2026 Milky Way Season Guide

www.kristinerosephotography.com

The 2026 Milky Way Season Guide

Plan your best shot of the year.

A complete month-by-month roadmap for capturing the Milky Way core: every new moon window, shooting hour, and sky position from April through October 2026.

- ✦ 7 months of new moon windows mapped out
- ✦ Best shooting hours for each window
- ✦ Northern & Southern Hemisphere notes

Prepared by Kristine Rose Photography

That's me ➡️

INTRODUCTION

The Milky Way Has a Schedule

People often think because we are “in” the Milky Way that you can go out at night and look up. But in reality when we say “photographing the Milky Way” we mean the Milky Way core. And the core of the Milky Way is not always visible at night. The Milky Way has a **season.**

Within that season, **new moon windows** are the key, when the sky is moonless and dark enough for the core to be captured in its full detail.

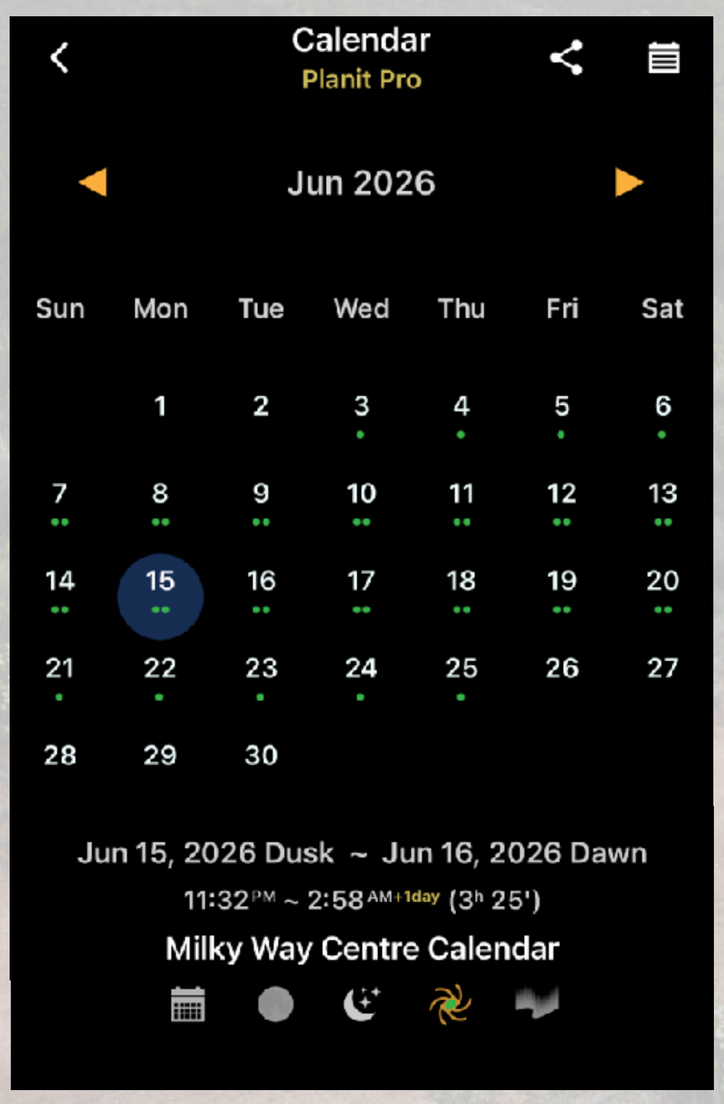
This guide is built around **Northern Hemisphere timing**, since that's where I have experience shooting.
If you're in the Southern Hemisphere it is a bit different. The same new moon windows apply. But the core rises higher and since peak season is in the winter, nights are longer with extended shooting times.

