

The M-Network's

# Money Saving Tips for the Holidays Guide

*8 articles that are bound to save **you** money this  
holiday season!*



*November 2008*

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## Money Saving Tips for the Holidays – Introduction

The holidays are quickly approaching and like most everyone else, those of us in the M-Network are always looking for ways to save money during the holidays. This eBook pulls together 8 exclusive articles from each of the M-Network members. You won't find these articles published on any of our blogs or frankly anywhere else on the internet, but only here in the eBook you are reading.

Reading through each of the articles you'll find:

- Tips on how to save money and “go green”.
- How to socialize during the holidays without spending your whole Christmas fund.
- How to save money by staying at home this holiday season.
- How to keep meaning in your holiday season the frugal way
- Free and frugal holiday date ideas
- Frugal gift giving strategies
- And tips on how to shop for gifts when you're separated from friends and family

We (the M-Network Members) sincerely hope you'll find some tips that benefit you this holiday season. We would also like to encourage you to share this eBook with your friends and family as well.

***From all of us to all of you: Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!***

***- David, Gible, Lynnae, Mrs. Micah, PaidTwice, Patrick, Pinyo, and Plonkee***

# Going Green and Saving Money During The Holidays.

By David from [My Two Dollars](#)

Normally, the holidays are expensive enough...but this year, with the current economic crisis hitting closer and closer to home, everyone is going to be looking for a few ways to save money this holiday season on everything from wrapping paper to travel. But with a little extra planning, you can not only save money but you can also help save the planet at the same time - After years of being both an environmentalist over at [The Good Human](#) and a personal finance blogger at [My Two Dollars](#), combining the two should be easy enough!

**First of all, let's talk about sending holiday cards.** Cards can cost a pretty penny if you are not careful in your shopping, but they also can cost a lot to ship - especially if you have a large list to send to each year. The simplest and quickest way to reduce your expenses here is to [make your own double-sided postcards from recycled cardboard and some ink pads](#). Not only will you be using less paper, but your postage per piece will be less as well. We spent less than \$45 total on the recycled paper, the ink pads, Christmas stamps and postage last year; and now we still have all the supplies to do it this year also!



**Next up, the biggest waste of paper and money that I see during the holidays is the use of wrapping paper.** We buy our presents, wrap them in colorful paper for a little while, and then throw the paper away - when you think about it, it's really a waste of your hard-earned money! Paper of different sorts is available for almost free everywhere you look - the grocery store bags, kids' artwork, the newspaper, comic books, etc., so why pay for paper? The newspaper and comics can be used as-is, and if you want you can dress up the paper bags with some paint and paintbrushes. And as with the homemade cards, not only does doing this save you a ton of money, but it also reduces the amount of virgin paper used for wrapping gifts. It's a win-win for everyone.

**So, what about the gifts that you get for people?** Will you be cutting back this year because of the economy? Well how about making some of your gifts yourself or picking up a few handmade gifts made by artisans? Many times, gifts you can make at home are cheaper than what you can buy in the store. Who wouldn't love some baked goods, a gift certificate for a night out on the town, some custom stationary using recycled cardboard and your printer, or a mixed-CD from a loved one? On one Valentine's Day, I made my wife a CD of songs that included the words "You're My Best Friend". Needless to say, it went over very well! If you don't think you can come up with anything to make for someone, you might want to check out websites like [Etsy.com](#) or

[tenthousandvillages.com](http://tenthousandvillages.com) to buy things from either local artists or from artists in faraway places who could really use your money more than your local big box store. Handmade items have much more "feeling" to them than cheap pieces of plastic from the store do, and I am sure the gift receiver would appreciate them. Plus, by either making it yourself or buying from a real artist, you are both reducing the amount of packaging used in "typical" gifts and supporting someone with your holiday spending. What could be more "holiday-like" than that?

**You could give the best gift of all without spending a dime or doing any harm to the environment, and that would be your valuable time.** We all spend all year running around to work, school, after school sports, plays, events, parties, vacations - and more than a few of us rarely just take the time to "be" with our friends and family. Sitting by the fire for a few hours with some friends and some good coffee. Hanging out in the backyard with your kids doing nothing but looking at the clouds. Or making time after the kids go to bed to talk and be with your spouse without being on the phone or watching TV. Spending your time with someone (or someone's) who don't get enough time with you could be the absolute best gift you could give, and making that promise to yourself to try to "be" more in 2009 would be a fantastic thing to offer to someone. It costs nothing, is more than "green", and is really in the spirit of the holidays.

