



# BUDGETING

## FOR A REUNION

DESTINATION  
*Reunions*

[DestinationReunions.com](http://DestinationReunions.com)

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## Introduction

Americans have always been willing to cross vast distances, whether for family or for opportunities. It's a trend that has built the nation and driven development over the centuries. And that trend is ever more important today as family and friends are spread out across the country.

In fact, according to the United States Travel Association, the No. 1 leisure travel activity for domestic travelers in 2018 was visiting relatives, while the No. 3 leisure travel activity was visiting friends. ([source](#))

Gathering your family or friends together for a reunion is one of the most cost-effective ways to come together for fun. It's also the best way to spend that precious quality time together.

However, a reunion of any size will inevitably come with the challenges of budgeting and financial planning. Whether you're planning a multi-generation family reunion, a class reunion, or maybe a long-overdue reunion trip with friends, coordinating costs and anticipating creeping expenses is vital to your planning success.

When your aim is a fun get-together, nobody likes a costly surprise.

Understanding the costs involved in reunion planning is the first step to navigating these budgeting challenges. There are many tools you can use to help plan your budget, as well as to minimize your expenses. This guide will offer multiple options for tools alongside suggestions for creating and sticking to your budget.

We'll start with understanding the costs that are involved in a destination reunion. Once you know what to expect, you can better plan your budget and find ways to save as you go. Collecting money can be a tough job, but there are plenty of tools at your disposal that can make this process as smooth as possible. Finally, we'll address those creeping last-minute costs that might happen and help you to avoid a costly situation.



## *Understanding the Costs Involved*

The costs involved with a reunion will, of course, vary based on the size and scope of your event. But there are general categories of expenses that you need to consider when planning your budget and evaluating your total potential costs.

While there are plenty of ways to cut down on costs and save if you need to, it's also easy to splurge and invest in an extravagant reunion for all. Whatever your budget might be, you need to plan ahead to most effectively use that budget toward your priorities.

According to the United States Travel Association, food and lodging are the two largest expenses for travelers. Food (which includes restaurants, groceries, and drinking establishments) accounts for approximately 25% of total traveler spending in the United States. Lodging (which includes hotels, motels, B&Bs, vacation homes, and campgrounds) accounts for approximately 20% of total spending. That means that nearly half of your destination reunion budget will likely cover just food and lodging ... but there are still many other categories of costs you need to remember. ([source](#))

There are large expenses that can be incurred, as well as plenty of small costs that will add up in the long run. Let's take a look first at the big expenses and then the little things that sneak in throughout the planning process as well as during the actual reunion.

### **Big Expenses for a Reunion**

The largest expenses that might happen during a reunion will vary based on where you hold the event and what the reunion actually looks like. But you should consider each of the following as you start planning.

#### **Venue**

If you book a location for a reunion, there will be a fee for simply using that venue. This could be anything from a conference center to a banquet space to even a small space like a BBQ area in a park (permits are often required). There are plenty of ways to save on venue costs, but you should consider the pros and cons of free spaces versus private spaces you book out just for your reunion. Also consider the length of the reunion when considering total costs and where you could hold a special event versus enjoying outdoor time for free.





### Lodging

If your reunion is far from home for the majority of attendees, remembering the cost of lodging is important when planning ahead. You'll want to keep in mind the variety of costs based on the distance traveled by attendees, with those traveling the farthest typically incurring the largest expenses. Being careful with lodging expenses can help more folks to be able to attend. Group hotel rates, off-season travel, and large vacation homes could all help defray costs, while alternatives like camping (or glamping) or dude ranches can be fun ways to travel and save.

### Travel

In conjunction with the costs of lodging, you should consider the costs of travel for the majority of attendees. If many are within driving distance, that's a different budget concern than if many need to fly from far away. Regardless, the cost of travel to a reunion will impact the option to attend for many, especially families who might need to book several tickets. Also consider the transportation costs during the reunion if you'll be going off-site for activities or meals. Renting a bus might be a better option than asking multiple families to rent cars.

### Food

Whether you have a catered event or you gather everyone at a restaurant, food can certainly add up for big groups! And the big meals aren't


your only consideration if you're doing more than a one-day reunion. Consider every meal, plus all the snacks, for every day. Look for opportunities to save via potluck or cooking together at home, if they suit your style of reunion.

