

Seven tips for ethical shopping this Christmas

December 9 2023, by Simon Oldham and Laura Spence



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

As you walk into a shop or go online hunting for Christmas gifts, it can feel pretty daunting. Who needs what, how much will it cost, will they like it? But also very important: am I making a good choice in where I am shopping?

To tick that last (ethical) box, many of you will rightly be wanting to buy from local retailers this festive season. Small businesses are the cornerstones of local economies, providing essential goods and services and vital community engagement. They [contribute £2.4 trillion](#) a year to the UK economy and provide 16.7 million jobs, yet many [are struggling](#) with the cost of living crisis and particularly in need of support at the moment.

When it comes to ethical purchasing from shops—or other businesses such as local manufacturers—[our study](#) of the research literature suggests it's wise not to make assumptions. There can be considerable variations in how [shops approach](#) issues like [environmental sustainability](#) and fair treatment of employees.

It's not always obvious what the policies are, since these businesses can shy away from talking directly to customers about this subject. This can mean they are not rewarded for doing the right thing, so taking some time to find out their policies may have a disproportionately positive impact.

To help you buy as ethically as possible this Christmas, here are seven tips.

1. Look for clues

If you are shopping in-store, look out for posters, ethical pledges, or awards that show some commitment to, for example, reducing the [business's](#) carbon footprint or paying employees a decent wage. You can

also check in-store or online whether the business has an in-built social or environmental purpose, for instance, whether it is a [social enterprise](#), [B-corp](#) or cooperative.

2. Listen to staff

Workers in small retailers often describe a relaxed and family-like experience, but there are exceptions. Take a moment to consider whether the staff seem happy in their work and are confident and supported in what they are doing.

Also be aware that there are occasional examples of retailers using illegally employed labor, paying below the [minimum wage](#), or exploiting workers in other ways. Tread carefully if you have suspicions—you could unintentionally make things worse for the workers by asking too many questions. The charity [Unseen](#) is a great source of advice in such situations.

3. Go eco

Look out for businesses that offer environmentally friendly options like organic, recycled, and upcycled products or that specialize in only selling eco-products. Check out a website like [Ethical Revolution](#) for recommendations.

4. Ask questions

Buzzwords like "ethical", "sustainable", "natural," and "locally sourced" have become commonplace, but how a retailer defines and commits to them can be very different. Take the word sustainable. For some businesses, this may mean they comprehensively try and reduce their footprint across the board, while for others, it may mean something

much more simple like trying to recycle or reduce their energy consumption.

If you aren't sure what a business means by a word or phrase, don't be afraid to have a chat and clarify with them. Equally, take a moment to ask about the provenance of a particular product, item, or ingredient. Even if the answer isn't ideal, you will learn a lot if the staff are aware and interested themselves.

5. Get familiar

Many third-party labels indicate a product's social and environmental impact. Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance, Carbon Neutral and Forest Stewardship Council are all examples from a long list, some of which provide more assurance than others. Not all require a business to be checked or verified by an independent body before they can use the label, for instance. [This list](#) is a good guide to what these labels really mean.

6. Ask around

Small retailers often don't shout about the excellent work they do, such as helping the [local community](#), going above and beyond for staff, or significantly reducing their environmental footprint. It can be just something they do as part of their [identity and purpose](#).

So keep your eyes open locally and ask friends and colleagues if they hear good things about particular retailers. When you come across one that stands out, shout about it on [social media](#). Also keep an eye on the local media, including social, since they have a role to play in identifying and promoting businesses that positively contribute to their community.

7. Take the long view

Just like people, no organization is perfect. Try to be supportive and help your [local businesses](#) to improve. There may be a few unscrupulous ones making exaggerated claims, but most are just doing their best, so it's good to encourage those taking steps in an ethical direction. Give them your repeat business where you see engagement and improvements and let them know you care.

Christmas, it must be said, can be a somewhat uncomfortable mix of goodwill and raging consumerism. Of course, there is lots we can do to avoid unnecessary purchases—such as buying second-hand or vintage, re-gifting, or donating to charity instead.

But when we do buy something new, it feels great to do so in a way which helps others. So support local, ethical stores as much as you can to help them go from strength to strength and continue contributing positively to the community.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Seven tips for ethical shopping this Christmas (2023, December 9) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-12-ethical-christmas.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--