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Full Review
Nikon Coolpix S4

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Test Summary (Mouse over items for explanations)

Power-on Time	2.0 sec
Shutter Lag, Full Autofocus	0.640 - 1.450 sec
Shutter Lag, Prefocused	0.063 sec
Shot to Shot time	2.41 sec
Continuous Speed	1.36 fps (8 shots)
Best Macro	1.85x1.38 in 47x35mm
Viewfinder accuracy (Optical)	n/a
Viewfinder accuracy (LCD)	99%
Distortion (Wide Angle)	1.0%
Distortion (Telephoto)	-0.3%

Battery Life
(CIPA standard)

290 shots
(NiMH AA)

These numbers are only a summary of our full test results. For more test results, see the [Optics](#), [Exposure](#), or [Performance](#) pages of this review.

COOLPIX S4 Digital Camera (6.4MP, 2816x2112, 10x Opt, 13.5MB Internal Memory, SD Slot)

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Nikon Coolpix S4 Overview

By: *Stephanie Boozer*

and *Dave Etchells*

Review Date: 11/03/05

The Nikon Coolpix S4 is the latest in a *long* line of Coolpix digital cameras whose popularity stretches back to the original Coolpix 900, Nikon's first "breakthrough" digital camera. The new Nikon S4 features one of the original

Basic Specifications

Resolution:	6.00
Lens:	10.0 (38-
Viewfinder:	LCD
LCD Size:	2.5 i
ISO:	50-4
Shutter:	2-1/
Max Aperture:	3.5
Mem Type:	SD
Battery:	2 x A
Dimensions:	4.4x (112

Coolpix design elements, with a swiveling lens that faces a wide range of angles.

	Weight:	7.2 oz (205 g)
	MSRP:	\$399.95
	Availability:	09/2007

The Nikon S4's 6.0-megapixel imager means it can capture high resolution images, and its 10x zoom lens gives you quite a bit of flexibility. All in all, it's an excellent "take-with-you-everywhere" digital camera, with a compact size that travels well. With its friendly, point & shoot exposure modes, the Nikon Coolpix S4 can handle just about any photo opportunity you're likely to throw at it. Read the details!

Nikon Coolpix S4 User Report

Returning to the tried-and-true swivel lens design that proved so popular in early Coolpix models, Nikon introduces the Coolpix S4. The new twist packs a whopping 10x optical zoom into a small camera body. The Nikon S4 features the same swivel lens design that differentiates it from other models from the digital camera pack, a design that lets you point the lens in almost any direction without losing your LCD monitor view. Though long for most average shirt pockets, the Nikon S4 is still fairly compact, especially considering the 10x lens it boasts. Measuring 4.4 x 2.7 x 1.5 inches (111.5 x 68.5 x 87 millimeters) with the lens in its storage position, the S4 weighs only 7.2 ounces (205 grams) without lens cap, batteries, or memory card. Since the Nikon S4 has only a tiny ridge on the front panel for a handgrip, I recommend keeping the included wrist strap securely around your wrist when shooting. The camera's plastic lens cover is actually hinged on the side of the lens, with a flip-open design. When opened, the cover flips backward and out of the way, and its attachment to the lens barrel means you need not worry about losing it accidentally. The camera's silver finish is smooth, attractive and fairly simple, housing a 6.0-megapixel CCD that captures high quality images. Other noteworthy features of the Nikon S4 include macro mode capable of focusing as close as 1.6 inches, and no fewer than 16 preset shooting modes. Since the camera operates mainly under menu control, its control layout and menu display are very user friendly.

The Nikon S4 features no optical viewfinder, only a large, bright, 2.5-inch color LCD monitor for framing. The camera's 10x, 6.3-63mm zoom lens (equivalent to a 38-380mm lens on a 35mm camera, a conservative wide angle to very long telephoto) offers a maximum aperture of f/3.5. It uses contrast-detection autofocus in normal mode, which ranges from 1.0 feet (30 centimeters) to infinity. Auto Multi-point AF selects the center point, though it doesn't report more than an AF confirmation dot. In Macro mode, the camera focuses as close as 1.6 inches (4.0 centimeters), and switches to continuous AF mode, focusing constantly when the Shutter button is *not* half-pressed. (Note that closest focusing is possible only when the zoom lens is set to a fairly narrow range of focal lengths toward the wide-angle end of its range. The zoom indicator that appears at the top of the LCD during zooming and the "tulip" macro icon both turn green when the zoom is set within the optimal range in Macro mode.) In addition to its 10x optical zoom, the Nikon Coolpix S4 offers a maximum 4x digital zoom, which lets you "zoom" in even closer (equivalent to a 1,520mm lens on 35mm camera), though, keep in mind that the digital zoom simply enlarges the center pixels of the CCD, resulting in lower image quality. The 6.0-megapixel imager captures high-resolution images, good enough for printing to 11x17 inches with good detail, as well as lower-resolution images for sending via email.

