

YOUR DANCE BUDGET – INVESTING WISELY



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In dancing, as in so many aspects of our lives, we have to work with finite resources. I'm talking about the limits we face on time, energy, strength, and of course, money. You know you can't do everything that is offered in your dance world, although maybe some of you have tried!

So how can you decide where to best invest your resources? Let's consider some of the factors that you can consider when creating your personal dance budget.

First, what are your current priorities and preferences?

– Do you get most excited about long nights of social dancing, or do you want to build

up your technique or repertoire of moves?

- Do you like to get to know your teacher, or do you long for classes from dance celebrities?
- Do you want to make new friends in far-flung places, or would you like to build relationships within a local community?
- Do you enjoy dancing to favorite tunes, or do you like to dance to a variety of unfamiliar music?
- Do you prefer DJ'd tracks or live music?

Now, these priorities and preferences are likely to shift and change as you continue to spend more time in your dance scene. However, having a clear idea of what you're looking for in the next few months will make it much easier for you to **make wise decisions about where to focus your funds, efforts, and time.**

So, what are your investment possibilities? Let's start by dividing them into two large categories: learning opportunities and social dancing venues. Then, within those categories we'll consider the relative advantages of several types. Depending on where you live and what your preferred dance is, you may not have ALL of these options, but you probably still have plenty to choose from.

1. Learning opportunities



Weekly classes are the most obvious and usually most readily available means of learning to dance. They're great because they're usually not too far away, and you get to learn with a group of people who also live nearby. That provides an instant pool of partners for whatever social you intend, as well as potential friends. If you're in a larger metropolitan area,

you can easily drop in at a few different teachers' classes. Check out their teaching and dancing styles and see who suits you best. Your teacher gets to know you pretty well if you come regularly to class, which makes them better able to offer you ongoing constructive feedback. If you're the kind of person who prefers to have plenty of time to practice what you learn before adding new material, an hour a week is probably the perfect pace to make sure you assimilate what you learn. Plus, weekly classes tend to be really affordable, with many studios offering discounts when you sign up for a full series or a multi-class pack.

The next thing to consider trying out is a **private lesson**, whether with a local teacher or a visiting instructor. Many people wait until they've been studying for several months before they consider a private, but if you are enthusiastic about your chosen dance style, I'd recommend taking at least one even as a beginner. Private lessons give you concentrated, immediate feedback, and the sooner you take one, the less likely you are to develop bad habits that will need to be more laboriously corrected later on. Private lessons are also great when you feel in between levels, whether you're lagging behind your friends or feeling like you aren't quite challenged enough in class. A good teacher builds the lesson around your unique goals and needs. If you have the means, privates can also give you an accelerated path to becoming a higher level dancer. Private lessons admittedly do cost much more by the hour than group classes, but the concentration of learning makes it well worth the extra cost(<http://www.kizombacommunity.com/rachels-blog/why-taking-private-lessons-is-the-best/>).

Sometimes local teachers offer a special **multi-hour workshop** on a weekend. This might be a beginner bootcamp, or a topical workshop, or an exploration of dances that are related to your primary style. If you're smart about registering in advance, these often don't cost much more than weekly classes, but they provide an excellent opportunity to concentrate on improving with other people who are enthusiastic. If you have an irregular work schedule and find it hard to commit to a weekly class, these workshops can be the perfect way to get started in a new style or continue building on a previous foundation. Just make sure you get enough sleep the night before so that your brain is ready to focus for hours of learning!



If you live somewhere with a reasonably sized dance scene, you can expect national or even international teachers to visit on occasion for a **weekend workshop**. These are excellent opportunities to experience professional instruction without the expense of traveling. Once again, planning in advance to take advantage of early bird pricing will yield serious value. Usually purchasing a "full pass" to such events will be significantly discounted in comparison to dropping in for just an hour or two. Check the teacher's credentials online, watch their videos, and ask others for their opinions before committing, though. Just because someone is coming from out of town doesn't necessarily mean they are a great teacher.

