

A man and a woman are shopping in a festive store. The man, wearing a dark jacket and a grey beanie, is holding a red and a blue shopping bag. The woman, wearing a brown coat with a fur collar and a white beanie, is smiling and looking at a small white figurine on a display table. The table is covered with various Christmas decorations, including ornaments, garlands, and small figurines. The background is filled with warm, glowing lights and more holiday-themed items.

Shop Local FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Impact Your Community

Shopping locally, during the holidays and beyond, fuels an important economic engine in your community.

Small, independent businesses are more likely to, in turn, purchase goods and services from local suppliers and distributors, hire a local workforce and to do business with local financial institutions, the Labovitz School of Business and Economics at the University of Minnesota at Duluth says.

Here's more on gift shopping locally this holiday season.

SHOPPING LOCAL AND JOB CREATION

The American Independent Business Alliance says 48% of each purchase at a local, independent business was recirculated locally compared to less than 14% of purchases at chain stores. Shopping at local, independent retailers, therefore, returns more than three times as much money per dollar of sales to the local economy than chain competitors. Meanwhile, shopping online generates almost no economic benefit outside of the delivery person.

Local spending benefits local schools. It's one of the most important sources of tax income for local and state governments, particularly schools. Callaway Bank says



© ADOBE STOCK

about 47% of school revenues come from state funds and 45% from local governments, both of which are dependent on the taxes paid by local retailers.

GREEN BENEFITS

Shopping local is better for the environment. Local businesses tend to have shorter supply chains, which results in

a smaller carbon footprint than international companies. The reduction in transportation lowers carbon emissions and local businesses may be more attuned to the environmental concerns of their community.

STRONGER SOCIAL TIES

Buying from local, independent retailers fosters a sense of

community and strengthens social ties, the North Jefferson Chamber of Commerce says. Local businesses are often owned by residents who want their community to do well. They support local events and sports teams, contribute to community initiatives and more, creating a supportive community where people feel a sense of belonging and support.

KEEPING COMMUNITIES UNIQUE

Local businesses can be the beating heart of the community, giving each town its own unique character and charm. By supporting local shops, customers can prevent their communities from becoming homogenized by the options offered at big, impersonal retail chains.

Hitting Holiday Markets

Many small businesses don't have permanent locations and, instead, rely on events such as holiday markets to sell their goods.

Here's how to get the most out of visiting these events.

COME PREPARED

Many holiday markets are outdoors rain or shine, so dress appropriately for the weather. In colder climates, layer up with hats, scarves and gloves. Wear closed-toe shoes, especially if the market is in a field or other non-paved area. Bring a tote bag for your purchases or for carrying layers as the day warms up.

CHECK THE WEBSITE

If the market has a website or a social media page, check for any restrictions such as pets or outside food or drinks. You may want to bring cash in smaller denominations as some vendors may not accept cards or digital payments such as Venmo or CashApp. Also note any instructions for parking and the hours the market opens and closes.

LOOK FOR UNIQUE ITEMS

Take the opportunity at these markets to snag some local specialty foods or



© ADOBE STOCK

handmade crafts. If you see something, go ahead and purchase it as some of these goods are one-of-a-kind or may sell out quickly. Ask the people working booths if negotiations are acceptable before trying to talk them into any kind of deal. Don't be afraid to ask the owners about how their items are made.

MAKE A DAY OF IT

Plan a day of fun for the whole family. Many markets

have food vendors and music events as well as kids' activities such as games or face painting. Be patient navigating festive crowds and traffic and obey event managers' instructions. Try to keep up the good cheer as some booths and vendors may have long lines.

SOME MARKETS TO VISIT

If you don't have holiday markets in your community, here are a few to consider traveling to:

- **Carmel Christkindlmarkt, Carmel, Indiana.** A traditional German market with ice skating, music and demonstrations.

- **The Great Dickens Christmas Fair, San Francisco.** Four acres of California becomes Victorian London with people dressed in traditional regalia.

- **Savannah Christmas Market, Savannah, Georgia.** This market is in a former power plant that is now an entertainment venue.

- **Texas Christkindl Market, Arlington, Texas.** Another traditional German festival that offers crafts and festive entertainment.

- **Christmas in Natchez, Natchez, Mississippi.** This market highlights the historic antebellum architecture of Natchez, Mississippi.

- **The Holiday Market at Dupont Circle, Washington, DC.** This market features small artisan and boutique brands.

Gifting Local Delicacies



Many communities have delicious local specialties, and these tasty treats can make excellent holiday gifts.

Local goods offer a taste of your home and can remind recipients of the great times they've had there. Here are some ways to package and send homemade love from your home to theirs.

CHOOSING WHAT TO SEND

You want to send items that are shelf-stable or nearly so and can endure the rough nature of holiday shipping. Perishable items can be shipped, but should be packaged appropriately and shipped as quickly as possible in appropriate temperatures.

