



Beat the New Year

BANK BALANCE BLUES

Main Image: istockphoto



ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS...

It's that time of year again. We've decked the halls, planned our party outfits and queued for hours to find a parking space at the shops! Whether you love it or loathe it, the Christmas holidays are upon us again.

While Santa has already made his list and checked it twice, it's never too late in the year to be good with your festive finances. Taking the time to sort things out now can help you avoid the January blues in 2014.

We asked five Blackhair readers who work for the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service that sorts out problems with banks, insurers, credit providers and more – what they want for Christmas. And, as it's a time for giving, they provided us with their top tips for keeping on top of your money this year:

NANAAMA ADJEKUM



'I want good health for all of my family – but in my wildest dreams, I'd love a pair of Louboutin's too! If someone treats you to a pricey present, it pays to check that you've got it insured. Ring your insurer to ask if, for example, your luxurious new watch will be covered under the policy should the worst

happen and it gets broken or stolen. You can't replace the sentimental value but you can make sure you've protected the price.

SHANIELLE BLAKE



I'm wishing for a White Christmas! But even if it doesn't snow, our British weather will make sure it's going to be really cold. There's nothing nicer on a frosty morning than getting into a warm car but be careful when you are warming it up and make sure you don't leave it unattended with the engine running. It might invalidate your insurance policy, should an opportunist thief wander by.

ANDREA WILLIAMS

My dream is to go abroad and visit my grandparents in Zimbabwe this year. I'm not sure I'll be able to make it, but if you're lucky enough to be going away, remember your travel insurance. Don't just buy the cheapest policy at the last minute. Take the time to read what you are, and more importantly are not covered for, before deciding if the cover is right for you.



MONIQUE BOWEN



My perfect Christmas present would be Tyson Beckford! But if you are getting gifts that money can buy, remember that using a credit card may give you extra legal protection if your goods don't show up or aren't as described. A lot of credit providers offer interest-free deals but keep a note of when the deal ends, as repayments after this date may be expensive and never borrow more on credit than you can afford to pay back.

CONSTANCE CHINHENGO

This Christmas I am wishing for good health and well-being for my family and loved ones. I can't wait to spend time with them! But remember while you are having fun with your family during your time off to keep a note of any payments you might have due. Bank holidays are not 'working days' for banks, so direct debit payments might be taken early from your account – don't get caught out.



The good news is that you don't have to be a Scrooge to survive the holidays with your finances intact. But if a problem does crop up that Santa's little helpers can't sort out, the ombudsman may be able to help on **0300 123 9 123** or follow us on twitter.