🌍 Northern Hemisphere

- Core stays low on the horizon
- Compact shooting windows
- Same windows as listed in this guide

🌏 Southern Hemisphere

- Core climbs much higher overhead
- Longer shooting windows
- Same new moon dates apply



Above on the left is a screenshot from the Planit Pro app for my location at 45° N in Nova Scotia, Canada and on the right is 32° S in New South Wales, Australia.
Notice the Milky Way shooting time as seen in brackets: 3hrs 25mins vs 11hrs 3mins.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to Use This Guide

A few key concepts shape everything in this guide. None of this is complicated — but a clear mental model makes the practical information much easier to use in the field.

What Is a New Moon Window?

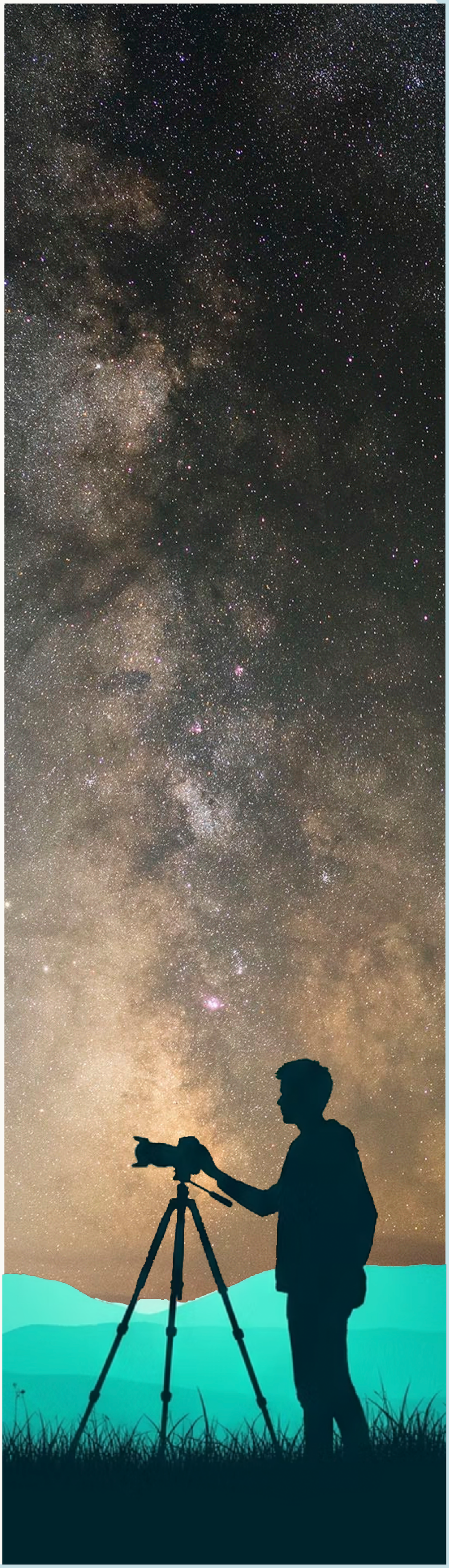
The new moon is when the Moon is positioned directly between the Earth and the Sun, causing the side facing Earth to be unilluminated. Without moonlight, you get genuinely dark skies and can capture detail in the Milky Way. While the new moon is only one day, you can photograph the Milky Way without direct moonlight interference for several days before and after as outlined in this guide.

Milky Way Core vs. General Visibility

The core is the bright, dense galactic centre of our home galaxy, the river of light you see in photographs. This guide tracks core visibility specifically. The core's rise and set times vary significantly across the season.

Northern vs. Southern Hemisphere

The Milky Way galactic centre is always viewed to the south. That means for those in the Northern Hemisphere like myself, the earth is in the way of our view when we look at the core. Photographers in the Southern Hemisphere don't have that problem, and as such the core rises much higher in the viewable sky than it does in the Northern Hemisphere.



