



Backgrounder: 40 Years of the PNC Christmas Price Index

It all started 40 years ago at a PNC predecessor bank in Philadelphia as a way to engage clients during the traditionally light holiday weeks. What hatched as the creative brainchild of the bank's then-chief economist has since grown into one of PNC's most popular and anticipated economic reports.

Over the years, trends have emerged, and the PNC Christmas Price Index® (PNC CPI) has often increased or decreased at a rate consistent with the U.S. Consumer Price Index, a measure of inflation produced by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Here are some factoids from the last 40 years:

- **The price of services** overall has increased, while the price of goods has slowed. This is a flip from 40 years ago, when prices for the cost of goods were much higher than services, which mirrors the trend in the U.S. economy. In the PNC CPI, goods are represented by the birds and the gold rings, while services are the entertainers and the maids.



- **Since the PNC CPI** launched, the Consumer Price Index has increased 191% while the PNC CPI increased 133%. The methodology differences are obviously going to give distinct results, but the overall inflation trends have remained remarkably consistent over the years.
- **\$4.14** – The price difference of the Seven Swans-a-Swimming between 1984 and today. Every single gift in the index has risen in price, but one of the most expensive is also the least changed from its debut. The swans debuted at \$13,120.86 in 1984, and are priced at \$13,125 in 2023. This, despite the swans being a volatile component, changing in price at least 10% seven times in the index's history.
- **50%** – The price drop those same swans experienced in 1995. Due to a successful domestic Trumpeter Swan breeding program, the prices of swans tumbled by 50% that year and fell even further to a paltry \$3,936 in 2002, before steadily climbing to today's price of \$13,125.





- **\$2,400** – Dollar for dollar, the four entertainment industry gifts (Ladies, Lords, Pipers and Drummers) have seen the biggest price increases and are most responsible for the CPI's growth over the years. Each of the four gifts has grown by at least \$2,400 from their debut in 1984.



- **\$2,903** – The debut price for the Ten Lords-a-Leaping in 1984. They have leaped in price by a staggering \$11,635 since then.



- **8** – The number of times the Four Calling Birds have changed prices in the history of the index. Ever a model of consistency from the inception of the index, the birds pricing remained the same for 17 years before their first modest increase.

- **\$15** – The debut price of the Three French Hens. The trio stayed at that price for almost 20 years.

- **233%** – The percentage price increase those same hens jumped in 2010 — it's the largest one-year percentage increase for a single gift in the history of the index. They jumped from \$45 in 2009, to \$150 the following year.



- **2003** – The year the CPI overall experienced its biggest jump in total price. The CPI grew by 18.4% that year on the backs of significant price increases to the Calling Birds, Swans, Pipers and Drummers.



- **4** – The number of times the index has experienced a drop in total price year over year. One of the most dramatic was in 1995, when the index dipped by 26.4% on significant drops in the housing market, gold, and the aforementioned 50% drop in the price of the swans. That year was eclipsed by only...

- **2020** – The year that saw the single biggest percentage drop in the index (58.5%) as well as the lowest overall price of the index (only \$16,168.14.) That version of the CPI did not include any of the four entertainment-related gifts, due to pandemic restrictions on in-person performances.

