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Holiday

GIFT GUIDE



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Great gift ideas for school-aged children to learn

Metro Creative Connection

Successful shopping for adults on a holiday list often involves identifying a loved one's favorite hobby and then finding something that makes that hobby even more enjoyable. For example, a new e-reader can be just what the family bookworm needs to make reading even more immersive.

School-aged children may not be so simple to shop for, as their interests are always evolving and they tend to outgrow toys as quickly as their growing bodies outgrow their clothes. No two kids are the same, but these gift ideas can appeal to school-aged youngsters at a time in their lives when their curiosity is always piqued.

■ **STEM gifts:** Parents know that the term "STEM" is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. These academic disciplines have gained heightened importance over the last couple of decades, and many toy manufacturers now make products that reinforce STEM lessons kids learn in the classroom in a fun way. STEM-based toys are available for kids of all ages, including children who are still in diapers.

■ **Nature-based gifts:** Many parents do everything they can to reduce the amount



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of time their kids spend looking at screens, which is a tall order in the digital era. But various manufacturers produce toys designed to help kids be more physically active in the great outdoors. From age-appropriate binoculars that encourage kids to explore natu-

ral settings to birdhouses and fairy gardens kids can build and paint in their favorite colors, shoppers can choose from a host of nature-based gifts that encourage kids to get away from their screens and enjoy the great outdoors.

■ **Board games:** Board games remain a wonderful way for kids to learn and have fun doing it. Board games are made for kids of all ages, and they're not just fun, but also beneficial to early childhood development. For example, clinical psychologist Beatrice Tauber Prior, Psy.D. noted to the children's book publisher and distributor Scholastic that board games requiring strategy help the frontal lobes of the brain develop. Those lobes are responsible for planning, organizing and decision-making. Board games also provide opportunities for families to spend quality time together free from distractions.

■ **Cookbooks:** Cookbooks are another great gift for school-aged youngsters, who can learn a lot from pitching in at dinner-time. Children who cook with their parents can learn valuable lessons about nutrition and measuring ingredients can reinforce lessons learned in the classroom. Shoppers can choose from any number of cookbooks designed for kids, and even children as young as two can pitch in when baking cookies or preparing family meals.

Shopping for school-aged children during the holiday season can be made easier with some suggestions that can reinforce classroom lessons while keeping the focus on fun.

Some of the best gifts just can't be unwrapped

Metro Creative Connection

The popularity of experiential gifts is undeniable. In its 2021 Winter Holiday Shopping Report, the market research firm Mintel revealed that nearly half of individuals surveyed for the report felt that experiential gifts are superior to tangible items. Such preferences are something holiday shoppers can keep in mind as they pursue the perfect gift for their loved ones.

Experiential gifts are often associated with adults and their bucket lists, but kids have much to gain from being gifted experiences as well. In addition to the lasting memories inspired by experiential gifts, such offerings also get kids up and out of the house. Parents recognize that's not always so easy in the digital age.

Though children likely don't have a bucket list that can make it easy for holiday shoppers to find the perfect experiential gift, the following are a number of experiences that kids of all ages can enjoy.

- A day at the zoo
- A trip to a trampoline park or bouncy house facility
- Tickets to a sporting event, concert or

live show

- Music lessons
- A paint and sip (juice) event with one or both parents
- Cooking lessons
- A day at a nearby national park
- A camping trip
- Horseback riding lessons
- A day at a nearby amusement park
- A day at a local arcade
- A day at a local museum with interactive exhibits
- A helicopter ride
- Art lessons
- A day on the ski slopes
- A day on the beach
- Gymnastics lessons/classes
- A day at the local bowling alley with friends

- Ice skating lessons
 - A round of mini golf
 - Jewelry-making lessons/classes
 - A fishing trip on a nearby body of water
- There's no shortage of experiences that can benefit children's lives. That's something holiday shoppers can keep in mind as they shop for the perfect gifts for youngsters on their shopping list this December.



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Avoid these 4 charity scams



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Metro Creative Connection

Charitable giving grew in 2021. According to Blackbaud Institute, a social good innovator, giving not only increased after COVID-19, but actually rebounded more than it had in a decade - increasing in the United States by 9 percent overall.

