

Shop Local FOR THE HOLIDAYS



Take the Local-First Challenge

A local-first shopping challenge is a great way to explore your community and get your holiday shopping list taken care of.

Make your holiday gift list, then check independent, locally owned businesses before hitting up online retailers or chain stores. Here are some ways to make the local-first challenge easy as Christmas pie.

DAY 1

On the first day of Christmas shopping, buy yourself a fancy coffee from a local coffee shop. And maybe a Christmas cookie. Remember, hydration and fuel are important for tackling holiday shopping crowds.

DAY 2

Check your holiday list and make one swap for a local business. Maybe it's holiday cards from a local bookstore or stationery shop. Or wrapping paper from a boutique, or ornaments. Also look to local artists who may not necessarily have a shop but are selling things such as hand-lettered gift tags.

DAY 3

Hit up local restaurants for gift cards to give out as holiday gifts. Especially look out for ones that have special



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deals that maybe put a little present in your wallet, too. Pick up some lunch, too, while you're there.

DAY 4

Leave a review for one of the businesses you've visited. Five stars creates exponentially more visibility for the local businesses in your area.

DAY 5

Bring a friend on the fifth and last day of your local challenge. Compare your lists and ideas for shopping local; they may know of shops that aren't on your radar. Encourage each other in shopping locally, not just the shops, but also in choosing brands in those shops that match your own values.

BONUS ROUND

Here are more ways to support local businesses this holiday season:

- Give out gift certificates for services such as salon services, lawn care, automotive service and more. These thoughtful gifts support local businesses and give the recipient the precious gift of time.

- Visit a local nursery and pick up some holiday greenery for your home or to give as gifts.

- Hit up local artists and craft markets to look for unique gifts that will perfectly fit everyone on your list.

- Look for shops and restaurants offering tasty treats to adorn your holiday table.

The Chamber of Commerce's Role

A chamber of commerce is a local, regional, state or even national organization that supports the interests of its local business owner members.

It elects leadership and pursues an agenda of lobbying on local issues. For its members, it offers a valuable conduit to lawmakers, but also the opportunity to network and even some publicity.

FINDING A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Most cities and even counties, regions and states have a chamber of commerce. You can look at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's directory of accredited chambers or consult your local directory. Review membership tiers for the chamber and pick the one that works best for your business. Then submit your application, pay your dues and get ready to get involved.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ACTIVITIES

Chambers of commerce host events such as educational workshops, policy summits, ribbon cuttings, business advocacy and more. These activities provide members with networking opportunities with other business owners, lawmakers and potential



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customers.

They may offer educational series on new and upcoming law changes that would affect businesses, leadership training for you and for your employees, policy summits, workforce programs and community partnerships.

Chambers celebrate their members' achievements, such as ribbon cuttings and grand openings, milestone anniversaries, awards and other

honors. This can result in positive (and often free) publicity for the participating business.

A VOICE FOR LOCAL BUSINESS

Chambers of commerce are voices for the local business community. On behalf of business owners in the area they represent, chambers of commerce reach out to lawmakers

and help shape laws and policies that affect business. These are rules for things such as tax policies, workforce and educational initiatives, employment law and more.

They provide a forum for industry-specific education and networking, such as programs that are geared toward women, minorities or other professional demographics or topics. Chambers represent the busi-

ness community to the next generation of business owners, leading educational initiatives for children and the community at large.

Chambers of commerce are valuable support networks for local business owners and for consumers. If you want to shop local and don't know where to start, a chamber directory is a great resource for finding businesses in your area.

Make a Hosting Gift Basket

The holidays mean gathering together. Sometimes, those gatherings need a little gift for those hosting.

Grab a basket and fill it with local goodies to make their holidays brighter. Here are some ideas of things to fill it with.

TABLE LINENS

Hit up local businesses for festive table linens. They add texture and warmth to your basket, while making the perfect backdrop. Instead of giant tablecloths, look for less expensive neutral napkins. For extra points, drop in napkin rings or other tiny table accessories they can use this holiday season.

GOODIES

Next, pop a few delicious items from a local bakery or kitchen store. A pack of cookies, a little jar of jam, a bag of ground coffee are all great candidates. Or, for the over 21 crowd, look for local libations such as wine, whiskey or beer.

