by 35mm to 105mm, called a 3X zoom—3 times 35 = 105.

Other options: 35 - 140, 4X zoom; 28 - 140, 5X zoom, 35 - 280, 8X zoom, 28 - 280, 10X zoom. Notice that the “X” doesn’t tell you the minimum or maximum focal length of the lens; you need to know one of them in order to find the other. Caution: it is very hard, almost impossible, to hold the camera steady at the larger focal lengths, unless you use a tripod or press the camera against a support.

Other considerations

If you’re coming from 35mm photography with a fairly sophisticated camera, you might want some other options. There are a LOT. Here is a run-on stream-of-consciousness list. If you don’t recognize a term, you probably never used it. If you want to know about, the Luminous Landscape, DPReview and Steve’s Digicam web sites listed below have definitions and tutorials. Anyway, here’s the list: aperture priority; shutter priority; manual mode; bracket mode; movie (at 640X480 pixels only); varying ISO values (sensitivity, what you might have done with different camera bodies loaded with different ISO value films); night mode (uses noise reduction); white balance (by Kelvin number or light source: replaces filters and film types with broad range of color correction). Enough! I think you get the idea. The DPReview site has a buying guide with a whole list of options that you can add or not, as you please, in defining the camera you want. It will then list an array of cameras for you to explore.

You also want to consider getting a skylight or haze filter to protect your lens. Cheaper cameras do not have a way to attach these, but they also have “eyelids” that close down over the lens when the power is off; you still have to be careful when the power is on. Some of the better cameras require a mounting tube to mount the filter in front of the lens; that makes the camera bulkier in the “off” mode. The best choice is a threaded front end to the lens mount as on better film cameras. Olympus 5060 and 8080 have this feature; the Nikons do not.

Where to buy

We tend to make our major photo purchases on the web. The prices are significantly lower than locally. I would be happy to pay a moderate premium for making local purchases, but the differences are in the $100 range, or more. Some of our favorite sites are listed at the end of this article. Some care is necessary in purchasing on the web. Here are the questions to ask.

• Is this an American warranteed product? (There is a gray market, international bulk sales. However, the USA branch of the manufacturer will not honor guarantees. They will tell you to sent it back to the country for which it was manufactured, but you won’t know that.)