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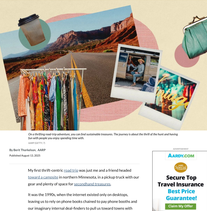
AARP MAGAZINE | Hands

Hit the Road for a Thrift Trip

They're eco-friendly, dust-focused and lots of fun. Live National Thrift Shop Day on Aug. 17 as your excuse to take one.



Jo Ann Hillenger and her daughter Lori, who can find outstanding treasures. The pieces in about the thrift of the heart and hearing Lori with people who says spending time with.

MARY CHAPMAN

By Barb Trachtman, AARP
Updated August 12, 2021

My first thrift center: Goodwill was just one of a handful of stores located in Lewiston in northern Minnesota. It's a place track with our gear and plenty of space for secondhand treasures.

It was the 1990s, when the Internet existed only on dinosaurs, meaning so to rely on phone books channel to you phone books and our imaginary internal drive readers to pull so toward towns with Truth of thrift stores. We found them, and though I can't recall our exact scores, I do remember an adorable small-town café and a late night by the campfire filled with laughter and conversation. Some version of a thrift trip has been a constant within my travel repertoire ever since.

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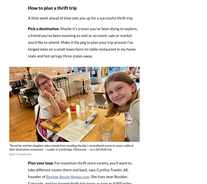
I think of them as leisurely treasure hunts that help me fill my home and closet with unique, eco-friendly and stylish finds. Thrift trips while exploring a destination with people I love. I've enjoyed them with Generation X friends and, more recently, my Generation Z kids, who like that I can splurge on multiple unique T-shirts or an ironed basics for the price of one new group.



Thrift trips are another fun way to bond with someone's child. Here, Barb Trachtman's daughter Lori and her friend Jessica explore a Goodwill in Minneapolis.

MARY CHAPMAN

Their generation is driving the current secondhand surge as they discover the benefits and charms that Gen X and Millennial parents have long understood. Individualism, sustainability and budget friendliness — especially ideal for older adults on a fixed income or anyone navigating a tight money — rank among the top reasons people buy secondhand, according to ThredUp's 2020 Resale Report.

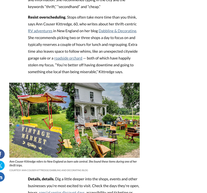
"Thrifting is a great way to find unique, well-made clothing while cutting back on waste," says Terran Fielder, a Gen Z media specialist at EarthEasy.org, the organization behind Earth Day. She recently went thrifting with her Gen X mom in New York City. "Doing it with someone who has a strong sense of personal style, especially someone older who's seen trends come and go, makes it even more fun and meaningful."

With National Thrift Shop Day coming on Aug. 17, AARP spoke with some longtime thrift lovers across the country for tips and tricks on making the most of your own journey.

How to plan a thrift trip

A little work ahead of time sets you up for a successful thrift trip.

Pick a destination. Maybe it's a town you've been dying to explore, a friend you've been meaning to visit or an event, sale or market you'd like to attend. Make it the jump to plan your trip around. I've binged some on a small town I've fallen in love with in my home state and hot springs three states away.



The writer and her daughter Lori, who found a treasure in the city's secondhand scene in a video called "Best destination restaurant — Lauter in Cambridge, Minnesota" — on a thrift trip.

MARY CHAPMAN

Plan your loop. For maximum thrift store variety, you'll want to take different routes there and back, says Carolina Toledo, 68, founder of Review Revue Resources. She lives near Boulder, Colorado, and has logged thrift trips lasting as long as 6,000 miles.

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Sketch in stops. Washington DC, area Gen Xer Anne Sundstrom, who posts her vintage finds and style tips on Instagram at thepickedfinch, uses her navigation app to scout where she's going for vacay. If you're unfamiliar with this helpful, easy-to-use feature, do a little research to find out how it works on your phone. Most platforms, such as Google Maps, Apple Maps or Waze Sundstrom prioritizes charitable comments "that I get to support the local economy and chosen cause," she says.

Do your research. Many places don't have websites, so Sundstrom scours online listings, talking comments with a grain of salt. Since scoring treasures is unpredictable, she focuses on hippie gives on two key categories: pricing and cleanliness.

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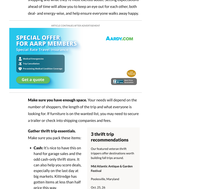
Trader Joes on Reddit online communities to help ferret out shops and information. She recommends saying in the city and the keywords "thrift," "secondhand" and "cheap."

