

FESTIVE FASHION

INDIGESTION

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CHRISTMAS FOR HIRE!

How to get someone else to do it all for you



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Let Santa's little helper help you!

Do you find yourself rushing round like a headless chicken at this time of year, with no time to spare for anything? Then make Christmas an altogether calmer time by hiring someone to do the job for you

The dream: you wake up to find your Christmas presents wrapped and sitting under the tree, the turkey defrosted and ready to cook, the cards written and posted, and your Christmas party perfectly organised.

The reality: three days before Christmas, you're in a panic because you still have all your

presents to buy and wrap, the cards are still in their boxes, waiting to be written and sent – and don't even mention the turkey.

If the second scenario sounds more like you, then you're in the right place. We've found the best places for getting help to ensure you have a happy, relaxing Christmas.

Best for... everything

How about a company that will sort out your every need? There are now dozens of companies across the country that can help you to save time – and they're neither as expensive nor as exclusive as they may sound. Our favourite by a clear margin is London-based buy:time, which offers a wide selection of festive services. These include Christmas tree purchase, delivery and decoration; house and garden decorations; gift wrapping and sending; Christmas card buying, writing and sending;

organising parties and other social gatherings; ordering and delivering food (including turkeys) and drink; organising Christmas or New Year holidays; organising and helping with New Year celebrations.

Price: £35 per hour, 10-hour blocks for £290, or 20-hour blocks for £500. **Availability:** Nationwide. **Info:** Call 0870 486 2624 or visit www.buy-time.co.uk

We also like: Lifes2short. Card ordering and sending; tree delivery, decoration, removal and more.

Price: from £25 per hour. **Availability:** Full service in London, limited nationwide.

Info: Call 0207 371 0444 or visit www.lifes2short.co.uk



Best for... Christmas trees

Whether you like your Christmas tree to be a glorious Norman fir, or if you would prefer a no-needle plastic one instead, get your tree delivered to your door the next working day through Christmas Tree Land. They also offer delightful colour-schemed decorations to match.

Price: Live trees cost from £20 for a 6ft tree, and fake from £70. Decorations, from £80. Delivery, £10.99. **Availability:** Nationwide. **Contact:** Call 0845 230 3663 or visit www.christmastreeland.co.uk

We also like: Pines and Needles, who offer a tree-removal service too (limited service outside of London). **Info:** Call 0845 458 2788 or visit www.pinesandneedles.com

Best for... decorating your house

Whether it's for a party or just decorating your house for the whole Christmas period, Theme Traders can offer a basic props and decorations package – or the full works.

'One of our most popular packages at Christmas is the ice and fire theme,' says company managing director Kim Einhorn. 'Also popular are movie themes.'

Price: Varying, according to theme.

Availability: Nationwide. Info: Call 0208 452 8518 or visit www.themetraders.co.uk

Best for... card writing

Writing and sending greetings cards is a time-consuming job. But secretarial company Torplan offer the works. For £5-£10 it can supply a rubber stamp in 'handwriting' that conveys your message. If you supply the blank cards and postage stamps, for an extra 28p per card it can type, print and stick on an address label, stuff the envelope, seal and add a stamp – bargain! Availability:

Nationwide. Contact: Call 0161 443 1881 or visit www.torplan.co.uk

Best for... Christmas dinner

Get your Christmas lunch cooked and served in your home. Clarke's Caterers offer the Christmas Day service. MD Mark Clarke explains: 'We have canapés as guests arrive, then a starter, traditional turkey, a fish dish, a selection of mini desserts, fruit and cheese, and wine.'

And no dirty dishes! Price: Approx £150 per person (minimum eight guests). Availability:

Nationwide.

Info: Call 0208 500 0863 or visit www.clarkescaterers.co.uk

We also like: Gourmet Food Catering. Info: Call 01375 843577



I GOT MY CHRISTMAS BACK!

Penny Francis, 46, from north London, is a partner in a law firm. 'I have a very busy life. I'm often in the office from 7.30am, and can sometimes be very late back home.'

'I never have time to do any of the little jobs around the house, so two years ago someone bought me a voucher for buytime. I thought it was a great idea and I used them for my Christmas shopping. I made a list of people and together we

came up with gift ideas and buytime bought them all for me.'

'I never make Christmas lunch because we tend to go out for Christmas dinner or to other people's houses, so lunch wasn't an issue for me. But having the presents sorted out was a huge weight off my mind. It gave me my Christmas back!'



SIX OF THE BEST WREATHS

Best bargain

Indulgence Baubles

£8.97, ASDA

With its explosion of Quality Street-colours, this wreath will add festive cheer to any front door. Diameter 35cm. Call 0500 505555 or visit www.asda.com



Best originality

Meribel Bells

£18, Habitat

This quirky wreath is made from cow bells, and could even double up as a musical instrument. Diameter 25cm. Call 08444 991111 or visit www.habitat.net



Best rustic

Natural Wreath

£9.99, Dunelm Mill

For a country feel, this earthy wreath is made of fruits of the forest: twigs, pines, cob nuts and berries. Diameter 38cm. Call 08451 656665 or visit www.dunelm-mill.com



Best traditional

Velvet Hydrangea

£19.50, Marks & Spencer

Rich velvet hydrangea wreath made from fabric petals and glitter berries. Diameter 40cm. Call 0845 3021234 or visit www.marksandspencer.com



Best festive

Gold Berry

£25, John Lewis

This fabulous gold halo is made up of gold berries and glass jewels. Diameter 32cm. Call 0207 629 7711 or visit www.johnlewis.com



Best designer

Winter Rose

£49, Plumo

This wreath is a beautiful creation of crystal beads, pearl drops, fabric flowers and leaves. Best suited for indoors. Diameter 35cm. Call 0870 241 3590 or visit www.plumo.com

