

Survival Guide: Day After Christmas Shopping

The day after Christmas is a great time to stock up on holiday supplies for next year - everything from wrapping paper to tree lights to home decorations. You can also find great deals on toys and electronics for future gifts (think birthdays or even next Christmas). And, while you're stocking up on gifts, pick up some \$5-10 holiday items at the 50% off price to use for Secret Santa gift exchanges and stocking stuffers the following year.

No doubt you will be called "crazy" for wanting to brave the early morning crowd. Maybe that's true. But, with a little planning and a good attitude you can shop the sales like a pro and still get to the office on time...or perhaps enjoy a relaxing breakfast out with friends. Here are a few tips and tricks to surviving the early morning rush:

1. **Preview the Sale Ads** - Set aside a few moments on Christmas day to rest, appreciate the wonderful day, smile at your lovely children...and look through the sale ads. Check to see what times the stores open - some may open as early as 4:00 am, others not until 6:00 or even 7:00.
2. **Must Have List** - Use the ads to jot down a "must have" list. Of course you're going to want to stock up on wrapping paper and bags and scotch tape, but if there's anything special you want (say a new tree or giant inflatable snow man or light up flamingo) make a note of what stores will have those items on sale. Keep in mind that some stores may sell out quickly - its always a good idea to have a back up store in mind. You may also jot down any supplies you do NOT need - say you have 7 rolls of wrapping paper left over, you probably don't want to buy any more.
3. **Plan Your Route** - This is especially important if you have somewhere to be later in the day - like work or a family event. Plan which stores you will visit first based on the times they open and on your "must have" list. Save less important stops for the end of the trip incase you run out of time. (Don't overlook discount and/or craft stores like HomeGoods, TJ Maxx, Hobby Lobby, Michael's. These stores often have fabulous home decor items as well as gift wrapping supplies at equally fabulous discount prices.)
4. **Schedule for the Crowd** - It will be busy. There will be lines...long...long lines. You will need to be mentally prepared to wait...PATIENTLY. Especially if you have somewhere to be, make sure you plan for delays.
5. **Shop with a Friend** - If you're anything like me, getting up early is very low on your list of things you want to do the day after Christmas. Plan on meeting a friend so you have the motivation to get up and go. You'll have more fun together. Plus, when you enter the Target Christmas section and realize you can't get your buggy within 30 feet of the isle it will be nice to have a buddy to take turns with - she goes down the isle to shop, you stay with the buggy, swap.
6. **Dress in Layers** - It's cold outside (especially if you arrive prior to opening time and have to wait outside the store) but when you're in the store, elbow to elbow with 50 or so less-than-friendly shoppers crammed in the Christmas card isle it's going to be a bit toasty.
7. **Starbucks Stop** - It's early. You need coffee. Trust me. Maybe a snack too.
8. **Don't Take Your Kids** - This really shouldn't need explanation. But, even if you're brave enough to tote your little ones along during the wee morning hours, for the sake of your fellow shoppers please leave the cranky little angles at home in their bed (with proper supervision, of course).
9. **Enjoy Breakfast** - If you don't have anywhere to go, having breakfast at your favorite pancake house is a great reward after a few hours of deal finding.
10. **Enjoy Your Savings** - Next year when you unpack all your Christmas decorations it will be exciting to get out all of your "new" decor knowing you paid half price or less.

Above all, mentally prepare yourself to have a good experience. Plan to be kind and courteous to the other shoppers and store employees. It will be crowded, items will be out of stock, prices will ring up wrong, some lady will deliberately push your buggy out of the way and elbow you in the back to beat you to the last 7' pre-lit tree. Don't let the crankiness and frustrations of your fellow early morning shoppers affect how you feel and how you treat others. Decide ahead of time to have fun and enjoy the day regardless of those you may encounter.

When the shopping is over and your bounty stored away for next year, there's only one thing left to do... take a nap.