At some point, all dance enthusiasts are going to want to head to a **full weekend dance festival**. The scale of these events provides the chance to learn from multiple



well-respected instructors in one place. There are often more advanced options as well as specialty classes you won't find anywhere else. Now, these festivals require a pretty hefty

chunk of cash, even when you're purchasing a pass in advance. To get the best mileage from your budget, I'd again advise doing a bit of research. Is this a festival that has previously been respected? Do the advertised teachers actually attend? What's the class schedule like – do they tell you topics or just “Intermediate Kizomba” and “Salsa Shines”? Are you going to be able to get to the classes you are most interested in, or do they conflict? Also consider the additional expenses related to travel. Of course you'll need to consider how to get to the city in question, but also check how easy it is to get from the airport or train station to the actual venue. You can also compare the cost of sharing a hotel room to getting a cheaper motel room or AirBnb nearby. (Or check out [more ideas about accommodations!](http://www.kizombacommunity.com/rachels-blog/festival-accommodations-where-to-lay-your-head/))

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If you still have some money to spare, large festivals can be your best chance at getting a private lesson with a big name dancer. Be careful to budget your energy as well – regardless of how much you spent on your festival pass, it won't be worth it (<http://socialdancecommunity.com/5-steps-to-maximizing-your-dance-congress-experience/>) to try to do everything that's offered. You have to sleep sometime!

2. Social dancing

Some of you live in places where there is no regular opportunity for social dancing. I encourage you to invest some of your energy into **hosting a house party**, bringing people together in a park, or organizing a small group to sharing the cost of a studio for a couple hours' practice. Chances are someone in your group will have speakers that will suffice, or you can use this simple amplification trick: place your phone or laptop in or over a metal mixing bowl. Living where there's only a small scene doesn't have to mean driving far away to dance! Plus, the nice thing about these small groups is you can play exactly what you want.

In most sizable towns, you can find a place to social dance at least a couple of times a month. Many studios offer **regular practicas or studio parties** so that students can take their learning and put it into action. You can also find social dances happening in restaurants or bars. The advantages of these sorts of regular socials are that the cost is generally quite low, you get to know people and find the dancers whose style you particularly enjoy, and it's easy to bring new dancers into the mix. However, these dance parties often include a few different styles, unless you're in a big enough city

to have a dedicated night. If you enjoy variety, that's great! If you really prefer one style, though, it can be a source of some frustration. Always remember to ask the organizer and the DJ to play music that suits the style you are longing for – most are responsive, so if enough people ask for something, they'll start to include more of it. I have certainly seen this work well for those of us asking for more kizomba at mixed Latin socials!



Monthly parties or other special parties, such as occur in the evening after a Saturday workshop, are worth making a little extra effort to attend. Because they don't happen as often, people tend to plan for them. You get a larger group of dancers from a wider area, so plenty of opportunity to make new connections and be challenged by new partners. The cost is usually higher than a weekly dance, but that usually means a nicer environment and a skilled DJ or even a live band. You'll get to interpret fresh tunes, and maybe even play off the energy of live instrumentation. What a fun way to challenge your musicality!

The social dancing at a **major festival** offers similar advantages, but amplified. People come from all over, and that means more styles and more levels. The DJ's are usually quite experienced and have huge music libraries. Live musical acts might include the very names you have on your playlist back home. That said, big events like this offer special challenges, besides the obvious greater expense for a ticket. Each one has its own focus and schedule, and you might find it's hit-or-miss as to whether people are actually present when social dancing is meant to occur. They might be resting up for competitions, watching performances, or out drinking with people they only see at such events. Also, the need for large venues sometimes means a sacrifice in quality of the actual dance floors. As always, a little research and discussion among past attendees can clarify whether it's worth your investment.



Personally, I like to do a little of everything, as my schedule permits. Hopefully with your personal priorities and preferences in mind, you can budget wisely for maximum dance enjoyment!