This year, don't go nuts getting in or [further into credit card debt](#) just to try to impress your friends and family. We are all going to be cutting back this year, and there is no shame in that. The best way to deal with it is to be creative in your gift-giving and how you spend your time - your family and your wallet will be thankful that you did!

## **Money saving tips for the holidays**

*By: Plonkee from [Plonkee Money](#)*

If, like me, you're living the single life then I bet your biggest holiday expense is socializing. Christmas parties means booze, food, new clothes,... In short a whole lot of expense. Here are a few ideas for cutting the costs.

### ***Work out how you're getting home first.***

The most important money spent on a night out is the cab fare home. Keep this separate and do not spend it on booze under any circumstances. Depending on where you live, it might actually be cheaper to get a basic hotel room for the night. Otherwise, if someone is driving, make sure they don't drink and try not to get separated. If you live near enough to walk or take the night bus home, only do so if it's safe and preferably with a friend. Saving money is only good if you're there to enjoy it.

### ***Clothes***

Nights out often mean dressing to impress. They don't have to mean buying oodles of new clothes. If there's a regular party or gathering that you go to each year, you might not

want to wear the same thing you did last year. But if you have non-overlapping groups of friends, they won't be any the wiser if you wear the same things twice. Accessorise, have mix and match outfits, shop from your existing wardrobe first, buy second-hand (vintage), try cheap clothes shops. You want to look good, but you don't want to spend a fortune doing it.

### ***Choose your venue wisely***

If you get any say at all in the matter, pick a place with a good happy hour, or a decent special offer that you like. Bar-hopping? It's cheaper to start less expensive and get more expensive. As the night wears on, you tend to drink slower and slower. Where there's a cover charge, it's often reduced or cheaper before a certain time. Keep an eye on the clock and you could save a few quid.

### ***Cut down on the booze***

Drink more slowly, take advantage of special offers, alternate alcoholic with soft drinks. Basically alcohol is expensive and bad for you, it's also normally the largest expense on a good night out, which means there's plenty of room to make savings. If you have mixed drinks, work out whether it's cheaper to get a whole small bottle or can of mixer from the bar and share it with a friend, or to each get a dash. If you drink beer, there's usually at least one on special offer, drink that (unless it's horrible) and drink slowly. If you drink wine, then it might be cheaper to buy by the bottle rather than by the glass. Otherwise, pop is usually the cheapest soft drink, tonic water is nearly as nice as gin and tonic, and tap water should be free.

### ***Food***

Normally, I prefer to eat before I go out. Or, heaven forbid, pick up a McDonalds whilst I'm out. Restaurant food at Christmas tends to be poor quality and over-priced and normally the only time I'm eating it is when it's the work do, and it's already paid for. On the other hand, if you do want to eat whilst your partying, \*ethnic\* is often the best value. I've had some good value Chinese and Indian food in the festive season, but depending on where you live Mexican, Caribbean or South East Asian food might be worth picking up. It'll save you eating too much turkey before the big day, anyway.

There we have it. A few ideas for saving money on your holiday socializing. Hope you have a Merry (but not too merry) Christmas.

# Stay At Home Holidays Money Saving Tips

By: Pinyo from [Moolanomy](#)



For many people, this holiday season will be different from the rest. Layoffs, bad economy, and poor stock market performance will force many people to be more judicious with their holiday spending. Aside from the gifts, costs associated with traveling to be somewhere for the holidays is the biggest of all – making stay at home holidays more appealing this year.

Personally, I don't mind stay at home holidays because I dislike traveling in bad weather and stuck in traffic with the army of holiday travelers. Although it's nice to occasionally be the visitor so that you don't have to do a lot of work associated with hosting, I feel that nothing beats the comfort of being in your own home.

