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Vanity fair outlets closing

After decades of providing outlet prices on brand-name clothing, the VF Outlet store in West Reading is closing. Clerks at the VF store were telling shoppers that all sales are final, as the store is closing Dec. 24. Below: VF Outlet Store, West Reading, PA. VF is closing sixty other stores nationwide. About twenty stores will be left open and transitioned into Lee/Wrangler Outlet and Clearance Centers. Below: VF Outlet Store closings in Williamsburg, VA, Crossville Outlet Center, Crossville, TN, and Tupelo Outlet Mall, Tupelo, Mississippi. VF, or Vanity Fair, opened the first multi-store outlet center in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1970. VF has a plethora of brands under its umbrella, including Lee, Wrangler, Nautica, Vanity Fair, Majestic, JanSport, Angels, Derek Heart, Timber Creek, Riders, Reef, Olga, Warner's and others. Vanity Fair's roots began with The Reading Glove and Mitten Manufacturing Co. in 1899, which later evolved into Vanity Fair. VF acquired H.D. Lee Co. in 1969 and Blue Bell, which included Wrangler and Red Kap holdings in Tupelo, in 1986. In August 2018, it was announced that VF would be splitting into two separate companies. The jeans and outlet stores would be spun off as Kontoor Brands. VF maintained the sports apparel and footwear businesses and moved its corporate headquarters to Denver, Colorado. Kontoor Brands Inc. became a separate company with the stock symbol KTB on May 23, 2019. Kontoor includes Lee, Wrangler, Rock & Republic and VF Outlets. In December 2016, Equus Capital Partners Ltd of Philadelphia bought the former VF Outlet Center in Reading, PA, which included the Designers Place building. In November 2017, work began on a \$70 million plan to transform the VF Outlet Center into a 34-acre mixed-use retail and business campus with UGI Energy Services as the anchor tenant. In May 2018, VF Outlet relocated to the former Designers Place building. Below: VF Sign Removal, Dec. 27, 2020, West Reading, PA. CONSIDER THE OUTLET MALL: SO AMERICAN and so inevitable is this cross between the grubby factory outlet of the past and the chipper middle-American shopping mall of the present that it's a miracle no one ever thought of it before. Today these malls are upscale and sleek, but their origins are humble. They began on the East Coast in the late 1800's as dingy back rooms of factories, often separated from the manufacturing area by only a flimsy curtain. To cut losses, factory owners offered their unsold and irregular merchandise to employees, who were happy to find a bargain—even if it did mean that one sleeve was longer than the other. Eventually the factories opened their doors to the general public. So it went for more than half a century, until sometime in the 1970's, when real estate developers hit upon the concept of the mega-discount-mall. The event was a watershed in retailing history. No more huge, faceless discount barns, with snarling bargain hunters milling around disheveled bins. No more endless paving through tangerine or puce size 2's and 24's. Today's outlets have class, with tidy displays and easily maneuvered clothing racks, but perhaps more important, they confer a sense of doing one's best in a battered economy. There are two reasons to shop in outlet malls. The first is to buy; the second is not to buy. Yes, you can save a bundle if you can find a batch of Ralph Lauren towels after poking through the "\$3.99 a pound" bin at WestPoint Pepperell. But it's even more fun when you know enough to bypass the fair-to-middling bargains. A four-quart saucepan and lid at Corning/Revere is \$28.50, only a 16 percent savings over the regular price of \$34, so if you're shopping for a wedding present, a far better choice is an oval silver-plated tray at Oneida for \$22—a 43 percent savings. Getting control of "bargain frenzy" is half the fun. Go and Get It TEXAS HAS FIVE LARGE factory-outlet malls near the state's major metropolitan areas, plus a smattering of smaller discount malls elsewhere. San Marcos Factory Shops (512-396-2200) is the largest Texas outlet, and "exclusive" is the key word here. The 68-store mall features such high-priced shops as Jonathan Logan, Cape Isle Knitters, Adrienne Vittadini, Geoffrey Beene, Coach, Jones New York, Donna Karan, Brooks Brothers, and Etienne Aigner. Yet while San Marcos' upscale stores carry better-quality merchandise, they also offer the smallest discounts. A Marble bag by Coach costs \$86 at the outlet, a mere 25 percent savings over the retail price of \$114. Mill Store Plaza, New Braunfels (512-620-6806), thirteen miles south of the San Marcos outlets, has 48 stores centered around WestPoint Pepperell—a bed-and-bath superstore offering large savings for shoppers with the time to sift through massive piles of merchandise. Mill Store Plaza is the mecca of housewares, with Lenox, Oneida, Royal Doulton, and Pfaltzgraff—four superb stores for savings and selections. Famous Brands Housewares, Corning/Revere, Kitchen Collection, and Welcome Home (a Victorian-style shop featuring rugs, wall hangings, crystal, and decorative items) round out the shops. If you're looking for anything from small appliances to