Annual private philanthropy as a percentage of GDP is about 1.44 percent in the United States. Philanthropy Roundtable reports that rate in Canada is 0.77 percent.

People tend to give the most to charity at the end of the year. While legitimate organizations may step up their solicitation of donations at this time, scammers also realize the months of November and December is prime giving season. So many scammers increase their deceptive tactics to cheat unsuspecting individuals at this time of year. Here are four common charity scams that every prospective donor should be aware of.

1. Impersonating another charity

Most philanthropic groups have an online presence in some shape or form. Scammers will replicate the look of the charitable group's website or social

media account, or may contact you through email or text to solicit funds. Thinking it is a legitimate charity, you may follow a link to enter donation information.

To avoid this scam, do not click on any links. Rather, enter the exact email address of a charity, if you know it, or use a trusted resource like Charity Navigator for contact information. If you're still leery about online transactions, call the charity and ask to be sent a donation statement in the mail, which you should be able to mail back postage-paid.

2. The hard sell

A legitimate charity is happy to welcome a donation any time you're able to give it. A scam operation may employ a hard sell or a deadline by which the donation must be made. In addition, a fraudulent "charity" might ask for payment only by cash, gift card or wire transfer (because it is difficult to trace), and this should raise a red flag that something is amiss.

3. A thank-you for your donation

AARP warns that some scammers will send you a thank-you for a dona-

tion that you supposedly already made to entice you to give again. This is designed to lower your inhibitions about a soliciting charity. It's always a good idea to keep records of charitable giving, especially for tax-related reporting, so you can easily verify if you gave to a group in the past.

4. Cryptocurrency wallet

As methods of making payments change, scam groups often ride the wave. The Federal Trade Commission learned that when the government of Ukraine announced it would be accepting donations to support their efforts via a cryptocurrency wallet, scammers started getting in on the action. But instead of the funds getting sent to the government's wallet, the donations headed to a private wallet.

Always conduct an online search of the wallet address to confirm that money is being sent to the right place. Typically you can't reverse cryptocurrency payments, so due diligence is required.

Individuals need to be extra cautious with charitable giving to avoid common scams.

Safety when buying toys for children

Metro Creative Connection

December is a special time of year for children, millions of whom await the arrival of Santa Claus and the bounty of toys he delivers each year. When buying holiday gifts for youngsters, adults must consider safety. According to the Alliance for Children

and Families, approximately 217,000 children are treated at hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries each year. Holiday shoppers are urged to stick to age-related recommendations on product packaging and avoid toys that do not contain the ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) label.



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Hometown Banking

What to give new homeowners this holiday season

Metro Creative Connection

The real estate market has been a wild ride in recent years. Sellers have cashed in on record-breaking profits, and buyers have had to compete against many others — sometimes in bidding wars — for a limited number of properties. Once listed, homes are selling fast. As interest rates rise and inventory increases, things are likely to change, though for some it did not come soon enough.

Individuals who were lucky enough to find a new home this year may discover they now have little money to outfit those homes. Shoppers with new homeowners on their holiday shopping lists may want to help those loved ones outfit their homes this season. The following are some home-related gift ideas to get shoppers started.

■ **Video/smart doorbell:** Although the smart doorbell market began with only a handful of options, there's

now a bevy of manufacturers who make video and smart home doorbells. These doorbells serve the dual purpose of alerting homeowners to someone at the door, while providing surveillance of the comings and goings outside of the home. Depending on the product, a subscription may be needed to access video history. Doorbells range from \$50 to \$200 and more depending on features and resolution.

■ **Furniture gift card:** There's a good chance new homeowners will need to furnish new rooms in a home, particularly if they're coming from an apartment or a smaller place. Many people also like to update furnishings when they move into new places. A gift card to a popular furniture store in the area will provide the head-start new homeowners need to secure sofas, dining sets, lamps, rugs, and more.

■ **Household tool kit:** What

better way to prepare new homeowners for the do-it-yourself projects and household repairs than with a tool kit? Home improvement retailers often package common tools needed in carrying cases or sets, but shoppers can grab separate items they think will be used and group them together into one gift. Pliers, screwdrivers, wrenches, a level, and a measuring tape are good starter tools.

■ **Customized doormat:** Give that new home additional curb appeal with a doormat customized with a special message or the new homeowners' names, such as Welcome to the Smith Home. Other customizable products include cutting boards and wall plaques.

