

Living on a Budget in NYC

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In the city of \$10 movie tickets and thousand-dollar studios, is it possible to survive on a run-of-the-mill salary? With a little creativity, it's not even possible, it's also painless. Use the ideas below to learn how.

Find a Roof

Your first step in finding a cheap apartment is to get out of Manhattan. Two affordable (and nice) neighborhoods are **Washington Heights** in Manhattan, and **Astoria** and **Sunnyside** in Queens. Both are a short commute away from midtown but offer savings of up to \$400 on apartment rentals. To avoid paying a broker's fee, approach apartment buildings directly or check specialty papers (the **Village Voice** and **Loot** are great options) and online sources (**Craigslist** is one example). One way to save even further is to find a sublet, which generally includes everything from furniture to kitchenware. This way, you avoid shopping for accessories and only pay for essentials (electricity, phone, etc.)



Photo: Diana Bocco

Feed Yourself

The best way to eat for cheap in NYC is to stay home. Supermarket food is inexpensive and even if you can't cook, you should be able to survive. For cheap and healthy staples, try the **Greenmarket** at Union Square, where regional farmers sell everything from fruits and vegetables, to dairy products, honey, and maple syrup. Head there at the end of the day for special discounts and 2-for-1 specials.



Photo: Diana Bocco

If you're bent on eating out, forgo restaurants for street food (pretzels or burritos) and deli or lunch counters (think huge sandwiches and daily specials). Ethnic food, especially Chinese take-out, is another great alternative.

If you eat out regularly, a restaurant discount card can help you save hundreds. The **"In Good Taste (IGT)" card** can be obtained for free online and used in restaurants around the city. To save 25 percent on foods and drinks, simply charge the amount to the card and the savings will show up on your next statement.

Move Around

New York City's public transportation is one of the best in the country. For a \$2 fare (or a weekly \$27 unlimited card), you can travel anywhere in the city. **Downtown Connection**, a free shuttle bus service running between Battery Park City and South Street Seaport, works seven days a week, from 10 am to 8 pm. The **Staten Island Ferry** is also free, but unless you live on the island, it won't do you much good. During summer months, get a bicycle to save even further.

Have Fun

Even a native resident should visit Broadway once in a while, just out of principle. Tickets to premiere Broadway shows are hard to come by and usually incredibly expensive for the budget New Yorker. Those shows that have been around for a couple of years make discount tickets available at various **TKTS** booths throughout the city. Same-day tickets are sold at a 25 to 50 percent discount. You can also buy standing room tickets (and you'll be nicely located directly behind the orchestra seating) a few hours before the performance, but only if the show is completely sold out.

During the summer, the **Brooklyn Bridge Park Summer Film Series** offers free Thursday-night screenings (classics revolving around a theme), as does **HBO Bryant Park Summer Film Festival**. On Wednesday nights, cross over the river for **Hoboken's "Movies Under the Stars"** (the lineup

frequently includes recent blockbusters). On rainy days, head to **Kew Gardens Cinemas** (81-05 Lefferts Blvd). General admission for first-run movies is only \$5.

Carnegie Hall offers \$10 partial-view seats and half-price same-day tickets; full-time students under 30 with valid ID can get tickets to the **New York City Ballet** for only \$12. Broke? **The Juilliard School** offers free music and drama performances weekly.



Photo: Diana Bocco

Nightlife

Start your night at **Fiddlesticks** (56 Greenwich Ave) where \$3 happy hour runs until 10 pm Monday through Friday. Head to nightclubs early for discounted or free admission, or choose places that don't have a cover charge. At **Earth Nightclub** (116 10th Ave), an exclusive, upscale lounge, there is no cover except on weekends. On Thursdays, Ladies in white pants drink free till midnight.

Free Drinks

Yeah, free. The **Brooklyn Brewery** (79 North 11 St, Brooklyn) offers free tours of its Williamsburg brewhouse, followed by samples of tasty beer. If beer is too lowbrow for your tastes, you can attend wine tastings, such as the one offered at **Mister Wright Liquors** (1593 3rd Ave) every Saturday at 4 pm.

