

FIREWORK PHOTOGRAPHY INFO - GPG October 2019

Location for Photographing Fireworks

Once you've found a scheduled display, take the lay of the land, considering possible backdrops for your fireworks photos. Then, get to the spot early to claim the high ground—a place in which you'll be comfortable and one that will give you an unobstructed, camera-eye's view of the colourful proceedings. When you get to the location, look for foreground objects. Fireworks against a black sky are colourful, but not that exciting in a photograph. Reference points—buildings, hillsides, trees, monuments can help a lot.

Please remember that if you've never tried fireworks before it's all trial and error and Each time a firework goes off there's always some element that's unpredictable so you have to learn to adapt and learn from your own mistakes, then correct for next time and do it again.

Camera Equipment & Settings

Use an electronic cable release, wired or wireless, because the less you touch the camera, the better. A wide-angle lens is ideal, but if you're farther away from the sky show than you'd like to be, a telephoto will be helpful. Check the camera instruction book; when using a tripod mounted camera, turning off the Image Stabilisation (IS) function is sometimes recommended.

A tripod is essential for fireworks. Get a good one: strong, sturdy, solid. Set it up so your camera's brought up to eye level by the height of the tripod's legs, not the height of the centre column. For maximum camera stability, keep the centre column as low as you can.

Set the camera's image quality for RAW and shoot the fireworks against a dark sky making sure to leave room at the bottom of the frame that will be devoid of any of the fireworks.

Fireworks Photography Tips

Have a small torch/head torch handy as it can be difficult to see camera dials & settings at night.

Use a sturdy tripod & use a cable release or wireless remote to trigger the shutter if you have one. (You can use the camera's timer function e.g. 2 seconds delay, but you may miss some action during the delayed shutter operation)

Shoot the highest quality file you can, RAW is ideal (There are bigger benefits when post processing images).

Set the camera to a low ISO, such as 100 or 200, turn off the autofocus; otherwise it might have difficulty locking onto focus. Manually focus your lens at infinity.

Set your camera on Manual mode for exposure and set your aperture between f8 and f16. Those apertures are pretty optimal for fireworks as the light streaks are controlled by the size of the aperture. Closing down more will make the light trails thinner, opening up more will make them wider and possibly too over exposed. Alternatively instead of choosing a shutter speed set the camera to Bulb (B) which allows you to keep the shutter open as long as you want. Expose for the entire fireworks burst. You can even keep the shutter open for multiple bursts.

If you want to ensure you are getting more than one firework exploding within the scene, take a small black card that you can hold over the front of the lens. If you don't have a card, then a cupped, dark-gloved hand will work, but take care not to touch the lens itself. Extend the exposure time and hold the card over the front of the lens between fireworks to prevent any ambient light entering. The shutter may be open for 15secs or 20secs, but as you are holding back the exposure with the card, the camera is only capturing the light trails from each separate explosion. This technique works best with bulb mode, especially if you need to extend the exposure.

DO NOT use flash

Shoot most of your shots at the start of the show; this will avoid the smoke/haze that appears a bit later, eventually the sky will be filled with smoke and it's not as pretty. If you are using a zoom lens try and do some close up/abstract photos if there is a lot of smoke in the sky.