Here are a few tips to have a great stay at home holiday celebration, while keep your expenses low:

- Reuse old holiday lights and decorations. Don't buy any new ones until after the holidays – you can get them really cheap then.
- Don't turn on your light show too soon and take it down promptly.  
If you are replacing some of your holiday lights, spend a little more on the LED type.
- Invest in a few electric timers.
- Invite a few friends and family over for dinner.
- Instead of traditional dinner, try holiday potluck.
- Send "care packages" with gifts and goodies to friends and family who could not come
- Connect with friends and family who cannot be there through telephone or web chat

Yes, holidays is about giving and being with people you love. But there's no reason for you to go through a financial hardship to accommodate it. As long as you are smart about it, you can give and connect without blowing three months spending budget to accomplish it.

## Frugal Ways to Keep Meaning in the Season

*By: Lynnae from [Being Frugal.net](http://BeingFrugal.net)*

One of the things that bugs me about the Christmas season these days is the focus on spending money. Holiday displays are up in stores before Halloween is over, begging you to buy, buy, buy.

Christmas movies hit the big-screen, tempting you to spend \$50 for the family to watch the latest blockbuster of the season. If you don't watch yourself, it's easy to spend more money...and time...on things that keep you from remembering the important things about the holiday season. For many people that is their faith and spending time with family.

Fortunately it's possible to have a memorable Christmas season, without spending a lot of money. Here are some of my favorite things to do during the holidays.

### *24 Books in 24 Days*



This is by far my favorite tradition. Before December 1, I wrap up 24 Christmas themed books. I found most of them for pennies at yard sales, thrift stores, and on sites like Half.com and Amazon. Each night from December 1 through December 24, my children unwrap one book, and we read it before bed. After Christmas, I pack up the books for use the next year. The one time investment in 24 books provides years of enjoyment, and my children look forward to their favorite Christmas books every year.

### *Bake Holiday Cookies*

I have three bachelor brothers, who never get fresh baked cookies. So every year, my kids and I spend a day baking cookies to give them for Christmas. Baking cookies from scratch isn't very expensive, and spending time together in the kitchen, while listening to holiday music, provides wonderful memories.

### ***Visit a Retirement Home***

Gather a group of friends and your children, and head to a retirement home. Sing Christmas carols and hand out homemade Christmas cards. The residents love to see young children, and your children will learn about giving joy to others.

### ***Have a Family Slumber Party***

Pop some popcorn and watch a Christmas movie together. Then sleep in sleeping bags in the living room, enjoying the lights of the Christmas tree as your kids nod off. (Parents, it's a good idea to turn off the Christmas tree lights once the kids are asleep.)

### ***Admire Christmas Decorations***

Hop in the car and drive around town, trying to find the best holiday decorations. Once you get back home, you can discuss which house was the best over hot chocolate.

Having fun during the holiday season doesn't have to be expensive. If you pick a few inexpensive activities and do them year after year, your children will begin to look forward to them (and expect them, so don't forget!). You will build great traditions and memories that will last far beyond the must-have \$100 toy of the season.

## **Save Money with 5 Free or Frugal Holiday Dates**

***By: Mrs. Micah from [Mrs. Micah](#)***

Because Micah and I have a small date budget, we have to be creative when coming up with things to do. One of my favorite things about the holiday season is that there are even more opportunities for fun free or frugal dates.

### ***Date #1: Take in the Christmas lights - FREE (or a little for gas)***

Even though my family has never been into major outdoor decorations for Christmas, I love looking at what other people create with lights and sculptures. Spend an evening wandering through local neighborhoods looking at what people have managed to do. Or ask around and find out who goes completely nuts (in a good or a bad way) and drive out to see them.

For a bonus, follow with hot cocoa to warm up those cold noses and fingers.

***Date #2: Admire mall decorations - cost of gas***

Or if you really don't to go out in the cold, visit the mall. Don't try to squeeze in your Christmas shopping, just admire the decorations. Some malls do an amazing job. Only downsides are that there'll probably be fewer decorating trainwrecks to giggle over than house-by-house and you may run into crazed shoppers. Remember to keep this about the two of you having fun and not turn it into a shopping trip.

***Date #3: Savor the flavors of seasonal coffee - <\$10***

Micah and I are huge coffee fans. And this is the best time of year for it, the time when it feels right to be drinking hot coffee and sitting in a warm coffee shop or bookstore in the evening. Also, between October and December, coffee shops bring out their very best flavors. Two small coffees cost less than \$10.

