

# In The LOOP

Your Magazine of Personal Finance

November–December 2015

## Your Holiday Adventure Starts Here!

**Tasty Tech: Tools to Help You Tackle Holiday Feasts**

**Quiz: Global New Year's Traditions**

**Financial Moves for a Happier 2016**

**Stick to It! Get Your Resolutions Right**

**12 Days of Seasonal Stress Busters**

# From the Firm

## Another Year is Almost Behind Us... Where Did It Go?

It's amazing—2015 is already drawing to a close, and the holiday season is here. Since we can't stop time, let's make the most of it...especially during this special time of the year.

To help you celebrate in style and welcome the New Year in a strong financial position, we've filled this

issue with lots of useful tips and inspiring ideas. Our goal is to help you make the most of the remainder of this year and the beginning of the next.

This time of year can be very hectic, but we invite you to take a few minutes and savor this issue—you may even want to share it

with your family and friends to help them get through the holidays with their sanity intact and their finances in better shape! Wishing you a very happy holiday season,

**Your Trusted  
Accounting Advisors**





November–December 2015

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# Your Holiday Adventure Starts Here!



Spending the holidays at home with your loved ones is something you'll always treasure—yet sometimes it's not possible, and sometimes you may just want to take the family (or not) on a holiday adventure. If spending the holidays away from home—whether on U.S. soil or abroad—appeals to you, then now's the time to make your plans.

**W**ant to stay in the USA? Check out these holiday adventures:

## **New York City**

Even if you've been to New York City (NYC) before, it can be one of the most magical places to experience the winter holidays. From Rockefeller Center and its famed ice rink and magnificent decorated tree to Radio City Music Hall's Christmas Spectacular, starring the Rockettes, NYC has something for everyone. In addition to the traditional holiday highlights including Central Park's skating ponds and horse-drawn carriage rides, NYC also hosts the Holiday Market with more than 100 vendors selling clothes, gifts, and refreshments. Of course, that's just the start of the shopping! Madison Avenue

boasts fashion's biggest names and some absolutely amazing window displays, so even if you're not in the market for high-end gifts, you can still enjoy the seasonal spectacle. You're likely already familiar with New York's Times Square New Year's Eve celebration—another idea if you want to wait until New Year's to travel. NYC offers a variety of eateries, entertainment, and amazing hotels to fit every taste and budget, so if you want to experience the hustle and bustle of big-city adventures at holiday time, consider making one of America's most iconic cities your destination.

## **Santa Claus, Indiana**

Far from the bright lights of New York to a special gem of a small town nestled in the heart of the Midwest, lies Santa Claus, Indiana.

This is a town where Christmas is celebrated all year long, making it the perfect destination for a little pre-holiday cheer...especially if you want to take little ones along on your adventure.

In addition to the expected Christmas stores, there's also the Santa Claus post office where you can drop a letter off for St. Nick and a group of volunteers called Santa's Elves will reply to it via postal mail. Also to visit: The Santa Claus Museum and Village (a great place for photo ops) and Santa's Candy Castle.

To get you in the spirit of the holidays during the weeks leading up to Christmas, Santa Claus, Indiana offers an extensive agenda including the Land of Lights display, a 1.2-mile drive around the Lake Rudolph Campground & RV Resort; a traditional parade; and Santa's buffet

dinner at the Christmas Lodge every Friday leading up to Christmas. See the town's full agenda at [www.santaclausind.org](http://www.santaclausind.org).

Feeling more adventurous? Try these holiday escapes abroad:

### **Quebec City, Canada**

If you'd like to get a taste of Europe without having to leave North America, consider a holiday trip to Quebec City. From the heart of the "old city" where Victorian-era characters host candlelit evenings enacting or reading Charles Dickens tales, visitors will enjoy participating in old-world Christmas traditions. Unique European-inspired fare can be found at Quebec's German Christmas market, and an exposition of nativity scenes from around the world is also a highlight of the season. Once you've had your fill of quaint village life and quiet celebrations, you may consider heading to nearby Sentier des Caps de Charlevoix, which offers family-friendly hiking, snowshoeing, and skiing.

