

# CELEBRATE the SEASON



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It's that time again. The Union Square tree is lit. Skaters are gliding around the rink on the Embarcadero. You're probably wondering where to spot Santa, buy the most outrageous gifts and fill your soul with holiday spirit. Everyone has their favorite holiday haunts, and so do we.

## Where to Catch Up With Mr. Claus

Kids wait all year to hit Santa with their wish lists — and the Bay Area has no shortage of places where they can do just that.

In San Francisco, your best bet is to head to the seventh floor of Macy's Union Square, which has been transformed into a magical Santaland. The big man in red arrives November 23 and stays until December 24. Hours vary, so check the store's signage for details. Macy's is located at 170 O'Farrell St., San Francisco.

If you're in the mood for a more opulent meet-and-greet, make reservations for the Fairmont Hotel's Christmas morning brunch, which includes Santa, a jazz duo and the Fairmont's famed two-story gingerbread house. The price tag is \$155 for adults and \$89 for children. The Fairmont is located at 950 Mason St., and you can find details at [www.fairmont.com/San-Francisco](http://www.fairmont.com/San-Francisco).

From November 3 to December 24, the Center Pavilion at Stanford Shopping Center serves as Santa's Peninsula headquarters. Check out the Pet Nights event — when Fido can join the photos — and Caring Santa, for children with special needs. For hours and details, visit [www.simonssanta.com](http://www.simonssanta.com). Location: 660 Stanford Shopping Center, Palo Alto.

## Residential Light Show Extravaganzas

The home of **Tom Taylor** and **Jerry Goldstein**, at 3650 21st St. in Dolores Heights, is a must-see for fans of over-the-top Christmas displays, with a 60-foot-high tree, teddy bears and giant stockings. This is the 31st year of the San Francisco couple's outlandish display, and "there will be new attractions this year that are large and move," says Taylor. Decorations go up the first week of December (weather permitting) and stay until New Year's Day.

Peninsula denizens need look no further than their own backyard for eye-popping residential light shows: Christmas Tree Lane in Palo Alto is a throwback to a simpler time marked by neighborhood camaraderie and holiday spirit. Kicked off by four Fulton Street neighbors in 1940, the luminescent tradition has attracted worldwide attention, inspired its own

carols and delighted thousands of awestruck visitors over the years. The spectacle typically gets rolling after the second week of December and runs through the Christmas holiday on Fulton Street between Embarcadero Avenue and Seal Road.

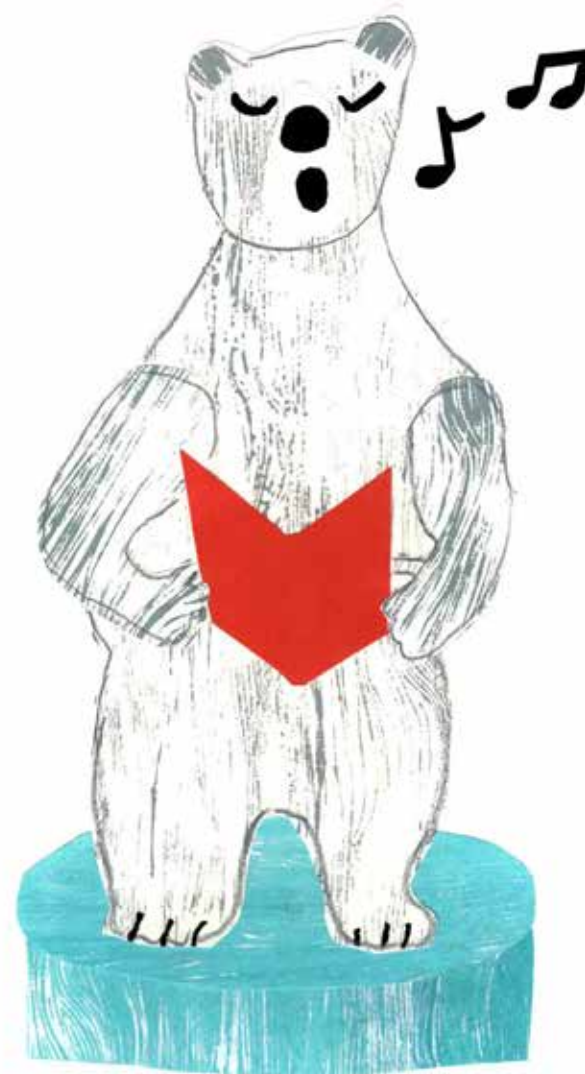
If you're game for a slightly longer drive south, make the trek to San Jose's Willow Glen neighborhood for a sparkling surprise. Residents of this charming neighborhood go the distance to bring the magic of the holidays alive in December, complete with reindeer sleds and, yes, Santa. For best viewing, visit the area bordered by Willow Street, Glen Eyrie Avenue and Carolyn Avenue. Also, check out the house at the corner of Cherry Avenue and Robshead Drive, which is decorated with reindeer, igloos and thousands of lights. "I'd encourage people to park their car along Willow and walk the streets with a hot cocoa in hand," says **Mayra Flores de Marcotte**, vice president of the Silicon Valley Organization.

