

RETAIL

## In-person shopping persisted through the holidays: report

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*As consumers continue turning to ecommerce, physical retailers must find ways to entice shoppers. Image credit: South Coast Plaza*

By NORA HOWE

Holiday shoppers across the United States made a strong return to malls in December. However, full recovery has yet to be achieved.

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As outdoor mall visits breached pre-pandemic levels, according to Placer.ai's [December 2021 Mall Index](#), foot traffic in indoor malls remained low. Overall, visits were up 51.5 percent compared to 2020 and down 10.2 percent compared to 2019.

The Index analyzes data from more than 100 top-tier malls and 100 outdoor shopping centers across the United States, in both urban and suburban areas. Placer.ai uses anonymized location information from a panel of 30 million devices and processes the data using AI and machine learning capabilities to make estimations about specific locations.

### Malls remain afloat

In Q1 2021, visits to indoor malls were down 24.2 percent compared to Q1 2019, but by Q4 2021 they were down to 4.4 percent, suggesting shopping behavior shifted due to the pandemic, as opposed to changing demand.

While the visit gap decreased during the holidays, compared to 2019, Placer.ai suggests the majority of this was due to rising COVID-19 cases in November and December. As it compared quarterly visits throughout 2021, the Index cites growth compared to each preceding month.



The Barneys at Saks floor in the New York flagship store. Image courtesy of Saks Fifth Avenue

September experienced a downward trend, compared to 2019, after the back-to-school rush, however, October saw the strongest visit numbers compared to 2019 for the entire year up 2.6 percent for indoor malls and 4.4 percent for outdoor malls.

The push by retailers to expand the holiday shopping season coupled with rising COVID-19 cases in late November likely influenced the drop in indoor and outdoor mall visits, down 10.4 percent and 8.5 percent, respectively.

However, visits in December were only down 4.2 percent compared to 2019 for indoor malls and up 0.3 percent for outdoor malls.

This pace suggests that major indoor malls are meeting customer demands, especially in three main areas: a narrower focus on apparel, heightened focus on dining and entertainment and fitness and co-working spaces.

Placer.ai suggests the declines on Black Friday and Super Saturday were likely far more dramatic than they would have been had it not been for the confluence of COVID-19, supply chain shortages and labor concerns.

#### Reshaping physical retail

Despite physical shopping not yet fully returning to pre-pandemic levels, consumers and retailers both acknowledge the unique experience bricks-and-mortar can offer.



Bloomingdale's launched its small-format store Bloomie's in summer 2021. Image credit: Bloomingdale's

Luxury brands and retailers are strategizing innovative ways to attract consumers, from new concept stores and renovations to specialized in-store offerings.

U.S. department store chain Bloomingdale's introduced its product offerings and services to a smaller, highly-curated store concept.

Located in the Mosaic District shopping center in Fairfax, Virginia, the 22,000 square-foot Bloomie's store is a style and service destination featuring new experience and design concepts and a unique assortment of contemporary and luxury brands across women's and men's fashion and beauty. It also features a tech-enabled stylist service model and a restaurant experience ([see story](#)).

During the summer of 2021, French luxury conglomerate LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton unveiled the newly renovated department store La Samaritaine, following a nearly 16-year restoration project ([see story](#)).

In December, Italian automaker Maserati began piloting its "online to offline" project which will help personalize

clients' experiences, guiding which steps of the purchase process can be done digitally and which can be done at a showroom.

Maserati stores will gradually adopt a new digital-focused design as well, starting with locations in Milan and Shanghai ([see story](#)).

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