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5 CHEAP ACTIVITIES PROVEN TO HELP YOU AVOID THE WINTER BLUES



No matter where you live in the northern hemisphere, the onset of winter means shorter days and far away dreams of summer vacations. For those who live above the 40th parallel, ice storms and slow-to-melt springs can wear on even the most devout of winter enthusiasts.

There's no doubt that a couple weeklong beach vacations and spa treatments at your disposal can add some spark to the same-old, same-old. However, the added stress of even [the most frugal of getaways](https://safetynet.com/blog/traveling-budget-6-tips-cheap-trips/) can quickly nullify those positive vibes.

This winter, even if you're overloaded with debt or under-loaded with savings, you need not be relegated to weeks of the winter doldrums. Below are five cheap activities proven to beat those winter blues.

Heat it up

[Scientific studies have shown that regular use of Finnish and infrared saunas](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5941775/) can have "profound physiological effects" on our health. Heating up your skin and core body temperature through short and intense heat exposure, your internal systems regulate your body temperature more effectively. What's more, the subsequent increase in blood flow [can reduce tension](https://www.healthline.com/health/fitness-exercise/are-saunas-good-for-you#7) in joints and muscles and even help you sleep better. Check around to see if your local YMCA or other gym has saunas in their facilities, then look into discounted or free trial periods (especially around the New Year). Alternatively, consider going in on a package deal with friends for a number of visits to a local spa. For even greater savings, keep your eye on discount programs like [Groupon](https://www.groupon.com/) and [Retail Me Not](https://www.retailmenot.com/) that advertise limited-time deals.



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likely suspected all along: listening to upbeat music will improve your mood—and not just in the short run. Even just 12 minutes of positive tunes resulted in [participants reporting feeling happier](https://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2013/0514-trying-to-be-happier-works-when-listening-to-upbeat-music-according-to-mu-research/) [<https://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2013/0514-trying-to-be-happier-works-when-listening-to-upbeat-music-according-to-mu-research/>], particularly if they listened with the intention of boosting their mood. Whether you're inclined toward kid-friendly venues or happy hour cocktails at the club, write yourself that prescription and get your groove on. Snowed in? Move the furniture aside, crank up the tunes and host [the most epic dance party](https://www.buzzfeed.com/hjupiter/the-ultimate-guide-for-the-perfect-diy-dance-party-96yn) [<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hjupiter/the-ultimate-guide-for-the-perfect-diy-dance-party-96yn>].ever.

Lighten up

For people with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), shorter days mean feelings of depression, lack of enthusiasm and a general disinterest in, well, pretty much anything. While the cause of these symptoms isn't quite clear, [studies have shown](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/seasonal-affective-disorder-bring-on-the-light-201212215663) [<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/seasonal-affective-disorder-bring-on-the-light-201212215663>], that exposing yourself to more light may reverse them. For some, "light therapy," as it is called is at least as effective as antidepressant medications.

10,000 lux light boxes, which are far brighter than indoor light (though still not nearly as bright as a sunny day) can be pricey—into the hundreds of dollars. Because they have been on the market for several years now, they can be found in second-hand stores for a fraction of the price. Some employers might even purchase a desktop version for your use at work. If nothing else, [get outdoors on sunny days](https://www.consumerreports.org/medical-treatments-procedures/bright-light-therapy-can-ease-seasonal-affective-disorder/) [<https://www.consumerreports.org/medical-treatments-procedures/bright-light-therapy-can-ease-seasonal-affective-disorder/>], and take a brisk walk around the block.

Take a breather

Visiting green spaces such as [botanical gardens and arboretums](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_botanical_gardens_and_arboretums_in_the_United_States) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_botanical_gardens_and_arboretums_in_the_United_States] can bring myriad benefits to people. While [empirical evidence is still being established](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5326776/) [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5326776/>], natural surroundings stimulate all of our senses and seem to induce in people a "wakefully relaxed state." There is also evidence that when we breathe in certain substances with antibacterial and fungal qualities secreted by some plants, you actually cue and enhance your sense of being connected to nature. If nothing else, the warm and humid air—even on the coldest and darkest of days—is sure to awaken a sense of optimism and relaxation. Most [major cities in the U.S. have botanical gardens](https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/best-botanical-gardens-in-america-nyc-dallas-seattle) [<https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/best-botanical-gardens-in-america-nyc-dallas-seattle>], with [indoor features](http://www.midwestliving.com/travel/destinations/53-midwest-gardens-and-arboretums-to-explore-winter/) [<http://www.midwestliving.com/travel/destinations/53-midwest-gardens-and-arboretums-to-explore-winter/>], and many universities have indoor greenhouses you may visit for a breath of fresh air. If that's out of reach, search for plant nurseries near you and peruse the beautiful plants with the scent of moist soil all around you.

Sow the seeds of summer

If you've got a green thumb, short days don't have to mean a short growing season. Starting up a summer garden from scratch can be a good project for the whole family, and the proven [health benefits of houseplants](https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/indoor-plants-can-instantly-boost-your-health-happiness-ncna781806) [<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/indoor-plants-can-instantly-boost-your-health-happiness-ncna781806>], make tending to your indoor plants a healthy and happy hobby. As an added bonus, seed packets cost just a few dollars or less and can significantly reduce your food budget down the line.

Depending on [what hardiness zone](https://garden.org/nga/zipzone/) [<https://garden.org/nga/zipzone/>], you live in, you may germinate seeds for outdoor transplanting [as early as February or March](https://www.ufseeds.com/learning/planting-schedules/) [<https://www.ufseeds.com/learning/planting-schedules/>]. Spend the dark evenings researching what plants will thrive in your climate and reading up on [discount gardening tips](https://safety.net/blog/tips-for-discount-gardening/) [<https://safety.net/blog/tips-for-discount-gardening/>]. Visit your library to thumb through inspirational picture books. Instead of investing in an entire greenhouse setup, look for full-spectrum growing bulbs on local sites like [Craigslist](https://www.craigslist.org/) [<https://www.craigslist.org/>], and [Nextdoor.com](https://nextdoor.com/) [<https://nextdoor.com/>].

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