### Drinks

Just like food, the cost of drinks can definitely add up. If you have just one day or night, you can look at the cost of an open bar versus a BYO-style event. Once you get into multi-day events, you'll want to consider the best options for drinks - and keep in mind the ages of attendees and the overall style of reunion you're planning.

### Entertainment

From board games and lawn games to DJs and bands, entertainment can be a big-ticket item. Whatever your type of reunion, there needs to be some fun and entertainment for everyone to enjoy. These costs can be really big or they might be small and add up over time. But the entertainment factor can't be ignored when planning your budget. Consider the size and type of reunion you're planning in addition to the guest list for age-appropriate options. Looking at all-inclusive places might be better for the budget if lots of kids will be coming and need to be entertained all day long. More information on fun and games can be found [here](#).



*You are  
invited*

### Small Expenses for a Reunion

While those big expenses might be cause for concern as you start planning, you can't forget the smaller costs that do add up. Their price points might be small enough to overlook at first, but if you foot the bill personally for lots of small purchases, you'll soon find yourself emptying your pockets.

Be sure to consider all of these potential items when planning your budget.

#### Decorations

It doesn't matter how little you end up doing, decorations will still be a cost you should consider when planning your budget. Everything from banners to family tree charts to balloons and more; these might seem small individually, but they can aggregate to quite a sum.

#### Invitations

If you print invitations and mail them out to people, these are two separate costs incurred for the paper item plus the postage. Creating and sending invitations online can be a great way to save, but it depends on your attendees and type of reunion. Consider the oldest generation and be sure to include them with more traditional invitations if necessary.

#### Photo Printing

With most photos being kept digitally nowadays, it can be a great idea to print photos as decorations or as opportunities for storytelling and sharing. But this small cost can add up if you take it on yourself! An easy way to lower that personal cost is to make it a collective effort from all attendees to print and bring their respective family branch photos.

#### Other Paper Products

From napkins to nametags, from sign-in sheets to coloring books for kids, there are lots of little items that need to be purchased where an organizer can sometimes bear the brunt. These can also be distributed to lower your personal costs, but you'll want to include them in your budget planning from the onset to get a clearer idea of total costs.

#### Website Management

If your reunion is rather large, it can be beneficial to set up your own website to keep things organized. This is also a good idea for collecting or raising money, which can combine your organizational with your financial needs. But you often need to pay for event-specific programs or for buying a domain name and getting website hosting if you do a DIY set-up.

#### Taxes and Tips

Don't forget that taxes will be added to everything you buy. And remember that tips will often be





necessary for everyone from catering staff to bartenders to housekeeping staff and entertainers. These are the extras that might slip through the cracks until closer to the event, but keep them in mind.

### Other

It's a good idea to estimate around 5-10% of your total budget for an "other" category. This will include those miscellaneous items that don't neatly fit into other categories, any last-minute things that creep in at the end, or in cases of emergency.

### Budgeting Tip

It's important to always consider the variety of potential expenses for your reunion, but also keep in mind your demographics. An adult-only reunion will incur different costs than a family-friendly adventure. But no matter the demographics, reunions are an ideal way for multi-generation families to travel, whether that includes little ones or not. As millennials continue to push the boundaries of travel, work, and play, their move toward parenthood shows no slowing down on travel. An in-depth market

report by Resonance Co. reveals that millennials are traveling more than ever before and that 44% of millennials are now traveling with kids. ([source](#))

Add to that fact that, when it comes to family travel, 95% of respondents to an Expedia Group survey declared that "Keeping my family entertained and happy is of the utmost importance." As you begin planning out your budget, remember the demographics of your group to ensure you include the necessary line items for fun and play at age-appropriate levels. ([source](#))



## How to Plan Your Budget

While that long list of costs might seem a little daunting, you can more easily grasp total estimated costs by planning your budget well in advance. There are plenty of tools you can use to navigate this process, so don't fret if you're not an accountant.

Planning a reunion budget should be done as early in the process as possible in order to give attendees a clear idea of costs. This will allow them to budget accordingly if they really want to attend.