4x6-inch snapshots.

In keeping with the tradition of the entry-level end of the Coolpix line, the Nikon S4's exposure control is very straightforward. Operating in automatic control, the Coolpix S4's user interface is easy to learn. Most of the exposure options are controlled through the multi-page LCD menu, although a handful of external controls accesses basic features. A Mode switch on the top panel controls the operating mode, with three positions: Scene, Portrait, and Movie. The Framing Assist modes are optional in Portrait, Landscape, Sports, and Night Portrait modes through the Scene menu, offering a range of framing scenarios. For example, under Portrait mode, you can set up the framing for a centered single subject, a single subject off-center to the right or left, a close-up portrait, two subjects positioned side-by-side, and a figure shot with the camera held in portrait (tall) rather than landscape orientation. Once a specific setup is chosen, faint yellow subject outlines appear in the LCD monitor to help you line up the shot for the best framing, and exposure. Face-priority AF is another option under portrait, where the camera analyses the scene and puts a square around each face, choosing to focus on the face closest to the camera. (This is pretty interesting, because if you move the camera, or if the subject moves slowly, the square will actually move to follow the face.) Sports mode offers enhanced options for capturing fast-paced action, such as a rapid fire mode that captures 16 tiny images in two seconds that form a single 4x4 image mosaic. Other Scene modes are Party/Indoor, Beach/Snow, Sunset, Daylight, Night Landscape, Close-Up, Museum, Fireworks Show, Copy, Back Light, Panorama Assist, and Voice Recording. Each scene mode sets multiple options to configure it for the specific type of subject and shooting condition chosen. In Voice Recording mode, you can get about 29 minutes of recording on the camera's internal memory.

The Nikon Coolpix S4 offers a few exposure options. Though no mode allows the user to control the aperture or shutter speed directly, the exposure compensation adjustment can be set in Auto mode to deal with high contrast, dark or light subjects. The Exposure Compensation adjustment increases or decreases overall exposure from -2 to +2 exposure equivalents (EV) in one-third-step increments. It is not reported on the LCD, but the Coolpix S4's shutter speeds range from 1/1,000 to 2 seconds. A White Balance adjustment offers five preset modes, an Auto setting, and a manual setting for manually determining the color balance. The Nikon S4 uses a 256-Segment Matrix metering system to determine exposure, evaluating contrast and brightness across the frame to determine the best exposure. ISO light sensitivity can be manually adjusted to 50, 100, 200, or 400 equivalents, or you can choose the Auto ISO setting. (Note though, that the camera doesn't report its automatically chosen ISO value to the LCD during shooting.) You can also access Nikon's Best Shot Selector mode, which automatically chooses the least blurry image in a series shot while the shutter button remains pressed. (The Best Shot Selector feature is one of my all-time favorite digital camera features, as it makes it possible to handle very long exposures by playing the odds that during one of those moments you're going to be still enough to get a sharp image.)

