

The weather's hot and humid, school is out (or nearly), and you need to plan something fun for the whole family this summer! However, keeping everyone entertained can put a strain on your wallet. Water park excursions, cook-outs, and Fourth of July parties can all add up to an expensive summer. Here are a few ideas to keep your budget from exploding this summer:



Research alternative activities.

Many towns and cities in Wisconsin and Michigan offer inexpensive or free activities during the summer. Your city's Chamber of Commerce or Travel & Visitors Bureau will have a full list of movie theater specials, park activities, zoo schedules, and outdoor concerts. Many local libraries also have free reading sessions for kids on weekdays during the summer, which can be a nice break from the heat if the rest of your time is spent outdoors.

Create a spending plan.

As with any budget, creating a plan for 'how' and 'when' you will spend your money is critical to enjoying a cost-effective summer. One method is to allot each child a specific amount of "fun money" for each week. This allows the kids an opportunity to practice good financial habits by determining how they will spend their portion. Another helpful method is to institute a spending plan to reduce spontaneous purchases that seem to creep up throughout the summer. For example, planning meals the week before a picnic can prevent the potential cost incurred by ordering pizza or fast food during the week.

Fourth of July party tips.

Independence Day celebrations are fun for the whole family, but it can be very pricey to feed everyone, especially if you're hosting a lot of guests. Consider having this year's event be a potluck to bring costs down. You can also make your own decorations rather than buying them. Also, skip the backyard fireworks show. Watch your local newspaper or search the internet for times and locations of public fireworks shows in an area near you. Professional fireworks are safe, free, and bigger than anything you can set off on your own.

With a little research, careful planning, and some creativity, you can have an exciting and enjoyable summer without squeezing your budget!