### **Bath, England**

It may not be the place that jumps to mind when you think of a winter holiday destination, but Bath (the only city in the UK to be designated as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site) offers some of the world's finest cultural celebrations of the

Christmas holidays as well as some unique outdoor activities. Some examples:

- The Theatre Royal, which Jane Austen mentions in "Northanger Abbey" and "Persuasion," is home to a musical celebration accompanied by mince pies and mulled wine in her honor.
- The 18-day Bath Christmas Market features 170-plus wooden chalets selling handmade British crafts.
- Bath on Ice is a great outdoor excursion for those who believe ice skating is one of the best parts of the holidays.
- Thermae Bath Spa is—you guessed it—a wonderful "whole body" experience, which allows you to indulge in the steamy mineral waters of an open-air rooftop pool while enjoying spectacular views over the city.

### **The Republic of Malta**

Malta offers some truly amazing holiday experiences including a visit to presepu (or nativity scenes) created by residents who proudly open their shutters and even their garage doors to display them.

In addition, the Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem is a life-size nativity experience spanning over 20,000 square meters. Inhabited and animated by over 150 actors comprised of entire families, this "nativity village" takes visitors back in time to Judea of 2,000

years ago, complete with oil lamps, grazing animals, crafts areas teaching traditional skills and folklore, a tavern, and a grotto sheltering the baby Jesus.

In Valletta, carolers singing outside the Baroque St. John's Co-Cathedral during advent and a spectacular display of Christmas lights on Republic Street are true holiday highlights. The city's Manoel Theater is also widely known for its annual Christmas pantomime.

### **Barcelona, Spain**

If you're planning to extend your break beyond New Year's Day, you may wish to consider heading to Spain where Three King's Day is celebrated on January 5. On the evening of January 4, Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar arrive at the city's port on their own ship, *Santa Eulalia*.

As part of the festivities, canons are fired, fireworks are set off, and the mayor hands each King the key to the city. Following this ceremony is a parade through the streets that includes camels, elephants, giraffes, and dazzling costumes.

These are just a handful of the amazing holiday adventures you may consider taking this season. Use them as a starting point for your own research to create a unique itinerary and celebrate the season in the place that appeals most to you. Safe travels! ■

Source: CNN.com

# Make These Financial Moves for a Happier New Year

Waiting until the clock strikes midnight to start working on your New Year's resolutions may be okay when you want to adopt healthier habits or chart a path to other life goals. However, when it comes to your finances, the earlier you start the better. Get on the path to a happier financial outlook today using these tips:

## 1. Dial Down Debt

Typically, the end of the year brings with it added holiday expenses. While you may not be able to get out of debt before the end of the holiday season, you can set yourself a goal to be debt-free in short order.

The first step? Rein in your spending over the holidays. This will make it easier to reduce your debt. Next, consolidate your debt and refinance as much as possible to the lowest possible interest rate.

Once you do this, put as much money as possible toward paying off the highest cost debt you have, and make the minimum payments towards other balances. Repeat this process until you are debt-free.



## 2. Monitor the Movement of Your Money

Even if you aren't in debt, it's important to know what you spend on average each month. Once you know the flow of your money, you can decide if you are spending it as wisely as possible or if you need to make some changes. The benefit of starting to track spending before the New Year is that you can get a handle on things and make a plan for streamlining spending well before January 1. This will allow you to hit the ground running right at the beginning of the year.

## 3. Evaluate Your Estate

Many people procrastinate about estate planning—not just for one year...but for years on end. If you do nothing else before 2016, educate yourself about the difference between wills and trusts. Check with your CPA—he or she can help you figure out the best estate planning strategies and also put you in touch with additional resources if you need them.

## 4. Initiate Your Investment Strategy

Hopefully, you've been investing for most of your working years. If you haven't, then 2016 is definitely the time to do so. If you have been investing but you haven't looked into rebalancing your portfolio

in a while, the last few months of the year is an ideal time to do so. Remember, you don't need a lot of money to start investing—take a long-term view and start now.

