

> GET OUT THERE, IF YOU DARE

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Sarah Giles says more than anything, shopping should be fun.

Patience. Lots of it. It's going to be crowded, and there will be lineups. For most retailers, Boxing Day is the biggest event of the year. Sarah Giles, who runs her own business as a personal shopper, worked in retail for 13 years. Her advice? "You should enjoy it," she urges. "Meet a friend, have lunch; it should be fun and if you get a couple of great deals, so much the better." On the other hand: "If you're going to get angry or irritated — if you're that personality type — it's probably not the best day to go shopping!" Fun is what Giles thinks the shopping experience should be, every day of the year. Still, she realizes not everyone finds this to be the case. As a personal shopper, her mission is to save her clients the hassle. She will, if requested, plunge into the Boxing Day fray. For those who do choose to brave it alone, Giles — and various salespeople around the city — offer a few tips for surviving the Boxing Day chaos, having a good time and maybe even scoring a few shopping victories:

Shop early. Except for those places with "door-crasher" sales, most stores are fairly quiet before noon. It's easier to browse, and you'll have a better chance of finding your sizes.

Be specific, says Giles; know what you're looking for and how much it usually costs, so you'll know if you're really getting a deal.

Some online research can save you time and trouble. Katie Goncharova, at Danier Leather, suggests visiting store websites and jotting down style numbers ahead of time, "so you don't waste your time" (or the staff's).

Despite the temptation to "grab and go," it's really advisable to try on clothing before buying it. If you need to return it later, there's no guarantee they'll still have your size.

"Know if it's a final sale," advises Giles. "Some stores won't issue you a store credit (if you need to return your purchase)."

Remember that Boxing Day is not the time to return unwanted gifts. Most stores will not process returns until several days after Christmas.

No matter what, there will be lineups. Long ones. "Make sure your phone is fully charged," advises one Walmart customer service manager. "Because when you're in line, that's going to be your source of entertainment."

Women: mind your purses. Crowds and chaos can make you careless and pickpockets thrive in such conditions.

Leave the little darlings at home. Kids and shopping are natural enemies at the best of times;

on Boxing Day, it's a really bad idea to drag them along. They'll be unhappy and in the way. And, as Brittany Gudgeon at Aldo points out, "There'll be no room for strollers" on the busiest shopping day of the year.

Finally, Giles says, "Be really sure you're prepared for this. You may be disappointed — or it may be the best shopping experience of your life." Donna Yawching

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