Whatever you decide on, ask the experts at the bakery, coffee shop or wherever you're shopping for a few perfect little accessories to tuck into the basket as well. Think about things such as bottle openers for beer, a coffee mug or other little items.

Look for items that may take the stress off hosting, such as



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pastries to enjoy the next day or coffee for the next morning.

ORNAMENTS

Holiday ornaments are lovely additions to any hostess gift. Look for locally themed ornaments, ornaments by local artists or local stores that stock

ornaments. Try to pick ones that are relevant to the host or hostess' interests. You can find just about anything for anyone these days.

FLOWERS OR OTHER GREENERY

Flowers are always a wel-

come addition to any holiday party.

Live plants are a great way to liven up anyone's table, as are bouquets in festive holiday colors. Wrap them in brown paper and tuck them into your basket as a gorgeous way to finish it off.

RELAXATION

Give the gift of relaxation with a locally made candle, soap, bubble bath or other items for your host to unwind after their hosting duties are done. Also look for other spa goods, such as hand cream, bath bombs or a diffuser.

Passes, Memberships and Lessons

Some of the best local shopping is done for experiences, and increasingly, experiences are more popular gifts.

Some surveys show more than 90% of U.S. adults say they'd rather receive an experience than a physical gift. The best news? It can be done locally.

ZOO OR AQUARIUM MEMBERSHIPS

If your town has any zoos, aquariums, insectariums or other animal-focused attraction, consider giving out family memberships or passes for the animal lovers in your life. You could really go bananas and gift the personal experiences that some facilities offer, such as hanging out behind the scenes with certain animals.

PARK PASSES

National parks and many state parks offer annual passes that allow people to visit all year long. The America the Beautiful pass is \$80 for U.S. citizens. Bear in mind that it will be mailed and can't be downloaded or printed out. The pass allows the owner and passengers in a non-commercial vehicle at per-vehicle fee areas and the pass owner and three adults where per-person fees are charged.

SERVICES

You can also give the pre-



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cious gift of time by gifting local services. These can be gift certificates or passes for a salon, spa, fitness center, personal trainer, house cleaning, landscaping, home organization and more. Try to think of things your recipient would love to have but wouldn't necessarily do for themselves. Get creative and consider ser-

vices such as family photographs, travel planning for a big trip, automotive services or luxury experiences such as personal shopping.

CLASSES AND LESSONS

Another great idea is classes or lessons. Cooking and baking lessons are always a hit, as are mixology classes,

music or art classes, or individualized instruction in sports. If you are the type of gifter that needs to give something to open, consider giving them an accessory they can use. For a baking lesson, for instance, think about a personalized apron with a certificate for the class tucked in the pocket.

ADRENALINE JUNKIES

Book experiences such as day-long supercar drives, helicopter tours, bungee jumping and other high-adrenaline activities your recipient might enjoy. Find out first whether they're healthy enough to enjoy the activity and can sign any waivers and meet any criteria the provider requires.



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Give Family Heirlooms New Life

Families have troves of beloved heirlooms that need saving and the holidays are a great time to pull those out and have them revived by local experts.

Whether it's grandma's vintage wedding dress or that box of home movies from the 1980s, search for a local provider who can help you out.

JEWELRY

A popular heirloom item is jewelry and having a jeweler you can trust restore it is important. The American Gem Society has a jeweler search tool that can help shoppers find qualified jewelers close to them. The organization says its certified jewelers have

undergone training and education in gemology, diamond grading, jewelry design and more. It adheres to a code of ethics and is committed to conducting business with transparency and honesty.

Other certifications to look for include the Jewelers of America (which has its own member directory) and the Gemological Institute of America. Make sure you know what services they offer in house and which they send out for.

Examine warranties and return policies carefully.

CLOTHING

Specialty cleaning shops are your best bet for taking care of heirloom quality threads. When you're calling shops, mention you want garment restoration services or vintage care. If possible, bring the item into the shop and discuss exactly how you want it cleaned and restored and your options for preserving the item.

To display your heirloom pieces, consider framing small pieces or placing them in a shadowbox. If an item is too far gone, talk to your provider about which pieces might be best to frame for

individual gifts. Think of pieces of an old wedding dress for all the bride's children.

