

Dust off the board games

Let's not forget board games as well, those saviours of rainy days and power cuts. Monopoly and Risk are obvious friends, but Christmas can also be the time to dust off more time-honoured classics such as backgammon and chess. Despite ostensibly being two-player games, the nature of these games will always attract spectators and undoubtedly lead to tournaments within the household. If you're looking for inspiration for presents, then a beautiful antique chess or backgammon board is an unusual and lasting gift that can also be an investment. 'Chess sets, backgammon boards and Maj Jong games have been steadily rising in price, but they're still fairly undervalued,' says Luke Honey, a specialist in chess, games and playing cards at Bonhams. 'You can probably find a nice, 19th-century

English chess set at auction or in an antique shop for £300, although something rarer will be several thousand.' A set of antique playing cards could be equally unusual. 'Playing cards are increasingly collectable,' adds Mr Honey. 'Nineteenth-century cards tend to look older than they are and sport delightful patterns and woodcuts.'



'Never mind the credit crunch or climate change —traditional games are power-cut stalwarts and easy on the wallet, too'

says Sukey Roxburgh, 'we used to play a game that was a variation on a treasure hunt. It's quite a useful one if you have a husband asking what to do. The idea is to find a number of objects from around the house and place them out of context in a room. For example, you could camouflage a strand of spaghetti in the groove of a cupboard, or a bar of chocolate against the wood of a desk. Items can be anything, from drawing pins to much larger items, but the key is that they should be camouflaged, not hidden. The game players are then given a list to tick off, with a prize given to the person who finds the most. We find it works well because it gets everyone moving around.'

However, if these sound a bit too active after overindulging in Christmas pudding, then a game of cards may be the perfect alternative. Like family games, these are generally cross-generational and, should you have any continental cousins staying, cross-cultural as well. Re-acquaint yourself with easy examples such as Old Maid and—a favourite in our family for sheer table-banging, all-involving entertainment—Racing Demon.

More ideas for Christmas games can be found under 'Parlour Games' on the website for the Museum of Childhood (www.vam.ac.uk/moc)

good if you're exhausted from getting lunch. With some forethought, it's possible to get most of the cooking out of the way the day before, leaving you free to organise the entertainment.'

People have to feel like playing games, she adds. 'After lunch, go for a walk, and then make time for a game.' Favourite Christmas games in the Pelham-Cheyne household include Hunt the Slipper and Wink Murder. 'Games are something even grannies can do, and they're good if you're feeling a bit full.'

One of the advantages of family games is their flexibility, but why not make up your own? 'When our family was younger,'

Wink Murder

A number of variations exist, but the basic framework remains the same. All players sit in a circle with their eyes closed. One player is then assigned as the Murderer and one as the Detective (by, say, tapping said players on the back an allotted number of times, or picking cards out of a pack). The Murderer then tries to kill off as many other players as possible (who should ideally die loudly and horribly) by catching their eye and winking, without being identified by the Detective.



Credit-crunch games

Purdey's cards
Purdey's playing cards show designs based on 1930s cart-ridges.

● £14 www.jamespurdeyandsons.com



Marbles

English Heri-tage produces a tub of 50 marbles, plus an instruction booklet.

● £6.99 www.english-heritageshop.org.uk

[english-heritageshop.org.uk](http://www.english-heritageshop.org.uk)

Tottering cards

Playing cards designed with characters by Annie Tempest from Tottering-by-Gently.

● £15, p&p £2.50

01732 866041; www.tottering.com



Games to ask Santa for

Dice game set

Fortnum & Mason's Renzo Romagnoli dice game set includes poker, draughts and dominoes.

● £125

www.fortnumandmason.com



Backgammon

William & Son, who claim the game has been played for 5,000 years, has tailor-made

backgammon sets in three sizes: 24in (tournament size), 18in and 12in.

● £750 to £1,550 020-7493 8385;

www.williamandson.com

Monopoly

A lambskin Monopoly board is available from Pickett, with a pigskin base in a choice of colours.

● £975

www.pickett.co.uk



Chess set

Linley has a bespoke chess set in red, black and cream leather

and Macassar ebony detailing, with solid ebony-and-boxwood chess pieces in separate leather cases. ● £5,895

020-7730 7300; www.davidlinley.com