THE SEASON

Month-by-Month Guide: April – October 2026

April
Season Opens · Core low, brief window

May
Momentum Builds · Earlier rises, longer nights

June
Full Visibility · Core up all dark night

July
Peak Season · Bold, dominant core

August
Peak Energy · Brightest window

September
The Shift · Tightening window

October
Final Window · Low core, last chance

The next pages outline each month and what to expect. Here is a legend for understanding each point and making it relevant to your specifics.

01

New Moon Window

Key dates for your primary shooting window each month. These are similar across locations.

02

Core Visibility

When the core rises and how long it stays visible.Timing will vary depending on your latitude: Closer to the equator in the Northern Hemisphere and those in the Southern Hemisphere will have more time generally.

03

Best Shooting Window

The most realistic hours to plan around consistently night by night. Times will vary throughout the New Moon window and some nights you may have an hour or two more than what I've listed for the month.

04

Position in Sky

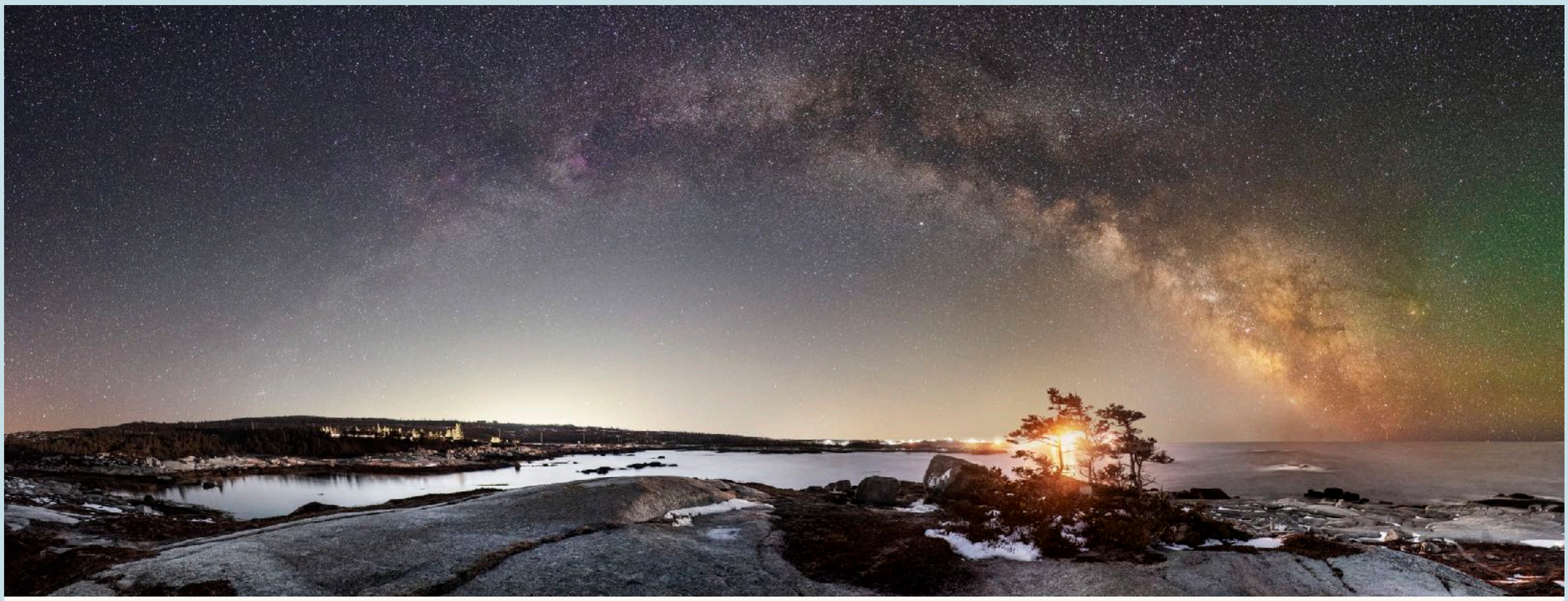
Direction and height of the core across the season. Note that for Southern Hemisphere photographers the core will get much higher in the sky.