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE PACKAGING

Use new, sturdy boxes that fit the items you're shipping snugly inside. For items that need to be kept cold or cool, pick insulated containers. Wrap each item individually with plastic wrap or foil and fill any empty spaces with packing materials such as packing peanuts or bubble wrap. If the items can leak, double bag them in watertight plastic bags. Use packing tape to seal the box securely. If you're using a cooler, UPS advises you to enclose it in a sturdy, new corrugated box as well. Then seal all the seams with pressure-sensitive packing tape.

SHIPPING FRUIT

If fruit is on your shopping list, UPS says to remove damaged or blemished fruits before packing. Choose a shipping container based on the type of fruit and how much fruit you're sending. Wooden crates and trays work well for oranges and hard fruit, UPS says, and plastic containers or great for small, soft fruit. Look for molded trays for anything that might bruise easily, such as pears. Bear in mind some states don't allow fruits and vegetables to be shipped into them. Your local shipping store can help you with any rules and regulations.

Whatever you're sending, alert the recipient that it's coming so they can be on the lookout for your gift in the case of weather or porch pirates. Mark food as perishable goods on the outside of the package and choose the most expedient shipping method you can. UPS advises a maximum transit time of 30 hours for perishables, either UPS Next Day Air or 2nd Day Air. Avoid shipping on a Friday when the package could sit over the weekend.

Look for Seasonal, Local Brews

Craft beer sales hit \$28.8 billion in 2024 and now account for nearly a quarter of the U.S. beer market.

The craft brewing industry contributed more than \$77 billion to the U.S. economy that same year, the Brewers Association says, and contributed more than 190,000 jobs to the American economy.

Hitting up local breweries for seasonal bottles are a great way to spend part of your holiday season that also contributes back to the local economy.

FINDING A BREWERY

If you're traveling for the holidays, look for local breweries as you go. The Brewers Association has a listing of craft breweries, and you can find listings on TapHunter, Untappd and more. Remember to imbibe responsibly and don't drink and drive.

SEASONAL BOTTLES

Craft beer brewers release a bevy of seasonal brews around the holidays. Some to keep an eye out for are:

- Stouts, a dark ale that is usually warm fermented and has a rich, creamy texture. They're heavy, filling and perfect for long winter nights. Labels to look for include New Holland The Poet, Deschutes Obsidian Stout, Goose Island Bourbon County Stout and Prairie Artisan Ales



© ADOBE STOCK

Prairie Bomb!.

- Porters are another dark ale that gets their color from brown malt. They're medium-bodied beers that were the first beer style brewed around the world. Bottles to look for include Funky Buddha's Last Snow, Trillium Brewing Company Pot & Kettle — Vanilla, Dangerous Man Brewing Peanut Butter Porter, Big Top Brewing Company Hawaiian Lion Toasted Coconut and

Coffee Porter, and (512) Pecan Porter.

- Doppelbocks are a stronger bock brew with a full body and a rich taste. They were originally brewed by monks fortifying themselves for religious fasting and are sometimes called liquid bread. Try to find Dust Bowl Brewing Steinbock, pFriem Family Brewers Doppelseck, Epic Brewing Double Skull, Maplewood Brewing Company Silver

Morning, Grimm Artisanal Ales Prognosticator and Samuel Adams Chocolate Bock.

- Altbier in German means "old beer," and is brewed using an older method of brewing. These bottles are a cross between a lager and an ale. Look for Red Lodge Ales Glacier Ale, Long Trail Double Brag, Schell Schmaltz's Alt and Sleigh'r Winter Ale.

- An imperial or double IPA has a higher alcohol content

than other IPAs (India pale ales), usually upwards of 8-10%. These may come in wintry flavors such as cranberry or gingerbread that go well with the holiday season. Try Russian River Brewing's Pliny the Younger or Pliny the Elder, Kern River Brewing Company's Winter Double IPA, New England Brewing Co.'s Double Fuzzy Baby Ducks, and Creature Comforts' Cosmik Debris.



© ADOBE STOCK

How Gift Cards Give Back

Gift cards are a popular choice for holiday shoppers.

In 2024, CivicScience says more than half of U.S. adults who celebrated the holidays received at least one gift card. A quarter — the lucky ones — got more than one. Gift cards aren't just great for the giver and the recipient.

They're also great for local businesses because the business gets the cash up front without shelling out goods or services.

GIVING A GIFT TO A SHOP

Local boutiques and other shops may offer gift card deals around the holidays where you get a discount for buying multiple cards or coupons with the purchase of a card. Choose a shop that carries things the recipient would enjoy (bonus points if it's either their favorite or soon to be their favorite). If it's an apparel store, ensure it carries their approximate size and make sure the card will cover a purchase in the store. An example: \$10 probably won't get you very far in Louis Vuitton.

