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Introduction

Winter holidays represent a time when Coloradans are most prone to opening their wallet, driven by tradition, generosity, and celebration. Despite inflation and economic uncertainty, holiday spending remains resilient overall, but the way people allocate their budgets is changing. In Denver, the decline in expected expenditure suggests a focus on smaller, more meaningful celebrations. At the same time, national trends indicate that experiences, digital convenience, and sustainability are reshaping what the holidays look like for millions.

Key Findings

- **Holiday Spending Increases:** Americans plan to spend \$1,778 per person on the December holidays, up \$126 from last year, driven by a better economic outlook and higher prices.
- **Denver Spending Declines:** Deviating from the national trend, Denver residents are cutting back, with holiday spending expected to drop from \$1,902 to \$1,782.
- **Experience Over Gifts:** Spending on holiday experiences has grown, with Denver residents spending 15.6% more on experiences than the national average.
- **Rising Christmas Tree Costs:** Christmas tree prices have doubled over the past decade nationally, leading more than 25% of Americans to cut their own.
- **Cautious Spending:** Many are still managing last year's holiday debt, reflecting a more careful approach to this year's shopping.

Christmas Trees Spending

With inflation tightening wallets, many consumers are reevaluating how they obtain their Christmas trees. This year, the average price for a Christmas tree in the U.S. increased by 10% compared to last year, costing between \$80-100. Here are the historical price averages for an authentic Christmas tree:

2008: \$37

2010: \$36

2012: \$41

2014: \$40

2016: \$75

2018: \$75

For the past decade, the average price of an authentic Christmas tree has doubled, whereas the cumulative inflation rate has only increased by 33.34%. If the cost of an authentic Christmas tree in 2014 had just grown at the rate of inflation, it should cost just \$53 today.ⁱ

Therefore, it is not surprising that over 25% of Americans choose to cut their own Christmas trees. This makes self-cut Christmas trees the nation's most popular method of obtaining the treasured holiday necessity, according to National Christmas Trees' 2023 consensus survey.ⁱⁱ

Rise in Experience Spending

While holiday traditions like tree shopping and gift-giving endure, a growing number of Americans are spending on experiences rather than material goods. According to Deloitte Consumer Insights, spending on holiday experiences has risen 16% nationally compared to last year.ⁱⁱⁱ This trend is particularly pronounced in Denver, where experience spending is expected to increase by 7%, reaching an average of \$818 per person—15.6% higher than the national average.

In Colorado, tree-cutting trips have become a quintessential holiday experience. Programs like "Harvest a Christmas Tree in Colorado" allow residents to venture into forests to cut their own trees, blending outdoor recreation with tradition. The U.S. Forest Service even offers permits to encourage sustainable harvesting while supporting rural economies. The permit costs between \$10-20, with the cost of cutting each tree resting at \$10, which, compared with retail prices in the next section, proves to be very affordable.^{iv} Therefore, for Christmas tree-cutting Coloradans, their trees should not take up too much of their Christmas budget.

Overview of Christmas Spending

As Christmas approaches, Americans are preparing for a time of celebration, reflection, and careful financial planning. According to Deloitte Consumer Insights, Americans are expected to spend an average of \$1,778 this year on holiday-related expenses. Specifically, Americans plan to spend **\$735 per person** this year on gifts and non-gifts (decorations, apartment amenities, etc.), marking a \$23 increase from the previous year.^v This increase is attributed to a combination of a more positive economic outlook (+9 percentage points), perceived higher prices (70%), and greater spending by households earning \$100,000 to \$199,000 (+17%). As inflation slowed, consumers can expect to experience "back to normal" prices compared to the pandemic-era, leading to more holiday purchases.^{vi}

Spending categories:

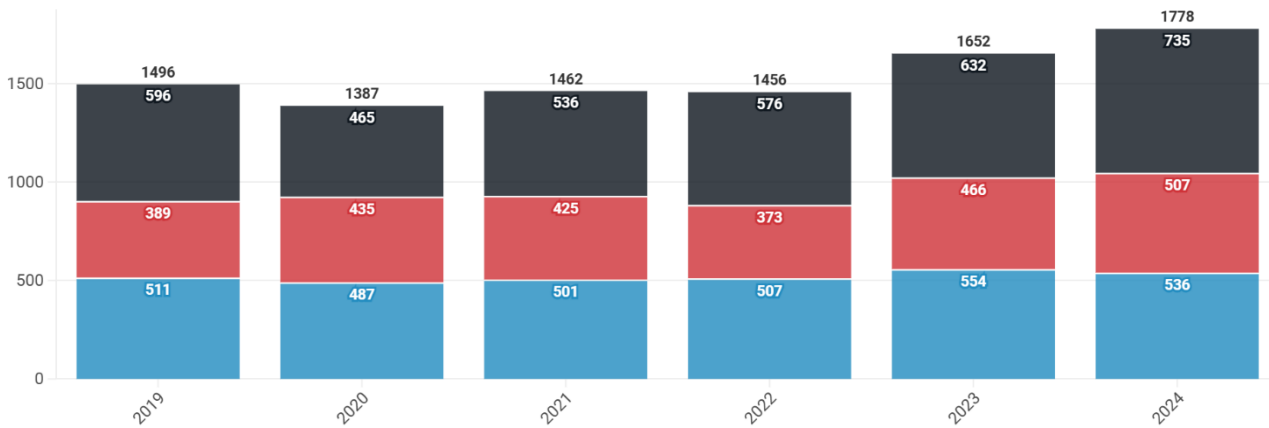
- Gifts: actual and virtual gifts, including gift cards
- Non-Gifts: holiday decorations and other related household items
- Experiences: concert and various show tickets, traveling, and other nonmaterial entertainment-related activities

