Your no-debt summer starts here

Warm weather's on the way, and that means vacations, concerts, parties... and big bills to pay for them. So Nicole Lapin's gonna show you how to afford all that well-deserved good stuff.



WHEN I TURNED 30, I made a list of 30 fun things I wanted to do that year, and while—okay—I'm 32 now, I recently crossed off one of the best items on the list: skydiving. It was terrifying, exhilarating, and expensive—to the tune of $300. But I didn't feel guilty because I had *planned for it*. That's what I want you to do before summer starts, whether your bucket list includes jumping out of a plane, renting a beach cottage, or buying the whole family lots of funnel cake at the fair. Do these things now, and have a great time later.

STEP 1 | MAKE A PLAN. IMMEDIATELY.

I'm a financial expert, not a fun expert (though I think I'm a fun financial expert!), so I don't care *what* you spend your money on—only that you build it into your budget.

Use visual cues. I've talked about giving your savings account a special name before; it helps motivate you to stick money in it, because you know exactly what it's going toward, like "Summer Mexico Vacation" (whereas just "Savings" can feel like a black hole). Now, take that positive visualization a step further and add a picture. There's a free app called Unsplurge that lets you link a photo to your savings account. Putting cash aside for that beach cottage? You'll be reminded how cute it is every time you open the app. When I see an image of my goals literally in the palm of my hand, it keeps me focused on what matters.

Create an "Emergency FUNd." See what I did there?! I always recommend an "Extras" line in your budget so you can regularly afford things you love, like lunches with friends or manicures. But in May, create a "Summer Extras" line, too, even if you can only steer a little bit of money into it. This is the time of year when there are harder-to-predict expenses that you're really going to want to spend on. Yes, you can put the big goals, like water park tickets, into an app, but that might not be enough. I mean, what if there's a last-minute margarita-tasting festival? You're not going to want to miss out on that!

STEP 2 | THINK OF SAVING AS A GAME.

You *can* put money away without penny-pinching.

"Steal" from yourself. Look at your checking account balance once a week or every couple of days. If you've got, say, $1,245.46 in there, move $5.46 (or $45.46, if you can) into your savings so you end up with a little bit more in reserve and a nice round number in checking. I (and my OCD) find this incredibly satisfying.

Pay yourself for being good. Every time you do laundry, put $3 into a pretty box or some other grown-up equivalent of a piggy bank (or heck, just use a piggy bank). Throw in $10 when you do something really impressive, like take a couple of boxes to Goodwill. Reward yourself with a dollar whenever you exercise or eat an extra-healthy meal. Your hard work should give you the opportunity to play hard, too.

Actually save the money you save. We all love seeing "You saved $17.90 today" on receipts, but where is that money going, really? Nowhere special, most likely. So for one month, every time you get a percentage off somewhere or use a coupon, take the amount you're saving and, you know, save it—in that "Beach Cottage" or "Water Park" fund, or your "Summer Extras" account. Now go have some fun. And have a margarita for me!

Former CNBC and CNN anchor Nicole Lapin is the author of the financial best-seller *Rich Bitch* and one of the stars of the new CW show *Hatched*.

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