How to Photograph Fireworks

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Fireworks season has arrived, and for photography lovers it's essential to know how to capture the visual spectacle on camera. Here's how to ensure your firework images are sparklers and not damp squibs!



The right gear

A wideangle lens is ideal, but if you're farther away than you'd like to be, use a telephoto such as the 18-200mm. A tripod is essential for the long exposures fireworks require. For maximum stability, keep the centre column as low as you can, so get your camera up to eye level by

adjusting the leg height. You'll also need a cable release to minimise the risk of camera shake (don't forget to switch off VR when the camera is tripod-mounted.)

Interesting foregrounds

Fireworks against a black sky are colourful, but not that exciting in a photograph. Reference points – buildings, hillsides, trees – add interest and scale. However, there is an exception…

Image overlay

If you're thinking about layering your fireworks into other pictures or combining a few into one image, then a black-sky background is the way to go. Most Nikon DSLRs have an Image Overlay option (usually in the Retouch menu). Just set the image quality for NEF (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 fireworks. Later on, when you've taken a shot (also at night) of a building, for instance, you can very quickly layer the two photos in-camera.

The best exposure technique

Select long exposure noise reduction, which cancels out much of the noise resulting from the camera's sensor building up heat during a long exposure. Turn off the autofocus, and manually focus your lens at infinity. Start off at ISO 200, f/11, and set the camera to bulb (B) – this allows you to keep the shutter open as long as you want, either for an entire fireworks burst or for multiple bursts. Review your first shot for detail, colour and sharpness, and adjust from there. If you're underexposed, open the aperture; if overexposed, close down.

Card trick

Ensure shake-free shots with the camera on its bulb setting with this neat card trick. Hold a black piece of cardboard, about four inches square, in front of the lens. Open the shutter using the cable release, wait about five seconds and then move the card away from the front of the lens. The card never touches the lens, it just blocks it. This gives the camera time to settle down after the shutter is released. When the card is taken away, the exposure starts, and when you decide the exposure is done, just move the card back in front of the lens, hold it there and close the shutter with the release. You can cover and uncover the lens multiple

times to capture multiple fireworks bursts in one exposure.



Quick tips

• Many COOLPIX models feature a fireworks scene mode. A tripod is essential, and it's a good idea to release the shutter via the self-timer to keep the camera steady.

• You can also use a Nikon 1 to shoot fireworks. Try Motion Snapshots as well as stills and video. Some Nikon 1 cameras can be set to bulb (B), too.

• For shooting D-movies, use auto mode, with the camera on a tripod to guard against shake, then incorporate your movies and stills into a slideshow or edited movie.



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