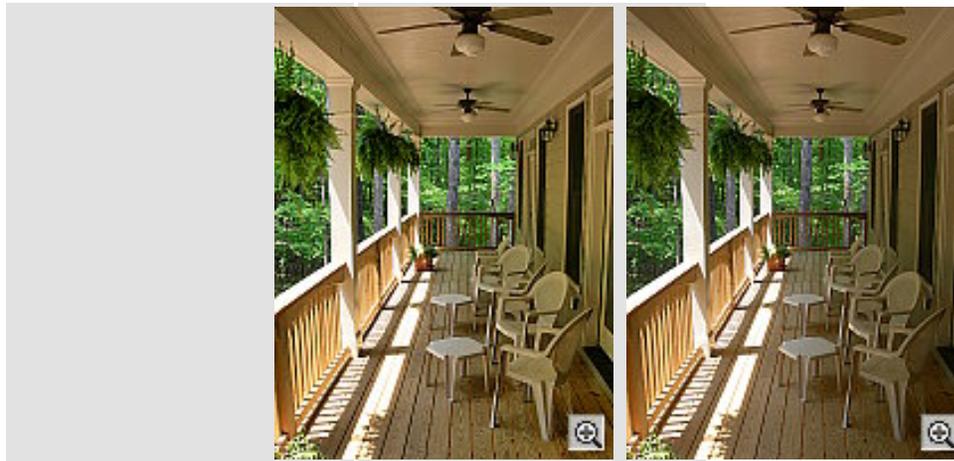
The Nikon Coolpix S4's built-in flash is rated as effective from approximately 1.25 to 10 feet (0.4 to 3.0 meters) depending on the lens zoom. The S4's flash operates in Auto, Red-Eye Reduction, Anytime (Fill) Flash, Flash Cancel, and Slow Sync (night) modes. An option in many modes, called Red-Eye Reduction, combines the flash with slower shutter speeds, letting more of the ambient light into the exposure, making for brighter, more natural-looking photos. In some Assist and Scene modes though, the flash mode is automatically set for you. Portrait Assist, for example, defaults to Red-Eye Reduction, but can be overridden, while in Night Portrait Assist the default Red-Eye Reduction can not be overridden. Night Portrait Assist and the Scene modes

Landscape and Dusk/Dawn also enable an automatic Noise Reduction feature to eliminate excess image noise resulting from the higher ISO or longer exposure. Flash is also not available in Sports or Landscape modes. While this panoply of default flash modes and constrained options is complicated, the net result is that the camera's scene modes let average users bring back good-looking photos from tricky shooting conditions with an enjoyable point & shoot simplicity.

Most digital cameras these days have special red-eye reduction flash modes, which pop the flash (or blink a bright LED) a few times before the main flash to make the pupils of your subject's eyes contract a little. This reduces the likelihood that light from the flash will reflect off the insides of the eyes, causing the dreaded red-eye. The Nikon Coolpix S4 goes quite a bit beyond the simple pre-flash red-eye reduction approach though, and incorporates special software inside the camera that can look for and remove red-eye before it saves the images to the memory card. While I haven't run a standardized anti-redeye test (for whatever reason, our eyes here at IR just don't seem very prone to redeye), I can attest that the S4's software indeed seem to remove red-eye very well when it's enabled, vs when it's disabled. The one downside to the Nikon S4's approach though, is the extra processing that the camera uses to search for and remove any remaining red-eye takes an appreciable amount of time, resulting in a rather long delay before you can capture the next shot.

Another really unique feature of the Nikon S4 is its innovative "D-Lighting" option. This is a Playback-mode option that could be thought of as a "post-flash," in that it brightens shadow areas. There are a couple of important differences between D-Lighting and on-camera flash though. First, D-Lighting brightens all the shadowed areas in the image, regardless of how far they were from the camera (that is, there's no light falloff as you'd have with a flash). A second point is that this is a post-capture option, one that makes a copy of the image with the D-Lighting effect applied, so your original image remains undisturbed. On the downside, a third key factor with D-Lighting is that it will make image noise more apparent in the areas that it's brightening.





D-Lighting's effect on images is generally pretty subtle, as you can see from the two examples above (borrowed from my review of the Coolpix S4.) In the situations where you'd want to use D-Lighting though, subtle is good, you ideally want the image to appear natural, as if nothing unusual was done to it.

Other camera features include a Self-Timer mode, which provides a 10-second delay between the time the Shutter button is pressed and when the image is actually captured. A Continuous Shooting mode captures a rapid series of images while the Shutter button is held down, with the actual number of images dependent on the size and quality settings, as well as the amount of memory card space. There's also a Multi-Shot 16 mode, which captures 16 thumbnail images in sequence, arranged in rows of four within a full-sized image. The Coolpix S4's Movie mode offers four options: TV Movie (720p, 30fps), Large size 480* (480 x 320 pixels, 15fps), Small size 320* (320 x 240 pixels, 15fps), and Smaller Size 160* (160 x 120, 15fps), plus a Time-lapse movie mode. The actual recording time depends only on the amount of available SD card space (there is no arbitrary limit set by the size of the S4's internal buffer) and is displayed in the LCD monitor. Movie mode also offers Electronic VR (vibration reduction), which attempts to reduce camera shake in the movie mode, similar to normal handheld camera movement.

