



Shop Local
We for the

HOLIDAYS

Connect Locally

It might seem like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting, but hitting downtown to do some shopping really can help put you in the Christmas spirit and provide a deeper connection with your local surroundings.

Most towns decorate the downtown streets, and many shops do holiday-themed window displays to attract shoppers. Yes, you should spend some money while you're out (it helps the local economy, after all), but just hitting the streets to do some window shopping is a great way to bond with your family and friends during Christmas.

HIT THE STREETS

When you're ramping up your Christmas shopping strategy, set aside a Saturday, or afternoon, to park (or walk, if you're close enough) into your closest shopping district and start exploring. You might find a store you've never seen, or at least make an effort to visit a store you don't frequent very often. It's a great chance to look for unique gifts, while also getting to know your own town a little bit better.

MAKE IT A FAMILY BONDING EXPERIENCE

Even if you don't actually pick up any gifts while the kids (or spouse) are with you, hitting the local stores to scout out gift options is a great way to just spend some time with your family. Tell your kids stories about unique finds in the antique store, or let them make a list of gift options while perusing the aisles at a downtown gen-



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eral store.

If you're shopping for adults, it can also give you a chance to glance into local downtown boutiques.

IT JUST FEELS LIKE CHRISTMAS

Walking the streets in downtown, with a chill in the air in November or December,

as the Christmas lights twinkle around the street lights and in the windows, just feels quintessentially Christmas. It evokes the visuals and emo-

tions from classic holiday films like *Miracle on 34th Street*, and is just a great tradition to add to the Christmas season.

A Chance to Get Quirky

If you're looking for something quintessential about your hometown or area, hitting a local shop is probably your best bet. The nearest big box retailer probably won't be carrying jewelry from a local artist, or T-shirts for the local football team. Shopping local for the holiday opens up a whole new arena for gift-buying, outside the usual hustle and bustle of cookie-cutter catalog options.

CHECK OUT THE ART

If you look close enough, many towns have local art shops — or at least an artist or craft guild — that organizes things locally. Track down the nearest one and see what the creative minds in your community have to offer. From mixed media art to paintings, buying from local artists helps support their work, while also offering a gift that is one of a kind and truly unique to the area. Some can even do work on commission, if you're looking for something extra personal.

THE SAME THING GOES FOR JEWELRY

With the rise of platforms such as Etsy and Pinterest, there are more small-town artists than ever just trying to make a living and offer up something unique. If you're shopping for jewelry, check around for local jewelry makers, and you could find the perfect, quirky gift for your loved ones. If you're looking for something with a local tie, too, this also could be your best bet.

DON'T FORGET THE TOYS

Locally made toys are a bit harder to pull off, but many local shops stock toys — and the offerings can be very different from what you'll find in the toy aisle at a big box retailer. From toy train sets to vintage toys that have been around since the 1950s (but may not be in easy circulation these days), local shops often carry a much more diverse set of toy options. Take a risk and go for something old school this year.



Don't Forget the Treats

With the focus so much on gift-giving, it's easy to forget that you also can get a little creative with the types of gifts you buy, especially with food. Most towns have local restaurants and bakeries, and all it takes is a bit of effort to work up a Christmas gift that can warm a heart — and a stomach.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Local bakeries are the obvious mainstays for most towns, and those are great. But, if you're looking to get a bit more creative, check around for something a bit quirkier. From gourmet popcorn shops to vintage candy stores, many small towns hold some interesting surprises, if you look close enough. These gifts can be both delicious and one-of-a-kind, since it's something only available locally. If you want to take it a step further, include a gift box with a local recipe.

CHECK OUT THE HOLIDAY DEALS

Along with being delicious, a box of cookies or gourmet treats also can take the edge off of wrapping and delivery. Many bakeries and candy shops offer holiday-themed packages, complete with bows and cards that can be personalized with different treats and messages. Some even offer delivery. If you're giving to a sports fan, some even offer team-themed packages. Just be sure to ask what types of gift packaging they offer. It might cost a couple of extra bucks but could save a whole lot of hassle.

DON'T FORGET THE RESTAURANTS

If you want to go with something a bit easier, you can always pick up an item (or gift card) from a local restaurant. The local barbecue joint might have its own special sauce, or a local bakery might sell its own cookie dough for baking at your leisure. If you have a loved one who likes to cook (or grill), this could make for a unique option to keep on the gift list.



Remember to Use Cash

There's one important step to remember before heading into town and hitting all those lovely, local shops to buy Christmas gifts: Hit up the ATM first. Shopping with cash has myriad benefits, but it can really be a huge help for small businesses around the holidays.

STICK TO YOUR BUDGET

It's so much easier to know what you're spending when you can literally look at the cash in your wallet or purse. Pull out what you've budgeted for gift-buying and get to shopping. By setting your limit and not bringing any extra cash with you, it can help you stay focused while shopping and help you stay on budget. Of course, just be cautious of carrying too much cash around with you. Make sure you have it secure and safe when strolling around.

SAVE BUSINESSES PROCESSING FEES

Those little credit and debit card machines aren't free for local businesses to use, and most businesses have to pay a fee with every swipe. That means you can actually help support your local businesses, and keep a few extra dollars in the local economy, just by shopping with green backs. It might not seem like much to you, but with potentially hundreds of purchases flying through each day during the holiday season, those fees can really add up for a small business with tight profit margins.