■ **Programmable thermostat:** A programmable or learning thermostat will help new homeowners save on their energy bills. Many thermostats now pair with smart home systems and phones



COURTESY PHOTO FROM METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

and automatically adjust the temperature as needed to reduce energy consumption.

■ **Linens:** A high thread count sheet set or plush Turkish cotton towels may

not be something new homeowners think to get for themselves. But these luxurious gifts can make life at home more comfortable.

Moving into a new home

is an exciting yet expensive endeavor. Carefully curated gifts can tap into what new homeowners need the most.

Gifts to rev auto lovers' engines

Metro Creative Connection

Since they first became widely available in the early 20th century, cars have inspired no small number of passionate devotees. Some people simply can't resist the thrills of the open road, while others love driving because of the sense of independence it provides. Regardless of what inspires their passions, come the holiday season, auto enthusiasts undoubtedly would be excited to unwrap these auto-related gifts.

■ **Car wash kit:** It's one thing to drive, and another thing entirely to drive a car that looks like it's fresh off the dealership lot. Car wash kits come in various sizes, so they're ideal for holiday shoppers working with various budgets. Kits may include wet wax, wheel gel, glass cleaner, a short handle brush,

and microfiber towels, among other supplies. Each accessory within the kit can make cars or trucks shine and look as good as new.

■ **Mechanics' tool kit:** Many car lovers enjoy working on their vehicles almost as much as they love driving them. That makes a mechanic's tool kit a must-have for auto enthusiasts. Like car wash kits, mechanics' kits are ideal gifts because they can suit shoppers working with various budgets. Extensive kits include all the tools car lovers need, from ratchets to extension bars to sockets and more, to spend a fun day working in the garage.

■ **Tire inflator:** All those miles on the open road is bound to catch up with tires over time, and a portable tire inflator can ensure tires are always properly inflated. Cordless varieties are popular, but so are options that

can be plugged into vehicle lighters. Either way, this is a must-have item for anyone who puts a lot of miles on their vehicle.

■ **Autocross lesson:** Of course, gifts for auto lovers needn't be restricted to helping them take care of their own cars. Autocross lessons can teach drivers the finer points of timed competitions while enabling them to get behind the wheel of an exotic car they've dreamed of driving. Autocross schools typically have classes for drivers with experience as well as novices, making this a fun gift for anyone who wants to take the thrill of driving to the next level.

There's no shortage of gift ideas to please the auto enthusiast on your holiday shopping list this year. From the fun to the functional, there's something for everyone who loves being behind the wheel.



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Gifts for people who adore the great outdoors

Metro Creative Connection

Certain people feel right at home in the great outdoors. With the sun on their faces and the wind in their hair, rock scramblers and kayaking buffs simply can't get enough of being outside in the elements.

Outdoor enthusiasts need reliable gear to make their experiences that much more enjoyable. Brandon Gaille Small Business & Marketing Advice reports that \$230.6 billion was spent worldwide on sportswear and outdoor apparel in 2021. However, there's always room to improve on adventures large and small, and holiday shoppers can keep these items in mind as they look for items for their favorite nature lover this season.

■ **Plasma lighter:** A plasma lighter can start fires in conditions that aren't conducive to other fire-starting measures. Plasma lighters are water- and wind-resistant and work in nearly all weather conditions. Saberlight even makes a rechargeable option with USB charging cable.

■ **Lantern:** Outside magazine recently named the BioLite AlpenGlow 250 as its

new favorite road trip item. It can be used in a variety of settings, including inside a tent or at a hunting cabin, and produces customizable illumination.

■ **Backpack cooler:** Yeti is known as a leader in coolers, and the Yeti Hopper Backflip Soft Cooler makes carrying food and beverages even more convenient. This product is a backpack and a cooler, so it's a hands-free and portable option when out in nature.

■ **Hiking socks:** Keeping feet cool and comfortable is essential on hiking trips. Injinji socks are made from CoolMax fibers that help provide a blister-free wilderness experience designed to minimize friction.

■ **Waterproof backpack:** Whether a loved one spends time in or near the water or just wants to safeguard his or her belongings in inclement weather, a waterproof backpack is the ideal outdoor gift. It's easy to clean and keeps items inside dry. IDRYBAG Waterproof Backpack is one to consider.