Figure 1

National Average Expected Holiday Spending

\$, per person on retail and experience

■ Gifts ■ Non-Gifts ■ Experiences



Source: 2024 Deloitte Holiday Retail Survey



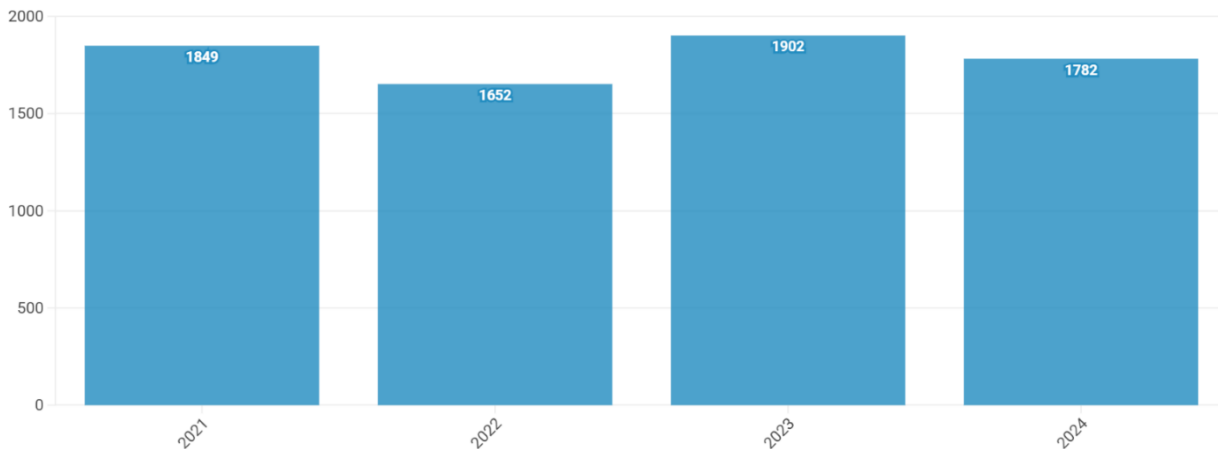
However, this general trend masks deeper nuances. A WalletHub survey reveals that inflation concerns are not completely gone.^{vii} Over half of the respondents admitted they're still grappling with debts from last year's holiday shopping spree. Meanwhile, some areas, like Denver, are bucking the national trend. Denverites, who have historically been big holiday spenders, plan to scale back this year. According to the Deloitte Holiday Retail Survey for Denver, **holiday spending in the Mile High City is projected to decline from \$1,902 in 2022 to \$1,782 in 2023.**^{viii} This suggests a shift in priorities.

Year-round Denver spending trends may also be impacting Denverites' Christmas budgets. [Previous CSI research](#) has shown Denver's sales tax recovery has lagged behind every other metro area county, suggesting shoppers are taking their business beyond the city's boundaries.

Figure 2

Average Expected Spending in Denver

per person, on gift, related holiday items, and experience



Source: Deloitte Holiday Retail Survey
<https://www.axios.com/local/denver/2024/11/13/holiday-retailer-spend-survey-2024>



Conclusion

As we move forward, the evolving landscape of holiday spending reflects not just economic realities but also shifting values. Whether it's gathering under a real tree you cut yourself, gifting a virtual gift card, or going to a Christmas light show, the holidays are becoming less about extravagance and more about connection, creativity, and conscious consumption.

ⁱ [\\$1 in 2014 → 2024 | Inflation Calculator](#)

ⁱⁱ [What NCTA Wants Everyone To Know About the Farm-Grown Christmas Tree Supply for 2024 | National Christmas Tree Association](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [2024 Deloitte holiday retail survey](#)

^{iv} [Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests Pawnee National Grassland - News & Events](#)

^v [2024 Deloitte holiday retail survey](#)

^{vi} [us_holiday_upload.knit](#)

^{vii} [Holiday Shopping Survey \(2024\)](#)

^{viii} [Denver holiday shoppers plan to spend less this year - Axios Denver](#)