

## St James Photo competition – 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020

It's the Easter holidays, so many of you should have time to get outside and take photos for this week's competition.

The theme is 'sky'. Sun rise on Easter day morning is an obvious one, but sun sets are often more dramatic, and fluffy white clouds representing an English spring day might be your inspiration.

Again, I'm probably teaching granny to suck eggs (a quaint English expression that will mean very little to the under 16s – adults, please explain!) but here are a few more tips

In the same way as flowers, think about composition – with landscapes or skies consider where the horizon might be – generally it's a good to have something to provide 'reference' which could be trees on the horizon, or an aircraft vapour trail (if there are any this week!), or an unusual cloud – something to draw the eye. This could be a close foreground object such as a shrub or using the boughs of a tree to frame the picture, but bear in mind that, in contrast to week one, it's probably the background that is most important!

A few notes on exposure – this does not mean putting on a swimsuit and sun cream in order to take a better photo – it's the amount of light that you let the camera use to take a brighter or darker photo. All modern cameras and phones will automatically select for you the optimum exposure – a combination of the time that the shutter is open and the aperture, or size of the hole that opens up – in order to give a 'balanced' level of light to suit the subject. Some subjects 'fool' the camera – notably when there is a light source behind the main subject – know in the trade as a 'back-lit' subject. To overcome this (if you want to) you can either add light in front – eg use a flash, or 'compensate' by over-riding the camera settings and deliberately over-exposing the photo.

Here are some photos of sunset over Whistley – all taken with a phone camera...



In this one I've allowed the camera to select the exposure – ie I've just pressed the button!



This one is over-exposed – and shows more foreground detail – but, you will see that the sky colour is washed out.



While this third photo – quite severely underexposed - creates a more dramatic picture. The foreground is lost completely in silhouette and the setting sun is more defined

There is no 'right' and 'wrong' here – all three pictures tell a story, but a slightly different one.

Even during daylight you can use what is called 'exposure-compensation' to achieve a different effect on your picture....



Standard exposure, framing the sky with both the landscape below and a tree above.



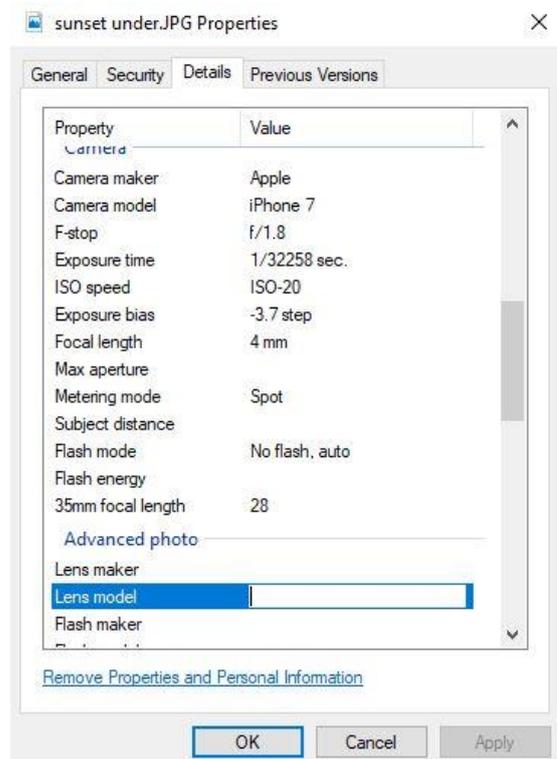
The same view but slightly under-exposed – you will see that the colours are richer (more saturated) and the darker sky adds more interest, with more contrast between sky and clouds.

I should add that all these photos have come straight out of the camera – unlike last week’s winner there has been no messing about (sorry, enhancement) with editing software!

