

YOUR GUIDE TO

# Surviving Christmas



While we might be singing along to 'I wish it could be Christmas everyday' - our bank balances are definitely glad that isn't the case. Whether you're big into celebrating the holiday or not, there's no doubting that it's an expensive time of year for most.

GoCompare published [▶ research](#) last year that suggests each household expects to spend £712 on Christmas.

To ensure plenty of festive cheer without creating a debt mountain, our Guide is here to help you to get organised now and teach you the secrets to having a Christmas that doesn't break the bank.

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#### What you'll learn

- » How to plan and budget for all the costs of Christmas
- » How to get the best deals on presents
- » How to master the Christmas food shop
- » How to keep guests entertained and fed during the lull between Christmas Day and New Year
- » Must-stick-to financial resolutions to recover from the cost of this Christmas and save for next year



# Before you do anything else...

Get your budget sorted (because nothing says Christmas like setting up a budget...)

Make a list of the different expenses then work out how much you can spend in total on Christmas. Think everything from gifts and catering to travel and those dreaded 'must-show-your-face' social events.

Budgeting helps you understand how you use money, avoid wasting it and ensures you don't overspend and start the new year without a financial hangover. Knowing your costs also identifies key money-saving opportunities.



Use our [▶ Christmas Budget Planner](#) so that some of the work is done for you.

## Let's cover the main expense areas

### 01 | Presents

Sure, the spirit of 'giving' is great but not if it breaks the bank. Divide the number of presents by your budget total or put a cost next to each name and add it up to reach your budget.

### 02 | Food and drink

If you're a guest you may be asked or want to contribute. If you're hosting, then think longer-term when it comes to your shopping list to cover Christmas Eve, the full Christmas dinner, drinks and possibly for Boxing Day to New Year too.

### 03 | Socialising

Christmas is party season and nights out can be expensive. Costs include taxis, drinks, meals and a new outfit. Multiply the events you're committed to by the cost of each to fix your budget.

### 04 | Transport

This is one cost hosts don't have but many people travel to get to family and friends for Christmas, so factor in travel costs whether by trains, planes or car.

## All you need for Christmas is willpower

It's OK if your willpower lets you down when it comes to festive treats this Christmas but avoid caving in when it comes to sticking to your budget.

It's not easy and requires strong willpower which is down to you, but there are tactics that can help.

Try using the [▶ 'piggybanking'](#) technique, this means putting away the funds you've budgeted for into a dedicated bank or credit card account to avoid complicating the cost of Christmas with your day-to-day budget. Putting the money into a separate 'pot' allows you to clearly see how much you've spent vs. how much you have left in your budget without having to account for your regular financial commitments.



# Smart spending for Christmas

## Buying presents (the fun bit... sort of)

Now you've finalised your budget, start looking for bargains. Find out what each person wants, research where to buy it but stay within budget.

The best ways to keep the costs down and get the right presents at the best price

- » Utilise discount codes, cashback sites or voucher codes. Check your employee benefits portal, lots of employers offer access to great discounts as part of their offering
- » Find local eBay or selling page bargains
- » Use supermarket or store loyalty scheme points. These can be traded up to 3x the value
- » Get your timing right. Don't leave it to the last minute when some gift prices go up
- » Keep present costs down for work colleagues or adults in your family by using Secret Santa

## The secrets to nailing Black Friday and Cyber Monday

You can get fantastic deals on these days, 29 November & 2 December, this year. Make sure you have finalised your gift list ahead of these days. Your forward planning here will reap serious savings and cut some of your Christmas costs.

Typically electronics and beauty products have big discounts on Black Friday and Cyber Monday. So, if you have items on your list that you can get at a bargain price, then it's worth trying to get them on these days. Focus on the retailers that sell those products so you [don't get carried away](#) and get distracted by deals that weren't on your list.

## Follow this strategy

- » Set your budget to nail which deals to go for and which to ignore
- » Decide what to buy in advance to focus which retailers to target and to save time
- » Ignore pressure from retailers that you must buy quickly
- » Check the product, the T&C's and reviews. There's no point buying a dud even at low prices.