05

Why This Month Matters

What makes each month worth showing up for and a personal note from me.

Each month builds on the last. Showing up in April means you're ready for September.



MONTH 1 OF 7

April — The Season Begins

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **April 17** | Window: **~April 10–22**

👁️ Core Visibility

1:00 AM — low and brief, but it's there.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

2:30 AM – 5:00 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

Southeast — Low on the horizon, becoming diagonal by full light onset.

Why This Month Matters

The core is low and short-lived, which means we focus less on perfection and more on reconnection. This month can feel like getting back on a bike after months off, or learning altogether. Give yourself permission to just get out and shoot. Experimenting and making mistakes now pays off later in the season when conditions are more demanding.

Because the core stays low to the horizon, it's the perfect time for 180° panoramas of the Milky Way arch.

If you approach April as a training ground you set yourself up for everything that follows.

> "Cold mornings almost feel like a reward after a long dark winter, and the morning birdsong with first light is one of my favourite things. I go to places where the landscape is more accessible and its beauty doesn’t require flora to be flowering, like rocky coastlines or beaches."
>
> — Kristine

MONTH 2 OF 7

May — Momentum Builds

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **May 16** | Window: **~May 7–22**

👁️ Core Visibility

Rises around **11:30 PM** — earlier and more accessible than April.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

1:00 AM – 4:00 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

Southeast → South — low at the start, rising to nearly vertical by full light. Multiple compositional options without moving location.

Why This Month Matters

May is where things start to click. The core rises earlier, stays longer, and gives you more flexibility to shoot without racing the clock.

Early in the night, you still have access to full arch panoramas, but as the hours pass, the Milky Way becomes more vertical, opening the door to single-frame compositions and vertical panoramas.

This is also the month where endurance is a consideration, longer nights and therefore more shooting time mean you can experiment with multiple compositions in one outing. The photographers who take advantage of May often see the biggest leap in their results.

> "It finally feels like Milky Way season in Nova Scotia, I’m not freezing, I can be out all night long and there are signs of life in the landscape. Apple blossoms bloom near the end of May which doesn’t always line up with the new moon cycle, but is a treat when it does."
>
> — Kristine

MONTH 3 OF 7

June — More Time, More Options

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **June 14** | Window: **~June 5–22**

👁️ Core Visibility

Visible for the **entirety of dark night** — you won't miss it regardless of when you step outside.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

11:00 PM – 3:30 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

Southeast → Southwest — diagonal after full dark onset, becoming vertical by the end of the night. Full arc of movement across the sky in a single outing.