cookie cutters, you'll be pleasantly surprised with the name-brand merchandise. Lone Star State Factory Stores, La Marque (409-938-3333), thirty miles south of Houston, is an unusually diverse, middle-of-the-road outlet with 177,000 square feet and forty stores. It has a great blend of housewares and clothing as well as both high- and low-end merchandise. Harvé Benard, Gitano, Bannister Shoe, Toy Liquidators, Bugle Boy, Cape Isle Knitters, Farberware, Kitchen Collection, WestPoint Pepperell, and Kid's Zone exemplify the variety. The mall is planning to expand to 282,000 square feet and more than seventy stores in 1993. Southwest Outlet Center, Hillsboro (817-582-9205), 35 miles north of Waco, off Interstate 35, has 56 stores with a slight emphasis on clothing and accessories. Nike, Liz Claiborne, Guess, Cape Isle Knitters, Jordache, Carole Little, Van Heusen, Wemco, Chaus, and Eddie Bauer offer impressive—in some cases incredible—markdowns. While most outlet malls have one lingerie shop, the Hillsboro center is awash in silk and satin, with Body Drama, Henson Lingerie, Gilligan and O'Malley, Maidenform, and L'Eggs, Hanes, Bali. Conroe Outlet Center (409-856-4979) is the newest of the megacenters. The problem is that it has only 25 stores—a disappointing discovery if you had planned to spend a whole day shopping. A much-needed expansion, which will more than double its size, is scheduled for 1993. Meanwhile, this small outlet north of Houston survives by having two high-profile anchor stores—Nike and Liz Claiborne—and smaller stores ranging from Carter's Childrenswear to Maidenform intimate apparel. Small-timers. Besides the five major outlets, numerous small centers throughout the state have been built around Vanity Fair factory stores. The VF Corporation is one of the largest apparel manufacturers in the world, selling under the brand names of Lee, JanSport, Jantzen, Health-tex, Wrangler, Barbizon, Red Kap, Bassett-Walker, Modern Globe, Girbaud, Lollipop, and of course, Vanity Fair. VF anchors shopping centers in Sulphur Springs, Mineral Wells, Corsicana, Livingston, Kingsville, and Hempstead. While these outlets don't have great range, they do offer an impressive 50 percent savings on their own brands. Rules of the Game Beware: Price Tags Can Lie. You know that "suggested retail price" listed on the tag? A lot of the time it is inflated. True, you still save money, but you may not save as much as you think. A study done by Value Retail News, a trade publication for outlets, showed that while manufacturers claimed their average savings was 40 percent, in actuality it was only 27.5 percent. Be Flexible and Forget Fads. It's essential to pre-shop. Knowing the full retail prices at department stores means you can identify the best bargains at the outlets. Also, be flexible. You won't find fads or trends at outlets because many of these stores don't carry the current season's merchandise, and if they do, it usually arrives four to six weeks later than when it appears in the major chains. When you have to purchase a particular brand or pattern of china, crystal, or silverware, call first, because outlets don't carry full selections of every pattern. You Can Go First Class. A common misconception is that outlets carry only flawed items or merchandise that did not sell elsewhere. Actually, 80 percent of outlet merchandise is first quality. These goods consist mainly of overruns—when the maker has produced too much of a given item—but some manufacturers are now using outlets as test markets. Just remember that first-quality items won't be marked down much—only averaging 20 to 35 percent. But There's No Shame in Settling for Seconds. Two types of less-than-perfect goods find their way to outlets. "Irregulars" have virtually unnoticed flaws—a crooked waistband seam, a slightly lighter color than the manufacturer's specifications, a missing bow—but they can be unbeatable bargains, like Wemco's 100 percent silk ties for \$4.99. "Seconds" have somewhat more-serious flaws like stains, pulls, and slight misshapes, but if you check them carefully and are willing to do minor repairs, you can save 70 to 80 percent, especially on clothing. Houseware seconds are also a bargain: Lenox's Abbey-patterned crystal bowls, regularly \$53, go for only \$16. Down to the Nitty-gritty: Outlet Mall Sales. Yes, it's true. Outlet stores have sales to fulfill any bargain hunter's fantasy: \$10 black pants at Chaus, \$20 dresses at Eddie Bauer, and 50 percent off all Oneida crystal. Seasonal sales are common, including large savings on housewares and linens in the fall and on clothing in the spring and summer. Also, some stores, such as Lenox and Oneida, have special promotions. Be sure to get on Lenox's mailing list since the store sends out coupons for free crystal when you spend a certain amount at the store. Achieving Critical Mass. Why are these malls so far from major cities? Simple: Manufacturers don't want to undercut their regular retail stores. Of course, if you live in a major city, it's not cost effective to drive thirty miles to save \$4 on a four-quart Corning casserole dish, but add in a \$20 savings on a Countess Mara tie at Wemco (usually \$55), \$21 on a pinpoint cotton dress shirt at Hathaway (normally \$48), and \$80 on a five-piece place setting of Lenox's broad gold-rimmed Tuxedo pattern (regularly \$212), and it's definitely worth the gas. Compounding Your Savings With Coupons. Trade publications such as the Joy of Outlet Shopping (800-344-6397) and Outletbound (800-336-8853) cost almost nothing to buy and they offer coupons. Additionally, outlet malls pass out buying-incentive coupons to large groups that come in buses just to shop. Just call ahead so the management will know you're coming. As a result, savvy buyers can often do even better than the marked low price. Expect the Unexpected. Never assume that a store known for one thing doesn't have surprises. Chicago Cutlery Etc. specializes in knives, but the real reason to cross its threshold is the unusual selection of aprons, tote bags, and candles. Famous Brands Housewares carries bowls, kitchen gadgets, and glasses, but less-usual bargains include picture frames, albums, magnets, table linens, and decorative coffee mugs. Creature Comforts. The biggest disappointment of outlet malls is food. Most complexes have customer conveniences like rest areas, TV rooms, and automatic-teller machines—the San Marcos mall even has a miniature golf course (\$3.95 for eighteen holes). But their food service is rudimentary. Fast food is the only option at San Marcos, which seems odd considering the mall's upscale image. And both the Hillsboro and the Conroe centers offer a single eatery, Cafe de France, a slightly pricey sit-down restaurant. The Lone Star State Factory Stores outlet presently has no eating places at all, which means you have to leave the complex for lunch. Overall, the Mill Store Plaza is best, with both a fast-food court and the restaurant-style New Braunfels Smokehouse. Bests and Worst Oneida (Hillsboro, New Braunfels) is the crème de la crème of outlets. Sixty percent off silver-plated serving trays, silver-plated baby spoons for \$5, baby cups for \$6 to \$13, a Chippendale five-piece coffee set for only \$194.21, and stay flatware starting at 98 cents all attest to the phenomenal bargains. It makes you want to stockpile for every conceivable birth, graduation, anniversary, or wedding in the next twelve months. Eddie Bauer (Hillsboro, San Marcos) has bargain-basement sale prices (\$9.99 for men's plaid shirts), but the store also offers a 30 to 60 percent savings on most other items. The men's clothing seems to be priced a bit less than the women's, but all the prices are low. I. B. Diffusion (Hillsboro) carries a colorful, well-made line of women's leisurewear with decorative tops and a wide variety of pants and skirts. The sales staff is attentive but not overbearing. On a recent visit, one salesperson pointed out the best buy in the store—a pair of stretch pants covered with bright geometric shapes on sale for only \$9. Body Drama (Hillsboro) is a Victoria's Secret-style shop specializing in lacy lingerie, surprising customers with its large selection and low prices. The classy Christian Dior undies can be marked down as much as 30 percent. Liz Claiborne (Hillsboro, Conroe) is another story. The sign says "Welcome to the Irregulars Only Liz Claiborne Outlet Store," so if you want first-quality Liz, don't bother. The prices are discounted, but the styles are mostly last season's (and the season before last season), and all sales are final—a policy that most outlets now avoid. On top of that, the racks are jammed and look like they're never cleared. Shoe discounts vary from store to store, but both Nine West (Hillsboro, San Marcos, Conroe) and Unisa (San Marcos, Hillsboro) offer large selections, with flats marked as low as \$20 a pair. Nike (Hillsboro, Conroe, San Marcos) gives a \$10 to \$15 savings on most styles and sometimes has a bargain rack of \$10 athletic shoes. The selection is minimal, but it could be just the thing if you have a growing teenage boy. Outlet shopping for children's clothes can truly save your budget. Carter's Childrenswear (Hillsboro, Conroe, Denton) and Kid's Zone (La Marque, New Braunfels) are the main "kids only" outlet stores. Fragrance shops all offer famous and lesser-known perfumes and toiletries at about 30 percent off. The trick is not being too picky. While the Perfumania in Conroe may carry Cartier, Opium, and Halston on a given day, the other locations might have Passion, Poison, and Yves Saint Laurent. How bad conscious are your kids? Do they have to own the latest trolls? If so, they won't be impressed with outlet toy stores. You won't find the latest craze at either Toys Unlimited (Conroe, Hillsboro, New Braunfels) or Toy Liquidators (San Marcos, La Marque), but both stores offer a variety of games, cars, puzzles, dolls, books, and Barbie paraphernalia, including the ski shop and lagoon pool (\$9.99 each, as opposed to the Toys 'R Us price of \$16.99). Regardless of minor downfalls, outlets do save money—even on the least-discounted items. And, if you view each outlet excursion as an opportunity for one-stop shopping, the potential for savings is easily multiplied. Basically, outlets allow you to purchase the same amount of merchandise for less money than you would spend at a retail store. So why shop anywhere else?

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