VIDEOS

Old film, VHS tapes, cassettes and other media are living on borrowed time. These materials degrade, and digitizing them is a great gift to your family. There are mail-in services, but many places have providers locally that can help you out.

Start by asking the experts at your local audio-visual store to find the experts who can restore your best quality memories. At your family's holiday gathering, arrange to watch the digitized content before giving out copies as gifts.



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Local Bookstores, Local Reads

Local independent booksellers are growing in popularity, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce says.

“Books have had an interesting ride,” says Elizabeth Lafontaine, director of research at Placer.ai, a location analytics company. “They were one of the first to be disrupted by e-commerce and we thought we’d never see a revival. But now we’re seeing this almost full-circle moment. Consumers are not only visiting bookstores but they’re also spending more time inside the stores once they’re there.”

Local bookstores are more likely to feature local authors on their shelves.

Their staff can make expert recommendations on what the bibliophiles on your list would like. While you’re at the bookstore, grab a card from the store and throw it in the bag. These stores are becoming the community center in many neighborhoods, and the gift of a safe space may be just as treasured as the book itself.

Rachel Kanter owns Lovestruck Books in Massachusetts. She partnered with coffee entrepreneur George Howell to combine a ro-

mance-themed bookstore with a café that serves its own pink cocktail.

“What I hear from people over and over again is that they’re just so happy to have a place to gather,” Kanter told the chamber. She partners with local book clubs to give them space to meet and offers book club member discounts.

Wonderland Books in Maryland opened in 2024. It has a founding book club program where clubs paid \$2,000 each to have their names printed on the store wall and receive store-branded merchandise as well as invitations to exclusive events.

“A huge driving force of what we do

is build a community behind this bookstore,” co-owner Gayle Weiswasser said. “It’s all in the service of ... making the store a place people want to visit and feel loyal to.”

The store partners with a dog rescue for in-store adoption events and music lessons.

Some bookstores are offering their own merch. Lovestruck focuses on cozy romantic items such as candles, socks, slippers and tea made by local vendors, spreading the local shopping love.

“The merch has taken on a life of itself,” Kanter said. “It’s almost half of our sales.”



Start on Your Health Goals Now

Holidays are for feasting, drinking and generally making merry, but it's also an important time to start considering your physical and mental health.

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As you shop, look for deals on fitness gear to get ready for your New Year's resolutions. Keep reading to learn more about what fitness trends might be top on the 2027 list.

STRENGTH TRAINING

As weight loss medications are helping people shed pounds, health professionals are focusing on strength training to ensure the people using those medications are losing fat and not muscle mass. Look for things such as dumbbells, weight sets and resistance bands. Also consider gifting a few personal training sessions to make sure your gift recipients aren't hurting themselves by working out.

WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY

The American College of Sports Medicine says wearable technology such as fitness trackers, smartwatches, rings and more collect real-time health data such as the wearer's heart rate, steps, speed and distance. More advanced tech can also capture indicators such as heart rhythm, blood pressure, sleep data, blood glucose, skin temperature and more.

ADULT RECREATION AND SPORTS CLUBS

Fitness and socialization? Sign us up. More adults are participating in recreational leagues for team sports, yes, including pickleball, the ACSM says. The

organization says it reflects a growing interest in activities that combine fitness with fun. Wrap up a gift of a lesson package along with a starter set of accessories.

EXERCISE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

ACSM says there's plenty of evidence that shows the positive effect of physical activity on mental health. Exercise can improve mood, your ability to cope with stress and your body image. Look for group classes that combine exercise with endorphin-boosting socialization. If you're giving a gift, choose passes to a class appropriate for the fitness level of the recipient. And you can get in on it,

too, consistent workout routines have the best success, and working out with friends can help.

FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

Functional fitness training is another coming trend in 2027, ACSM says. This is a practice that includes strength, power, mobility and endurance movements designed to improve physical performance in real world activities. Programs emphasize compound movements such as squats and lunges that translate into daily life. Gift ideas: A custom shoe fitting and gift certificate for a new pair of athletic shoes, passes to classes and accessories such as a new water bottle, sweats and more.