

Hello I'm Dennis, one of Santa's helpers. In 2008 I opened my rented Brisbane house and gave everything away. Since then, I run free Christmas shops.

This year is my 8th free Xmas shop in Ocean Shores shopping centre in NSW. Everything is free. Everything is new. Everyone is welcome. We open 18th to 24th December 9am to 6pm daily. I borrow a free shop, get free insurance, tables, covers, signs, shop cleaning, tree and decorations. No empty shops are available this year so the lovely people from the church next to K-Hub offered their hall for the Xmas shop. It's the corner of Rajah Road and Bindaree Way, Ocean Shores.

Santa asked me to share his tips to make your Christmas special.

It's a nice idea to have a family meeting to plan your Christmas period; locations, outings and times. All meals and menus: shopping, preparing, cooking, serving and cleaning. Make a list of the food everyone loves: e.g. I love organic salads, apple pie, sugar cane juice and pumpkin pie.

Wow! Do this for everyone. Light fruit salads, organic chickens to cook (easier and cheaper than turkey) salads and special deserts. Consider having no fast food and less alcohol, sugary drinks, greasy food, lollies and chips. Overeating is voluntary but not best to start a New Year. Make or buy health snacks, cakes, bars, breads and almond/coconut balls. Add delicious non-alcoholic wines, fresh fruit juices, home made ginger beer and cookies, unusual herb teas and fresh drinking water. Some organic ice creams are superb. Do some early sampling.

Working your plans prevents last minute rushing around and stress. It allows you to relax for a peaceful Xmas period together. It's a holiday – so plan to enjoy it. If the house, backyard or garage needs spring cleaning, get everything done early. The key is scheduling!

Don't buy so much it hurts the budget. Make thoughtful presents. More loving than pricing. You can limit the number of gifts or even the shopping budget. Discuss it. Think of giving services. Either offer them yourself or buy a gift voucher. Suggestions are massage, house cleaning, health program, fully installed veg garden, guitar or exercise course, car or house repair, lawns mowed or make them a craft item. Such things are usually greatly appreciated.

Plan your outings or days. Lots of potential games, music sheet sing-a-long or amateur hour. Don't forget Xmas carols - perhaps on Xmas Eve with candles. Memorable! Swimming, water games, boat hire, etc. Cricket or badminton. Perhaps have less electronics and more of the games we used to play as kids. Special gifts of things we can do together; build a plane, train, a cubby or dolls house. or even a pre-planned bird aviary. Children love, most of all and forever remember, your focused time with them.

Quietly chatting about the past year or planning the future can be a special time. You can create a story-book film of this beautiful experience - to show over the years.

Do plan a special Xmas card for everyone. Take the time to paint, design, draw or sew it yourself and tell each person why you love them. What it really means to have them in your life.

It's beautiful to thank people who help us. A favourite mechanic, workmate, lawnmower, someone or a singer at the local shops. Your note to people who made a difference in your live will make a difference in theirs.

Ways to help others? Perhaps shop for elderly neighbours or help with things in their home; or recruit a team to mow lawns to make everyone's home lovely. Help homeless people with some free camping gear or a Christmas meal you put together in a white foam ice-box, or invite someone home to share your families joy.

Is it not true that giving isn't just the quickest way to change ourselves and our world. It's the only way?

Never let anyone say there's no Santa. I spend lots of time with him. Some can't see him easily, like God. Santa tells me he lives in everyone's heart.

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