## 5. Reboot Your Retirement Contributions

Before year end, max out the allowable contributions to your retirement plan if your employer offers a 401(k) or similar plan—and if there is a matching contri-

bution plan, take advantage of it! If you're self-employed but haven't been setting aside retirement funds, now's the time to reboot your savings by contributing to a qualified IRA. Either way, by rebooting your retirement savings before the New Year hits, you'll get the benefit of tax deferred funds and a structured savings plan. Don't wait until after the holidays to start taking action. Do at least one or two of the items on this list before 2016 arrives to help you face the coming year in a happier financial position. ■

*If you do nothing else before 2016, educate yourself about the difference between wills and trusts.*



# Tasty Tech: Tools to Help You Tackle Holiday Feasts

Delicious food is central to many holiday gatherings, but cooking for a crowd can be exhausting and stressful. To help you out, we're sharing the newest kitchen technologies (and those coming soon) designed to curtail your culinary chaos:

## 1. SmartyPans

Aside from the cute name, the SmartyPans is a cook pan you use in a normal oven. It connects to a tablet app with over 350,000 recipes. When you add ingredients, the pan weighs the ingredi-

ents and shows a progress bar to ensure accuracy. The pan shows you the estimated cook time based on heat and humidity level. You'll see warnings if you need to adjust the oven temperature (available in early 2016).

## 2. Range Smart Thermometer

The Range Smart is a cooking thermometer that, like SmartyPans, connects to an app. It comes in two sizes—a 3-inch sharp tip or a 6-inch round tip. You connect to the app using an iPhone or iPad



headphone jack. As you cook, you can see the real-time temperature and get notifications that let you know when your food is cooked thoroughly. On an iPad, you can see a real-time graph that shows the cooking process.

### 3. Mellow

You might call Mellow the first genuine cooking robot. It uses the sous-vide cooking process, which involves watertight bags you insert into a vat of boiling water. The app lets you start the cooking process automatically and walks you through how to mix the ingredients. If you decide to cook salmon, for example, you can use the machine to keep the fish cold all day and then start cooking it in time for an evening meal. You can cook up to six portions at once, and the included bags seal tightly without needing a vacuum sealer (pre-order today for delivery in early 2016).

### 4. Crock-Pot Smart

#### Slow Cooker with WeMo

Like a traditional Crock-Pot, this product is durable and heavy-duty for serious kitchen use. It has a dial for making adjustments even if you don't have your smartphone handy. Once connected to the Belkin WeMo app, you can adjust cooking time and temperature, set the Crock-Pot to warm, or turn it off. This is a great idea if you want

to prep a slow-cooked meal while you're away from home.

### 5. The Drop

This small kitchen scale only has one button for on and off. It connects to an app that shows the real-time weight of ingredients, so instead of using measuring cups for sugar, you can just pour and watch a virtual mixing bar raise up to the desired amount. Want to make a double-batch of cookies? Just scale the recipe up and you'll see the correct mixes. The app includes seasonal recipes and the scale is accurate to a single gram.

### 6. Perfect Bake

Like The Drop, Perfect Bake is a connected kitchen scale with recipes that can also be scaled and video cooking tutorials. Perfect Bake includes three mixing bowls, and the LCD read-out on the scale tells you what to do, such as pour or mix.

The product also includes a kitchen thermometer and a small stand for your tablet.

So there you have it...the run-down of some of the tastiest tech for your holiday cooking—and maybe even holiday gifts. One thing's for sure: These tools should help even the most seasoned chefs enjoy the holidays a little bit more. ■

Source: FoxNews.com

## Don't Miss These Tax Deadlines



*Keep these dates handy to avoid paying penalties:*

### Business Tax Deadlines

- **March 16, 2015**  
Filing Deadline
- **Sept. 15, 2015**  
Extension Deadline

### Estimated Quarterly Tax Payment Deadlines

- 1st Quarter:**  
April 15, 2015
- 2nd Quarter:**  
June 15, 2015
- 3rd Quarter:**  
September 15, 2015
- 4th Quarter:**  
January 15, 2016

### Individual Tax Deadlines

- April 15, 2015**  
Filing Deadline
- Oct. 15, 2015**  
Extension Deadline

### IRA Contribution Deadline:

- April 15, 2015**

Please visit  
[www.tax.gov/calendar](http://www.tax.gov/calendar)  
for additional information.

# Stick to It! Get Your 2016 Resolutions Right

These habits can help you beat the odds and make your resolutions stick:

**M**ake more money, lose weight, and live by the Golden Rule. Come January 1, 2016, it's estimated that one in three Americans will vow to make resolutions to better their lives. Most, however, will collapse long before they achieve their goals. About 75 percent of people who make New Year's resolu-

tions are on target a week later, but that figure drops to less than 50 percent by July, according to experts. If you are really committed to sticking with your resolutions—there is hope! The habits outline here can help you achieve goals big or small. So in addition to the standard resolutions you might make, add these to your resolutions list:



## **1. Become a better time manager**

Time is an invaluable asset and should be spent wisely. Learning where to expend energy, and where not to, has innumerable benefits—including less stress, more free time, fewer mistakes, and improved production.

