



43

RICHMOND

EXPERIENCES

FOR EVERYONE

ON YOUR LIST

FACE IT — WE ALL HAVE TOO MUCH STUFF. Instead of stressing about what to give your aunt who has everything this holiday or wondering where you're going to store your kids' Christmas presents once they've been unwrapped, consider an experiential gift.

It's been said that the best things in life aren't things, so we've rounded up ideas for everyone you know, and we're presenting a shopping list that won't require you to fight the crowds at the mall. From rock climbing lessons and hot air balloon rides to cooking and art classes, tours and tastings, we guarantee these adventures won't be forgotten and may even lead to a new interest or hobby.

Plus, we've got a roundup of some favorite holiday events and suggestions for subscription-based gifts that keep giving all year long.

BY **PAULA PETERS CHAMBERS, LAURA ANDERS LEE**
AND **JESSICA RONKY HADDAD**

FUN WITH FOOD

Mise en Place

Professional chefs teach basic, advanced and themed cooking classes at this downtown studio. From \$75 per person; miseenplacerva.com

From Scratch

Professional chef Elizabeth Oliver leads private cooking classes for couples and friends in the comfort of their own kitchens. From \$85 per person, plus ingredients; fromscratchva.com

Young Chefs Academy

Cooking classes, monthly memberships, culinary camps and special workshops are offered for everyone in the family. From \$25 per person; richmondva.youngchefsacademy.com

The Publix Aprons Cooking School

Classes focus on everything from special wine pairings and cultural cuisine to baking classes for children at the Nuckols Place Publix in Glen Allen. Prices vary by class; apronscooking.school.publix.com

The Kitchen Classroom

Budding chefs can master cocktail making, international cuisine, knife skills and more through hands-on experiences and group instruction. From \$75 per person; thekitchenclassroom.com

Discover Richmond Food Tours

An indulgent afternoon includes stops at notable Church Hill eateries with historic commentary along the way. From \$65 per person; discoverrichmond.tours.com

Drink Richmond

This tour company is a safe and fun way to experience a few of the area's top cideries, breweries and distilleries. From \$69 per person; drinkrichmond.com

ICE CREAM MAKING

They'll all scream for ice cream at one of Sweet Wynns' workshops on making ice cream. Taryn Wynn has just opened the venue in Shockoe Slip where she hosts classes, birthday parties and private events.

"First, we teach a little ice cream history and let our guests taste their way through some of the first flavors, so everyone has an understanding of our favorite frozen dessert," she explains. "Then we teach everyone how to make their own custom flavors, labels and even names — people can get very creative."

Wynn's favorite flavor is one she created called Bourbon Street, a bourbon brown-sugar ice cream with caramelized pecans and butterscotch swirl. She's been making ice cream since her first job as a teenager in New York. "It's the best job ever," she says.

Classes start at \$25 for kids 5 and over and \$50 for adults. sweetwynns.com



TEA TASTING

Send the tea lover on your list on a journey to Project CommuniTea. Owner Crystal Stokes left traditional farming to grow herbal tisanes, wild harvested yaupon and quality whole-leaf teas.

"Tea has always been a big part of my life, and I love making a cup for friends when they come over," Stokes says. "I've traveled to a lot of authentic teahouses and wanted to bring an Asian-style experience to Richmond, like gong fu cha, which has a meditative piece to it."

Tastings last 90 minutes and are held in Stokes' Montrose Heights greenhouse. Guests will try a variety of teas, such as green, smoked and dark roasted yaupon; yaupon matcha; and yerba mate grown on-site.

From \$150 for a group of four; projectcommunittea.com

EXPERIENCES FOR

Foodies

MUSHROOM FORAGING

Tell your in-laws to take a hike — for mushrooms, that is. Book a guided tour through Haashrooms, and they'll learn everything they need to know about the wild fungi. Owners Steve and Elizabeth Haas open their 65-acre Goochland farm on weekends for group tours and wild food forays.

"We have a good 20 or so edible mushrooms in Virginia," Steve Haas says. "We'll identify edible, poisonous and medicinal mushrooms, cover survival skills, and just have a lot of fun in the woods."

After a tour, participants can pick up mushrooms at the farm store, along with products such as mushroom tea, coffee and skin care. "If someone owns some land and wants to know what kind of mushrooms they have, we can also come out to a private property," Haas says.

