable material for post-war photography in Greece, but at the same time, positively influence younger generations, highlighting the path that will lead to the knowledge and love

of the Greek countryside and its inhabitants.

3. Photographer Dimitris Letsios

Born in Anaksasia, a large village in Volos beneath Makrinita, on December 12, 1910, Dimitris Letsios [4] is one of the most significant figures in post-war photography in Greece. He spent his childhood in Volos, working in the bakery established by his father in 1909, after his return to Greece following arduous work in restaurants in San Francisco. The income from the bakery appears to have been sufficient, ensuring that his five children lacked nothing essential for their survival.

Letsios recalls: "We had the means to learn letters. However, I did not want to continue my studies. I saw that the profession was ready for me... I continued (the work) until 1984, because I enjoyed it, and it provided me with professional independence. Thus, I learned photography. On my own. Wandering around Volos and the villages of Pelion. Searching. Wasting film and paper, trying to improve yesterday's work. Since then, everything has photographic interest for me. What matters is to walk, to live, in order to take photographs." [4] From his base in Volos, he embarked on excursions to photograph Thessalian land and, more broadly, all of Greece, creating an exceptionally important archive consisting of approximately forty thousand photographs.

As a self-taught photographer, like most photographers of his time, he began documenting his surroundings with a cheap camera. By the end of the interwar period, he managed to purchase a German Super Ikona with a 6x6 cm negative. However, he was unable to keep it during the Occupation, as he was forced to exchange it for some wheat, which was surely necessary for his survival during those difficult years. Additionally, as the bakery he ran was requisitioned by the Italians, he organized himself within the EAM of Volos, which he led. At the same time, he created resistance artistic events, although he was unable to photographically document the National Resistance, as he lacked the necessary photographic materials and equipment.

A genuine fighter with left-wing ideology, Letsios was arrested after the Dekemvriana (December events) and was imprisoned and later exiled, like many others who shared his views. Upon his return, he decided to self-exile for a long period in Athens and Piraeus, cities far from the place where he was born and deeply cherished.

A pivotal moment in his photographic career was his participation in the establishment of the Hellenic Photographic Society (E.F.E.) in 1952, which led him, four years later, to open a branch in Volos in 1956. He was fully responsible for organizing exhibitions, events, and photographic lessons aimed at promoting the photographic arts among young people with sensitivities and visions for their lives. Unfortunately, the 1954 earthquakes destroyed his photographic work completely, particularly from the interwar period. However, he did not consider this particularly important, as these images represented his early experiments with the new medium of expression.

A dynamic feature of Dimitris Letsios' artistic creation is his landscapes, which are often chosen from the unparalleled beauty of Thessalian land. With his camera, he captures every breath of nature through the interplay of mountain peaks and the light with shadows. The wild, jagged peaks of the mountains seem to intertwine with the white clouds in the sky, as if competing to dominate the beauty of the landscape. The rolling plains and strong chiaroscuro effects dominate, revealing the extent of his aesthetic choices. At other times, the foreground takes the dominant position, creating an axis of escape through the perspective of the composition.

Letsios' images, showcasing the characteristics of his high technical training, highlight his ability to organize the subject he chooses, through the subjugation of volumes and the absolute control of light and shadow. The presence of people is particularly intense and overwhelmingly dynamic, subjugating all other individual elements of the scene. The lives of the people in the Thessalian plain parade before his camera, through their everyday expressions, festivals, religious celebrations, and agricultural and pastoral activities. His images have the documentary power to capture every human expression, every drop of sweat from the people of labor.

Letsios remained, throughout his life, an amateur photographer by conviction, and he seemed enraged at the mere idea that he could be asked to photograph by someone else: "The fact that I was always an amateur photographer granted me a unique freedom. I photographed whatever I wanted, as I saw it, and whenever I desired. Becoming a

professional just to have people come and say 'take a weekly photo of me'? I would never accept that. Moreover, professionals also used retouching to remove wrinkles. I couldn't do that, and I wouldn't accept it..."

The images of this significant creator are not merely objects of exhibition value; on the contrary, they are documents and photographic memories with undeniable evidentiary power. His subjects are alive, human, forms of life and expressions of the inhabitants in their everyday actions. They are elements of the history of our land, although he believes: "I do not consider it the photographer's obligation to record history or shape opinions. I do not like the 'I' in photography. I took the photos, and I enjoyed them."

