HOW TO TAKE FESTIVE GROUP PHOTOS

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The key to getting the best photographs of your family and friends this festive season is to relax and let it happen. 'Take it easy' doesn't just refer to your camera's auto features – it also means chilling with your modus operandi.

• You'll get the best pictures when people are doing what they're into doing: dinner preparations, gift wrapping, chatting, table setting, decorating, eating, drinking. In all cases, go with the flow; fit in, don't disrupt. You're bringing photography to the action, not stopping that action to take a picture. If you find yourself saying, "Hold it... stay there... just a second...smile," chances are you're missing the best moments.

• If timing is nearly everything, location is most of the rest. You know where the family's favourite places are: kitchen, living room, dining room… so be there. Even if you're not planning on a picture, try to keep the camera at hand; you never know when a great moment's going to happen. "Hold it, I'll get the camera" is another sure sign you've missed

the shot.

• If you want to make the background a feature, the Christmas tree is a good bet. Shoot in aperture priority mode (A) for maximum control over depth of field, but if you're less confident, Program (P) does the work for you, leaving you free to compose and shoot.

• If you're shooting with a COOLPIX, the Scene Modes make it easy to get well-lit, sharp images in a variety of situations. They include Party/Indoor, Beach/Snow, Night Portrait, Food, and Night Landscape – all perfect for festive photos.

• For posed group shots with everyone in a line, keep them all in focus with an aperture of around f/4-5.6; if they are standing in a horseshoe, go for f/7.1 or f/8. Take multiple photos, so you've got a better chance of catching everyone looking in the right direction and not blinking!

• With a Nikon DSLR, in low-light conditions their high ISO sensitivity enables you to get stunning shots at ISO 2000 or above. Activate auto ISO and switch on your lens's VR (vibration reduction) mode to allow far longer shutter speeds handheld in lower light than would otherwise be achievable.

• For shots taken in front of a backlit window, pop up the built-in flash to balance the ambient light. To prevent skin tones from bleaching out, use flash exposure compensation to turn the flash power down to around -0.7 or -1 EV. Keeping flash shots underexposed in this way captures the ambient light for a more natural, 'unflashed' look.

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