Get in Shape

With so many gyms offering a one or two-week free trial, you can exercise for months before running out of options. If your conscience doesn't allow this (after all, salespeople work on commission), you can try the **City of New York Parks and Recreation Centers**. For a one-time membership fee of \$50 (\$75 for recreation centers with indoor pools), you can have your pick among dozens of facilities in all five boroughs. A good example is **Tony Dapolito Recreation Center** (1 Clarkson St). The center offers an indoor pool, two gymnasiums, a fitness room, a training room, and a running track.



Photo: Diana Bocco

Can't afford to pay \$50 to work out? Get a second job. Or try one of the free Recreation Centers, such as **St. John's** (1251 Prospect Pl, Brooklyn). They offer a pool, library, fitness room, gym, and computer center – all for free.

Going for a walk on your lunch break, biking in your neighborhood, or walking your dog also qualify as exercise. Seek out opportunities to be more active in your everyday life.

Shop for Gifts

At the dollar store? You'd be surprised at the incredible bargains you can find. Besides the typical Bounty paper towels and disposable baking pans, you can also find makeup, books, scarves, and even small portable radios. Great stuff to use as stocking stuffers or party favors. Need something a little finer? Try **Paramount Variety Discount Center** (83 Allen St) for lots of Oriental rugs (small ones start at \$1), china that will last more than one washing, and lots of home decoration items.

Need something to make a statement? Head to **C&M Farms** (105 W 28th St). You can impress even the most demanding individual with a \$35 potted orchid.

Gamble for Free

Really. Buy **Gray Line's Atlantic City package** for \$15 (special price on Mondays and Tuesdays only) and you'll get a casino voucher for at least \$16 in free chips or quarters. Ok, so that's really only \$1 in gambling money, but still a great deal. Some casinos also give you a coupon to an all-you-can-eat buffet or a \$10 discount for local restaurants. Even if you don't want to gamble, you can cash your roll of quarters and go shopping at the myriad of little shops that populate the boardwalk.

Redo Your Apartment

So, you've found the perfect shoebox studio and now you need to put something inside it. Whether furniture, rugs, or lamps, you can find it on a budget. Broke? Cruise around on recycling night for discarded furniture, much of which is usually in top condition.

Annex Antique Fair & Flea Market • Sixth Ave b/w 24th & 26th Sts • www.annexantiques.com

Entry: \$1

Arrive early for an amazing selection of antique, vintage, and just plain old furniture starting at around \$50 (all the way to \$20-30,000). Bargains abound if you know how to hassle, but keep in mind that this is considered an upscale flea market (celebrity spotting is common: Sarah Jessica Parker is something of a regular).



Photo: Diana Bocco

Ikea • www.ikea.com

Of course there is and forever will be Ikea. Take the free bus from the Port Authority Bus Terminal to the mothership of furniture shops. Where else can you find a desk for \$19.99 or a kitchen table for \$14.99? Sure, you have to do the work of actually putting the furniture together, but who cares?

Craigslist • www.craigslist.com

My first NYC apartment was completely furnished thanks to Craigslist. I bought some of the furniture, got some for free, and even traded some for things I had but didn't need anymore. The ultimate online flea market, Craigslist can provide you with pretty much anything you need to survive in the big city, including cheap furniture.

National Wholesale Liquidators • 632 Broadway • www.nationalwholesaleliquidators.com

National Wholesale Liquidators offer a vast selection of discounted items, including housewares (like a three-bin laundry organizer for \$9.99), small electrodomestics (coffee maker for \$14.99), and some furniture (wicker drawer set for \$9.99). One of the best things about National Wholesale Liquidators is that their stock changes weekly, so if you don't find it today, keep going back.

While this is not the ultimate list, it just goes to show that it is very possible to survive in NYC with a little creativity and effort. Now get out there and start saving!