Try making a list of everyday distractions—the things that occupy time throughout the day but serve little purpose. Then eliminate them, or set aside an hour every day for tending to those diversions.

## **2. Manage your debt**

The peace of mind that comes with taking control of debt can do wonders for overall health and give you a sense of control, which can transfer over to other areas of your life. The first step to getting on track financially is to get organized. Make a list of all debts, including minimum monthly payments and due dates. Create a bill payment calendar to remind you which payments are due when. Figure out what order to pay off your debts. Usually starting with the debt with the lowest balance can give you some momentum to keep going.

## **3. Make an effort with co-workers**

We spend countless hours with the people we work with, but few of us take the time to get to know our colleagues. Building

friendships in the workplace can actually relieve stress or tension in the office. Plus, having the support of your co-workers when you're trying to achieve fitness or healthy eating goals can often be the difference between success and failure.

## **4. Be more mindful**

Downtime can make many people uneasy, especially if you have a lot to do, but getting off the hamster wheel every now and then is a must. Learning to live in the moment is what some psychologists call “mindfulness.”

Many of us schedule our every move, and then obsess over sticking to the plan. Few people allow room to improvise or to simply be still. Learning to be mindful—putting your attention on the present, rather than thinking about the past or planning for the future—can relieve stress, improve sleep, lower blood pressure, and improve overall well-being, giving you energy to tackle tougher resolution goals.

## **5. Eat better**

Note that we didn't necessarily say, eat less. The goal here is not weight loss per se...although it might be a side effect. Swapping fast food and junk food for all those healthy things you know you should be eating will improve your health, energy level, and mood. And these are all things

that serve to improve productivity and motivation.

## **6. Make time for exercise**

Just 20 minutes a day of moderate physical activity can boost energy, improve mood, and keep certain dangerous health conditions like high blood pressure at bay. Walking, swimming, and mowing the lawn fall into the category of moderate exercise. Exercise doesn't have to be tedious. In fact, it can even be fun. Take a dance class, go hiking, or join a local sports team to get the blood flowing.

## **7. Get enough sleep**

Hand-in-hand with eating better and exercising, sleep is crucial for goal-setters to be successful. The average adult needs between seven and eight hours of sleep a night to keep body and mind in tip-top shape. A good night's sleep has been linked to less stress, increased alertness, reduced inflammation, and may even prevent certain cancers.

Above all else, when trying to stick to your resolutions, be kind to yourself. Remember that it's okay to make mistakes along the way. The process of making improvements to our daily routines should be pursued at the pace of a marathon, not a sprint. After all, self-love can go a long way toward a healthier lifestyle and a happier life. ■

Source: International Business Times

# Happy Holidays!

## 12 Days of Seasonal Stress Busters

Don't let your own expectations—or those of others—create undue stress this holiday season. Consider how doing less can actually bring you more joy. We've planned 12 days of holiday stress reduction to start you off.

It's the most wonderful time of the year for many of us...but it can also be one of the most stressful ones if we try to accomplish everything we think we are "supposed" to do. Here are some simple ways to skinny down your list of holiday "have-to's" without forgoing any festive fun.

**Day 1: Omit over-the-top spending.** Buying expensive (or too many) gifts can cause financial stress, and the truth is you don't have to always buy the best of everything or spend hours trying to find the

perfect present. Consider setting a spending limit for your gift exchanges and choosing moderately priced presents.

**Day 2: Cancel the crafting class—unless you truly enjoy it.** If you just don't have the time (or



talent) to make handmade gifts, then don't. You can always find cool crafts made by passionate artists on Etsy or at a local craft show.

**Day 3: Segue from selecting unique gifts for everyone on your list.** Giving the same gift to multiple people is not a crime. Unless they live in close proximity, they'll likely never know!

**Day 4: Share the holiday cooking duties.** Do you really have to cook everything yourself? It's okay to have a potluck or even to visit the pre-made section of the grocery store.