## Trees, Trees, Trees!

The Union Square Christmas tree is a favorite San Francisco tradition. The reusable tree stands 83 feet tall and is decorated with more than 33,000 lights and 1,100 ornaments. The tree is lit the day after Thanksgiving and brightens up the area through the end of the year.

While you're in Union Square, also check out the Bill Graham Menorah, a 22-foot-high mahogany Menorah, which will be lit the eight nights of Hanukkah, from December 2 to 9. The tradition began in 1975 and "was the first public menorah lighting outside of Israel," says Rabbi **Moshe Langer** of Chabad of San Francisco. The first night includes live music, as well as a dreidel house for kids to make arts and crafts. For lighting hours, visit [www.billgrahammenorah.org](http://www.billgrahammenorah.org).

In San Jose, stroll through the Plaza de Cesar Chavez, which is transformed into a holiday fantasy for Christmas in the Park. From the day after Thanksgiving until Christmas Day, the park is lit up with a 60-foot Community Giving Tree and an Enchanted Forest of 600 trees decorated by San Jose's schools, community groups and businesses. The park is located at 194 South Market St., San Jose.



## Best Gifts for Spoiled Children

Let's face it, a lot of kids in our neck of the woods are spoiled — so why not give them a gift that embraces that? For your first shopping stop, head to Tantrum in San Francisco to buy a Moulin Roty rag doll. Like a page out of a *Madeline* book, Moulin Roty dolls are the epitome of whimsical French charm. "They're designed in France and made with a lot of attention to detail and craftsmanship," says Tantrum co-owner **Richard Weld**. The dolls cost \$72. You can check out the store's website at [www.shoptantrum.com](http://www.shoptantrum.com), or visit Tantrum stores at 858 Cole St. and 248 Clement St.

For the truly spoiled kid, head to Tiffany & Co. for its sterling silver building blocks. This lux-

urious set of 10 numbered and lettered building blocks — think high-end Legos — is made of American walnut and silver. The set costs \$1,650 and there are limited quantities available. You can find Tiffany stores at 350 Post St. in San Francisco and 149 Stanford Shopping Center in Palo Alto.

But to truly get into the holiday spirit, what could be better than a six-foot-tall singing polar bear? The Hansa Toys singing polar bear from Neiman Marcus plays 16 holiday favorites and works with personal media players. The bear costs \$6,500 and limited quantities are available. Grab your ursine balladeer at 150 Stockton St. in San Francisco and 400 Stanford Shopping Center in Palo Alto.



## Holiday Services and Celebrations

For the last 13 years, San Francisco has been home to the Citywide Kwanzaa Celebration, which organizer **Adrian Williams** says "draws more than 2,000 people." This year's celebration takes place from December 26 to January 1, with 16 free events in nine different neighborhoods. Each event celebrates one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa and includes a spiritual ceremony, lighting of the candles and a feast. The festivities kick off at City Hall and end at St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church. For details and schedule, visit [www.kwanzaasanfrancisco.com](http://www.kwanzaasanfrancisco.com).

For a memorable celebration of the Festival of Lights, head to the Peninsula Jewish Community Center for *Light It Up: A Hanukkah Extravaganza*. The event, which takes place December 2 from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., includes latkes, a Hanukkah puppet show, community candle lighting and a station to make friendship bracelets for refugee children. For more information, visit [www.pjcc.org](http://www.pjcc.org). The PJCC is located at 800 Foster City Blvd., Foster City.

For a Christian celebration, it's hard to top the majesty — or music — of Grace Cathedral's Christmas Eve Choral Eucharist at 7:30 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. The 11:00 p.m. Eucharist features the Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys, as well as an orchestra and the church's 7,466-pipe Aeolian-Skinner organ. "Experiencing this music in a Gothic cathedral is a feast for the ears, eyes and soul," says **Patsy Barich**, a spokesman for the cathedral. The church fills to capacity, so plan to arrive an hour early. You can find details at [www.gracecathedral.org](http://www.gracecathedral.org), and the church is located at 1100 California St., San Francisco.

