

Holiday Spending Tips - Ten Ways to Keep from Having a Holiday Spending Hangover

Ah the holidays... a time for parties, over eating, and over spending. Americans routinely overspend during the holidays, often resulting in increasing credit card debt to go along with that increasing waistline from too much pumpkin pie.

The holidays are stressful enough. Don't add to that stress by overspending your holiday budget. Here are ten tips to help you save time, money and stress this shopping season:

1. Make a list. Decide how much you can afford to spend this year and write it down. Decide who you want to buy for, and how much you want to spend on each person. Take this list with you when you go shopping to ensure that you don't buy on impulse or exceed your spending limit. Also, don't forget to include wrapping paper, decorations and shipping costs. These can add up fast!
2. Pay cash for your holiday gifts. It's much harder to spend cash than credit, so this tip alone could save you hundreds of dollars this holiday season. Also, avoid credit card offers or store charge card offers that offer you a discount if you sign up. These cards usually have high interest rates, and could end up costing much more in the long run than the discount you receive when you sign up for the card.
3. Do your shopping online this year. Buying online could result in discounts not available in stores. Just remember to include the shipping cost when buying online. Even if you don't actually buy online, the time you can save by doing comparison shopping before you go to the malls could be invaluable.
4. Have a Secret Santa gift exchange, where you put names in a hat and each person draws one name to purchase for. If you have a large family, this could mean tremendous savings! You should set a dollar limit so each person knows how much to spend. That way no one overspends and relatives with smaller budgets won't feel bad about not spending a fortune on a gift.
5. Another alternative for those with large families is to do a group gift. Have several relatives go in on one big gift instead of each person buying a separate gift. You will probably all save money and you can buy the recipient one big, cool gift that they really want.
6. Start early! Shopping early allows you to comparison shop and to catch pre-holiday sales, which could mean huge savings. This also curbs impulse shopping, which can be very expensive. Another benefit to shopping early is lower shipping costs if you need to mail a gift. Waiting til the last minute can be expensive because you're more likely to pay full price for the gift, and you may have to pay extra to ship it if you want to guarantee it arrives in time.
7. Make your holiday gifts. If you have creative talents, such as cooking, crafts, etc., making your own gifts can be very special. If you're not very creative, consider giving your time. Offers to baby-sit or to do something special for someone can be very personal and appreciated gifts. How many parents do you know who wouldn't love to have free babysitting?
8. Purchase wrapping paper, holiday cards and other decorations right after the holidays. Seasonal items are usually offered at deep discounts after the holiday, and they never go out of style. Stock up on clearance-priced items for next year, this year!
9. If you'll be traveling this holiday season, book your travel plans early. Airline flights, train tickets and bus tickets usually go up significantly during the holidays, so booking your travel plans early can save you money and stress.
10. Start a Christmas fund in January for next year's shopping. Many credit unions and banks offer special accounts just for this purpose. A CD is another great way to save for next year's holiday expenses. It never hurts to sock away a little money every month between now and the next holiday season. You'll earn a little interest and you'll have cash to spend on your holiday gifts and other expenses when the holidays roll around.

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About the Author

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