The Nikon Coolpix S4 stores images on SD memory cards, but the standard retail package in the US includes no memory card. There is enough internal memory, however, to hold up to about four full resolution pictures according to the user manual. Files saved to internal memory can be easily transferred to an SD card, and vice versa. Given the camera's large 2,816 x 2,112-pixel maximum image size, I strongly recommend picking up at least a 12GB memory card so you don't miss any important shots. Images are saved in JPEG format, with three compression levels available. A CD-ROM with Nikon Picture Project software accompanies the camera, compatible with both Windows and Macintosh platforms (including Windows XP and Mac OS X). Nikon Picture Project provides organization and image editing tools for enhancing images. The camera comes with a set of AA-type Coolpix NiMH rechargeable batteries and a charger. (As always, I recommend picking up a spare battery and keeping it freshly charged at all times, to avoid dead-battery syndrome - Murphy's law applies in spades to digital camera batteries - They invariably go dead when you can least afford it. Read my [NiMH battery size comparison](#) to see which batteries currently on the market are the best, and see my review of the [Maha C-204W NiMH battery charger](#), my current favorite.

optional AC adapter uses a "dummy battery" that slides into the battery compartment. This could be useful for offloading pictures after a long shooting, but really isn't necessary for the vast majority of users. Also included with the Coolpix S4 is a video cable for connecting to a television for slide shows, and a USB cable for downloading images to a computer.

The Nikon S4 is a combination of a Nikkor 10x optical zoom lens, a 6.0-megapixel CCD, and a range of automatic, preset shooting modes in a compact and slim digital camera. Automatic exposure control lets the camera take charge of all the picky details, although a handful of exposure options and creative tools when you need them. While it won't fit into most shirt pockets, the Nikon Coolpix S4 is still compact enough for travel as well as carry, and the range of preset shooting and framing modes anticipates most common shooting conditions. The 2,816 x 2,112 pixel maximum resolution is high enough for making acceptable 11x17-inch photographic prints (or 8x10 prints with some cropping), while the 640 x 480-pixel resolution is perfect for sending email attachments over the Internet. The uncomplicated user interface means you won't spend much time learning the camera for novice users or anyone looking for a point-and-shoot camera with a few extra features, great ease of use, and sharp, colorful photos, though the S4 could also serve as a great take-anywhere snapshot camera for more advanced shooters.

Basic Features

- 6.0-megapixel (effective) CCD delivering image resolutions as high as 2,816 x 2,112 pixels.
- 2.5-inch color LCD display.
- 10x, 6.3-63mm zoom lens (equivalent to a 38-380mm lens on a 35mm camera).
- Maximum aperture f/3.5.
- Shutter speeds from 1/1,000 to two seconds.
- 4x Digital zoom.
- Automatic exposure control.
- Built-in flash with five modes.
- Built-in mic and speaker for including sound in videos and playback from the camera, plus voice recording.
- 13.5MB internal memory.
- SD memory card storage.
- Power supplied by two AA-type batteries, or optional AC adapter.
- Nikon Picture Project 1.5 software for both Mac and Windows.

Special Features

- Face-priority AF recognizes faces in a scene and keeps them in focus.
- Voice recording mode.
- QuickTime movies (with sound) and Electronic VR (vibration reduction).
- Continuous Shooting, Multi-Shot, and Multi-Shot 16 mode.
- Twelve preset Scene modes, plus four Scene Assist modes.
- Red-Eye Fix automatic red-eye correction.
- Self-timer for delayed shutter release.
- Best Shot Selector mode.
- Macro (close-up) lens adjustment.
- White balance (color) adjustment with seven modes, including a manual setting.
- 256-Segment Matrix metering.
- ISO equivalent sensitivity range of 50 to 400, plus Auto setting.
- PictBridge compatibility.
- USB cable for quick connection to a computer.
- Video cable for connection to a television set.

In the Box

The Nikon Coolpix S4 ships with the following items in the box:

- Coolpix S4 digital camera.
- Wrist strap.
- USB cable.
- A/V cable.

- Coolpix rechargeable batteries and charger.
- CD-ROM loaded with Nikon Picture Project software and drivers.
- Instruction manuals and registration kit.