■ **Lightweight sleeping bag:** Maybe someone's sleeping gear needs an overhaul? Enlightened Equipment offers an 850-fill, zero-degree



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sleeping bag that is warm, but only weighs 1.5 pounds. That helps free up space and lessens hikers' loads when carrying gear on the trail.

■ **Power bank/solar charger:** Many people can't live without their devices, even when out in the great outdoors. Since you can't plug a phone into a tree, a portable solar charger and power

bank is key. The BioLite SolarPanel 5+ comes with its own built-in battery, so a person can capture the sun's rays during the day and save some power reserves for

charging after sunset. These are just a few of the innovative items that can appeal to outdoor enthusiasts on your holiday shopping list.

Hand made gifts for makers, the home, families and more

Metro Creative Connection

Woodcraft is ready to help you stay ahead of the holiday shopping season. These gift ideas, curated from thousands of products available at Woodcraft, should please the consistent project builders, those who do home maintenance and families who cherish spending time together.

PROJECTS TO MAKE OR GIVE AS GIFTS

Cutting boards play a major role in kitchens. You can easily craft one or more eye-catching boards for gifts

with a kit from Woodcraft, like the 3/4" x 91/2" x 16" one pictured. The 17 pieces of the Small Exotic Cutting Board Kit include Brownwood, Marblewood, Purpleheart, Wenge and Maple, all hand selected, kiln-dried and surfaced on four sides - ready for you to arrange as you choose, glue, clamp, sand and finish. Kits also make great gifts.

Create a custom game board using Sauers Chess or Checkers Wood Veneer. The 2" x 2" Natural and Black Dyed Maple Veneer pieces are adhered to a solid sheet

of Mahogany Veneer for added strength and stability. Apply this veneer to a stable, flat substrate like Baltic Birch Plywood, preferably 1/2" (12 mm) or 3/4" (18 mm). Veneer measures .036" x 19" x 19". Add a simple border or build your own custom frame.

FAMILY FUN TIME

Adults can join in helping children learn to build with the Woodcraft® Log Cabin Playset, made in Maine from Eastern White Pine since 1930. The 70-piece set includes versatile building blocks - everything to build a

classic log cabin.

Flags of Valor - Build your Own Wooden Flag Kit is an opportunity for families to work together to create patriotic art - two 5" x 8" wood flags. Two glue sticks, two pieces of sandpaper, two display easels and two activity books are included. You provide the markers, crayons or paint.

HANDY HELPERS FOR THE SHOP AND HOME

The comfortable WoodRiver® Adjustable Height Shop Stool has a tractor style seat, backrest and a bottom footrest ring. Seat adjusts 22" to 32"; holds 330 pounds; and is 41 3/4" high.

GRIP® LED Shop Light with flexible gooseneck uses batteries or a standard electrical outlet. Adjustable light width. Attach by a magnet to steel or iron surfaces or by the Accessory Clamping Bracket to 2 1/2" max material.

WoodRiver® Small Parts Organizer is a carry/storage case that includes 20 individual removable containers with transparent lids to protect contents from dust, dirt and moisture. Great for small parts, screws, sewing supplies, and a lot more.



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FastCap® Lefty/Righty Tape Measure is available in 16' and 25' versions. Innovative features include an erasable notepad and tape surfaces, dual thumb and finger locks, superior ergonomics, compact rubber casing, and a stainless-steel pencil sharpener.

AccuSharp® Pull-Through Knife Sharpener can make any double-edged western-style knife sharp in a hurry. The secret is the industrial quality, super hard carbide blades. Ceramic rods included for honing.

Have the right profile scraper available, whether you are scraping glue squeeze-out or stripping a piece of furniture, with the WoodRiver® Deluxe Scraper Set. Includes 5 3/4" hardwood handle and five blades: three concave, one convex and one straight.

Use the WoodRiver® Cordless Precision Engraver Pen to sign your woodworking or other craft projects; to

mark valuable items like scientific calculators, laptops, or guns; or to create designs on glass or ceramics and more. Powered by three AAA batteries (included), it has an aluminum body and a diamond tipped engraving bit.

