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Holiday Shoppers Are Spending More, But Not Where You Think

By Naveen Jaggi, Contributor. I write about consumer trends shaping the f... Follow Author

Published Nov 10, 2026, 10:38am EST, Updated Nov 10, 2026, 03:50pm EST

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Summary SPONSORED BY servicenow

U.S. consumers plan to spend nearly 10% more this holiday season, averaging $1,243 per person, according to JLL's 2026 Holiday Shopping Report. However, much of that extra money is directed toward dining, entertainment, and

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Friends shopping together at the mall this holiday season.
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Holiday shoppers are opening their wallets again, but that doesn't mean business as usual for retailers. After last year's pullback, Americans plan to spend nearly 10% more this holiday season, according to JLL's 2026 Holiday Shopping Report. The catch? Much of that extra money is going toward dining, entertainment and celebrations, while gift budgets are barely budging.



Shopping habits are changing, too. Enclosed malls are making a comeback, AI is influencing what consumers buy and where they shop, and visiting a variety of stores appears to matter more than lingering for hours. For shopping center owners, the challenge is turning those changing habits into more visits and purchases across their properties.



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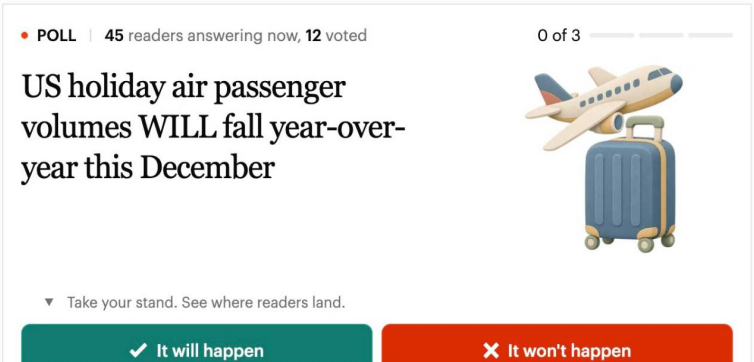
2026 Holiday Spending To Top $1 Trillion As Consumers Pull Back Spending

By Sharon Edelson



Consumers Plan Bigger Holiday Budgets, But Shorter Gift Lists

Consumers are planning to spend more this holiday season, though gifts are taking a smaller share of the budget. JLL's survey of 1,054 U.S. consumers puts average planned holiday spending at $1,243, up 9.7% from last year and approaching the 2024 peak of $1,261. Gift budgets are growing just 3.1%, compared with 16% for food and decorations and 17.3% for holiday experiences.



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Inflation remains a concern for 71.6% of shoppers, but few are responding by chasing discounts or buying cheaper gifts. Instead, more shoppers are cutting people from their lists altogether. This year, 28.9% plan to buy for fewer recipients, up from 24.9% in 2025. That's a tougher proposition for retailers: You can't upsell someone who isn't on the list.

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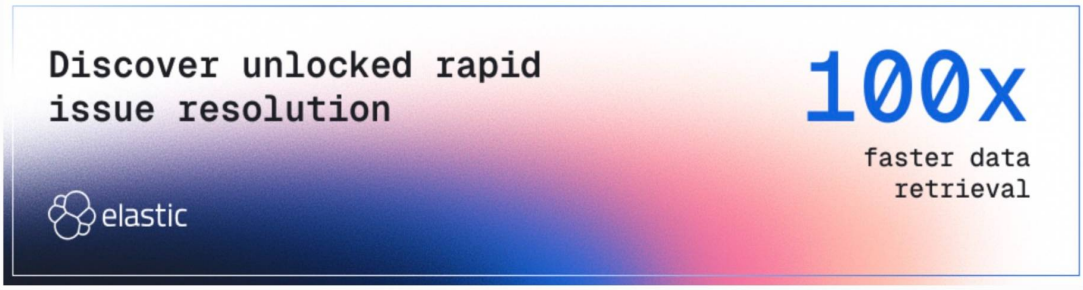

Gift bundles, accessible price points and gift cards may help retailers keep those recipients on the list. But shopping centers may find a bigger opportunity beyond gifts, particularly among restaurants and entertainment tenants benefiting from increased spending on experiences.



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The pull of experiences is strongest among Gen Z. Gen Z will spend less overall than any other generation, yet $245 (32.2%) of its smaller budget is going toward entertainment and experiences, the highest experiential share of any generation. As JLL's report puts it, "the one thing Gen Z protects is the fun." For shopping centers, that's a reminder that dining and entertainment tenants can draw even budget-conscious visitors.