GIVING A GIFT FOR A SERVICE

A great gift idea is to pick up a gift card to the recipient's favorite nail salon, hairstylist or for another service they frequently use. Make sure the card carries the value of a full service that they enjoy or you think they'd enjoy, including any taxes.

You may not be able to add a tip, but if you can, consider that, too, in the amounts customary for your area.

Also check expiration dates for any gift cards you purchase, and ask for a gift receipt to go with it.

WRAPPING A GIFT CARD

Even if a gift card seems like a boring gift (it's not), you don't have to wrap it that way. Consider it part of a theme, such as wrapping a gift card to a coffee shop in a reusable travel mug or hidden in a pile of coffee beans. You could also use a more luxe presentation, such as in a velvet or other bag. Several retailers offered ugly sweater gift card holders last year. If you're gifting several gift cards together, arrange them in a bouquet with floral stems and ribbon.

Give the Gift of Membership

This holiday season, give a gift they can use all year round.

A membership or subscription lets friends and family enjoy their present for months to come.

Memberships or subscriptions offer the opportunity for an intensely personal and meaningful gift.

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIPS TO LOOK FOR

There are a lot of different subscriptions or memberships your friends and family might enjoy that go far beyond the sock-of-the-month club. Look for digital or online subscriptions, such as for courses, magazine or newspaper subscriptions, or platform memberships from YouTube or Patreon.

A more traditional gift is a membership to a club or organization that brings a variety of benefits to the recipient, such as AAA or a local museum or zoo. Memberships for a museum or zoo usually include free visits, special events and discounts on merchandise and are great options for a family with children that could use something to do.

Around the holidays, there may be discounts or additional items available, such as experience packages or other merchandise. Keep an eye out for deals, particularly on Small Business Saturday or Giving Tuesday.



© ADOBE STOCK

HOW TO GIVE A SUBSCRIPTION OR MEMBERSHIP

You might not even have to leave the house. Many subscriptions or memberships

can be purchased and gifted online. Just look for a gift option on the website and choose the appropriate membership tier and recipient information. A lot of the

platforms will allow you to add a personalized note. You may be notified when the recipient opens or uses your gift.

If you need to physically

give a gift, consider packaging it as a themed present. For instance, give a membership to the local zoo with stuffed animals for the children and a pair of binoculars for animal spotting. A theater membership could come with popcorn and boxes of theater candy.

Other subscriptions and memberships to look for include:

Monthly or other regular box deliveries. For the foodie, look for Raw Spice Bar's The Spice Adventure starting at \$15 per month. They'll get small-batch spices and recipes to use with it. Ipsy, TheraBox and other beauty boxes include makeup and skin care products. Then there's the old standby: The Book of the Month Club, starting at \$59.99.

Zoo, museum and park memberships. Contact their local zoo or museums to ask about tiers of family memberships, or opt for a state park pass. The America the Beautiful National Park Pass is \$80 and includes park admission for the pass owner and passengers in their non-commercial vehicle.

Movie memberships. Several movie theater chains, such as Regal's Unlimited, AMC Stubs A-List and the Cinemark Movie Club offer memberships that allow recipients to view a certain number of movies per month. There may be restrictions for specific formats, such as IMAX movies, but some come with perks such as discounted concessions and other rewards.

Gifts That Give Back

The holiday season is a great time to give back.

You can do that and give a gift at the same time by donating in the name of your intended recipient. Here are some ways to make twice the impact this holiday season.

GIVING TO A CHARITY

Choose a charity or organization that is dear to your recipient's heart and donate in their name. Some groups have a way to notify the recipients for you, but otherwise, write a heartfelt note saying that you've made a donation for them. Consider a local animal shelter, humane society or other group for the animal lover in your life. For naturalists, the Arbor Day Foundation will plant trees in someone's name. Local food banks, churches and other groups are also good bets.

If you're having trouble finding the right organization, use a website such as Charity Navigator, GiveWell or ActBlue to find organizations that make a good use of money and support good causes.

ANGEL TREES AND OTHER GIVING

A popular way to benefit your community around the holidays is by sponsoring a gift for an underserved family in your area or in your recipient's area. Reach out to local school systems, churches and charitable organizations who



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CODY MOTT/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

identify families who need extra support during the holidays and ask how you can help.

Include a list of the items you purchased to help, or maybe a picture of the wrapped presents if the

organization asks you to wrap the gifts.

It can be a lot of fun to shop for gifts for these families, but make sure you're getting items they actually asked for and need. Double check sizes, colors and other specifics to

make sure these families can use the items you're purchasing.

Nationally, you can give to programs such as Toys for Tots, a charity run by the Marine Corps Reserve. You can donate money directly, or

drop off new, unwrapped toys at designated locations during the holiday season. In addition to playing Santa during the holidays, Toys for Tots also supports foster children and literacy programs all year around.