



The December Spending Olympics: Don't Enter Yourself Into Events You Cannot Afford

It's that magical time of year again—the one where the air smells like cinnamon, your neighbours' lights can be seen from space, and your wallet begins quietly hyperventilating. Yes... December, a.k.a. the month in which rational financial behaviour goes on holiday without applying for leave.

Even though we all love the festivities, the gifts, the parties, the outfits, the “specials” on offer from your local shopping mall (somehow, they still cost 40% more in December than in June), let us have a money heart-to-heart chat before you swipe your bank cards into an early grave.

Budget now. Because prying opens your wallet in January while it cries softly is not a great way to start the year. And not the cute, motivational, “New year, New me” January. No. The long one. The 127-day one. The one that feels like a financial detox you didn't sign up for. So, grab a gingerbread cookie or a mince pie, sit down, and let's talk about the New Year expenses that are waiting like patient predators in the tall grass.



To help you survive both the festive cheer and the fiscal fear, here are your 5 reality-checked tips to keep your December joyful without causing your future self to file an emotional complaint.

1. Remember: Retirement & Tax-Free Savings Deadlines Are Coming (February Isn't Far)

I know, I know—nothing kills a festive mood quite like the words “tax-deductible contributions.” But hear us out. While you’re out here buying gifts for relatives you haven’t seen since the 2010 World Cup, your February deadline for topping up your retirement annuity and tax-free savings account is jogging toward you with the confidence of a marathon runner. Every rand you overspend now is a rand you can’t tuck into an account that literally lowers your tax bill. SARS will definitely be happy that you decided to not reduce your tax bill because you “saw a really cute air fryer on sale” and decided it was more of a priority than topping up your retirement fund. Be kind to your future self—the one who wants to retire someday and spend their golden years sipping something cold on a KZN beach somewhere, not still paying off festive season debt.

2. Credit Cards & Overdrafts: The Unexpected Bills With Ninja Stealth

December has a way of blurring reality. One moment you're tapping your credit card like it's a cast member of Riverdance; the next, January's statement arrives and suddenly you're doing trigonometry to understand the interest. And overdrafts? Oh, they're not your friends. They just pretend to be. Like that one cousin who always “forgets their wallet.” If you tell yourself, “I’ll deal with this next year,” just remember: next year is 27 days away.

3. School Costs: Because The Children Return Whether You're Ready Or Not

Parents, gather round. You already know what's coming. School fees, stationery that somehow becomes more expensive every year, uniforms that the children have outgrown despite doing absolutely nothing except existing.

In December, it's easy to forget that January demands money with the aggression of a debt collector collecting protection fees.

4. January Is 127 Days Long (Give or Take)

Scientists may not officially recognise this fact, but everyone with a bank account does.

January is long. Emotionally long. Financially long. Spiritually long. It's the Monday of months. Your December bonus? Cute. Blink twice and January will have eaten it, digested it, and asked what else is on the menu.

When you're in the shops this December and you feel the temptation to splurge, repeat after me: “January is four months long.”

Hyperbole? Yes. Helpful? Absolutely.



5. Food & Routine Costs: You Still Have To Eat Next Year

Here's a fun truth bomb: your groceries don't magically pay for themselves just because you bought a giant gammon and three tubs of custard in December.

Food, electricity, petrol, data, dog food, toothpaste, deodorant—all those unsexy but essential items—continue right through the festive glow and deep into the New Year.

Final Thoughts (Before You Swipe Again)

December is wonderful. The lights, the joy, the gatherings, the slightly burnt cookies—enjoy all of it. But spend with the same caution you'd use when opening an email from a prince offering you money. Because while December is full of sparkle, January is full of invoices. Give yourself the gift of a calmer, saner financial start to the year. Your bank balance—and your stress levels—will thank you.

Festive greetings from all of us at Verso and may your 2026 start without a financial hangover!

Article written by Thayn Nieman CFP® - Verso Wealth's Regional Head Wealth: Eastern Cape / Financial Planner