Easily customize your lettered signs with the six different bits (1/4" shanks) in this Whiteside CNC Signmaking Router Bit Set.

Ideal for overhead drilling and driving, the Bosch 12V Max 3/8 Drill/Driver Kit is lightweight (1.8 pounds), has two speeds and provides 265 inch-pounds of max torque. Comes with two 12V Max Lithium-Ion 2.0 Ah Batteries, 12V Max Charger, two bits, and a carrying bag.

Use the Kreg® Drilling Guide to drill straight, accurate holes without a drill press. Six major drill bit sizes: 1/2", 3/8", 5/16", 1/4", 3/16" and 1/8". Stair-step bottom is self-centering on the edge of 3/4" and 1/2" material.

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Did you know?
 Shopping is foremost on the minds of many people come the holiday season. When considering loved ones and acquaintances while making holiday shopping lists, tangible gifts, such as clothing or items for the home, may be the first things that come to mind. However, experiential gifts also merit consideration.
 Experiential gifts are those that focus on experiences rather than items. These can include anything from a horseback riding adventure to a spa day to concert tickets to getting behind the wheel of a race car. Experiential gifts can be tailored to people's interests. A 2014 study by researchers at San Francisco State University showed people tend to realize greater well-being from life experiences and consider them to be a better way to spend their money.
 Overall satisfaction tends to be greater with gifted experiences than with material things. Furthermore, the Harris Group found that 72 percent of millennials actually want to spend more money on experiences rather than things.

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Gifts for foodies

Metro Creative Connection

Experiential gifts shift the emphasis from tangible items to building memories through experiences. Various studies have indicated that the memories gained through experiences may surpass the exhilaration and happiness of receiving a material item. What's more, experiential gifts may be something that people can share together — expanding the possibilities of gift-giving even further.

There are many different experiences to accommodate people's specific interests. People who enjoy spending time in the kitchen will undoubtedly be excited by these food-related experiential gifts.

CULINARY CLASSES

What better way to enjoy a passion for cooking than by learning more about techniques and terminology? Culinary classes can be the perfect avenue through which to gain more experience and instruction from professionals. While it's possible to enroll in a culinary school if the goal is to change careers, many different private classes are ideal for hobbyists, such as cake decorating lessons to classes catering to children and teens.

ATTEND A SHOW

Food as entertainment was first made popular by legendary television personality Julia Child. Child paved the way for many others, including professionally trained chefs and

those like Rachael Ray, who honed her self-taught skills through experience. Network food shows often tape in metropolitan areas like New York and Los Angeles. Research how to purchase tickets and give the experience of being an audience member.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE HOP

To promote local businesses, many cities and towns with strong hospitality markets organize seasonal restaurant tasting tours. For a predetermined price, participants gain entry to various establishments offering samples of their offerings. Gift-givers can purchase entry to these events, gifting a few people at the same time. Then the group can sip and nibble the day away.

PERSONAL CHEF FOR A DAY

Treat someone to a professionally prepared meal in his or her own home. Private caterers and personal chefs will sometimes offer their services and walk guests through the making of a meal — preparing it right before their eyes in one person's home. It's a great way to learn technique and gather with a few other lucky people to enjoy a delicious meal at home with little effort.

Food-based experiential gifts can treat any foodie to special memories that last a lifetime.



COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Great homemade food gifts for those with a sweet tooth

Metro Creative Connection

Gifts from the heart are among the most coveted and appreciated come the holiday season. Hobbyists from all walks of life can turn their passions into handmade gifts, but few gifts may be as welcomed as those that can be eaten.

Cooking and baking ramps up during the holiday season. People can turn extra time in the kitchen into opportunities to create festive treats that are ideal for gifting. But which items are the best of the best? Even though tastes are singular, these items will appeal to most foodies and others on your gift list.

■ Jams and preserves: Fruit jams and preserves are versatile foods. They are as

at home on toast and biscuits as they are as fillings in cookies and tarts. Jams and preserves can be made with relatively few ingredients and work well with seasonal fruits.

■ Cinnamon rolls: Warm, sticky and full of aromatic spice, cinnamon rolls are the perfect comfort foods. These rolls do not typically have a long shelf life, so be sure to present them promptly before they get stale.