Recommended Accessories

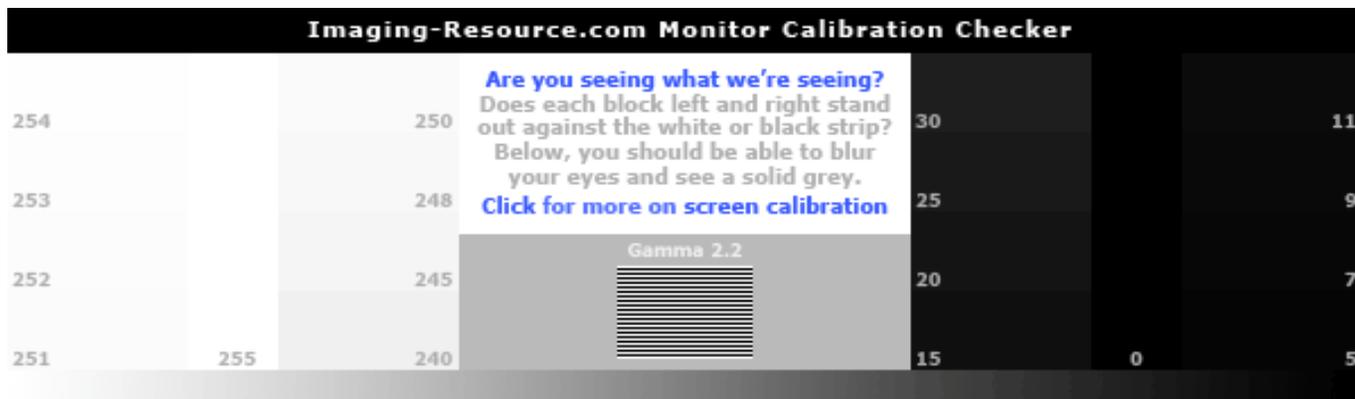
- [Large capacity SD/MMC memory card](#). (These days, 128 - 256 MB is a good trade-off between cost and capacity.)
- Small camera case for outdoor and in-bag protection.
- AC adapter.

Conclusion

Pro:	Con:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attractive design, well-built• Swivel lens design eases shooting at odd angles• 10x optical zoom lens much more useful than average range• Very bright color will be pleasing to most consumers• Exceptional macro performance• Loads of helpful "assist" options for novices• D-lighting feature helpful for shaded subjects• Best Shot Selector works well for avoiding motion blur• Flexible movie options, including 640x480 resolution and time-lapse modes• LCD viewfinder offers very accurate framing• Large 2.5" LCD display	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shutter lag is quite long at maximum telephoto• Only average shot to shot cycle times• Flash recycling is a little slow• LCD doesn't work well in dim lighting• Rather contrasty tone curve• Very bright color may be unappealing to some users• No exposure info shown on the LCD• Plastic, flip-open lens cap feels a little cheap and easy to lose• More chromatic aberration than is common on lower-zoom lenses• Vertical flash limits function• Higher than average image compression• Battery life is only average

Nikon's Coolpix line of consumer digital cameras has always been well-received and greatly appreciated for its overall image quality and ease of use. The Nikon Coolpix S4 packs a lot of features, including a 6.0-megapixel CCD with 10x zoom lens, and a surprisingly large 2.5-inch LCD into a fairly compact package. For the average consumer willing to delve just *slightly* deeper than just pushing the button, its extensive scene modes and unique options greatly extend its capabilities, making it easy to bring back good-looking shots of what might otherwise be difficult subjects. While it's a matter of personal taste, we really like seeing the return of the swivel-body design that was so popular on Nikon's earlier Coolpix models. The camera delivers bright, saturated color that most consumers are likely to find very attractive, yet manages to produce very natural-looking skin tones. It handles a wide range of exposure conditions, so should be able to accommodate the shooting conditions encountered by average consumers. Its low-light capability isn't best-in-class, is more than adequate for typical city night scenes. We were also surprised to find that its high-ISO capabilities were quite good, with ISO 400 shots usable to print sizes as large as 8x10 inches. Finally, the unique Nikon-only Best Shot Selector is a great feature for capturing sharp images in dim lighting without a tripod, and the D-Lighting feature does a great job of opening up shadows, making for much more natural-looking images under difficult lighting conditions. We'd really like to see better shutter response at the telephoto end of its zoom range and somewhat faster shot to shot cycle times, but the total package is nonetheless very appealing. All in all, a very capable and enjoyable little camera that snaps great-looking photos, deserving of its status as a [Dave's Pick](#).

Note: For details, test results, and analysis of the many tests done with this camera, please click on the tabs above or below.



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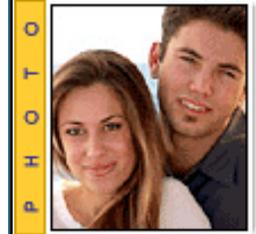
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