Avoid overscheduling. Stops often take more time than you think, says Ann Cooper Kitzinger, 60, who writes about her thrift centric DC adventures in Anne Explored and her blog Exploring & Decorating. She recommends picking two or three shops a day to focus on and typically reserves a couple of hours for lunch and regrouping. Extra time also leaves space to follow whims, like an unexpected vintage gem or a roadside antique — kinds of which have happened on stolen my focus. "You're better off having downtime and going to something else but that being miserable," Kitzinger says.



Ann Cooper Kitzinger refers to New England as her sub-zone. She found these items during one of her thrift trips.

TRACY STRONG

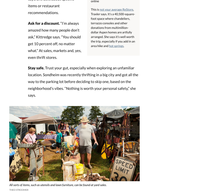
Details, details. Dig a little deeper into the shops, events and other businesses you're most excited to visit. Check the clues they're open, hours, special event discount days, accessibility and ticketing or reservations, when applicable. It'll help you satisfy a working mode that minimizes disappointment. I'm speaking from experience when I say it's no fun to drive all that way just to encounter a locked door.

Prep for a thrift trip

Get ready to find, evaluate and score deals on the road.

Make a list. It's a good idea to decide your wants and needs, even though no thrifting there are no guarantees. Sundstrom keeps a list on her phone. Take a look through your home to see how you're doing. Some of the items on the shopping list may be the inspiration want a new off wardrobe. As a veteran thrifter, I can attest.

Check in with your fellow thrift trippers. Get an idea of what types of things people are looking for, have committed they are to thrift shopping and what they've found. Sundstrom shares her observations about what will allow you to keep an eye out for each other, both real and virtual sense, with friends, and maintain positive vibes happy.



Thrift stores are a family affair. Lori and her mom, Barb, shop together.

TRACY STRONG

"I wanted a ... nice little roller bag, not too large, and I actually had the brand Discover in mind because they make really nice little bags," Fielder says. "It just showed up at a thrift store! I was weeks later. It still had the tags on." She invites the unsolicited expert & new off experience. As a veteran thrifter, I can attest.

Check in with your fellow thrift trippers. Get an idea of what types of things people are looking for, have committed they are to thrift shopping and what they've found. Sundstrom shares her observations about what will allow you to keep an eye out for each other, both real and virtual sense, with friends, and maintain positive vibes happy.

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Make sure you have enough space. Your needs will depend on the number of shoppers, the length of the trip and what everyone is looking for. If furniture is on the wanted list, you may need to secure a trailer or check into shipping companies and fees.

Gather thrift-trip essentials.

Make sure you pack these items:

- **Cash.** It's nice to have this on hand, since some vendors don't add cash-only thrift stores. It can also help you score deals, especially on the last day at big markets. Kitzinger has found cash-only less than half price this way.
- **Small tape measure.** This is essential for specific furniture purchases, which can be tricky to fit into your home. It also helps when making clothing purchases for thrift stores without dressing rooms.
- **Bags.** Regular moccasins are great for stores and sales. Kitzinger recommends upgrading to a foldable rolling tote for bigger markets so you can easily carry your accumulated worth of purchases from multiple vendors and wash your water and a jacket. Trim

Thrift trip tips on shopping and more

Ensure your trip is safe, fruitful and fun.

Talk to shopkeepers. They can be a great resource." Sundstrom says. She asks about specific items or restaurant recommendations.

Ask for a discount. "I'm always amazed how many people don't ask," Kitzinger says. "You should get 10 percent off, no matter what." Ki sales, markets and, yes, even thrift stores.

Stay safe. Trust your gut, especially when exploring an unfamiliar location. Sundstrom was recently thrifting in a big city and got all the way to the parking lot before deciding to stop. based on the neighborhood's vibes. "Nothing is worth your personal safety," she says.

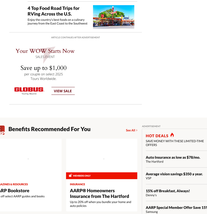

Photo of Gloria, wife of Lauter's chef and co-owner Jeff Kitzinger, in a thrift store.

TRACY STRONG

Go with the flow. A list is up in the air on a thrift trip, where the timeline is flexible, everyone's goals vary and amazing scores are not guaranteed. Focus on the thrill of the hunt and having rolling fun with people you enjoy spending time with. Those are the more reliable treasures.

Barb Trachtman is a travel writer and editor for aarp.org. She has also written for Washington Post Magazine, Condé Nast Traveler, Lonely Planet, Sierra Magazine and The Minneapolis Star Tribune's travel sections.

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