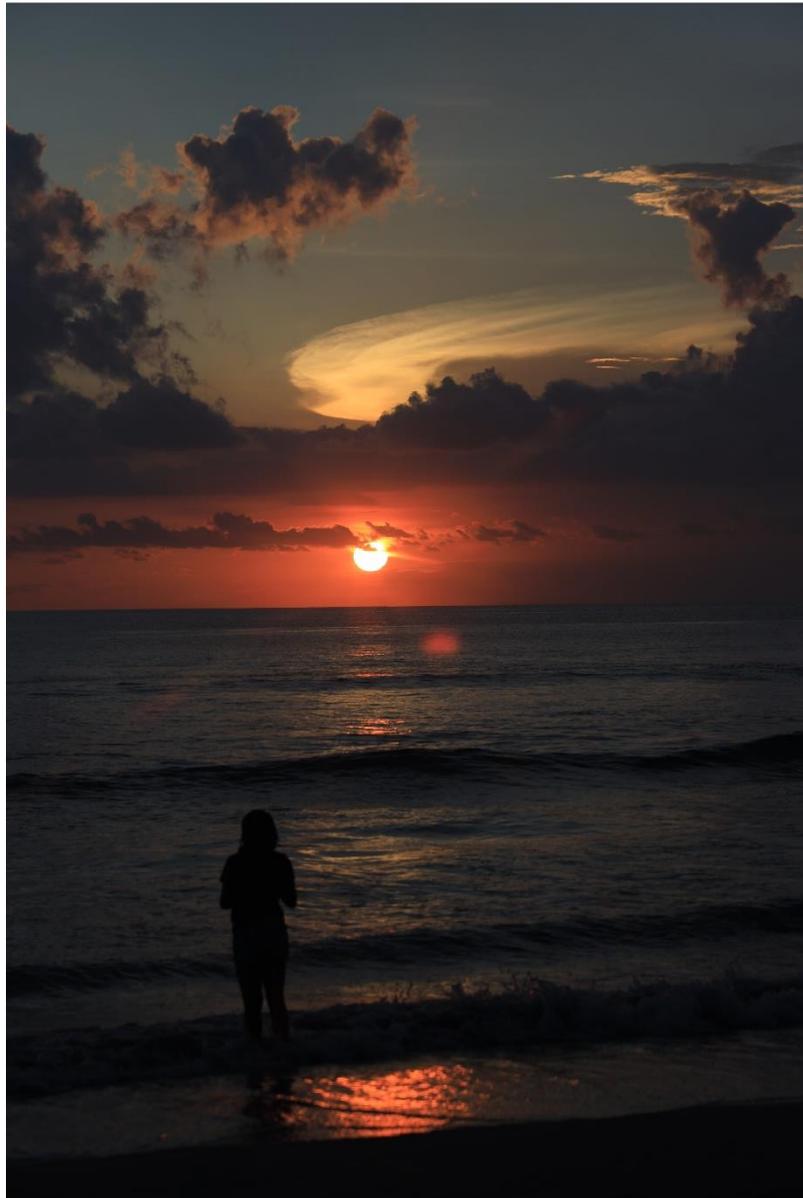
You may be asking how to change the exposure. On SLR or compact cameras this will differ with the model, but almost all will have a setting (not the basic ‘auto’ setting) that will allow you to simply add or reduce exposure – in the manual (yes, you might need to find this – if you can’t, it may well be available as a download on google) it will be called ‘exposure compensation’. On a phone camera, I can only really go with my experience using an iPhone – when you are looking at the screen ready to take a photo tap the area of the screen where you want the photo in focus. A focus box will appear and a picture of the sun to the right of it. It’s a bit fiddly, but you should be able to drag the ‘sun’ up and down to change the exposure.

Lastly, and a bit of information that you never realised that you needed...Metadata!! All modern digital cameras, including phones save a large amount of data with the photo, including camera make and the settings used for the photo.

If you are able to download the photo to a laptop or PC you can access this data – right click on the photo file (not the open photo) – towards or at the bottom of the list that comes up should be ‘properties’ – click this, and then click ‘details’ from the top row of options. If you scroll down to ‘camera’ you will see all sorts of geeky information! On my system, what we have been discussing above is called ‘Exposure bias’ and this example, which is the under-exposed sunset photo above, the bias shows as -3.7 steps



Here is a photo using a digital SLR with one-stop under exposure – meaning that the amount of light entering the camera is half that which the camera judges is correct...



I look forward to seeing Easter Skys!!