\$50 per person; haashrooms.com



FROM LEFT: COURTESY SWEET WYNN'S; COURTESY PROJECT COMMUNITEA; PARKER MICHELS-BOYCE; COURTESY JOIN OR DIE KNIVES; COURTESY THE GLASS SPOT; COURTESY HAND/TROWN; ALEXIS COURTNEY

Creative

EXPERIENCES



KNIFE MAKING

Beginners and hobbyists can sharpen their skills at **Join or Die Knives**. Whether taking a one-day or two-day class, participants go home with their own hand-made, one-of-a-kind knife.

Owner Brent Stubblefield has been blade-smithing since 2012 and teaching since 2017. "It's been really cool to bring the history and tradition of knifemaking to Richmond," he says.

The one-day "Intro to Knifemaking" is Stubblefield's most popular class, during which participants grind a custom blade and choose their handle. In the two-day class, participants are given a rectangular block of steel that they forge themselves over an anvil.

From \$225 per person; joinordieknives.com



GLASS ART

Blow someone's mind this year with a glass-blowing class at **The Glass Spot**, Richmond's only public hot glass studio. Artist and owner Chris Skibbe teaches participants the art of glass-blowing, in which molten glass is shaped by blowing air into it. Popular classes include making drinking glasses and paperweights, as well as blown eggs, pumpkins and ornaments during the holidays.

"Many of our workshops are for all ages, so whole families can experience it together," Skibbe says. "Everyone gets a hand in creating it, whether getting to choose the design and colors or getting to blow the glass and expand it themselves, which is really fun."

While ornament classes are sold out through December, shoppers can head to the studio to purchase beautiful pieces from Skibbe.

Workshops last about 45 minutes and start at \$245 for a group of eight; richmondglassspot.com

POTTERY CLASSES

Your loved one can take a spin on the pottery wheel at **Hand/Thrown Studio** in Brookland Park. Choose from multiweek courses, one-day workshops and introductory classes. Students can make coffee mugs, ornaments, vases, ceramic animals and decorative boxes.

Scholarships are available to low-income and disabled students, as well as students who are queer, trans, Black, Indigenous or people of color. "Accessibility and inclusivity are really important to us, and we hold special sessions just for the BIPOC community," says Alexis Courtney, co-owner.

Most workshops are suitable for ages 16 and up, while shorter classes can accommodate children 5 and older with their parents.

From \$40 per person; handthrown.studio/classes



ART CLASSES & MORE

VMFA

Dozens of exciting classes for children, teens and adults, such as pottery, African jewelry, painting, writing and art history, keep the creative juices flowing year-round. From \$12; vmfa.museum

Visual Arts Center of Richmond

Located in the Fan, VisArts teaches modern quilting, silversmithing, raku, letterpress, plein air drawing and more. From \$145; visarts.org

Studio Two Three

Artists teach linoleum printmaking and screenprinting at the Scott's Addition studio or from its mobile print truck, S23 To-Go. From \$50; studiotwothree.org

Rosewood Pottery

Everyone gets fired up with workshops and classes that focus on everything from the fundamentals to advanced techniques like glazes and intricate decoration. Four-week workshops from \$175; rosewoodpottery.com

The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen

Youth and adult classes ranging from guitar and painting to metalwork and digital photography help bring out the artist in everyone. From \$25; artsglenallen.com

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Art in the Garden classes focus on botanical illustration, watercolors, and creating luminaries, ceramics and more. From \$60; lewisginter.org

Sneed's Nursery

Everyone gets their hands dirty with interactive classes like herb growing, worming and planting fairy gardens. From \$5; sneedsnursery.com

PlantHouse

Green thumbs will love lively workshops such as make-your-own terrariums, moss walls, dried floral arrangements and succulent centerpieces. From \$25; planthouse.us

CHOOSE AN ADVENTURE

Ballooning

Floating above the treetops on a hot-air balloon ride with Balloons Over Virginia, you'll see familiar landscapes from a new perspective. \$300 per person for a shared ride or \$1,050 for a private, two-person flight; balloonsovervirginia.com

Boxing

Learn self-defense skills, improve confidence and mental health, and get a great cardio workout at Phoenix Fitness & Martial Arts. \$90 (loaner hand wraps and gloves included for first lesson); phoenixfma.com

Open-cockpit Airplane Rides

The Flying Circus Aerodrome allows you to experience flight aboard a vintage "barnstorming" airplane, where you can really feel the wind in your hair. \$100 (standard) or \$180 (aerobatic), flyingcircusairshow.com

Tandem Skydiving

First-time jumpers get a thrill from the 120 mph free fall and six- to eight-minute float under a parachute with an instructor from No Limits Skydiving. \$230 or \$305 (sunset jump), nolimitsskydiving.com

Racetrack Driving

Satisfy that inner speed demon with the NASCAR Racing Experience, offering a quick trip around the Richmond Raceway track. Five minutes, \$500; 16 minutes, \$1,399; 32 minutes, \$1,599; nascarracingexperience.com/richmond-international-raceway



EXPERIENCES FOR

Thrill-seekers

BASICS OF OUTDOOR ROCK CLIMBING

Using the Manchester Climbing Wall, instructors help participants find shapes or cracks in the surface — an experience very different from indoor climbing walls, where holds are clearly marked.

