

Summer Fun on the Cheap

By Jenn Danko

We've racked up 10 hot tips for teens seeking summer fun. From volunteer opportunities to shopping sprees, here's a list of the season's best bets for beating the heat for cheap.

With the days of summer waning, there's still time to get out and dig into some creative fun on the cheap. Balance those lazy, poolside afternoons with urban explorations, volunteer opportunities, and even catch independent films for free! There's a world of cultural and professional opportunities at your fingertips. Enlist in resources from your local library to map the course for seasonal free time.

10 Tips for Hot Summer Fun on the Cheap

1. Summer time is festival time and there's no better way to take in the sunshine and excitement than through volunteering at a local street fair. "A lot of them don't cost anything to get in—and those that do always need volunteers," says Shel Horwitz, author of [The Penny-Pinching Hedonist: How to Live Like Royalty with a Peasant's Pocketbook](#). An added bonus? You will probably get tickets for free meals or ice cream for your service.
2. If you like dogs—or any type of animal, for that matter—consider volunteering at a veterinary clinic or a local animal shelter as a way of introducing you to the profession. Alexandra Mayzler, founder and director of Thinking Caps Tutoring in New York City, says teens who express an early interest in veterinary medicine will find working for a vet beneficial. "That way you are not just putting in hours and cleaning out cages—you are learning more in the process," she says.
3. If you live in a large urban city, consider taking the subway all the way to the end of the line and see what you find, Horwitz suggests. "You may find beaches, parks or extraordinary things you didn't know about in your home town," he says. Similarly, take a local ferry or walk through an ethnic neighborhood. "Go into an area where you don't know the language or culture and see what you find," Horwitz says. Then read up on your discoveries at your local library. But be sure to let your parents know of your plans and be aware that certain neighborhoods may not be as welcoming as others.
4. If you like the buzz of city life, you may also like the buzz of a rock concert. Consider ushering for a musical event during the summer and see it for free. Mayzler and Horwitz agree it's a sure fire way to see your favorites on stage minus the coin. Pick some of your favorite albums to preview—or even review—at your local library.
5. Like concerts, movie theaters and summer festivals are always looking for volunteers, Mayzler says. "Many theaters use volunteer ushers in addition to staff ushers," she says. Volunteers arrive an hour before the show and help seat patrons. "In return, the volunteers are able to see the show for free," she says. You may also be able to find some of your favorite flicks at your local library.

6. Instead of going to the movies, try throwing a cooking party. Psychologist and author Jennifer Austin Leigh suggests a “ribs throw down.” “Or have a cooking night where everyone pitches in and see who creates the best dish,” she says. Get cooking with real summer BBQ fun. Learn easy tips on the cheap through books such as *Freshman in the Kitchen: From Clueless Cook to Creative Chef*. The book offers cheap, quick tips for novice chefs and may be available at your local library.
7. Step into the shade at your local museum and consider shadowing a tour guide. “Many museums have volunteer programs where you can either guide tours or just go along with the tour guide,” Mayzler says. It’s an easy way to get a quick cultural fix outside traditional classroom settings.
8. Beat the summer blues with a summer shopping spree. Consider scouring the local thrift stores and garage sales for true one-of-a-kind finds at the right price—cheap! “Finding great gently worn pieces of clothing is like going on a fun treasure hunt,” Austin Leigh says. She suggests setting a budget and finding clothes to boost your wardrobe and not break your wallet. “Shopping together is fun—and guys actually like thrift store shopping too,” she says.
9. For older teens, or with a parent’s help, consider setting up your own garage sale or selling items on eBay. “Learn to be an entrepreneur for the summer,” Austin Leigh says. Not familiar with how eBay works? Ask for assistance at your local library, which has books and computer resources available to get your budding business online in no time.
10. Nothing screams summer like a good, old-fashioned car wash. Austin Leigh suggests asking your neighbors first. More ambitious teens can organize a car wash for the whole block. You’ll have fun in the sun and pocket some money too. Just remember to wear sunscreen!