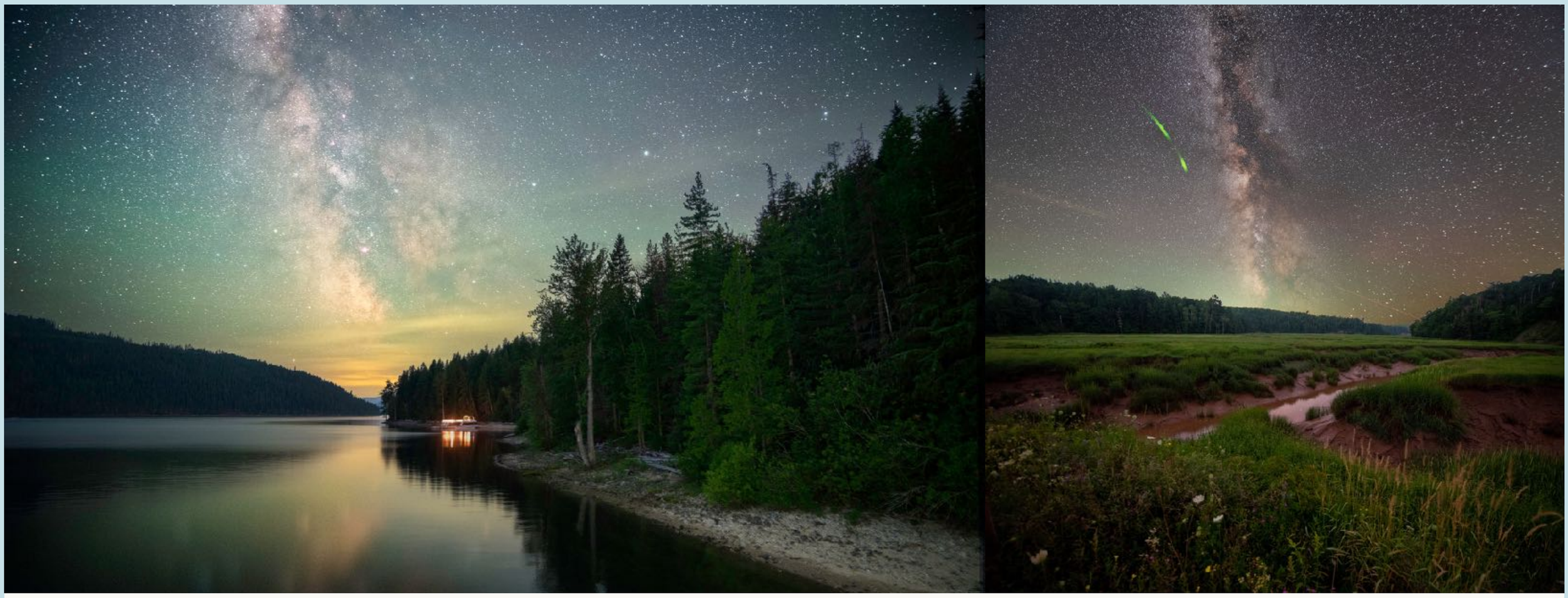
Why This Month Matters

June unlocks full creative freedom. With the core visible all night you have the flexibility to try a lot of things even with the shorter nights in the Northern Hemisphere.

This is the month to explore variety. You can shoot early, late, wide, tight, single frames, stacked images, or panoramas.

Northern Hemisphere experiences the shortest night of the year (and more northern locations may have no dark night at all) while Southern Hemisphere photographers have their longest making this a crossover month globally where different photographers are in completely different phases of their season.

> "June gives me less overall shooting time than May, but it is noticeably warmer so it’s a tradeoff I’m happy to take. I look for lupins lining the ditches later in the month!"
>
> — Kristine



MONTH 4 OF 7

July — Peak Season Begins

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **July 14** | Window: **~July 7–22**

👁️ Core Visibility

Visible after full dark onset, setting shortly before first light arrives.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

11:00 PM – 3:30 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

South → Southwest — diagonal at full dark onset. Early arrival is important to catch the best position before it shifts toward the horizon.

Why This Month Matters

July is where the Milky Way becomes visually dominant. The core is bright, structured, and positioned in a way that naturally creates striking compositions.

This is the month where in most places the technical challenges are lower, which means the creative bar gets higher. Start to execute on things you've been practising through the year so far.

If April was about learning and May was about building, July is about creating work you are proud to share.

> "July is my favourite month of the year and almost my favourite month to shoot. I love finding places with flowers and natural beauty. I often spend evenings hiking the areas I want to shoot at, staying to watch the sunset and stars take over the sky one at a time."
>
> — Kristine

MONTH 5 OF 7

August — Peak Season Energy

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **August 12** | Window: **~August 6–18**

👁️ Core Visibility

Visible after full dark onset, setting **midway through the night** — the window is slightly shorter than July, which sharpens your focus.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

10:00 PM – 1:45 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

South → Southwest — nearly vertical at full dark onset, setting in a diagonal arc. The early hours are the most visually powerful.

Why This Month Matters

August is peak energy, both in the sky and in your momentum. You are experienced from earlier months, and conditions are still working in your favour.