"In the gym, people can do pull-ups on the wall, but with outdoor climbing, the holds are smaller," Griffin says. "People have to trust their feet and use them to push up the wall."

All equipment is provided, including climbing shoes, and climbs can happen nearly year-round. "In the winter, we go in the middle of the day, to catch the warmth," says RVA Paddlesports owner Patrick Griffin. "We just want it to be 50 degrees and dry." \$80 for three hours; rvapaddlesports.com/intro-to-rock-climbing



BEGINNER HANG GLIDING

Blue Sky hang gliding school owner Steve Wendt, the 2004 USHGA Hang Gliding Instructor of the Year, knows that every student wants the experience of being aloft, even for just 30 seconds, and then the chance to land on their feet, "like a bird," he says.

The introductory class, located about 30 miles east of Richmond, offers the basics for people who have never tried hang gliding. A simulator shows the proper body and hand positions needed before participants learn how to jog with the glider and balance the wing in preparation for flight. Wendt notes that while participants should be reasonably fit, able to carry and run with the 50-pound glider prior to launching, by the end of the class, many will be able to fly hundreds of feet in distance, no more than 10 feet above the ground. \$150 for four hours, blueskyhg.com

INTRO TO AERIALS

Aerial work, whether using silks or hoops, can be deceptive. "Sometimes people realize it's a lot harder than they think it would be," says Ryan Schmidt, aerial arts education director at SOUL Aerial and Performing Arts. "Other people are surprised by what they can accomplish. It's really fun to see what your body can do."

The introductory class focuses on warming up and conditioning exercises, especially for the shoulders, before teaching basic moves.

"Everything in the beginning happens from the ground," Schmidt says. "Other people think that you already have to be strong [to begin an aerial program], but the reality is you get strong while doing it. For me, it's a way to work out that's not working out. It's a way to be active, get moving and have fun." \$30 for one hour; soulaerial.com





WATCH BALD EAGLES

Celebrate the robust return of the American bald eagle on a 24-foot pontoon boat helmed by Captain Mike Ostrander, who's been leading tours on the river for nearly two decades. As recently as 1975, eagles were extinct locally. But in 1979-80, a single pair made the **James River** their home, and others soon followed.

Now, more than 340 pairs of eagles live within the James River watershed. In the winter months, participants may see resident eagles, who live here year-round, or migratory eagles from northern climes. Summer migratory eagles arrive in May and stay through the summer. \$95-\$140, two-three hours; discoverthejames.com

EXPLORE HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY BY E-BIKE

For those who aren't sure their legs are up to the challenge of Hollywood Cemetery's steep slopes, an electric bike is just the answer.

"You don't have to worry about pedaling up the next hill; you can throttle up," says Hendley Davis, **Pedego RVA** operations manager. "Plus, there's not much training needed for an e-bike, and we can cover more ground."

Guides will stop at meaningful locations during the tour, including President's Circle — the resting place for James Monroe and John Tyler — and scenic spots overlooking the James River. Hollywood is an appealing attraction for those who routinely visit burial grounds as well as local residents seeking to entertain visiting friends and family. "It's just a gorgeous place," Davis says. \$75 for two hours; pedegorva.com

MORE ACTIVE OPTIONS



Bike Tours

Take a spin on a classic or electric bike with **Basket & Bike**, choosing from one of their signature tours or creating your own. Refresher courses are also an option for those who haven't been on a bicycle in a while. \$45-\$155; basketandbike.com

Whitewater Rafting

Take advantage of our city's finest feature — the James River — with routes of varying difficulty. Watch RVA Paddlesports' Facebook page for pop-up options. \$65-\$89; rvapaddlesports.com

Segway Tours

Explore neighborhoods or the city's great collection of murals on a different kind of vehicle along with a knowledgeable guide from RVA on **Wheels**. \$50-\$75; rvaonwheels.com