Letsios captured several villages in the Greek countryside during his travels and wanderings. Makrinita, in particular, is a space deeply familiar and special to him, as he succeeded in documenting, through his camera, its transition from the difficult years of abandoning weaving and tanning to its current flourishing of tourist economy [5]. The events that colored daily life, highlighting the warmth of relationships and the optimism facing the coming changes, inform the viewer, contributing to their immersion in the happenings. He states, "Makrinita is the place that completes me. The location, the warmth of the people, and the village itself provoke a unique sensation in me. They make me feel a part of the community. That is why I loved Makrinita, not only as a photographic subject but also as a place; it is deep in my heart." [6]

The photographer's love for the Thessalian landscape is again evident in the images he captured, which document the transformation of Lake Karla into dry land, condemning, through his lens, the abuse of nature by human intervention. Furthermore, he did not hesitate to photograph electrical wires and other unsightly human choices aimed at desecrating the monuments of tradition. He is a photographer who refuses to remain silent in the face of human vanity. He passed away at the age of 98 in January 2008.

4. Photographer Iasonas Apostolidis

The perceptive and particularly modest in temperament, Iasonas Apostolidis is considered one of the most significant photographers whose contributions played a crucial role in the development of photographic art in Greece after World War II and the Civil War.[7]

Born in 1922, he began photographing at the age of ten with borrowed cameras, and it was not until 1947 that he managed to purchase his first camera, a used Rolleicord 6x9, which he later replaced with a Leica and a Rolleiflex. His primary focus was on landscapes and various moments from the daily lives of ordinary people. At that time, most photographers in Greece were capturing landscapes with predominantly touristic appeal. However, Apostolidis approached his subjects with a deeper artistic perspective, always seeking perfect compositions and themes that would not go unnoticed.

The majority of his photographs were taken in areas surrounding Attica and on beautiful islands in the Aegean. Many hours of his day were spent in the darkroom, where he printed his images alone, striving to reproduce as faithfully as possible what he truly envisioned in the magic moment of the "click." He often said, "Others cannot do what you want in the darkroom... If it weren't for the possibilities the darkroom offers, I might never have pursued photography [8]."

Without a specific photographer as a role model, Apostolidis worked photographically based on the emotion he derived from the subject he selected. However, his interest in the work of Dimitris Charisiadis is evident. Among those who influenced his photographic work, he particularly highlights the art critic Angelos Prokopiou, whose lectures at the Hellenic Photographic Society (E.F.E.), of which Apostolidis was a member, played a significant role in sensitizing his artistic sensibilities, encouraging him to approach his subjects more creatively.

Apostolidis is an integral part of the generation of significant artists who emerged within the E.F.E., alongside figures such as Voula Papaioannou, Dimitris Charisiadis, Spyros Meletzis, Kostas Balafas, Christos Tsellos, Dimitris Tloupas, and Dimitris Letsios. His photographs were published in many issues of the journal *Hellenic Photography* and won numerous awards in national photography competitions. In April 1959, together with S. Meletzis, K. Balafas, P. Mylo, Z. Stella, K. Tsellos, V. Papaioannou, D. Charisiadis, and others, he participated with his works in the "Exhibition of Greek Photography" in Paris, at the invitation of the *Fédération Française de*

Photographie, under the patronage of the Greek Government Presidency and the Greek Ambassador in Paris [9]. Apostolidis received many accolades within the photographic community and served as a judge in several Greek photography competitions.

As one of the leading photographers of the postwar period, his photographs epitomize an era when the world sought to dream and forget the hardships caused by World War II and the Civil War. Was he a pictorialist or a naturalist? This remains a challenging question, as Apostolidis' personality resists simplistic and unexamined classifications. His work is constantly evolving, transforming, and renewing itself, as though it seeks to avoid the conventional path of predictable and superficial progression.

For Apostolidis, beauty exists everywhere; one only needs to perceive it, to give quality attention to the everyday utilitarian objects, the people, and the landscapes. Then, all that might seem insignificant to many can speak to you and "unfold" before you with all its genuine innocence. Most of his images from the countryside evoke melancholy and nostalgia, while the human figures serve in the composition as a quiet force that contributes to the overall harmony. As a true poet of the image, he captures the hard lives of rural people with realism and dignity, emphasizing their inner strength and optimism.

His images from the Aegean islands demonstrate the artistic breadth of the creator, evoking a desire to transform the past into the present, a present that we hope will survive as long as possible. These photographs, taken across several islands such as Mykonos, Paros, Ios, Skyros, Evia, Tinos, Hydra, and Aegina, clearly demonstrate that Apostolidis was not interested in capturing purely tourist images but rather sought to portray essential, timeless images that resonate with life. With a carefree lightness at times and contemplative thoughtfulness at others, he vividly presents the form of postwar Greece, with an authenticity that shakes the viewer through the everyday relationships of its people and the meaningful semiotics of their gestures, without any ulterior motive on the part of the creator at the moment of capture.

In his landscapes, the choices of subject matter and the aesthetic weight of the composition highlight his deep technical knowledge of the medium. The elements of nature—the sun with its interplay of light and shadow, the road disappearing into the depth of the frame, the pruned trees, the reflections in the water, the Old Phaliro in 1968—are themes that speak to the soul of the viewer, while the creator opens a dialogue with them through these photographs.