If your reunion will be on the larger size (for example, 150+ attendees), then you'll want to start your planning around 18-24 months in advance. If you're considering a smaller-scale reunion, you can probably get away with about a year of notice for attendees. Regardless, having a fairly accurate estimate for costs in these early stages can help everyone.

The first thing you'll need to do is find out how many people are interested in attending a reunion. Informally gauging interest and budget possibilities per person or family will help you to start planning. With an estimated guest list, you can more accurately identify the location, timing,

and large expenses involved (such as lodging, food, and travel/transportation costs).

Once you have an estimated guest list, a destination for your reunion, and a general idea of the scope of your event, you can more accurately plan your budget. For scope, you'll want to consider the age range of attendees, the goal of your reunion, and the general budget range you're working within. If every invitee responds with affirmative interest and no budget cap whatsoever, it's quite a different reunion than if the majority want to come but can only attend if the cost is less than \$100 per person.

To plan your budget, here are some top tools you can try out. Keep in mind that certain tools might be better suited to other types of reunions or group sizes, so pick whichever works best for you and your planning committee.

### Budgeting Tools

There are plenty of digital tools you can use for planning your budget and also for tracking your expenses as you move forward with the process. Some also allow you to track payments received, which can be handy as you start collecting deposits and final payments from attendees.





These are a few apps that can be very helpful:

- [Goodbudget](#)
- [Mint](#)
- [Wally](#)
- [Quicken](#)
- [Moneystrands](#)

Each of these will allow you to organize your categories of expenses and then to track individual costs. Some will link to bank accounts or credit cards, while others are more manual and require you to enter details as you go.

You could allow different planning committee members to organize their own budgets in whatever way works best for them. Or you can choose to create an account specifically for your reunion and give everyone permission to use it simultaneously. The size and scope of your reunion (and your planning committee) will determine the best way forward for your budgeting.

If you prefer a simple spreadsheet to track your expenses and payments received, you can use this very basic template on the following page to get started (but we recommend you create your spreadsheet for your exact expenses to better track total costs).

### **Budgeting & Payment Collection Timeline**

If you plan your budget early during your reunion planning process, then you can also more effectively collect payments along the way. Asking attendees for multiple smaller payments over a period of time is definitely easier than asking for a single large lump sum because you need to pay all the vendors immediately.

If you plan your budget at the onset of your reunion planning, then you should consider providing the option for a monthly or quarterly payment plan for attendees. You could also offer an installment plan of 2-4 payments to make it easier.

We'll go into more detail on collecting money later in this guide, but you certainly want to consider a payment plan option as you plan your total budget. Your family and friends will surely appreciate it.



## Budgeting Sheet

Event Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Event Location: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Attendees: \_\_\_\_\_

Item	Total Cost	Per Person	Payments Made	Payments Received	Balance Owed
Venue Rental					
Breakfast					
Lunch					
Dinner					
Snacks					
Drinks					
Entertainment					
Decorations					
Paper Products					
Website Fees					
Printing Fees					
Transportation					
Activities					
Estimated Tips					
Miscellaneous					
<b>TOTAL</b>					





## 8 Ways to Save

No matter what your overall budget looks like, there are ways to easily save instead of accidentally allowing costs to get out of control. From utilizing technology to simply planning ahead, there are plenty of opportunities for you to stay in control of your reunion budget, including all of the following suggestions.

### Group (and Other) Discounts

Ask for group rates at a hotel to help all attendees save; you might get savings of up to 50% or more for a large block of rooms. But don't just stop there. Ask for complimentary rooms per every 10 rooms booked. Ask for a free breakfast and/or free parking if they're not already included. Try to negotiate the best deals possible on behalf of your whole group.

Also ask about group rates for all activities or tours you opt to do. The same goes for transportation or other travel needs.

Always see what kind of group deals you can get for food and drink, whether you're using caterers, restaurants/bars, or making your own meals. Buying your own might be best done via bulk purchases at distributors like Costco instead of that small boutique shop in town. That just

requires a little planning in advance to avoid last-minute purchases at higher prices.

