

# The Frugal Shopper

Save more, spend less



## A Guide to Going Out Without Going Broke

Staying in isn't the only way to save money.



Sticking to beer at the bar can get you the most for your money when it comes to what you're drinking.

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After a [long week](#) at work, come Friday you may be aching to unwind with a nice dinner and maybe a martini or two.

But nights on the town can be an expensive indulgence. Dinner, drinks and Uber rides can add up quickly, taking a big chunk of money out of your hard-earned paycheck.

That doesn't mean you have to spend your nights at home alone, watching Hugh Grant movies with a box of wine and a sleeve of Thin Mints. With a solid plan of action, it's possible to paint the town red without going broke. Learn more by checking out our guide to going out on a budget:

**Withdraw cash for the night.** Decide how much you can afford to spend on your night out beforehand. Withdraw the amount of cash you've allocated for the night so you won't lose track of how much you spent later on. When your wallet is empty, you'll know it's time to stop spending.

**Find a designated driver.** Cab rides and ride sharing can be one of the most expensive parts of going out. Look out for both your safety and wallet by finding a designated driver who can drive you and your friends to and from the bar. Of course, it's not always easy to convince a friend to be a designated driver – try arranging an alternating system with your friends, where one person agrees to be the designated driver each week.

**Start at home.** You can save money by starting your night at home. Invite your friends over to [share a few beers](#), and you'll end up spending less money on drinks when you're out. Drinks at a restaurant or bar can cost upwards of \$8, but a six-pack from your local grocery store can cost as little as \$6.

**Hunt down restaurant deals.** On [restaurant deal](#) sites like Restaurant.com, you can purchase gift certificates to local restaurants at more than 50 percent off. Simply plug in your ZIP code and you'll be presented with a variety of deals for restaurants in your area. You can also check out discounted gift card sites like Raise and Cardpool to score gift cards to popular chains at a discount.

**Split meals.** Many restaurant dishes fall well beyond the range of the USDA's recommendations for sodium, fat and calories. [Splitting a meal](#) is not only a healthy choice, it's a cost-conscious one. Consider ordering a salad and a main course to share with a friend. Pack up leftovers, and you'll have lunch taken care of tomorrow.

**Look for specials.** Once you're finished with dinner and ready to hit the bars, do a bit of homework beforehand to find out which bars have the best drink specials. Search local event guides to find listings of promotions and specials, and plan your night accordingly. At a bar, don't be shy about asking the bartender if they're running any drink specials you might have missed.

**Stick to beer.** Cocktails, wine and shots are typically marked up anywhere from 350 to 500 percent at bars. With beer, you often get the best value for your money – especially if you can buy beers on tap or by the pitcher.

**Avoid brand-name liquors.** If you prefer liquor to beer, make sure to specify that you would like the house alcohol rather than the brand-name in your mixed drinks. Many bars will [charge more for premium spirits](#), so it's a good idea to be specific about your house alcohol preferences to avoid being charged top-shelf prices.

**Finish at home.** Instead of staying out late and shelling out more money at the bar, consider bringing the party back to your house. You can continue to enjoy each other's company (and continue to drink) in the safety of your own home – where the drinks aren't marked up, you don't have to tip and there's never a cover charge.

**Stay in.** Your friends won't be devastated if you turn down an invitation to go out every once in a while, and they're likely to be understanding if you explain your reasons. Next time your friend asks you to come out, try saying something like, "I've really had fun going out with you before, but I can't make it tonight. I'm really trying to stick to my budget." Everyone can identify with wanting to be more responsible with their spending habits. By deciding to stay in one night, you allow yourself a little more wiggle room next time you go out. You're bound to enjoy your next night out much more when you're not pinching pennies.

Remember just because you stay home doesn't mean you can't enjoy yourself. Take the time to relax with a bubble bath, cook a delicious dinner or read that book you've been meaning to finish.

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**Maria Lalonde** honed her deal-hunting skills while traveling through South America and Southeast Asia, combing colorful local markets for unique finds. Her love of blogging and thirst for deals brought her to [Offers.com](#), where she blogs about savings tips.