This is the month to push for standout images, refine your style, and capture portfolio-level work. The alignment of events like meteor showers (like the Perseids in the Northern Hemisphere) adds an additional layer of opportunity.

The key here is intention, not just shooting more, but shooting *better*.

> "August nights are for the Perseids meteor showers, waves crashing at the beach and campfires. I don’t always get those things each year, but I count myself grateful if I do.
> In 2026 the peak of the Perseids falls on the night of the new moon 🤩🤩 if you can find clear skies mark this on your calendar to get out - even if you need to drive a few hours, it's worth it”
>
> — Kristine

MONTH 6 OF 7

September — The Shift Begins

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **September 10** | Window: **~September 4–15**

👁️ Core Visibility

Visible after full dark onset, but **sets earlier overnight** — the window is tightening.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

9:30 PM – 12:00 AM

🧭 Position in Sky

Southwest — vertical at full dark onset, setting diagonally. Arriving on time matters more now than it did in June or July.

Why This Month Matters

September introduces constraint again, but this time with experience behind you. The window is shorter so your decision-making is sharper.

This is where efficiency meets creativity. You are no longer experimenting widely, you are executing with purpose. Shorter nights mean planning matters more, and every composition is intentional.

For many photographers, this becomes a favourite month because it blends comfort, skill, and just enough pressure to elevate your work.

> "This might be my favourite time of year to shoot. **There, I said it.** Nights are still warm, but they are earlier. I can get out and shoot and still be back in bed with enough time to get up with my kiddos in the AM. I might get some changing colours in the landscape, but that’s just a cherry on top of an already delightful night."
>
> — Kristine

MONTH 7 OF 7

October — Final Chances

🌑 New Moon Window

🌑 New Moon: **October 10** | Window: **~October 2–10**

👁️ Core Visibility

Visible briefly after full dark onset — **low in the sky** and setting quickly. This is not a month for patience; it's a month for presence.

🕐 Best Shooting Window

8:30 PM – 10:00 PM

🧭 Position in Sky

Southwest — the core is already well on its way to setting when darkness arrives. Arriving precisely at full dark is essential; even 20 minutes late can mean a meaningfully different sky.

Why This Month Matters

October is about urgency. The core is disappearing, and every opportunity counts.

You are no longer learning or experimenting, you are choosing your *final photos of the season*.

Limitations force clarity, and often lead to some of the most meaningful images you create all year. If you show up in October, even when conditions aren't perfect, you close your season with intention rather than regret.

> "This is it, the last hurrah. In June I wouldn’t go out on a night that only had 30 minutes of core visibility, but I might in October since I know cold nights and the end of core season is coming. But if I time it right I can get the Milky Way core and beautiful fall colours. Sometimes I just get a calm night under the stars, and that is always worth it"
>
> — Kristine

QUICK REFERENCE

2026 New Moon Calendar

Milky Way Shooting Window

New Moon

APRIL

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

MAY

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

JUNE

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

JULY

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

AUGUST

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

SEPTEMBER

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

OCTOBER

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

WHAT'S NEXT

Now You Know When… What Comes Next?

You understand the Milky Way season as a predictable, structured opportunity rather than a lucky accident. You know which months to prioritize, which windows to block out in your calendar, and what to realistically expect from the sky each time you go out.

Knowing when to go doesn't guarantee the shot. But it's the foundation everything else is built on.

Stay Connected

Follow along for seasonal reminders, shooting tips, and updates as each new moon window approaches.

https://www.facebook.com/kristinerosephotography

https://www.instagram.com/kristinerosephotography/

Watch For Emails

Get deeper guidance delivered directly to your inbox.

You'll be the first to know about anything I create to help photogs like you get amazing sky photos.

Coming Soon

More detailed instruction on settings, composition, and processing is on its way.

I run trainings throughout the year and opportunities to join Milky Way Magic.

The stars are *predictable*. The opportunity is **real**.

The only question is whether you'll be **ready** when the clouds part and the skies clear.