And don't forget other potential discounts for seniors, students, military/veterans, or children. There are often different rates for more expensive things like tours and food, but even lodging and transportation should be considered.

Finally, wherever your reunion will be held, reach out to the local Convention and Visitor Bureau (CVB), Chamber of Commerce (CoC), or Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) to see if your large group could get any discounts on tours or activities to see more of the destination.

### Off-Season Travel

Summer is by far the most popular time to book a family reunion because kids are all out of school. However, that popularity also drives up the prices you'll need to pay at every level, from lodging to transportation to vendors and more.

If at all possible, try to book a destination reunion at other times. Spring and fall are often called shoulder season or off-season and they both tend to offer better rates than summertime. For example, booking a reunion in Florida during November can mean up





to 50% savings at some hotels! You can also often enjoy discounts on golf courses and even bonus offers at hotels like buffet breakfast included at no additional fee. ([source](#))

If you need to book around holiday weekends when the kids have an extra day off school, you won't get the lowest possible rates but you will still probably get better deals than during the peak summer season.

Also remember that the slower season isn't the same everywhere! Winter can be peak season (*pun intended*) for ski areas. But that same popular ski spot might actually have a great summer deal available. Remember to check for annual events or festivals and try to avoid them if you're bringing a large group. A smaller group might intentionally book to enjoy such special times, however.

If you're flexible on dates but have a specific destination in mind, ask accommodation providers for the dates when they can offer their very best rates.

### Destination Options

Alongside off-season travel, you can opt for less popular destinations in order to lower your total costs. According to the US Family Travel Survey, the top five states for family

vacations are Florida, California, Hawaii, New York and Colorado. Don't follow the masses - head elsewhere! Choosing a different destination doesn't mean there won't be activities or worthwhile places to visit. In fact, planning your reunion in a totally different locale can become a fun adventure for everyone as you learn and explore somewhere totally new together. ([source](#))

### Crowdsource Everything

Crowdsourcing is great for digital things like fundraising online or brainstorming opinions on platforms like Facebook. You should crowdsource ideas and suggestions so decisions aren't the sole burden of a single planner or small committee. Create polls on Facebook to see the most popular activities, destinations, dates, music ... whatever you want. Just remember the older folks and don't exclude their opinions if they're not on Facebook.

By crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions, you might also uncover some hidden talents within the group. Maybe a cousin has been honing those videography skills or an aunt has connections at that hotel chain you've been looking at -- you never know if you don't ask.

In a similar thread, a potluck is a great idea to distribute food and drink costs as appropriate. If not potluck, at least ask everyone to contribute snacks and drinks to have around as needed. You can still





organize for the big meals while getting everyone to share in the costs and organization of other food needs. If your reunion will last several days, consider organizing a few big meals and then potluck or share responsibility for the others. This is most easily done if you have full kitchens at vacation homes, rather than hotel rooms.

### **Tech Tools to Use**

There are countless ways you can use technology to your benefit when planning your reunion budget and dealing with the entire accounting process. A few have already been mentioned, including Mint, QuickBooks, GoodBudget, and even Facebook. But there are many more.

### **Photos**

Consider other ways to save, such as creating a hashtag for social media in order to aggregate all the photos and videos taken during the reunion. With smartphones having such high-quality cameras these days, you can cut the cost of a professional photographer if necessary. And social media helps you to organize it all. Other options include cloud folders via Google or Dropbox, or websites like Cluster or Shutterfly for collecting photos and even ordering scrapbooks or other physical products.

### **Invitations**

You can use Facebook or build a website to

organize all the details in one location for everyone. But you'll still want to send a more formal invitation with a way of collecting RSVPs. Websites like Evite, PaperlessPost, or Punchbowl are all great options for creating fun or fancy invitations online easily.

### **Music**

Hiring a band could be fun, but you can also save big by using popular music streaming apps. Bring a good speaker (or a few) and have volunteers create playlists for various times as needed. Have a variety of volunteers, and consider pairing a younger tech-savvy attendee with an older attendee to create a diverse playlist that will appeal to everyone.

### **Communication**

When planning and coordinating everyone, there are plenty of digital tools you can use for free. Google Hangouts or Facebook Messenger can be used for video chats during the planning process. SurveyMonkey or Doodle can be used for scheduling times to chat or even for finding the best dates for the reunion.