Pontoon Boat Cruises

Paddle Club RVA offers cruises with exercise — you can pedal if you desire — and BYO food and drink. \$45-\$55; seasuitecruises.com/paddle-club/richmond-va

Virginia State Parks Annual Pass

With parking and admission fees covered for all parks throughout the state, there are plenty of reasons to go exploring. \$40 (senior), \$85; dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks

Outdoor EXPERIENCES

LEARN TO ROW

Virginia Boat Club Treasurer Kim Nelson touts rowing as "a low-impact, aerobic team sport that builds muscles and cardio fitness." In the club's introductory classes — one at Robious Landing, the other at Rocketts Landing — newbies learn how to master the rhythm of sliding back and forth on a seat and sweeping one oar into the water while listening to the call of the coxswain. "In the very beginning, you're awkward and trying to figure out the movements and [how to] row with other people," she says. "After you get the technique together, it all comes together."

In the spring, the two classes test their mettle by competing against each other in the club's annual June regatta.

"What can be better than learning a new skill on the beautiful James River?" Nelson asks. \$325 for 12 weekly sessions; virginiaboatclub.org



FROM LEFT: COURTESY BLUE SKY; COURTESY RVA PADDLESORTS; COURTESY SOUL AERIAL AND PERFORMING ARTS; COURTESY VIRGINIA BOAT CLUB; GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY PEDEGO RVA

Holiday Traditions

OLD AND NEW

Nov. 11-Jan. 1

Illuminate Light Show

Virginia's largest drive-thru synchronized Christmas light and music show happens at the Meadow Event Park. \$30 per vehicle. illuminatelightshow.com

Nov. 19-Jan. 1

Light up the Tracks

The Downtown Ashland Association transforms the town's historic district into a vintage Christmas village, with a mile-long light display and numerous special events. ashlandvirginia.com/lightup

Nov. 21-Jan. 8

Dominion Energy GardenFest of Lights

With a theme of "Seeds of Light," thousands of lights transform Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, along with a model train display and a 20-foot tree in the conservatory. \$8-\$30. lewisginter.org

Nov. 24

RRRC Turkey Trot

The 10K and kids run will be held at Bryan Park; a virtual 10K option is also available. Walkers are welcome, and registration is required. runsignup.com/Race/VA/Richmond/WegmansTurkeyTrot10K

Nov. 25-Dec. 24

Legendary Santa

Santa returns to the Children's Museum for in-person visits. Kids can look for gifts at the Fawn Shop. Ticket sales begin Nov. 1 for nonmembers. childrensmuseumofrichmond.org

Nov. 26-27

'Let It Snow'

The Richmond Symphony's annual holiday concert features Christmas favorites and a carol singalong at the Dominion Energy Center. \$10.50-\$85. richmondsymphony.com

Dec. 1

Richmond Run-A-Latke 5K

After racing, celebrate with hot chocolate, doughnuts and everyone's favorite Hanukkah treat, latkes. \$20-\$30. runsignup.com/Race/VA/Richmond/RunALatke

Dec. 1-4

The Bizarre Bazaar

Shop for gifts, decorations, food items, home goods and more at this traditional Richmond shopping extravaganza. Richmond Raceway Complex. \$10 adults; \$2.50 ages 2-12. thebizarrebazaar.com

Dec. 2-3

Maymont Merry Market

Shop for the holidays with goods from local artisans and craft vendors at this outdoor market. Hot cocoa, carolers and holiday decorations will create a festive mood. maymont.org

Dec. 3

Dominion Christmas Parade

The parade returns for its 39th year. Departing from the Science Museum of Virginia at 10 a.m., it travels east on Broad Street to the Richmond Coliseum. richmondparade.org

Dec. 4

Deck the Halls

For more than a decade, Deck the Halls has been a major fundraising event benefiting women and children at Hanover Safe Place. Come create wreaths, swags, candle surrounds and more. \$40. Pine Grove Farms, 12438 Elmont, Ashland. deckthehallsva.org

Dec. 9-23

'The Nutcracker'

Richmond Ballet's beloved holiday production is back, with new scenery, choreography and costumes, along with Tchaikovsky's iconic score performed by the Richmond Symphony. richmondballet.com

Dec. 10-11

The 60th Fan District Holiday Hour Tour

The 60th diamond jubilee for the Fan District Holiday Hour Tour features 11 houses. Noon to 5 p.m. daily. Online tickets, \$25; day of tours, \$35 at the FDA office, 208 N. Strawberry St. fandistrict.org