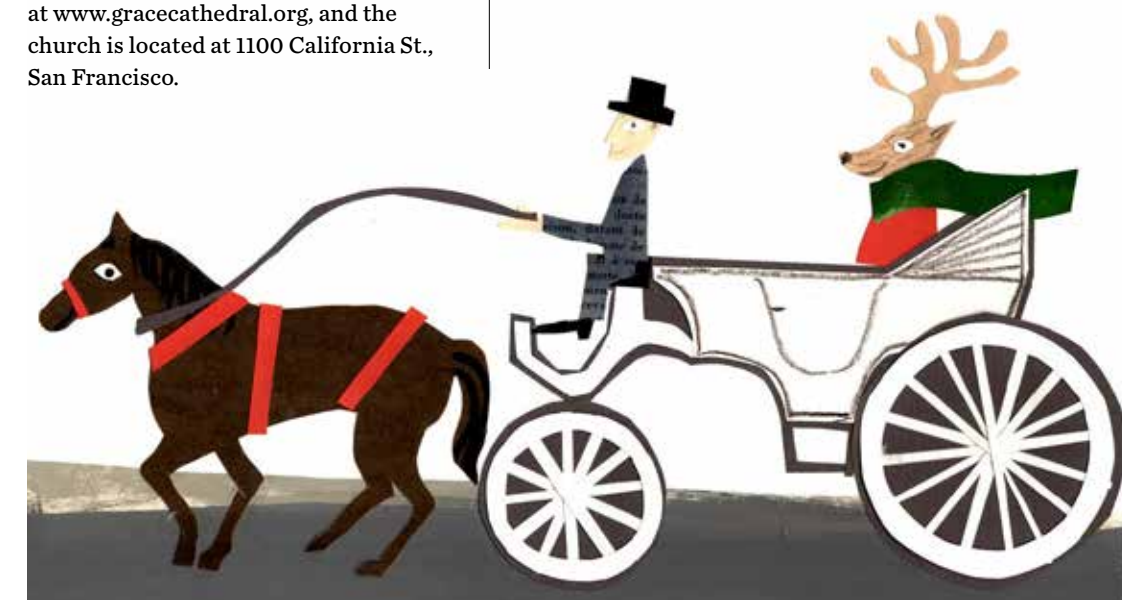


## Holiday Escapes

If you're looking for Old World charm during your holiday, make a trip to Nevada City for its "Victorian Christmas." "It's like a page out of a Dickens novel," says **Lex Matteini** of the Nevada City Chamber of Commerce. The event features strolling carolers in period costume, Scottish highland dancers, yuletide treats and carriage rides. Stay in the small but charming Broad Street Inn ([www.broadstreetinn.com](http://www.broadstreetinn.com)), where rooms start at \$119/night. For dates and locations of Victorian

Christmas, visit [www.nevadacitychamber.com](http://www.nevadacitychamber.com).

Better yet, escape the holiday madness entirely and book a room at the Four Seasons' newest Hawaiian property, Oahu at Ko Olina Resort. Santa will visit the beach on Christmas Eve morning, and the resort's soaring atrium is home to the tallest living Christmas tree on the island. You could also skip the festivities and head to the spa for an oxygen facial or a Hawaiian healing therapy instead. For more information, visit [www.fourseasons.com/oahu/](http://www.fourseasons.com/oahu/). Room rates range from \$799 to \$19,500/night.



## Onstage:

### The Nutcracker

One of the most magical things about the holiday season is *The Nutcracker*. Our very own San Francisco Ballet was the first American dance company to stage *The Nutcracker* in 1944 — and it continues to offer a world-class production of this holiday favorite today. Performances at the War Memorial Opera House run from December 12 to 29, and tickets range from \$39 to \$448. The Children's Enchantment Fund offers free tickets for families

who need them. For more information, visit [www.sfballet.org](http://www.sfballet.org).

You don't need to make the trek into the city for kids to revel in Clara, Fritz and the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Western Ballet will perform *The Nutcracker* at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts from November 30 to December 2. Tickets range from \$28 to \$33, and you can find more information at [www.mvcpa.com](http://www.mvcpa.com). The MVCPA is located at 500 Castro St., Mountain View.