**Day 5: Cut out the cooking from scratch—unless you really love it.** Don't like to make pie crust or handmade baklava from scratch? No worries...you can buy store bought goodies, and few people will notice that you didn't supply homemade sweets. For those who do, an invitation to bring a homemade dish to the next gathering is a nice gesture.

**Day 6: Streamline your Christmas card list.** It's all about priorities. If you already keep in touch with the people you want to keep in touch with, then do you need to send them a Christmas card? Instead, send your friends a "Thinking of you" email and save

yourself the stress of staging a family photo and the postage costs.

**Day 7: Reduce your gift wrapping.** If you're still wrapping stocking stuffers, don't. That's what the stocking is for! If you haven't discovered the utility of gift bags over wrapping paper, maybe this is the season to do so.

**Day 8: Attack your agenda.** Trying to be everywhere at once during the holidays is tough. If you want to save your sanity (and your relationships), be proactive about learning your extended family's plans for getting together and prioritize non-family parties. Sometimes you just have to be polite and refuse an invitation or risk running yourself ragged—and where's the joy in that?

**Day 9: Take a time-out on some traditions.** Trying to do everything you're "supposed" to do at the holidays is exhausting. Pick the most meaningful annual activities and take the time to do them with glee and focus.

**Day 10: Hire some help.** If your budget allows, spending some cash to cut down on your holiday have-to's can be a lifesaver. Of course, you can hire a variety of services from professional companies, but

if you're on a budget, consider that many charitable organizations offer gift-wrapping services, food preparation, and even quick gifts that can be helpful. You may also want to trade off holiday errands or babysitting services with a neighbor or friend.

**Day 11: Relax and ring in the New Year.** While there's no denying a rowdy New Year's party can be fun, if you're already exhausted from the holidays, ringing in the New Year in your pajamas may actually hold greater appeal. Invite some friends over and have a p.j. party with fabulous food (or take-out), movies, games, and beverages of your choice.

**Day 12: Don't rush holiday décor removal.** There's no rule that says you must remove your holiday trimmings by noon on New Year's Day. Why not back off on any aggressive post-holiday take-down plans and spend some extra time relishing in the results of all of your hard work instead?

While you may not wish to do everything on this list to reduce your holiday stress, it can be quite liberating to try a few of the ideas. In doing so, you might find that your holidays can be just as joyous... if not more so, when you give yourself a little breathing room. ■

# Test Your Knowledge of Global New Year's Traditions

Just about every country in the world has its own way of celebrating the beginning of a new year. Test your knowledge of New Year's customs around the world—and maybe adopt one or two to make ringing in 2016 even more special.



**1 In which country do they eat 12 grapes as the clock strikes midnight (one each time the clock chimes) on New Year's Eve?**

- a. Canada
- b. Vietnam
- c. Spain

**2 In which country do some people eat long noodles to wish for a long life?**

- a. Italy
- b. Japan
- c. Argentina

**3 In which country do people go to the beach to jump seven waves and throw flowers in the sea while making a wish?**

- a. Italy
- b. Spain
- c. Brazil

**4 In which country is a bell struck 33 times?**

- a. Korea
- b. Puerto Rico
- c. Colombia

**5 In which country do people eat noodles while listening to a bell ring 108 times?**

- a. Germany
- b. Japan
- c. Greece

**6 In which country do people who want to travel take a suitcase and carry it around the house on New Year's Eve?**

- a. The United States
- b. Venezuela
- c. The Philippines

**7 In which country do people wear white clothes in order to have good luck during the New Year?**

- a. France
- b. Papua New Guinea
- c. Brazil

**8 In this country, families dress a stuffed male doll with old clothes from each member of the family and then burn it, symbolizing forgetting all the bad things of the old year. Which country is it?**

- a. Hungary
- b. Angola
- c. Colombia

**9 Which country's citizens pound rice into a glutinous form using a huge hammer?**

- a. Thailand
- b. Japan
- c. Indonesia

**10 Wearing masks and burning them on December 31 to drive away bad luck is a New Year's ritual in which country?**

- a. Spain
- b. Ecuador
- c. Nigeria



**ANSWERS:**

**1.C 2.B 3.C 4.A 5.B 6.B 7.C 8.C 9.B 10.B**

Source: Topicsmagazine.com

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