Dec. 10

CarMax Tacky Light Run

This 6K fun run takes place in Midlothian's Walton Park neighborhood, featuring homes bedazzled with over-the-top light displays. \$20-\$45. sportsbackers.org/events/tacky-light-run

Dec. 10-11

Carytown Holiday Artisan Market

This holiday market features more than 100 local artisans, food trucks and music. City Stadium, 3201 Maplewood Ave., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. carytownmarket.com

Dec. 11

Church Hill Holiday House Tour

Church Hill's traditional holiday house tour returns. See how classic architecture and modern living converge in Richmond's oldest and most historic neighborhood. \$35. churchhill.org

Dec. 30

Capital City Kwanzaa Festival

Elegba Folklore Society presents one of the largest Kwanzaa celebrations on the East Coast. efsinc.org

● FESTIVITY/ENTERTAINMENT ● SHOPPING ● ACTIVITY

Gifts THAT KEEP Giving



BLOOMS FOR MONTHS

Hazel Witch Farms offers a flower club that delivers fresh, locally grown flowers to members weekly for 10 weeks, or biweekly for five weeks, beginning in April.

The 1-acre family-run farm is in eastern Hanover above the Chickahominy River and is run by Ash Hobson Carr and Patrick Carr, who grow a variety of flowers and medicinal herbs without chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

"Early spring is the best time for local flowers," Ash says. Subscribers can look forward to receiving tulips, ranunculus, anemones, specialty poppies, delphinium, foxglove and more. "About 50% of folks buy [the subscription] for someone as a gift," she says. \$190-\$380; hazelwitchfam.com/subscriptions

JOIN THE CLUB

Jam Membership

Dayum This Is My Jam offers a monthly membership of four locally made items chosen by the recipient — jams, pickles, salsa or one of each — available for pickup or delivery. \$40 per month; dayumjamrv.square.site

A Bouquet of Gifts

Send a loved one a fresh bouquet each month with Sneed's Nursery's floral subscription that includes a seasonal, designer's choice arrangement delivered once a month for a year. Starting at \$60 per month; theflowershoprva.com

Wine Club

Barrel Thief's customizable wine club allows you to pick a price tier, number of bottles, taste preference and frequency — monthly or quarterly. Starting at \$40; barrelthiefwine.com/subscriptions

Museum Memberships

For an experience that lasts all year and comes with insider perks such as gift shop discounts, free admission and invitations to special events, consider a membership to a local museum. Parents with young kids will appreciate the opportunity to visit the **Children's Museum of Richmond** (\$149; childrensmuseumofrichmond.org) or the **Science Museum of Virginia** (\$110-\$185; smv.org). A membership to the **Virginia Museum of Fine Arts** is perfect for your hip sister (starting at \$70; vmfa.museum).

Your history-loving uncle will appreciate a membership to the **Virginia Museum of History & Culture** (starting at \$65; virginiahistory.org) or **The Valentine** (starting at \$50, thevalentine.org). And gardeners and lovers of the outdoors will treasure a membership to **Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden** (starting at \$95, lewsginter.org) or **Maymont** (starting at \$45; maymont.org). **11**

MYSTERY READS

Local book subscription service

Book Brigade

ships a surprise reading selection each month along with three or four items that are related to the book and sourced from small businesses. Recent boxes included "Stay Awake" by Megan Goldin and "Hello, Molly!" by Molly Shannon.

Subscriptions are available for adult fiction, adult nonfiction and young adult fiction for one, three and six months.

While the selections are a surprise, hints are provided online before the boxes are shipped.

The service was started by Zoë Strauss, who got the idea during the pandemic. "One of the big parts with reading that I loved was sharing books with my friends and family, and then they would read it, and then we would talk about it," Strauss told Richmond magazine earlier this year. "I loved that aspect of it because it brought people together." Starting at \$49.99 per month; bookbrigade.com



CULTURED CLUBS

The perfect gift for the family member who is always asking you to "pass the butter" at Thanksgiving, or the friend who hovers over the holiday cheese tray, **Truckle Cheesemongers'** Cultured Clubs offer monthly cheese or butter — or both — for one, three or six months.

Butter Club members receive a fancy butter, bread and accoutrements such as honey and jam.

Cheese club members receive three "interesting cheeses," bread and accompaniments such as salami, plus tasting notes.

"You get to learn a little bit each month about the cheese and its history," says owner Maggie Bradshaw. "It's fun for me as a cheesemonger to pass on deeper info than you could get in the shop on a busy day." Starting at

\$29; items must be picked up. trucklecheesemongers.square.site

