

DAILY CAMERA

For the people who really DO have everything

Get a little creative, and get fewer socks

By Kate Mishara For the Camera

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Rather than spending hours searching for *more stuff*, many holiday gift-givers are choosing to give experiences as presents.

Alexa Wyatt, 21, and Chad Lembeck, 23, have given each other their fair share of material gifts over the course of their six-year relationship.

"Ipods, clothing, jewelry, even socks," Wyatt said. "We have really given each other everything over the last six years. And then there came a Christmas when I couldn't think of something he didn't already have, or something I hadn't already given him."

That is the shopper's dilemma: what to buy for the person who has everything. Lembeck embraced this dilemma as a chance to give Wyatt something different. For their five-year anniversary, the couple went on a hot air balloon ride.

"It was incredible," said Wyatt. "And the best part is, I will never forget it. I would so much rather have a memory that will last a lifetime, than a sweater that I might wear three or four times."

Cloud 9 Living is a Web site dedicated to the experience gift. Based in Boulder, the site offers over 1,600 experiences in 41 cities across the country. Gifts range from riding shotgun in a stock car to dinner cruises and Pilates lessons.

"People have enough 'stuff,'" says John Augst, co-founder and president of Cloud 9. "Each year people are challenged with finding 'the perfect gift,' and what better gift is there than an experience that has the ability to truly excite, inspire and create lifelong memories for the recipient."

For the outdoor enthusiast, Cloud 9 experiences include ice climbing lessons and night vision white water rafting in Vail, dog sledding in Leadville, and rock climbing lessons and glider rides in Boulder. Other gifts include glass blowing lessons and bee keeping classes to a personal shopper and an image makeover.

Several other local businesses, including Fair Winds Hot Air Balloon Flights, have also embraced the idea of experience gifts. Fair Winds, located in Boulder, prides itself on making each flight a memorable experience.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime adventure," said Jeff Meeker, a Fair Winds aeronaut. "It's like you're captivated on a magical voyage for an hour and a half of your life. You're taken away from it all."

Each Fair Winds flight includes Champagne, a continental breakfast, a T-shirt, a photo, several other goodies, and of course, phenomenal views.

"Here in Boulder, we have such an array of things to see," said Meeker. "This is one of the prettiest places in the world to fly."

For those who would rather spend a day in the lap of luxury than out in the wild, spa gifts are a go-to gift. Essentiels Spa, designed like a beach house in the mountains, is truly a getaway from daily life.

Two of the most deluxe Essentials packages include the Queen for a Day and the King for a Day.

The Queen for a Day retreat includes an extended massage session, a skin renewal facial, a signature manicure, and a spa lunch. The King for a Day offers similar pampering for men. The package consists of a session in the hydrotherapy tub, an application of self-heating seaweed down the spine and shoulders, a full body massage, and a men's oxygenating facial.

In addition to the wide selection of luxury packages, Essentiels offers all types of massages, facials, and beauty treatments. And for those who would rather race a Lamborghini than soak in seaweed, you're in luck. Altitude Dream Cars, with locations including Boulder and Denver, offers luxury and exotic car rentals in Colorado.

Whether it be for the day or the weekend, car rentals range from a Lamborghini Gallardo and a Porsche Boxster to a Mercedes CLS500 and a Range Rover.

Though cruising in a Porsche does come at a cost, giving an experience gift doesn't have to mean spending lots of money. Making a surprise dinner at home can be one of the most memorable gifts of all.

"If Chad were to make me a special dinner, and I could tell he put a lot of effort into it, that would mean so much to me," said Wyatt. "But would I eat it? That's a whole other story." a photo, several other goodies, and of course, phenomenal views.

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