Another thematic unit of his work involves tools depicted in solitude, captured through a repetitive arrangement, expressing the union between humans and nature. Both exist as invisible protagonists in the composition—absent as active elements but always present in their associative capacity.

Most of Iasonas Apostolidis' photographs belong to a broader photographic-technological unit that is dominated by inspiration and experimentation. These works are created in two tonal levels: light and dark, the bright and the shadowed. Through this technique, the photographer enters the realm of surrealist expression, revealing another side of the inventive artist who borrows stories and images from the world of illusion and dreams.

The Futurists believed that the twentieth century should seek beauty in its materials and creations, while Fernand Léger asserted that art must be valuable within its own time, just like any other intellectual manifestation [10]. Apostolidis' photographs invite their viewers, unveiling meanings that are not as easy as they initially appear. Through these works, the viewer witnesses the great artist's journey through his actions and searches. These are timeless images that will always evoke emotion and aesthetically challenge their audience.

5. Photography and Its Role in Tourism Entrepreneurship

Photography has undeniably played a pivotal role in the development and promotion of tourism in Greece. Since the early 20th century, the power of the photographic image has helped to craft an alluring visual narrative of Greece, enticing international visitors and contributing to the country's rise as a prominent tourist destination. The use of photography, particularly through the lens of iconic landscapes, cultural heritage, and vibrant local life, significantly impacted the tourism industry by portraying an idealized image of Greece that resonated globally. This visual representation of the country laid the groundwork for the modern tourism industry and, over time,

evolved into various specialized sectors, transforming the nation into a multifaceted tourist hub.

The Role of Photography in Shaping Greece's Image

Photography has been one of the most influential tools in shaping the international image of Greece, especially post-World War II, when the country sought to redefine its identity on the global stage. The visual impact of Greece's majestic landscapes, its ancient ruins, picturesque islands, and traditional villages became a visual brand recognized worldwide. Photographers played a significant role in this process, capturing the essence of the Greek experience and showcasing its beauty in a way that encouraged exploration and discovery.

In the early stages of the country's tourism boom, mass tourism was the primary mode of travel, with large numbers of international tourists visiting Greece primarily for its classical heritage and idyllic Mediterranean scenery. Photographs of the Parthenon, the Acropolis, the Temple of Apollo, and the Aegean Sea were central to these promotional efforts. Through strategic visual campaigns, Greece was marketed as a paradise for leisure and relaxation, a land of history and myth, where ancient civilization met the vibrant present. These images, disseminated through travel magazines, postcards, and advertisements, not only captured the attention of potential tourists but also shaped how Greece was perceived abroad.

From Mass Tourism to Diversified Tourism Entrepreneurship

The photography of these early years was inextricably tied to the rise of mass tourism entrepreneurship. Photographers and travel agencies formed a symbiotic relationship, with photographers capturing images that highlighted Greece's beauty and uniqueness, which were then used by tourism businesses to attract international visitors. As mass tourism became an integral part of Greece's economic model, it paved the way for the development of infrastructure, such as hotels, resorts, and transportation networks, all of which further supported the tourism industry.

As the global tourism market evolved and diversified, so too did how Greece was marketed to potential visitors. Over time, tourism entrepreneurship in Greece began to shift from mass tourism to more specialized and niche forms of travel. Photography continued to play an essential role in this shift, as it allowed tourism businesses to highlight new and emerging forms of tourism that were distinct from the traditional offerings. The image of Greece as a destination for specific types of tourism, such as religious tourism, wine tourism, and sports tourism, began to take shape, attracting a different demographic of travelers.

Religious Tourism and Photography

One of the significant niche markets that emerged in Greece was religious tourism, with the island of Tinos being a key example. Tinos, home to the famous Church of Panagia Evangelistria, became a pilgrimage site for Orthodox Christians, especially during the celebration of the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. Photographs of the island's sacred sites, the spiritual atmosphere, and the devotion of the pilgrims have played a critical role in promoting this form of tourism. Religious imagery, capturing the fervor of religious observances, the sacred architecture, and the island's serene landscapes, became an essential element in marketing Tinos as a destination for spiritual reflection and connection. In this context, photography serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of conveying the deep cultural and spiritual significance of these sites, which attract a dedicated and often international audience.

