How to take Beautiful Portraits on your Holidays

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Composition



IMAGE BY LOTTE MEIJER

Check in the LCD screen or against the crop marks in the viewfinder that body parts haven't been accidentally amputated, or that trees and signs aren't growing out of heads; you might

need to move slightly so you can recompose to prevent this. Turn the camera on its side for full-length shots, and never be afraid to move in close – frame-filling portraits can be very effective. Take care with focus to ensure the eyes are sharp, otherwise the picture won't work.

Lenses

A lens with a focal length around 18-135mm is ideal for most portraits. Get too close with a wideangle and you'll start to distort facial features, making noses and chins appear larger; a medium telephoto lens setting of around 70-135mm creates a more flattering result. For candids of the kids that won't disturb their fun, try the long end of a telephoto zoom – you can shoot from a safe distance, and the focal length will create shallow depth of field that focuses all attention on your subject, with distracting backgrounds and foreground softened into a pleasing blur.

Light

Daylight gives the best results for portraits. Late afternoon sunlight has a warm glow, while cloudy, overcast conditions throw a soft, cool light. For indoor portraits, try placing your subject next to a large window for a soft, flattering light. The camera's pop-up flash can throw harsh shadows, so try shooting with it turned off and the ISO sensitivity increased, so you can make the most of the available light instead. Reflective, white surfaces such as walls are handy for bouncing light onto your subjects.

Shade

Natural shade can be really effective for portraits, but you may need to adjust your exposure to compensate. Hold down the +/- (EV) button (on the top plate behind the shutter release), and use the main command dial (on the top right of your camera's back plate) to add in +1/3 stop increments until you get the desired effect. To be absolutely sure, don't just rely on what you see on the LCD screen; check the histogram. The more its peaks are shifted to the right, the brighter your shot will be (and vice versa).

Flash

If you have no option but to shoot in harsh, midday sun, particularly with the light behind your subject, flash will darken down backgrounds make your subject 'pop' out of the picture, light up faces and eradicate shadows under the nose and eyes. It can also create pleasing catch-lights in the eyes. To minimise the risk of red-eye with flash, COOLPIX cameras have an anti-red-eye mode which corrects it in-camera, and it's also easy to get rid of on the computer in post-production. Otherwise, tackle the issue at source: if you have the option of off-camera flash, try this angled rather than firing directly at your subject.

Other people

If you want to take portraits of the locals, no matter where you are it's usually a good idea to ask permission first, especially in places where you might not know what is acceptable and what isn't. While most people will be happy to have a photo taken, if they say no you must respect that. When language is an issue, smiling and miming picture-taking will usually get across what your intentions are.

Quick setting tips

• Try portrait scene mode – it automatically adjusts exposure and metering for optimum results, so you're free to concentrate on capturing the moment.
• Sports mode can be helpful if the kids won't stay still – it automatically ramps up the shutter speed and ISO to freeze them in motion. Continuous shooting will also improve your hit rate.
• Child mode is also handy, keeping skin tones soft and natural while capturing the vivid colours of summer clothes and backgrounds.
• Aperture-priority mode on your DSLR and some COOLPIX cameras lets you select a wide aperture such as f/2.8 or f/4, which focuses sharply on the subject but blurs distracting foreground and background detail.
• Face-Priority AF is a feature of Nikon COOLPIX cameras – it actively focuses on human faces, so you're more likely to capture them sharply.

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