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Why Stores Matter More Than Ever This Holiday Season

By Jill Standish



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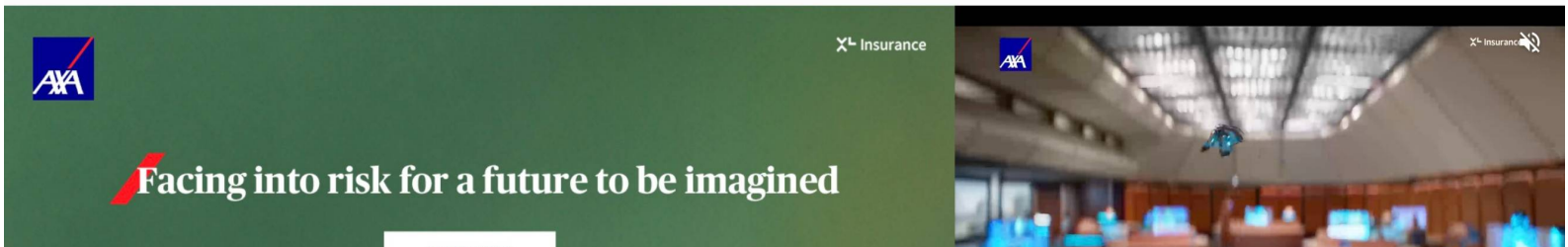



More Store Mix, More Spending

Longer shopping trips don't necessarily mean bigger budgets. Planned spending peaks among consumers expecting visits of 60 to 75 minutes, averaging $1,594, before declining among those staying more than 90 minutes. But the variety of stores visited tells a more interesting story: Shoppers browsing seven or more retail categories have budgets exceeding $2,000, more than three times those visiting just one or two.

The average consumer plans to visit about five stores, and the share of shoppers planning 10 or more stops has risen from 7.8% to 12%. Cross-promotions, clear directories and convenient pickup options can help shoppers discover more stores along the way, turning a trip for one gift into an opportunity to browse a bookstore or beauty retailer.

Consumers Plan To Shop At Malls This Holiday Season

Enclosed malls have been declared obsolete more times than most retailers would care to count, yet they're the only shopping channel gaining ground this season. More than half of consumers (55.3%) plan to visit one, up from 49.9% last year. Online delivery remains the most popular option at 80%, though that's down from 83.9% in 2025.

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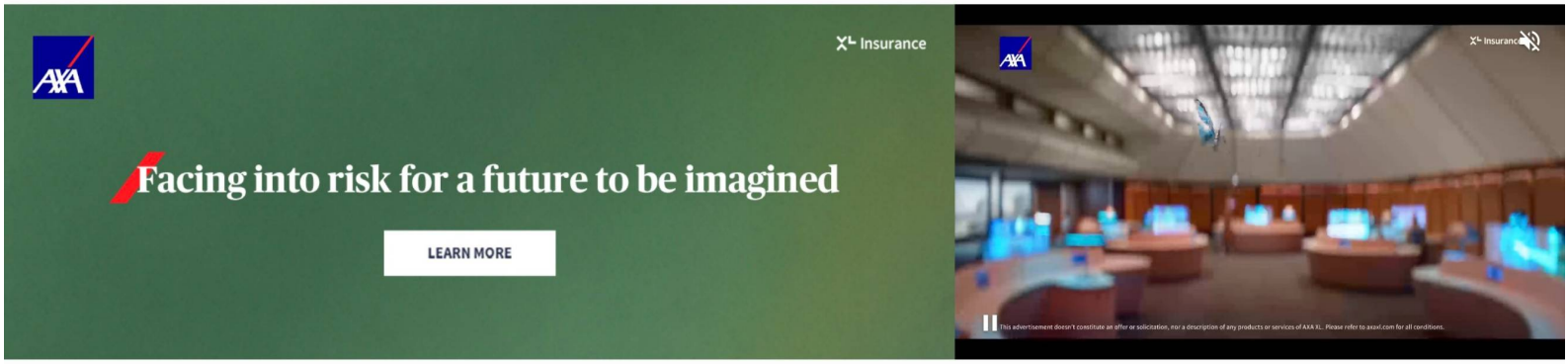

Mall shoppers report larger planned holiday budgets, averaging $1,357 versus $1,101 among other consumers, and longer visits of 67 minutes versus 48 minutes. Department stores are also regaining ground, with planned visitation climbing to 53.4%, nearly matching mass merchandisers at 54.6%.

The return of mall shoppers is encouraging, but owners still need to turn foot traffic into sales by drawing visitors beyond department stores and into specialty retailers, restaurants and services throughout the center.

Dining Out Becomes Part Of The Routine

Holiday shopping isn't all about shopping. Dining out is the most popular seasonal experience, with 93.2% of consumers planning restaurant visits, averaging about six between November and December. That's roughly twice as many outings as moviegoers have planned.

More shoppers are making food and drinks a regular part of their trips. One in five (20.8%) plans to stop for refreshments every time they shop, up from 12.2% last year. They're also among the bigger holiday spenders, with average planned budgets of $1,909 compared with $686 for those who never stop.

Shoppers are more likely to grab coffee, snacks or fast food than sit down for a full-

entertainment venues can draw visitors back long after the gift shopping is done.

AI Joins The Holiday Shopping List

Wondering what to buy a hard-to-shop-for relative? There's a good chance someone is asking a chatbot. In its first survey of AI use, JLL found that six in 10 consumers plan to use it for holiday shopping, particularly for gift ideas (40.5%) and discounts (33.7%). Nearly one in five (19.4%) will use it to decide where to shop.

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