***Date #4: Romantic nostalgia on the couch - <\$5 (FREE if you use the library or a tv station)***

This is the time of year for nostalgia and old holiday movies. You might be able to get some of these at your local library (or TCM if you get it); if not, drop by your video store and check out their selection. There's nothing like bundling up on the couch with your special someone, a few mugs of hot cocoa, and turning off the lights to watch classic films.

Not much for holiday movies? It's still a great season for snuggling on the couch, even if you're watching your favorite tv show or an action/horror/chick flick. Turn off the lights and pile on blankets for a dark, romantic, winter feel.



***Date #5: Candlelight Dinner - \$? depends on how far you go.***

What's more romantic than dining by candlelight? And with the sun setting so early, it's not something you have to wait up for. Tips for a great candlelight dinner: Do dress up, even a little. Plan it after you've already done holiday decorating (if that's something you do) so your house looks extra-nice. The food matters less than the atmosphere: order pizza if it means you won't be stressing about getting everything done right. Take your time: have a couple courses or find another way to spread out your dinner as you would at a restaurant.

Bonus date idea: Keep your eye out for concerts and recitals going on at this time of year.

If you're a fan of Handel's Messiah, for instance, you might be able to find a church whose choir is doing a special performance. Or a school/college orchestra doing their winter concert.

## Five Frugal Gift Giving Strategies

*By: Paidtwice from [I've Paid For This Twice Already...](#)*

In this season of giving and receiving, it can be hard to give sensibly and frugally and not feel cheap in the process. Here are five strategies I have used or considered to keep my costs under control but stay in the spirit of giving. Guilt-free gift giving is always my ultimate goal.



### ***1. Don't Do Lists***

It may be ironic to start a list with an admonishment to not do lists, but that is the #1 way I keep from going overboard on my spending. If you ask for a list from a person you are getting a gift for, you are somewhat locked into picking from it. So if you want to ideally spend \$10 and all that is on the list is \$30 DVDs, you are out of luck. Think outside the box. Exchange gifts without a list.

### ***2. Homemade is better, especially in bulk***

When I was in high school, I had a lot of friends and limited money. I routinely made homemade gifts for Christmas, specifically a collection of fudge and cookies. The ingredients cost me about \$50 (a fortune to me at the time) but made enough to provide 30 or so gifts, so a very low per gift cost. And I could personalize the presents by selecting different sweets for different people or embellishing with different decorations.

And everyone thought they were yummy.

As an adult, I've done the same type of thing with homemade jam - people love jam, and if you can get the fruit for cheap, more the better. But even if you have to pay full price for the fruit, jam is inexpensive generally and a nice gift.

### ***3. Do group exchanges***

If it is an option, consider drawing names and exchanging with one person in a group of friends and relatives. I am not a big fan of this option, but some people really enjoy it.

### ***4. Shop the clearance section***

This is absolutely my favorite. Don't tell my kids, but most of their gifts come from the clearance section. I can always find toys they will enjoy or clothes that fit them if I look hard enough. I leave the full-priced gifts for the grandparents.

### ***5. Plan in advance***

Don't start shopping on December 20th. Keep an eye out (year round ideally, but starting now is better than starting tomorrow) for the perfect gift for someone on your list. A little at a time is much easier to budget for than all at once.

Hopefully some or all of these strategies will lead to a holiday season of good cheer that you and your budget will enjoy!

## **Shopping for Holiday Gifts When You are Separated from Friends and Family**

***By: Patrick from [Cash Money Life](#)***

I moved away from home over 10 years ago, and since then, most of my holiday celebrations have taken place away from the majority of my family and friends. Christmas just isn't the same when you aren't with the ones you love. But just because you can't be there in person doesn't mean you shouldn't send a gift.

I enjoy giving gifts, and since I have spent so many holidays away from loved ones, I need to send most of my gifts instead of giving them in person.

How to shop for friends and family who live miles away:

- **Know the person you are shopping for.** Giving gifts can be difficult, especially if you don't know exactly what their wants and needs are. The better you know

the person you are shopping for, the easier it will be to find a gift they will use and not toss in the back of their closet.

