

# How To Spend Less Money For The Holidays

by Tom Harkins



If you're like most people, you've been breezing through autumn watching the leaves fall while wearing an oversized sweater and sipping a pumpkin spice latté. It's not until you turn that calendar page and feel a rush of panic that you realize it's November and Christmas is next month! It's time to start planning your money for the holidays!

As everyone is aware, the best part of the holiday season is enjoying time in the company of family and friends, and the worst part, without a doubt, is the overspending. According to CNBC, the average American adds more than \$1,000 to his or her debt during the holidays. Think about that. People spend more than \$1,000 that they don't have to buy presents for the people in our lives. It makes no sense! It's the gift that keeps on giving...giving you stress throughout the year as you try to pay it off!

It doesn't have to be that way. With some careful planning and determination, you can stay on track and not add to your debt over the holidays. Here are five ways to spend less money over the holidays:

## 1. Create a Budget

Before you see the first elf, come up with a budget for your holiday spending. You should include those friends and family who you want to buy presents for and how much you'd like to spend on each person, as well as any parties you may be hosting or

attending. Determine how much you can afford to spend, preferably without using credit, and divide it among the items in your budget. You may have to cut some things or spend less on presents for some people; but, is gift-giving worth putting it on credit and paying for plus interest over the next year?

## 2. Shop Smart

Come up with a list of gifts ahead of time. If you wait and browse while you're in a store, you'll likely spend more. Check out flyers for deals and compare prices online. If you wait until the last minute, you'll have less of a selection, and you'll likely end up spending more for something that the recipient won't want. Even online retailers run out of stock, and if you don't shop early, you run the risk of receiving your gifts after the holidays.

If you buy presents for everyone in your extended family, consider having a Yankee swap. That way, you'll only have to buy one gift. Yankee swaps can be a lot of fun, and your friends and relatives won't mind buying only one gift, too! Find rules for how to play [here](#).

If you travel over the holidays, be sure to shop around.

Check [Expedia](#), [Travelocity](#), [Kayak](#), and directly with airlines and hotels before you book your flight or stay. Should you book your flight early or wait for last-minute deals? It's risky. It's best to shop around, find the best price available at the time, and not risk paying more money for the holidays or not being able to find the dates you want.

The holidays are about spending time with family, so there's no reason to stay at a hotel. Staying with the family will make for a more memorable holiday. Bonus: You can split food costs!

## 3. Be Creative

Gifts don't have to be expensive. Why give Aunt Carol another overpriced scented candle when you can give something that came from your heart and hands? You can paint, knit, or make a craft that she'll love. Pinterest is a goldmine of ideas that you don't have to be overly skilled to pull off.

Cookie kits are a fun idea. You simply layer the dry ingredients for your favorite cookies in a mason jar, and then print the recipe on a card and attach it to the jar with a ribbon. This idea is applicable for other things, such as chili, soups, hot chocolate with marshmallows, candy canes, and chocolate pieces.

Homemade coupons are always welcome. Print coupons on your computer for things such as snow shoveling, cleaning, babysitting, dog walking, and yard work. Everyone would love some help with these tasks without having to ask. If you have a particular skill, such as painting, maybe you have a friend who'd enjoy some lessons.

## **4. Be the Host**

If you receive invitations to various parties or gatherings that will cause you to travel, offer to host. If your friends and relatives can come to you, you may be able to eliminate hefty travel expenses, especially if there are flight and lodging expenses you'd have to incur. Decorations can be simple and inexpensive. If you're hosting a dinner, make it a potluck. People usually love sharing their favorite holiday recipes.

## **5. Keep Track of Everything**

Keep all your receipts and make sure to cross off gifts from your list as you buy them. If you monitor your list and spending closely, you can make adjustments as you go. Maybe you found that fishing hat for Uncle Ned for \$10 less than you'd expected, and you can use the extra money somewhere else in your budget. If you keep a watchful eye over your spending, you'll increase your chances of staying on budget.

You don't have to go overboard with holiday spending. If you plan and follow the plan, you'll not only avoid too much money for the holidays, but you'll also save yourself a lot of stress!