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STAYING IN YOUR CHRISTMAS 'BAUBLE': SURVEY REVEALS SHIFTS IN HOLIDAY HABITS

It's no surprise that Stockland's annual Christmas survey* has revealed some profound shifts in holiday habits in light of the global pandemic that was present for much of 2020.

A staggering half of Australians surveyed have nominated spending time with family and friends as the thing they love most about Christmas (46 per cent). Furthermore, 12 per cent indicated that they're even more determined to see loved ones these holidays compared to previous years.

Aussies are even incorporating technology to make this happen, with one in ten (11 per cent) planning to Facetime or Skype family and friends whom they would normally see at this time of year.

In the same vein, a quarter (23 per cent) of Australians admitted that they will not be able to see their usual family and friends this year due to travel restrictions. Moreover, 17 per cent have had to cancel their overseas or interstate travel plans for this Christmas.

On Christmas Day, half (48 per cent) of Australians claimed that they will not travel at all this year. Likewise – pending restrictions – half (52 per cent) also expect to spend the majority of Christmas Day at their house, followed by a relative's house (38 per cent), suggesting that Aussies are keeping their circles small and staying close to home.

Shopping behaviours have similarly changed for the holiday season, with nearly a third of Australians (28 per cent) claiming that they'll be ordering some of their Christmas shopping well in advance this year. Encouragingly, half of those surveyed (47 per cent) also revealed that they would still buy the majority of their gifts at retail town centres.

Michelle Abbey, GM of Retail at Stockland, said: "It's been promising to see so many customers eager to get an early start on their holiday shopping this year, especially after the challenging year that it's been for retail. With some strong pre-Christmas sales events, customers have been proactive in jumping on the bargains and stocking up early for Christmas gifts.

"We also weren't surprised to see that shopping centres are still customers' preferred way to shop during the festive season. The tangible, in-centre experience is still unmatched, and we anticipate a further uplift in supermarkets as people prepare for their holidays spent majority at home."

The annual ARA/Roy Morgan Christmas retail spending forecast predicts a spending increase of 2.8 per cent in 2020 to over \$54.3 billion across retail stores during the Christmas trading period.** The same forecast predicts that Australia's largest percentage increase in spending will be in the food category which is forecast to grow by a large 10 per cent from a year ago to over \$23.8 billion.

Stockland's research supports this with 41 per cent of Australians indicating that food and drinks (including alcohol) would be the category most gifted. This was followed by gift cards (32 per cent) and toys (31 per cent). One in 10 (11 per cent) also said that they would be preparing a small gift for their neighbour this Christmas.

Ms Abbey said that Christmas continues to be a pinnacle event on the Stockland calendar and something to look forward to every year.

"We understand that there are certain pain points to Christmas shopping and so we do everything we can to make that experience easier, more convenient and enjoyable – from charity gift wrapping stations and our new augmented reality app, to special delivery services, socially-distant Santa photos, extended trading hours and parking support in many centres.

"All of our retail centres operate under a strict Covid-Safe plan which includes a number of hygiene and social distancing measures to make sure that customers' shopping experiences are as safe as possible."

Stockland is also helping Australians to find their Christmas magic with its Christmas Campaign 'The Story of Ibis' which has amassed over a million views in just two weeks. The animated film uses the Ibis to show that even though you may have been dealt a challenging hand, it's possible to turn things around with the right amount of determination, resilience and belief in the magic of Christmas.

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*Sample size: N=1048. Survey in field 2 November to 15 November 2020.

**ARA/Roy Morgan results.

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About Stockland: Stockland (ASX: SGP) was founded in 1952 and has grown to become Australia's largest diversified property group – owning, developing and managing a large portfolio of shopping centres, residential communities, logistic centres, business parks, office assets and retirement living villages. Stockland is rated as one of the most sustainable real estate companies in the world by the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index (DJSI). Stockland is also an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality, as recognised by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency www.stockland.com.au