



Money Saving Tips for Christmas

It seems like yesterday when we were taking down the Christmas tree and putting away the holiday decorations.

Now, in a few weeks, we'll be putting up the Christmas tree and taking out the holiday ornaments.

The holiday season also means shopping for those special gifts for friends and family and we may sometimes over-spend. Then in January when the bills start rolling in, reality strikes and we regret spending so much money and promise ourselves that we will not do that again.

Here are some tips on how you can enjoy the season without that spending hangover in January.

- Make a list of everyone to whom you want to give a present. Try to keep it to close family and friends and set a maximum amount you plan to spend for each person. After you calculate this total, you may want to go back and cut back a little more.
- If you find that you've already over-spent before you even get out the door, go back and see where you may be able to give a meaningful gift without spending a lot of money. Think about giving personal "coupons" to some of the people on your list. For example, give your next-door neighbor a free lawn mowing in the spring. Give your harried sister-in-law with four children a "date night" with her husband while you keep the kids. Teens might consider giving mom a coupon for a night-off in the kitchen each week by promising her to cook and clean one night a week. Give dad a coupon for a free car wash once a month.
- While some people like the hustle and bustle of the shopping malls, you may prefer to sit in your home at your computer and shop online. Not only will you save gasoline, you'll save yourself a lot of stress and headaches. In order to save on shipping fees, look for free-shipping promotions. Check with major retailers near where you live to see if they can save you money on shipping costs if your item is shipped to the store instead of to your home address.
- Many people use credit cards for their holiday shopping, so they can increase their frequent flier miles and other rewards offered by their credit card company. This is a great idea and you may pile up enough of those frequent

flier miles to earn a free trip to see those grandchildren next year. But keep in mind that you still need to make a budget and be able to pay for those charges in January in order to keep from incurring large credit card interest.

- You might opt to use cash for Christmas shopping. Decide on an amount for each person, total the amounts and take cash from your checking account. Divide the cash into your pre-determined amounts for each person and place the cash in envelopes with each person's name and amount on the envelope. Take these with you on your shopping excursion. Stick with your list and when the cash is gone, it's gone.
- With the new social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, you also may be able to find money-saving coupons and discounts.
- If you have adequate storage space, one of the best times to do your Christmas shopping is in January when retailers are trying to clear out their merchandise from the holidays. And you might think of shopping for those stocking stuffers during the year as sometimes those can get rather costly.

To make the most of your holiday season, sit back and take a moment to enjoy the meaning of the season and the opportunity to gather with family and friends and all those you hold dear. Then take a deep breath and head to the mall.

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