## Christmas trees and decorations on a budget

If you're not worried about the fresh pine smell, artificial trees can save you around £50 year on year. If you do want a fresh Christmas tree, it's best to check locally, but if you're a city-dweller then try [▶ christmastreesdelivered.co.uk](#) or [▶ pinesandneedles.com](#)

If you have kids, you can kill two birds with one stone by keeping them entertained and getting some homemade decorations for your tree.



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# When you're out and about

## Socialising on a budget

Christmas parties can be tricky to budget for if someone else is organising them because you don't have control of all costs.

Discount and voucher codes can be used at certain restaurants. ASK, Pizza Express, Prezzo and many more have regular deals that can save 25% on food.

Check your employee benefits portal, lots of employers offer access to great discounts as part of their offering. When it comes to what to wear, search for the best deal and use voucher and discount codes and get creative by customising an outfit with a seasonal touch for next to nothing.

## New Year's Eve

Avoid disappointment and spending unnecessary cash this New Year's Eve by doing your research first. Some pubs only let in regulars, some charge and clubs and venues only let in those who've bought tickets in advance and also bump up prices for the night!

If you're entertaining at home there should still be good deals in the supermarkets on party food and drinks. Make the most of post-Christmas 'party platter' discounts.

## Travelling

Last year, the AA said there were 19 million cars travelling home for Christmas on Friday 21 December, and roads, trains, coach services and flights are always busy with the great escape.

### If you're driving

Have your [▶ winter survival kit](#). Check your tyres and oil before you travel to reduce the chances of breaking down and facing extra costs.

### If you're flying

Book in advance for cheaper flights and wider availability. Get to airports early to avoid stress and possible extra taxi costs. If you're delayed or your flights cancelled, know your [▶ rights](#) to claim back any costs incurred through no fault of your own.

### If you're taking the bus or coach

Book ahead for cheaper seats. Shop around - some services like [▶ Megabus](#) offer intercity trips for a few pounds if booked long enough in advance.

### If you're taking the train

The general rule of thumb is the earlier you book, the cheaper your ticket. You can also check to see if you can save using split ticketing. Websites like [▶ TrainSplit](#) splits your ticket for you making it simple to do.





# Children and Christmas on a budget

Managing the expectations of children is a challenge at Christmas, especially with adverts ramping up the present demands from November. You want to give your children a magical experience at Christmas because those years for a child are unique and go fast.

Help teach your kids the value of money by explaining saving sacrifices in terms of pocket-money, and comparing the difference between one expensive gift or more small gifts.

The more you involve kids in the general festivities, the more excited they are about the time of year, rather than focusing on just the presents. Involve them in decorating, cooking and shopping where you can.

For Christmas gifts and cards, save money by making/baking/cooking your own gifts. A personalised present is special and you can make someone's Christmas by giving them a unique card or gift. If you're feeling less than inspired, then swing by Pinterest and type in ➤ '[homemade gift ideas](#)'. You'll lose hours of your life scrolling but hopefully emerge with some creative flair.

## Pearls of wisdom from a Neyber mum

Our daughter earns pocket money by helping out or trying hard at school. For her, her pocket-money is her hard-earned cash and it takes her time to save up for the things she wants. It makes it easier for us to have expectation conversations when it comes to birthdays and Christmas.

She will, like so many kids I'm sure, look through the Argos or Smyths books and will cut out things she likes to put on her list but at the same time, we will have a chat about how long it would take her to save for that toy if she were to buy it herself. The doll that she wants might take her 3 months to save for – that's all the time from going back to school after summer right up to Christmas! If there is something a little more pricey that she would like, we do a little test with her – we ask her, as it's a lot of money, how

would you feel if that were the only gift you got? Or would you prefer to have something less expensive but have a couple of other gifts too. This allows us to test whether it's something that she really wants and how much she wants it.

Make sure the bill for ingredients and supplies doesn't outweigh the cost-benefit of going homemade



# Thrifty

# festive food

## The food shop

For some adults, this replaces Christmas presents as the time to get excited, for others the dreaded food shop can be a stressful experience, but like most things, a bit of thought and planning goes a long way to keeping the costs and stress down.

Shopping is a personal choice and what goes on it depends on who you're catering for. A list is important when food shopping because otherwise, especially for Christmas, it's tempting to buy extra items.