SCORE A BETTER DEAL

It doesn't just work on car dealers. Most vendors prefer cash, and a bird in the hand is



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worth two in the bushel, as they say. It's not a guarantee by any means, but especially

when you're talking about bigger ticket items, shopping with cash can also help shave

a few dollars off the sticker price. Since it saves vendors money and is easier to deal

with, some are willing to have a bit of wiggle room on a price when dealing with cash.

Check for Special Events

Christmas festivals: There may not be one in your town, but if not, it stands to reason there's probably one nearby. In November and December, small and mid-size towns across the country host downtown Christmas festivals, with local stores and organizations participating to encourage folks to shop and spend some time outside the big box stores.

LOOK FOR DEALS

Most shops offer deals or coupons as part of a Christmas festival event, and it's a great time to get some shopping done while taking advantage of the sales. With so much foot traffic hitting the area at one time, shops are usually fighting it out for attention — which is good news for shoppers. Also check with the local Chamber of Commerce to see if there might be a local coupon book for an event.

MAKE MEMORIES

Along with getting some shopping done, these festivals often also feature caroling, Christmas tree decorating contests, and sometimes even horse-drawn carriage rides. If the weather cooperates, it can be a great way to get into the Christmas spirit and have a fun and affordable night out. Be sure to see if there's a schedule available for live music and events, so you can plan accordingly.

DON'T FORGET DINNER

With shops trying to lure in customers around holiday events, local restaurants often get in on the festivities, as well. Some will have special meals and promotions around the holiday season, so you might even be able to change things up with a Christmas-themed dinner to go along with all the shopping.

REMEMBER TO EXPLORE

Having everyone out around downtown means local shops are often putting their best foot forward, so it's a great opportunity to try out some stores or restaurants you've never visited — or perhaps even noticed — before. Make it a point to visit at least one place you've never been, just to see what you might be missing.





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Why Shopping Local Matters

It's easy to forget that shopping local helps your community and state in many, many ways. From tax dollars to supporting mom-and-pop businesses, the benefits are myriad.

SPEND LOCAL AND MORE STAYS LOCAL

Numerous studies have analyzed the way money recirculates, and most agree that

money spent locally has a much higher chance of staying in the community.

A study commissioned by the British Columbia division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees found that for every \$1 million in sales, independent retail stores generate \$450,000 in local economic activity, compared to just \$170,000 for chains. Among restaurants, the figures are \$650,000 for independents and \$300,000 for chains.

Across both sectors, this translates into about 2.6 times as many local jobs created when spending is directed to independent businesses

instead of chains. The study concludes that a shift of just 10 percent of the market from chains to independents would produce 31,000 jobs paying \$940 million in annual wages to workers.

MORE STABLE JOBS

Economists at Yale University and the University of Bristol found that in times of high unemployment, small businesses both retain and create more jobs than large firms. During the recession of March 2008 to March 2009, the employment growth rate of large employers fell 1.65 percent more than the growth

rate of small employers, compared with the previous year. In every other recession and recovery period in the study's sample, large firms took years to recover relative to small firms.

IT'S BETTER FOR THE COMMUNITY

A study by a professor at Baylor University found strong positive relationships between local ownership, firm size and employee loyalty, which they refer to as organizational commitment.

Using data from a nationally representative public opinion survey, the study found that

57.2 percent of small firm workers scored in the highest commitment category, compared to 40.5 percent of large firm workers. They found a similar relationship for ownership, with 56 percent of workers at locally owned firms having high commitment scores, compared with just 38.7 percent of workers at non-locally owned firms.

When the researchers plotted the scores on a 16-point commitment scale, the authors found that, together, the two civic measures accounted for as much as a 1.7 point increase in organizational commitment, effects.



Local Gift Cards

If you're totally stumped for a gift selection, there's nothing wrong with snagging a gift card and tossing it in a greeting card. There's no rule, however, that says you have to buy a card from a chain restaurant or big box store. Think local for an easy gift solution.

CHECK LOCAL SHOPS

Most local stores have started offering gift card options for customers, be it a rechargeable card or just a gift certificate signed by the manager. Regardless, it can make for a more personal gift than just a generic gift card. If you find a store you think your loved one would really like but can't find the perfect gift, just get a gift card and let them enjoy shopping and picking out their favorite items on your dime. A gift card to a local store can be a much more personal gift, and it also takes some of the guesswork out of gift-buying. Plus, it supports a local business.

DON'T FORGET RESTAURANTS

Most local restaurants also offer gift cards, and a free lunch is a great gift. Aim high on this one; pick out a place

you really think they'll like, and let them indulge with a nice meal as a gift from you.

Be it a great, highly rated local restaurant or a beloved hole in the wall that has the best burgers in town, get creative and choose something that complements the taste of the recipient.

COFFEE SHOPS, BAKERIES

If you want to offer a bit more of a snack, pick up a gift certificate to a local coffee shop or bakery. Just make sure the place is good (maybe test out a few pastries before you pick up the card). A \$20 or \$30 gift card can stretch a good distance at a coffee house or bakery.

Try to think of a place that might be on your friend's commute, as well, so they'll have a chance to use it and take full advantage of your clever gift.

If you find a store you think your loved one would really like but can't find the perfect gift, just get a gift card and let them enjoy shopping and picking out their favorite items on your dime.