### **Collecting Money**

This will be covered in the next section, but there are plenty of digital tools you can use.

### **Fundraising Options**

Fundraising is another effective way to lower the overall budget for your reunion. This could take



different forms, depending on the type and scope of your reunion. Consider simply asking for donations from all who are invited. You might find some folks can't attend but still want to contribute to defraying the costs. Some attendees will be generous and try to help lower costs to help less financially flexible attendees.

You can also consider raising funds via various sales events, such as the following:

- Bake sale
- Auction family heirlooms
- Raffle (online or in-person) -- ask attendees to donate services or items, or broaden your reach by asking businesses and professionals to donate if your reunion is large-scale
- Walk, run, ride, or swim for donations
- Car wash
- Garage sale

### Maximize Rewards and Referrals

This might not apply directly to the overall reunion budget, but it can be very helpful for each attendee to be reminded of during the planning and budgeting process.

Credit cards often come with rewards programs that might include airline miles, hotel discounts, or rental car rewards. This goes back to crowdsourcing, but you should ask all attendees about these options. If someone can get an even

better deal for lodging or transportation simply by using their credit card instead of yours for the booking, then it's definitely helpful.

Another option is referrals. If an attendee has never booked on Airbnb, for example, then a discount can be applied by simply using a referral link from another attendee. Providing a space (on Facebook or another chat option) where attendees can share their referral links, discount codes, and rewards options can help everyone to save a little more along the way.

### Educate and Inform Attendees

It never hurts to offer information and education to help everyone save a little bit more. Beyond the referral links and discount options that you can possibly pool via various attendees, you should also consider other ways to save.

If lots of attendees will be flying in, make sure they set up their own airfare alerts. Some airlines also offer discounts for groups, so try to coordinate folks who could fly from the same origin or hub airport.

Consider coordinating arrivals to get onto a shuttle bus together instead of everyone renting their own car. These types of details can help everyone save on the big-ticket items, and can be easily coordinated using simple tools like spreadsheets and Facebook or other chat options.





## Collecting Money

No longer do you have to collect checks and run to the bank — there are several apps you can use for collecting money from your attendees that will be helpful based on the number of people sending payments as well as the demographics of your group. If most attendees are tech-savvy enough, then you should be able to manage the vast majority of payments through these systems.

There are a few things to consider as you use these tools, however. Some might add fees for certain types of transactions. For example, when sending money via PayPal, the sender must select the option of sending to friends/family in order to avoid a fee being charged. If your reunion happens to be internationally-based, consider transaction fees and exchange rates as well. Also remember that fees are sometimes added for installments or payment plans if you opt to use those for vendors.

For collecting money via online payments, here are a few options:

1. [Venmo](#): This app is used by most American millennials, but it's also gaining popularity in other age groups. You can set up your

account on your smartphone and send money to any contact in your phone who also uses the app. It's that simple.

2. [PayPal](#): Venmo is actually owned by PayPal, but PayPal has been around a lot longer and makes some folks feel more comfortable. It can be used just as easily on a desktop as it can on a smartphone. A sender also doesn't need an account in order to send money. You can request a payment easily and the sender will just enter credit or debit card details to finalize the transaction.
3. [Splitwise](#): Splitwise is ideal for sharing costs within a group. This is an app you might want to suggest to everyone if there will be small group activities, tours, dining and drinks during the reunion itself. The payment will still be made via Venmo or PayPal, but Splitwise tracks all the payments and determines who owes who how much at the end of the reunion!

Always remember to track every payment received. You should have a spreadsheet or use one of the budgeting apps mentioned previously and track all incoming and outgoing payments. Keeping accurate, updated records is your best bet for a frictionless budgeting role.



## *Last-Minute Cost Escalation Prevention*

When planning a large event, there are always a few expenses or issues that show up somehow. That's why we recommend including a 5-10% cushion in your total budget for "other" or "miscellaneous" expenses. Most typically, last-minute costs are actually related to travel or to misunderstandings between the organizers and attendees.