- » Make a food plan that covers Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day
- » Factor in the number people you're entertaining for
- » Make sure that list has everything you need
- » Do some research on the best deals before you head out
- » Make sure you stick your list

If you're looking for leftover recipes that are a bit more exciting than the ordinary Bubble and Squeak, have a look on the internet for inventive leftover recipe ideas like those from [BBC Good Food](#) and [Delicious Magazine](#). Turkey Jambalaya, anyone? Failing that, go for failsafes like a Boxing Day buffet or in some slow cooking.


## Food shop tips

- » Do a cupboard, fridge and freezer inventory so you know what you've got and avoid duplicating costs
- » Recycle food waste and donate unwanted items to make extra space
- » Start buying non-perishable items weekly a few months before Christmas to spread the cost
- » Don't buy too much. You can only eat so much between Christmas Eve and Boxing Day
- » Be savvy to supermarket tricks - special offers aren't always 'special'
- » Compare the cost per weight and be wary of overpriced buy one get one free deals
- » Compare costs using a comparison site like [mysupermarket.co.uk](#) to see if you can save
- » Take advantage of loyalty schemes

Ask guests to bring a dish or bring their own booze to reduce the amount you have to buy. Most people expect to contribute something if they're coming for Christmas. Plus... if they really love you, they don't want you to break the bank!

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# Ho, ho, ho! Christmas Day is finally here!

(Don't forget to actually enjoy it)

This is the time to have fun, fun, fun! Enjoy the fruits of your planning and hard work and let the whole day come together for the enjoyment of everyone.

Christmas Day is the culmination of your budgeting, planning and savvy financial decisions of the last few months, so make it a celebration.

## Entertaining everyone on a budget

These next few days if you're lucky enough to have them off work, are often pressure-free, where it's quite easy to lose track of time and forget what day it actually is!

There is plenty to do on a budget though and it's a chance for different generations of the family to come together and spend quality time doing things face to face.

## There are loads of money saving options

- » Get two for one on loads of attractions if you register and then buy a [▶ National Rail ticket](#).
- » If you're desperate for a white Christmas, you could take your kids to an indoor ski or sledging centre.
- » Book up in advance to get free tickets to be a member of the audience when TV shows are recording. [▶ SRO Audiences](#) & [▶ Applause Store](#) are two of the best.
- » There are loads of fantastic free museums in London including the Science Museum, Natural History Museum and the British Museum. They're brilliant and they don't cost anything to get in.
- » Get out in the garden and make up your own treasure hunt to amuse young children.
- » Enjoy cheap cinema tickets for kids aged 2-12 and adults from [▶ Vue Entertainment](#) at their 'Mini Mornings' showings.



# Start planning for Christmas 2020 this Boxing Day



If possible, work out what the total cost of presents, travel, food and drink and other Christmas expenses were this year, divide that by 12 and save that each month. If you can't manage that at least you'll have a good idea of what you need to save so you can work on achieving that throughout the year.

Set aside a dedicated savings account and deposit money into it each month to ensure you have next Christmas covered.

This will make it much more likely you'll avoid getting into debt and will help make your Christmas more fun and more relaxing.



Use our [Christmas Budget Planner](#) so that some of the work is done for you.

Try and bring all these tips and resolutions together in a realistic overall strategy that's achievable.

## Simple financial resolutions

There are many ways to plan and improve your finances in 2020, but the most vital point is to see resolutions as something to be incorporated into your overall financial philosophy and remember that February and April are as important as January, to create an ongoing year-long success story.

### Some resolutions include

- » [Switch energy suppliers](#) – If you never have you could save up to £250 a year
- » Switch bank accounts and get up to £150 as a free switching incentive
- » [Haggle with broadband](#) and telecom suppliers for a cheaper deal
- » Save on insurance. Use quotes sent seven days before your deal ends as they're often 10% cheaper
- » Check your mortgage and re-mortgage to a better interest rate if you have more equity

But don't be overambitious and take on too much. Two or three priority resolutions that dramatically improve your financial security are more effective than trying to do too much and giving up.

### Then

- » Target areas you are most likely to be able to make improvements in and focus on these.
- » If you have debts, pay back the ones with the highest interest or fees first.
- » Visualise where you want to be in a year's time, perhaps booking a holiday with your savings and try and picture this in difficult moments to resist the urge to spend.