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Get Your Thrift On

Are you looking for items for your home on a small budget? Do the kids need clothes, but you don't want to spend a lot of money? Are you starting out on your own and need housewares at an affordable price? Or maybe you're throwing a party and need some serving pieces, but don't want to spend a lot (and don't want to use plastic or paper)? If you said, "yes" to any of these, or similar situations, then thrift store shopping may be your answer (and your new best friend).

Thrift stores have been around for a long time. And while some folks may have a not-so-positive view of them, many people not only use them, but really love them. According to NARTS: The Association of Resale Professionals, 16% - 18% of Americans shop at thrift stores each year. And while apparel stores (19.6%), and major department stores (21.3%) see the majority of business, thrift store shopping has a larger customer base than either consignment/resale shops (12 -15%), or factory outlet malls (11.4%).

Thrift store shopping is good, not only for your wallet, but for other reasons as well. Most thrift stores are run by charitable organizations, many of which provide or support important services in the community. In addition, thrift stores are an environmentally friendly shopping option, as gently-used items reduce landfill waste and the environmental cost of the production of items. And finally, thrift stores offer opportunities for you to show your creativity and style by mixing and matching items from different eras.

To help make the most of your thrift shopping outings, consider the following tips.

- Generally, stores in the nicer areas of town have better inventory, and are less picked through.
- Out of town? Shop thrift stores in different areas. Inventory varies from area to area.
- Talk with store employees to find out when the largest amount of new merchandise is available, and when the items you are interested in will be discounted.
- Sign up for email mailing lists so you are notified of sales and special promotions.
- Return often. Items move in and out rapidly, so check back if you're looking for a particular item.
- Shop at the change of seasons when people are likely to clean out and give items away.

- To find thrift stores near you, go to: <http://www.thethriftshopper.com>. Enter your zip code to find thrift stores in your area with hours, location, how to sign up for mailing list, and reviews from other shoppers
- Wear simple clothing and shoes, such as a tank top and leggings. This allows you to try on items without needing a dressing room.
- Shop down and up one size from your normal size to accommodate for changes in sizing from era to era.
- Consider items that may require slight alterations or simple repairs.
- Expand your comfort zone. While you might not be willing to buy something that is out of norm for you at full price, you can do so without a big loss at a thrift store.
- Search for items that have potential, and can be made to look good again, or even repurposed to fit your needs.

Thrift store shopping can save you money, and can be lots of fun. There are many bargains awaiting. Who knows, those items you've been looking for, but just can't seem to find, just might be waiting for you to come and rescue!

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