To try to avoid this situation, we recommend you follow the steps outlined above to prepare your budget as accurately as possible and to keep open lines of communication with guests along the way. Being open about the costs and planning will keep everyone looped in and help you to avoid surprises.

We also recommend you take a deposit to confirm attendance from every individual. The amount you charge is up to you and will be largely based on what costs you include in the total fee. For example, if you're booking vacation rental homes that house large groups of people, you certainly want a deposit upfront from whoever wants a space in that house. Sites like Airbnb often require at least 50% to book the house, so it's fair to ask your attendees for 50% upfront as well. For attendees booking their own lodging, you

might ask for a 25% deposit on the anticipated reunion activity costs. This can help you with vendor deposits and bookings, without burdening your guests too much too early in the process.

If you work out those basic details first and already have an accurate budget for your reunion, then you can probably avoid big surprise fees. Your best bet is to always be honest with your attendees and let them know why any costs have changed along the way. If an entire family has to back out due to an emergency, your per-person costs may change. But explaining that to the other attendees can be easier than suddenly just demanding more per person.

Many last-minute costs tend to also be travel-specific. Something important to remember is that more than half of Americans leave paid vacation days unused each year. The U.S. Travel Association even started a national "Plan for Vacation Day" on January 28th each year to encourage Americans to book a trip. Because of this cultural tendency, many of your reunion attendees might not be avid travelers. Some may never fly or travel far at all. Therefore, they might not know the latest trends in travel fees or expectations. Try to remember this and always offer extra detailed advice for those booking longer journeys. ([source](#))





A few things to keep in mind (and to mention to your attendees) when booking include the following:

- **Baggage fees:** Check your airline's policies, but also remember to check your credit card reward program for any airline-specific bonus options you might have. Baggage fees can add up for families especially! If some families are driving, coordinate so they bring the large shampoos and sunscreens and let the flyers avoid checked baggage altogether. This goes back to open communication and crowdsourcing to keep costs down.
- **Airport food:** Check that credit card again for airport lounge access! You can save quite a lot in food or drink costs if you have access to a lounge during layovers.
- **Insurance:** Renting a car upon arrival? Check that credit card again! Some credit cards will offer insurance coverage, but you want to make sure it applies to your location and specific needs. Some, for example, won't cover any off-road damage, so your campground or dude ranch may pose a problem if you have tire damage.

Throughout the reunion (especially if it's more than a single day) other costs can come up. This might include food and drinks, activities or transportation costs. If you can't make the reunion all-inclusive, then be sure to consider the possible

extra costs while planning. These should be fair estimates that you can provide to attendees so they can budget their trip accordingly.

Consider how densely-packed the schedule is and look at spaces where families or groups might opt to go out for various reasons. If those excursions or meals are not included in your total costs, give the attendees a heads-up so they can plan accordingly. They will feel better prepared to budget as long as they are properly informed.

With that said, costs can still creep up on the attendees who haven't been really paying attention during the planning process. To minimize these issues, communication is vital.

Organize the definite and potential costs in very simple terms in your emails, if that's how you're communicating all reunion details. If you're using a Facebook group or event page, pin these details to the top and post regularly to remind folks to review this very important information. If you're on a big group text message, inform everyone whenever you send important information by email so it stands out from the gifs and emojis that can overwhelm a conversation.

However you do it, be sure to communicate the budget openly with everyone to try to minimize the surprises and concerns along the way.



## Conclusion

Budgeting for a reunion can certainly be a challenge. From the big expenses to all those tiny little details, the costs certainly have to be considered and managed throughout the planning process. We recommend you utilize the tools mentioned and all the opportunities for saving money along the way.

If everyone feels like the reunion was valuable, then you're more likely to make this a regular event.

Remember, with proper planning, plenty of time, and lots of open communication, you can and should manage it all without an accounting degree. Although, if someone in the family actually is an accountant...maybe ask for a little help.

### Additional Resources

Looking for more tips? Destination Reunions has everything you need to plan the perfect reunion. Here are a few resources to get you started.

### Print and Digital Edition

Published annually in March, Destination Reunions is available in print and online at the click of a button. The magazine covers everything from destination advice to best practices to practical tips and more. Download the digital edition [here](#).

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