

Christmas Shopping Guide

Specials and gift ideas from local merchants,
plus a sleighload of holiday stories.



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Hanging stockings is a popular global tradition. **Page 11.**

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SECTION B



ROBERT NICKELL/CREATORS.COM

Robert Nickell reads a Christmas story to his son.



DEBBIE ANDERSEN/CREATORS.COM

Celebrate Christmas with a bang by giving guests "poppers," which hide trinkets.

Christmas games, activities for the whole family

By KRISTEN CASTILLO
Creators.com

The Christmas holiday is a great time to take a break from routine and indulge in family fun. Read on for holiday activities and games that will keep kids of all ages entertained.

Party poppers

Christmas dinner "starts off with a bang" for Debbie Andersen and her family. Dinner guests pull apart a noisemaker holiday decoration called a "popper" or a "cracker."

"Each person at the table crosses his or her arms, and instead of holding hands with the person on either side of them, they each hold one end of the popper," says Andersen. "On the count of three, everyone pulls the popper toward themselves — similar to pulling a wishbone — ripping it open."

Made of paper towel rolls stuffed with trinkets, candy and a popping device, these poppers are an enjoyable way to celebrate the holiday. You can even make your own poppers and decorate them with the family using Christmas wrapping paper and ribbon. Find popper-crafting instructions online at <http://PineapplesAndPalmtrees.com/Christmas-poppers>.

"The best part is it is a fun activity filled with silliness and laughter for all ages to share in creating lasting memories for all," says Andersen.

Game Time

"Christmas is a great time for families to put down their iPods, tablets and electronic games and gather around the table and play together," says Ginny Underwood of Virginia's Easy Living Solutions, who suggests families play board games, card games and put together puzzles.

"Playing games is a way for all to have fun, relax and spend time together — young and old, boys and girls, adults and children," Underwood says.

You can budget your gaming time on the needs of your family. Some games, such as card games, can start and finish in less than an hour, whereas board games such as Scrabble and Monopoly may

take a lot longer.

Interactive games, such as charades, can get all the guests involved.

Robert "Daddy" Nickell, a father of seven and founder of dad apparel company DaddyScrubs, suggests Christmas-themed charades in which "each person reenacts something that has to do with Christmas," such as reindeer, elves making toys or Santa checking his gift list.

"This is sure to bring a night of laughs for the whole family!" says Nickell, who suggests another Christmas game, called "What's In The Stocking?", which involves filling a large Christmas stocking with 20 holiday items, such as unbreakable ornaments, pine cones, pens and paper.

"Have the family members pass around the stocking and, without peeking, reach inside and then write down what they think the objects are and how many objects are in the stocking," Nickell says. "The person who guesses the most correct objects and closest number gets a small prize."

Scavenger hunts

Get the whole family involved in a holiday scavenger hunt. You can buy scavenger kits or make your own. The Christmas-focused treasure hunts encourage guest interactions and make everyone excited about the holiday.

Masters of the Hunt, a company that produces holiday team building scavenger hunts, sells a Christmas scavenger hunt that encourages guests to work together.

"One year, I used the hunt to lead my son out to the garage, where a brand-new bike was waiting for him," says Kerri Bishop, employee at Masters of the Hunt. "He found the first clue in the tree and then went all around the house finding additional clues until the last one led him out to the garage. It is a really fun way to make that special gift even more special."

Affordable activities

You don't have to spend a lot of money to have meaningful family time at Christmas.

Kids and adults will enjoy inexpensive activities such as making

cookies or cocoa, playing Christmas bingo or caroling through the neighborhood.

Test your performance skills with Christmas karaoke, sing-alongs and dancing. Even if you miss a dance step or forget the lyrics,

chances are you'll still have a blast.

No matter which games and activities you choose, remember that the objective is to have a good time and encourage family togetherness.

"Having fun during the holidays is about reminding ourselves this is a time to bond our family and create lasting memories. Remember to make the traditions fun, as the routines are boring," says Nickell.

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