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December's Best Shopping Deals

Black Friday is history, but December offers bargains too

By Beth Braverman,
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Whether or not you've finished your holiday shopping, you can still find good deals on a variety of items in December.

With many products, getting the best price in December is a waiting game — the later in the month you make the purchase, the better the price you'll find. But you'll also likely find a slimmer selection, and you run the risk of the item selling out entirely.

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Another way to find value this month is to focus on bundled items. Whether you're shopping for cookware, tools or beauty products, you'll see retailers packaging multiple items for sale together at a price that's less than the products would cost individually, or throwing additional accessories in for free with the purchase.

In general, you'll find the biggest discounts in the week between Christmas and New Year's, when retailers are trying to move inventory that didn't sell for the holidays — and tempt buyers coming in with returns or gift cards to pick up something extra.

If that's too late for you, keep your eyes peeled for deals on so-called Green Monday, which takes place on the second Monday in December (Dec. 11 this year) and has historically represented the last day you can order items with free shipping for delivery by Christmas. That said, Julie Ramhold, senior staff writer and consumer analyst at DealNews, recommends checking the individual retailer's shipping policies, since they can vary significantly.

Here's a look at some of the categories where, according to shopping experts, you'll find sales this time of year, as well as where to shop and how much you could possibly save.

Tools

Whether you're planning on tackling a home improvement or looking to gift some new equipment to your favorite DIYer, you'll find a wide range of tools on sale this month. Keep an eye out for bundled deals, in which you can get a bigger discount for purchasing a few items at once. Stick with hand tools and small power tools this month, however. Discounts on larger equipment and winter-focused supplies like snowblowers will be better after the New Year.

Where to find deals: Lowe's, Home Depot, Ace Hardware

Potential savings: 40 to 60 percent

Loungewear and lingerie

Victoria's Secret typically holds its second semiannual sale right after Christmas, with discounts on items in all categories, including underwear, pajamas and bathing suits. Competitors may drop their prices on these items as well in a bid to steal some revenue from the category's market leader while consumer attention is higher.

"Smaller brands may not have the same sort of blowout sale prices, but it still might be worth checking if there's a brand that you really like," Ramhold says. "The bigger chains will have bigger sales."

Where to find deals: Victoria's Secret, Frederick's of Hollywood, ThirdLove

Potential savings: 40 to 60 percent

Beauty sets

Beauty advent calendars and more general holiday-themed packaged sets of makeup or skin care already offer value to customers, but as the month goes on, prices will drop significantly. Retailers know they can't sell these items any other time of the year, so they price them aggressively. You'll find the best deals at department stores, but you may also see discounts on lower-end cosmetic sets at pharmacies.

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Where to find deals: Macy's, Nordstrom, JCPenney

Potential savings: 50 percent or more

Smart home devices

Even without discounts, the prices for many Internet of Things devices have been falling, as widespread adoption has reduced some demand. But many retailers may offer additional deals this month, with bundled packages that might include, for example, a smart home security system sold with smart locks and a doorbell included, says Sarah Jankowski, director of user growth at Shopkick.

"Smart home devices are a great gift, but this is also an opportunity to buy something for your own home and invest in those devices that you might want for yourself," she adds.

Where to find deals: Best Buy, Walmart, Google store

Potential savings: 10 to 20 percent

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Gift cards

You may be able to stretch your gift card budget in the last few weeks of the shopping season, as many consumer-facing businesses offer cards at a discount this month. That can mean savings on both gift cards you're planning to bestow on others and those you purchase for yourself to get that discount on future purchases from that vendor.

Where to find deals: Target, local restaurants and national chains, spa and nail salons

Potential savings: 5 to 20 percent

Holiday decorations

Hanukkah falls early this year (Dec. 7–15), so you'll find discounts on Hanukkah items throughout the month. Meanwhile, you'll see the best deals on Christmas-themed decor starting a day or two before Christmas. But stock up quickly, since retailers usually price these items as low as possible to move the inventory out of the store.

Where to find deals: Amazon, HomeGoods, West Elm

Potential savings: 75 percent or more

Beth Braverman is a contributing writer who has covered shopping and personal finance for more than a decade. Her work has appeared in Consumer Reports, *CNNMoney.com, CNBC.com, and dozens of other outlets.*

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