



19 Ways to Have Fun on a Budget

Many Americans are learning about poverty firsthand for the first time in their lives. American culture has focused on consumerism and material riches as the major source of pleasure for decades, making this transition to poverty harsh for many people. Though their basic needs may be met, some of the newly poor find themselves depressed by their new monetary limits and unable to see the pleasures still available to them.

I've lived in poverty for different parts of my life. I was poor for much of my childhood and homeless directly afterward. I learned early on how to have fun on a budget. Then I managed to pull myself up to middle class for about a decade. Illness and other problems brought that time to a close. I've experienced everything from abject poverty to an upper middle class lifestyle.

I noticed during my middle class years that most middle class people don't do a lot of things that aren't spending related for enjoyment; they seem to always be going out to eat, going to movies, shopping, or partaking of expensive hobbies. As a result, once they no longer have the same income they aren't familiar with many ways to have fun on a budget.

I'd like to share things I do for enjoyment that people of any income could enjoy.

Read- Reading is a very budget-friendly entertainment. Reading is free entertainment if you have a library card or have friends who read. You can also find book swap clubs in your area. Nothing is more relaxing for me than curling up on the sofa with a good book. Reading is one of my favorite activities.

Go for a Walk- Walking is cheap and fun. Even in the city, there's nature to be seen, squirrels in the park, sunsets to enjoy. Otherwise you can people watch as you walk around your home city or make a game of seeing it as a tourist would - paying attention to the architecture and the unique features of your neighborhood or city. Walking is not only enjoyable, it's also healthy. Time spent in nature is reputed to reduce blood pressure.

Play Board Games and Card Games- Games provide hours of enjoyment and healthy social interaction. You can usually find board games and card games pretty cheap at secondhand stores and discount stores. Even bought brand new, the outlay for a board game or card game is usually far less than the cost of just one person going to a movie or out to eat.

We have a bunch of board games in my home but the ones that get the most use are Scrabble and Boggle because we all love playing with words. Apples to Apples comes in at third place and it is great for playing with guests because it is a silly, social game.

Visit with Friends- This is just what it sounds like - either hosting friends or visiting friends to just sit around and chat, perhaps over a cup of tea. You could also turn this into a potluck night and take turns hosting. Bring along some board games and you can have a great time for the cost of gas to a friend's house.

Volunteer- Volunteering is fulfilling, interesting, and usually costs nothing. Check out your local charities (homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food banks, animal shelters, literacy projects, etc.) and find one or more that you would like to support and volunteer there. I've found that most people take great pleasure in volunteer work - or at least take pride and pleasure in having volunteered. Give it a try, it can be very enjoyable.

Attend Open Mic Nights- Enjoy free or nearly free music, poetry readings, or comedy acts. You might not be able to afford concerts anymore but you can still enjoy live music and other live entertainment. Some bars, coffee houses, and clubs host open mic music nights for comedians, musicians, poets, and other performers. In the current economy, this phenomenon has really taken off as many businesses have started hosting them to improve business. Check with your local bars, clubs, and coffee houses for dates and times. For the cost of a few drinks (avoid alcohol to keep it really cheap) you can enjoy an evening of live entertainment.

Join a Book Club- Combine reading and visiting with friends and you can get together with friends or socialize with new people through a book club. Many bookstores will host them so all you need to do is read then talk about it. Check the bulletin boards at your local bookstores and libraries for book clubs or create one of your own.

Play Free Online Games- Search for free games online. There are many, many of them. I don't often play games online but for many people it's a fun distraction.

Watch Free Movies- Libraries often allow you to check out movies as well as books. The library is a great source of free entertainment. Also, if you live in an apartment complex check with your complex office; they may have a movie lending library. You can also swap DVDs with friends and family members.

Go on Picnics- You've got to eat, right? Well, then, pack it up and take it outdoors! Eat in a local park or even your own back yard. To keep this activity inexpensive, consider walking or biking to your destination.

Enjoy Free Zoo and Museum Visits- Many museums and zoos have days when they can be enjoyed at no charge, sometimes during their off season or at other times for promotional purposes. Find out when these promotional free admittance days are through your local zoo and museum webpages.

Go to Free Shows- Locally, several venues have free music shows and speaking events. Here in the Greater Grand Rapids area the locally owned bookstore chain, Schular's Books, hosts bands and other performers as well as guest speakers on a variety of topics, children's story hours, and book signings. Check your local bookstores and libraries for activities and events such as these.

Solve Some Crosswords and Puzzles- You can find many crossword puzzles and word searches online and available for the cost of paper and ink. Print them out and have fun. Some don't even require printing, you can solve them online and pay nothing. You can also sometimes find crossword puzzles in newspapers and periodicals. So nab the newspapers and magazines your friends, family, or workplaces discard and check them for puzzles or other word games.

Join or Create a Common Interest Club or Forum-Check your local paper, book store bulletin board, and Craigslist for common interest clubs you might like to join. Perhaps you like bird watching, knitting, writing, or something else - there's probably a club for it in your area. If you aren't able to get together in person you can always find an online forum or club where you can at least talk about your common interests.

Try New Recipes-Look up a new recipe online and give it a try or go hog wild and look up a whole meal's worth of recipes to create a theme dinner. Don't choose recipes with expensive or unusual ingredients, just try something different. Get your whole family involved for added fun.

Attend Community Events- Check out your community calendar for your apartment complex, neighborhood, your town or city and those of nearby cities. You can do this by going to their websites. Oftentimes, you'll find some fun things to do on one of those lists that won't cost much if anything at all.

Make Blanket Tents and Have Pillow Fights- Some of the best free fun available! You're an adult? Yeah, well, so what! Dig out your blanket tent making skills and create your own indoor camping spot. Then hide in it with a pet, friend or sweetheart, lounging on some pillows and cushions. When it's time for it to come down, demolish it with a pillow war.

Visit the Park- Spending time outside is healthy and often free. Investigate your local parks. Visit a park near you to play on playground equipment, grill some hot dogs, or simply to lie down in the grass. You can also combine going to a park with other activities such as having a potluck or just getting together with friends. This is especially nice if you don't have appropriate housing to host a traditional gathering.

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