

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 local connection.

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), but just hitting the streets to do some window shopping is a great way to bond with your family and friends.

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



Remember to get cash

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.

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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.

CHECK LOCAL SHOPS

Some local stores have started offering gift card options for customers, be it a rechargeable card or a gift certificate. It makes for a more personal gift than a generic gift card. If you find a store you think your loved one would like, get a gift card and let them enjoy shopping and picking out their favorite item.

OR A COFFEE SHOP

A \$20 or \$30 gift card can stretch a good distance at a coffee house or bakery.