

Cost-saving Tips for Your Holiday Event Planning

1. **Non-profit organizations.** Instead of a banquet hall or restaurant, non-profits' rates are competitive and you can usually reserve the space for several hours, not just for dinner. They are usually more flexible on time frames, not as locked in on menus or catering choices, can accommodate larger groups, and you usually end up with a more private setting. Check with local churches, retreat centers, and universities as well as sports and civic organizations.
2. **Mid-week events.** Many advantages here: less of a scheduling conflict with spouse and children's end-of year functions, which are usually held on a weekend night. All vendors, from caterers to D.J.'s to photographers, will usually have much better availability and better rates for a weekday event. Venues usually charge less on weekdays too, especially for overnight accommodations, if guests prefer to spend the night.
3. **Lunch instead of dinner.** Obviously, lunches are less expensive, but the savings doesn't end there. You would only have to pay for employees, not spouses. Employees are happy to be getting paid as part of their regular workday and happier as there are virtually no scheduling conflicts. The program can be shorter, with less outside entertainment for a lunch than a full evening event.
4. **Serving stations** versus a sit-down banquet. A taco bar, salad bar, pasta bar, carving station, and dessert station give your guests the opportunity to mingle more and can save you money over a full sit-down banquet. Classier than a buffet, and with choices to suit even the most discriminating palate, serving stations are not only economical, they're fun!
5. **For inexpensive entertainment, roast the boss!** Okay, maybe you'll have to roast middle management so as not to lose your job, but celebrity roasts cost next to nothing and your staff will be laughing for months at the clever roasts their co-workers deliver. Scavenger hunts are also exciting and economical. Include destinations all within the banquet room, such as: find the man with the yellow tie who has a clue in his jacket pocket, or put an item in the restrooms. Of course, if keeping costs down is not a concern – you can rent a snow making machine and let your staff and family go sledding and tubing on a hillside and bring in Santa on a sled pulled by reindeer, or hire a mystery dinner theatre. Both scenarios have been done at the Rancho Capistrano Conference and Retreat Center in San Juan Capistrano.

6. **Save on centerpieces and decorations** by gathering natural items from the grounds. If you are lucky enough to have your event at a place that has beautiful grounds or a park nearby, fallen pinecones, pine branches and greenery, along with some store bought fruit, can make lovely centerpieces. (Obviously, get the property owner's permission on this one first!)

7. **Chocolate fountain or fondue for dessert.** Imagine dipping your rice crisp bars, pretzels, strawberries, pineapple, and other items into mouthwatering melted chocolate for a dessert costing less than an individual slice of gourmet cake for each guest (and far less waste, as many guests on special diets may not want dessert at all; however, the ones who do will be so grateful to you!)

By Darlene H. Grimes, Sales & Marketing Director for Rancho Capistrano, the South Campus of the Crystal Cathedral Ministries, a 170-acre campus with a Conference and Retreat Center, Wedding Department, Private Christian Schools (Pre-8th Grade) and Summer Camps Programs. For more info on Rancho Capistrano, visit www.ranchocapistrano.org, or call 949-347-4000. E-mail: info@ranchocapistrano.org.