■ Pancakes (or cookies) in a jar: If you have a fantastic recipe that you can't resist sharing, try turning it into a gift. Measure and package the ingredients into mason jars, tie with ribbons and include directions for preparation and cooking.

■ Mini bundt cakes: Fruit cakes may be a holiday stan-

dard, but bundt cakes make for great and traditional offerings as well. Miniature bundts filled with chocolate chips, dried fruits or even those soaked in a favorite boozy-butter glaze can be moist and delicious.

■ Chocolate barks or fudges: Seasonal flavors can come to life in chocolate treats. White chocolate filled with peppermint pieces or dark chocolate and cherry chunks are tasty pairings. Break apart portions of the bark or cut the fudge with cookie cutters and gift inside cello bags tied with ribbons or in cardboard candy boxes.

■ Cocktail syrups: Create spicy or sweet syrups that are tailor-made for enhancing cocktails. Anyone on your gift list can then become a master mixologist.

■ Shortbread cookie ornaments: Circular shortbread cookies can be decorated with royal icing to look like Christmas ornaments. They can be eaten or even placed on trees to complete holiday decor.

■ Festive cookie pops: Cookie pops can be made by mixing homemade or pre-purchased crumbled cake with frosting or softened cream cheese and formed into balls. Insert a lollipop stick and dip the balls into melted chocolate or candy melts. Sprinkles, nonpareils or luster dust can be used to enhance the covered pops.

Food gifts are perfect for the holiday season. Handmade treats from the heart show loved ones how just much you care.



COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Quick and easy Reindeer food

Servings: 24

Ingredients

- 1 (20 ounce) package miniature pretzels
- 1 (17.5 ounce) package crispy corn cereal squares (such as Corn Chex®)
- 1 (16 ounce) jar salted dry-roasted peanuts
- 1 (14 ounce) package candy-coated milk chocolate pieces (such as M&M's®)
- 24 ounces white chocolate, chopped

DIRECTIONS

Cover a large area of counter space with waxed paper and tape it down.

Mix pretzels, corn cereal, peanuts, and candy-coated milk chocolate pieces together in a large bowl.

Melt white chocolate in the top of a double

boiler over simmering water, stirring frequently and scraping down the sides with a rubber spatula to avoid scorching.

Pour melted white chocolate over pretzel mixture; stir to evenly coat. Quickly transfer mixture to the prepared waxed paper and spread in a thin layer; let cool completely, at least 30 minutes.

Break into pieces and store in an airtight container.



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How to navigate potential supply shortages this holiday season

Metro Creative Connection

The COVID-19 pandemic might not be over, but for much of the world, its darkest days are well in the rearview mirror. Despite that progress, a few lingering non-medical issues remain, including supply shortages.

Consumers across the globe have been forced to contend with supply shortages since the early days of the pandemic, and that same issue could cause problems this holiday season. Holiday shoppers can consider these tips as they try to navigate their way through another holiday season that could be affected by global supply chain issues.

■ **Shop local.** By mid-spring 2022, the National Retail Federation indicated that congestion at ports on the west coast of the United States had lessened significantly. But the NRF noted that the same

could not be said for ports on the east coast. Many big box retailers rely on imports to fill their shelves, and that could make it hard for such sellers to deliver items in time for the holiday season. Shopping local and buying items directly off the shelf can ensure no one is given an IOU this holiday season.

■ **Give gift cards.** If shipping estimates make it unlikely that gifts will arrive on time for the holiday season, pivot to gift cards. Put the amount of money you would have spent on the item on the card instead. For example, if an e-reader costs \$150, give a \$150 gift card in its place.

■ **Ship directly to recipients.** It might not offer the same heartwarming charm as handing a loved one a gift in person, but shipping gifts directly to their recipients increases the likelihood that the person will receive the gift by Chanukah or Christmas morning. Many

online retailers now offer wrapping at additional cost, and shoppers can splurge and have directly shipped gifts wrapped to add a more traditional feel to gift-giving.

■ **Give homemade gifts.** Homemade gifts, whether it's baked goods or crafts, don't need to be shipped, so there's no way such items will spend the holiday season sitting on a ship in a congested port. If you choose to make crafts, decide early what you want create so you can secure all of the necessary supplies in plenty of time to deliver the items during Chanukah or on Christmas morning.