Wine Tourism and Photography

Similarly, the rise of wine tourism in regions such as Santorini, Nemea, and Northern Greece is another area where photography has contributed significantly to tourism entrepreneurship. The photographic documentation of Greece's vineyard landscapes, wine-making traditions, and the sensory experience of tasting local wines has become central to the promotion of this niche market. The stunning images of sun-kissed vineyards on the volcanic island of Santorini, with the turquoise waters of the Aegean in the background, have been particularly effective in attracting visitors seeking to combine their passion for wine with the allure of Greece's natural beauty. Wine tourism, which emphasizes the local culture, gastronomy, and the authenticity of the wine-making process,

benefits from the aesthetic power of photography, which captures the essence of these experiences in an evocative and compelling manner.[11] [12]

Sports Tourism and Photography

Another significant sector in Greece's tourism portfolio is sports tourism, which has grown in recent years due to the country's favorable climate and varied landscapes. Greece's mountains, coastlines, and islands offer excellent conditions for a wide range of sports activities, including hiking, cycling, sailing, and water sports. Photographs that capture the dynamic nature of these activities, alongside the country's dramatic landscapes, not only promote Greece as an adventure destination but also emphasize the country's diverse appeal. For instance, images of the crystal-clear waters of the Ionian Islands or the rugged terrain of the Peloponnese often highlight the exciting and active lifestyle that sports tourism entails. By capturing these moments, photographers help create a visual narrative that appeals to tourists seeking more than just relaxation, encouraging them to explore Greece through an active and engaging lens.[13] [14]

Photography as a Cornerstone of Tourism Entrepreneurship

Photography has played an integral role in the development of tourism entrepreneurship in Greece, serving as both a promotional tool and a visual storyteller [15]. The images captured by photographers have shaped the international perception of Greece, supporting mass tourism and later contributing to the diversification of the tourism market. From religious and wine tourism to sports tourism, photography has been central in depicting the multifaceted offerings of Greece and attracting tourists from all over the world. As Greece continues to evolve as a dynamic tourist destination, the power of photography will undoubtedly remain a cornerstone of its tourism entrepreneurship, providing the visual language necessary to communicate the country's allure and diversity to a global audience.

6. Conclusions

Photographs often possess the remarkable ability to transmit the emotional intensity experienced by their creator at the moment of capture. The ideal relationship between the subjects, the surrounding atmosphere, the quality of lighting, and the precise moment chosen results in timeless images that will always "speak" to the sensitized viewer. The human mind receives, forms, and interprets the image of the external world through both conscious and unconscious forces. The realm of the unconscious could never become part of our experience without the reflection of perceivable things.

The semiotic analysis of a photograph, or a series of photographs, can convince us that events occurring around us are not always perceived by those present. Certainly, they do not engage us as profoundly as a printed photograph might. A photograph has the power to intervene in the consciousness of individuals in a transformative way [16]. In the reading of a photograph, the goal is not merely to convey information about an event occurring elsewhere. Rather, the aim is to create a situation in which the viewer, through their interpretation of the photograph, experiences not only an understanding of reality but also a sensory engagement with the events, thereby positioning themselves as an active participant in the narrative [17]. This is precisely what the tourist product seeks to achieve, as it deeply penetrates the thoughts and decisions of the modern traveler. Written propaganda is ineffective unless it is accompanied by vivid representations of the spaces being advertised as part of the tourist experience.

The photographic lens climbs the mountains to reveal the grandeur of the Greek mountain peaks. It delves into ravines, captures the shores of islands bathed in the abundant light of the Greek sky, reflected in the pristine waters of the Greek seas, and immortalizes through its lens the unbreakable beauty of the Greek village. It uncovers the eternal monuments of ancient and Byzantine art, discovering hidden photographic treasures of our land, thus offering a genuine exploration of Greece. There is no doubt that Greece must be considered the photographer's paradise. Most words are redundant in the face of such immense beauty and historical richness.

Photography is an essential tool in capturing not just the physical landscape but the emotional and cultural depth of a place. The images it creates become more than mere representations; they become instruments that evoke a

profound sense of connection and engagement with the viewer. The photographs taken in Greece embody not just the visual grandeur of its landscapes, villages, and monuments, but they also serve as vehicles for conveying the soul of the country—the timeless beauty and the enduring cultural significance that make Greece so unique.

In this sense, the photographic image is not a passive reflection of the world; it is an active participant in shaping the perceptions and understanding of the viewer. It invites the viewer into a deeper connection with the subject, moving beyond surface-level impressions to provoke introspection and a reimagining of the world. This is why photography holds such a powerful place in the tourism industry—it creates experiences that transcend the physical and reach into the emotional, making the destination not only seen but felt.

Therefore, it is clear that the role of photography in tourism is not simply one of capturing a moment in time; it is about communicating a profound connection to place, to culture, and to the very essence of what makes a destination compelling. The timelessness of a photograph, with its ability to resonate with viewers long after it is taken, is what makes it an indispensable tool in tourism promotion. Through the lens of the camera, we come to understand not just the image but the deeper story it tells—a story that will forever captivate and inspire those who view it.

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