

The ResolutionsRTK Christmas Compendium 2011

Christmas means so many things to different people. It can be a time filled with excitement and anticipation; religious contemplation and celebration; trepidation, dread; great expense; or indifference.

Popular culture has provided a number of novel insights into this significant time of the year. "The Strike" is the 166th episode of the NBC sitcom Seinfeld. Aired in 1997, during the 9th and final season, it featured and popularised the holiday of 'Festivus', and we've included an extract for your amusement. While clearly absurd, the concept of 'Festivus' touches upon the lengths some will go to enjoy, survive, or indeed reinvent a season that doesn't always meet its reputation for jolliness.

With this in mind, we've prepared a compendium of Christmas tips and tricks to help make this season bearable, or perhaps even practically joyful.

1. Manage your expectations

The Christmas and Holiday period is filled with expectations and a diverse range of emotions, from the excitement of family gatherings, to anxiety about managing split, blended or fractured family relationships. Often it is the expectation that it should be perfect that heightens our anxieties when things don't go to plan. So let's forget the perfect Christmas, and focus on what can help you get through the day:

- Plan a 'circuit breaker' in advance that helps you strategically remove yourself from people or situations that zap or push your buttons
- Schedule some buffer time between family visits
- Set realistic expectations around how the day needs to turn out – this might include expecting some tensions between certain family members
- Incorporate a walk as part of your routine either in the morning or evening as a way to wind down

An extract from the Seinfeld episode,
"The Strike"

Frank Costanza

Many Christmases ago I went to buy a doll for my son. I reached for the last one they had, but so did another man. As I rained blows upon him I realised that there had to be another way!

Kramer

What happened to the doll?

Frank

It was destroyed. But out of that, a new holiday was born: A Festivus for the Rest of Us!

Kramer

That must have been some kind of doll.

Frank

She was.

(He continues)

At the Festivus dinner, you gather all your family around, and tell them all the ways they have disappointed you for the past year.

Kramer

Is there a tree?

Frank

No, instead there's a pole, it requires no decoration. I find tinsel distracting.

You'll find a clip on You Tube here:
<http://youtu.be/ChmhQz5wsOI>

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- It's normal to grieve during this period and remember those whom you've lost – you may want to share some of your memories with others you trust
- If you anticipate being on your own during this period you may plan to be involved in either voluntary work or participate in community activities in your area

2. It's a holiday, not a travel brochure

Holidays bring parties and gatherings, along with more opportunities than usual to spend time with family members. A family may naturally expect to have a good time on holidays. However, it is worth remembering that most families only spend a few hours per day together because of work, school and recreational pursuits. Habits that are usually just annoying could become major sources of irritation when you spend every waking minute together on holidays.

To keep the holiday dream alive without losing your mind:

- Include some down time for each family member in your itineraries
- Expect tensions and conflict
- Keep lines of communication open, rather than leaving this until you return from holiday
- Accept that setbacks to schedules or delays are part of going on holidays
- Remember it's a time to recharge your batteries, not an opportunity to see everything listed in the guidebook. With a narrowing work/life divide, many people over-compensate by organising jam-packed schedules, which can lead to exhaustion and disillusionment.

3. Avoid starting the year in debt

A loving and generous personality can coexist with a careful approach to financial management. Plan and stick to your Holiday/Christmas budget, and avoid overspending, no matter how great the deal is. Here are some basic ideas for keeping your financial wits about you this Christmas:

- Set your holiday budget and stick to it – consider getting the whole family involved
- Plan for hidden costs e.g. food, overseas calls, entertainment etc.
- Buy presents only for the children
- Have a Kris-Kringle, where everyone draws a name out of a hat and buys a present only for that person
- Set a limit on the cost of presents

4. Give creatively

The retail sector doesn't hold all the clues to a great gift. Consider the following services:

- Gardening and/or lawn mowing
- Pet services such as dog walking
- Babysitting
- Window cleaning
- Car wash and detailing
- House cleaning
- Ironing
- Fresh fruit/ vegetables supplies home delivery

5. Give sustainably

Here are some ideas for sustainable gifts, suggested by the Australian Psychological Society:

- Encourage your workplace or family to organise an ethical, sustainable Kris Kringle, with gifts chosen on the basis that they contribute to one or more of the following: equity of resources, ecologically sustainable practices, reduction of greenhouse emissions
- Gifts might include Fair Trade products, handmade or recycled gifts, sustainably produced non-animal tested products
- Contributions to charitable organisations. Gifts could be selected from organisations such as Oxfam, Red Cross, Amnesty, the ACF or the Wilderness Society

6. Go easy on the booze and party pies

With the festive period, restraint, routine and exercise tend to go out the door or nearest advent window. So if you like to have a drink or two, remember to pace yourself at parties and alternate water between drinks. Other tips for enjoying yourself in moderation this year:

- Nominate yourself as the designated driver ('Sober Bob') if you wish to avoid alcohol
- Learn how to say no and encourage your friends to be supportive
- Designate AFDs (Alcohol Free Days) in your week
- At the very least, alternate your drinks with a glass of water – your body will thank you in the morning

7. Give yourself a break

The team at ResolutionsRTK have a simple wish – that you have a safe and realistic Christmas and Holiday period. We hope you enjoy your break, and take care of yourself and others.