Supply shortages could make for a tricky holiday season again this year. Planning ahead for such shortages can ensure gifts make it into the hands of loved ones without delay.



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Tips to prepare to host your favorite holiday guests



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They're back! Family, friends and acquaintances are once again taking up residence on cots and fold-out sofas across the country as loved ones gather to celebrate the holiday season. That's welcome news nearly three years after a pandemic first restricted such gatherings. But hosts must ask themselves: Am I ready to host house guests?

Travel is a big component of the holiday season. According to a 2021 survey by The Vacationer, a travel tip and vacation guide, nearly 63 percent of Americans age 18 or older planned to travel for at least one holiday in 2021, with most traveling in December. That marked a 37 percent increase in travel from a year prior. Holiday

travel for 2022 may be even higher as families adapt to life during the pandemic.

As individuals get ready to host holiday guests, here are some strategies to maximize space and make guests feel comfortable.

■ **Discuss plans in advance.** Every traveler is different. Some people thrive on making lists and following itineraries. Others fly by the seat of their pants. It's reasonable to ask potential house guests how they envision their visit, including if they plan to stay long and if it will include sleeping over. This way you can make accommodations accordingly, particularly if guests request to borrow a vehicle or want to see the sights.

■ **Create some extra privacy.** While some homes

are equipped to handle guests comfortably, smaller homes may not be equipped with such luxuries. Folding screens can be used to create a barrier and add some privacy in open spaces where guests will be staying.

■ **Stash away travel samples.** Travel-sized soaps, shampoos and lotions can make guests feel more welcome. Stock up at the grocery store or pharmacy and leave them in the room where guests will be staying.

■ **Stock up on new linens.** Treat guests to fresh fluffy towels and new bed linens, especially if it's been awhile since you have restocked these items.

■ **Ask about food preferences.** Your guests may not want to munch on kale chips and tofu hot dogs apart from

the holiday meal. Don't push your food restrictions on others. Ask guests what they typically eat and then fill the pantry and refrigerator with some of the items they mention. When guests need snacks, they'll have familiar foods on hand.

■ **Be mindful of bedtimes.** Consider guests' preferences about bedtimes. While you may be a night owl, some guests may hit the hay much earlier, particularly older relatives or those with young children. If need be, make an effort to be quiet when kids or early birds are staying over.

Hosting for the holidays requires a little creativity and flexibility. All that effort is well worth it when loved ones have a good time while staying over.



As we pause to give thanks for all of our blessings, we count friends and customers like you among them. Thank you for your support and faith in us.



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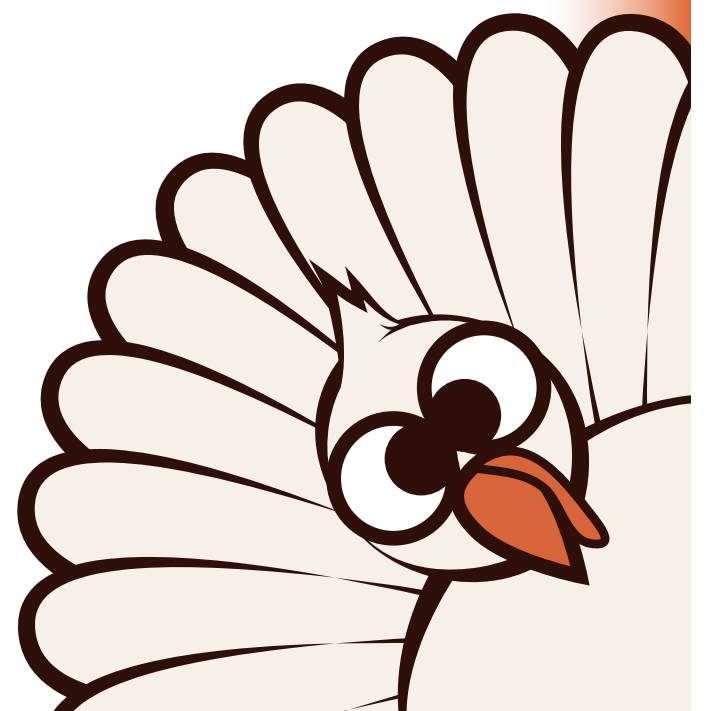
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