



TOP TIPS

💰 Always try on clothes before you buy them. Don't think "ahh, it's cheap, it won't matter" as you'll end up with a closet full of pieces you can't wear.

💰 **Never go expecting to find something. It's not a retail store, it's pot luck.**

💰 Always go around stocktake sale time or at the end of seasons. Op shops will do clearouts then.

💰 **You will always find winter clothes during summer and vice versa. We usually throw out warm clothes when we are sweltering and cool clothes when we can't think about wearing such a small amount of clothing.**

💰 Always visit op shops around wealthier suburbs as they throw out the best stuff with store tags often still in place. They also have the best finds and designer clothes. I always target op shops in select suburbs of Brisbane, north Sydney, inner-city Melbourne and around Noosa.

💰 **Don't think op shops are just for skinny minnies. Most of us throw clothes out when we start to lose weight so you will often find brilliant clothes in all sizes (sometimes with the tags still on).**

💰 Take the time to explore. Sometimes you can quickly run in and grab something in less than five minutes, but often you need time to go through the racks properly.

💰 **Op shops have cottoned on to the fact people don't think there are bargains to be had so will often do the hard work for you by offering 'label' racks.**

💰 The bigger chains of op shop are generally more expensive than the little charity shops.

💰 **Join VIP lists. Endeavour has a great VIP program, which will often incorporate fashion parades and new-season events.**

💰 Try to have cash on you. While most op shops now have EFPTOS facilities, it is easier for the charities if you have money to give them.

💰 **Make sure you donate back. Give your old clothes and items back to charity bins, but don't just dump the goods outside them as that is just rude!**

💰 Remember the staff are all volunteers and give them an extra smile. They are legends.

💰 **All the money from sales goes to charity. So if you can, round up your bill. If the total comes to \$11.50, give them \$12. At the end of the day, op shops are generally the main source of income for many charities.**

💰 Note op shops aren't just for clothes. Some outlets (particularly Lifeline at Kunda Park) have wonderful knick knacks and furniture.

skirt, bohemian threads before they were bohemian, and endless classic books that are no longer in print.

I've found old suitcases (some even appeared in our wedding), stunning furniture pieces, gorgeous costume and estate jewellery, artwork, even a funky jacket complete with someone's concert ticket stub from seeing a band in St Kilda in the '80s.

I have also picked up day-to-day clothing, which has suited all of my many jobs (with a quarter of the price tag), from journalist to corporate businesswoman.

My favourite joke at barbecues is that through op shops, I've supported just about every charity there is and how can my husband question my shopping sprees when I say "but it supports charities".

Still, I have noticed a trend in the past five years. No longer am I receiving odd looks when I say: "Oh, this old thing? I picked this up at an op shop in Maleny." Now, people are saying: "So, can you give me some tips on how to get some similar bargains myself? I'm so tired of wearing all the same stuff as everyone else".

Op shopping is no longer considered daggy. It's considered normal for anyone – from any social status – to rifle through rack after rack at

charity shops for that special item, at a fraction of the price of new items or those seen at the seemingly growing number of vintage shops.

On top of making use of the opportunity for budget-conscious shopping, people are opting for op shops in search of their own piece of individuality and for the joy of the search. They like going into a shop, rifling through racks of clothes and coming out with a handful of items (while not breaking the bank) that are unique and theirs. I dare anyone not to give themselves a mental high five when they stumble upon a designer item (with the tags still on) at a ridiculously low price.

For me, op shops are a treasure trove where you can find individual pieces, complete with their own stories, while providing funds for worthwhile charities. It's philanthropy at play, and I get a nice jacket for my trouble.

It is truly the piece that just keeps on giving. And as for my grandma, if you see a red-haired woman in Toowoomba with cake crumbs on her stylish lapel rifling through the racks, stay clear. She's a professional.

Happy op shopping!

Turn over and see page 15 for Sarah's op shop finds and to learn how you can buy them

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