- **Shop online.** Not only can you find extremely good discounts at online retailers, but online shopping often comes with free shipping, which will save you the time and money it takes to ship a gift to your loved one. Many online stores also offer gift wrapping for a nominal fee – again saving you time and frustration! (Well, I know I can get frustrated trying to wrap gifts!).
- **Send gift cards or gift certificates.** Many people claim that sending gift cards is impersonal, but I disagree. If you know the person and which stores they prefer, then a gift card can be a very useful and welcome gift. It all comes down to knowing who you are shopping for. When shopping for gift cards, keep in mind that some may come with expiration dates. There are also many places online where you can find discounted gift cards, which can save you 20% or more on the face value of the card. Another idea is to give a gift certificate for an adventure and not to a store. Examples of this would be gift certificate for skydiving, hot air ballooning, or a ride in a glider. These are adventures your loved one is sure to remember. (But good luck topping your gift next year!)



Things to remember when shipping gifts on your own:

- **Allow plenty of time.** First, make sure you allow plenty of time for shopping, wrapping the gift, and shipping the gift. The mail system can get backed up the closer you get to Christmas.
- **Wrap your gift before sending it.** Wrap the gift before you send it, or clearly mark the package with instructions on who should open the gift and when! Unwrapped gifts are never fun and you don't want to spoil the surprise!
- **Packing and insurance.** Make sure you securely package the gift before shipping it out to your loved one and if the gift is expensive or hard to replace, buy insurance. You can never be too careful!

The holiday season is one of my favorite times of the year. I hope these tips help make your holiday season a good one.

# Saving money when shopping for a large family

By: *Giblguy (Gibble)* from [Gather Little by Little](#)



We have a large family and as a result Christmas time can be both expensive and financially stressful. In my immediate family, we have 8: myself, my wife, and 6 children. On my side of the family it's fairly small as I only have one sibling. She isn't married and doesn't have any children yet. My wife's side of the family is very different though. She has 2 brothers and both of them have a number of children.

Given the size our family it's really financially stressful around Christmas time. Here's a few tips that our family uses to make things a little less stressful:

- **Encourage your children to get gifts they can share.** We've purchased a few video games systems, sports equipment, a TV and a number of other items. While these items are a bit expensive when shared across a few children it really brings the overall cost down.
- **Don't exchange gifts.** I know this might sound a bit harsh, but with my wife's family, we've agreed to focus on the kids so the adults don't buy gifts for each other. We only purchase gifts for the children. This has really saved us a great deal of money over the years. Most of us adults don't need anything anyway.
- **Buy items on sale throughout the year.** My wife is really good about watching for items on sale and going ahead and buying them. She literally begins Christmas shopping for the following year right after Christmas. Not only does she get some great deals, but it spreads out the expense throughout the year rather than all at one time.
- **Set a Christmas Budget.** We set a budget for each family member, including our children and ourselves. That is all we spend. This is a great way to keep yourself from overspending.
- **Bigger is not always better.** In our family, I guarantee you our kids play more with the \$10.00 football we bought them than the Xbox 360 or computer they have upstairs. Remember, bigger and more expensive is not always better. This is particularly true for younger children.
- **Focus on things they'll really use.** Throughout the years our children have collected more junk. A few years back we started purchasing just one primary gift for them. The rest is just small nick-knacks, clothes and some sweets. We've

found that when kids have too much to play with they don't appreciate it. Less is more.

If you are part of a large family, I hope these tips will help you avoid some financial stress this Holiday Season!

## About the M-Network

The M-Network is a group of personal finance blogs that have joined forces to bring you the best content possible. Recognizing that the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts, the M-Network of PF blogs works hard to publish informative, insightful and, dare we say, entertaining content.

One of the great benefits of the M-Network is that while each of us writes about personal finance, we all have our own different perspectives, and we tend to focus on different aspects of personal finance.

The M-Network is:



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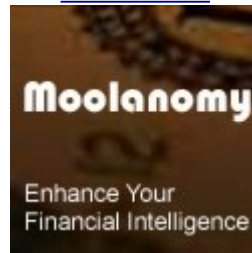
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