

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.



Christmas eve traditions

Christmas Eve is one of the most tradition-filled days on the calendar. From wide-eyed children to full-grown adults, it is a special day that fills our bodies with anticipation and excitement. And sugar. Don't forget the sugar.

Cookies and treats aside, it's easy to start a Christmas Eve tradition. You just need a dash of imagination and a pinch of youthful exuberance to make it happen.

Don't forget to include lessons about the true meaning of Christmas if you're looking to involve the kids with your traditions. It's easy to get wrapped up in the presents, decorations and cookies, but teaching children about the meaning of Christmas from a young age can be one of the most important traditions you make for your family.

Head to church

Many churches will have special Christmas Eve services to help celebrate the season. Carve out a couple of hours of your day or night to join your church members in doing just that. Teach your children the stories of Christmas and how it has come to be such a big part of our lives.

Spend time together as a family discussing the meaning of Christmas over a nice meal after church. Ask your children questions to pique their interest and test their knowledge. If they're old enough, encourage them to continue researching the topic on their own time — not just at Christmastime.

Santa time

Many families have an elder uncle or grandparent play the role of St. Nick on Christmas Eve. Enlist the help of a willing participant and start the tradition in your family.

Make reindeer sounds on the roof to excite the youngsters and have Santa show up with a full sack of toys. Have Santa take a seat near the tree and have each child come up for their chance to sit on his lap and receive their presents. This can create magical memories for children — and adults — that last for years to come.

New pajamas

What's better than a set of new pajamas on Christmas Eve? Watch the holiday spirit envelop you and yours as you settle into your new comfy PJs on the couch for a marathon Christmas movie night.

Find pajamas that are brightly colored and vibrantly designed in holiday themes.

The more fun and outrageous your holiday pajamas are the better — and try to find matching sets for the family and even family pets to really create some family camaraderie.