

3 Great Christmas Towns In California For A Magical Christmas



Christmas tree in San Francisco's Union Square
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While California is known for its pristine beaches and sunshine all year round, there are notable destinations within the state that are the perfect places to celebrate Christmas this year. California has tons of holiday offerings from dazzling decorations, holiday fairs, and spectacular shows to winter sports and long-time traditions. From big cities to quaint towns, there is sure to be a place in California that will bring the holiday magic to you and your family this holiday season. We won't discuss the major city events you've likely seen on TV, as I'm sure you've heard enough about them. No "bah humbug" here, as we give you the low down on our top picks for 3 great towns in California for a magical Christmas.

3 Great Christmas Towns In California For A Magical Christmas

1. Best For A Cozy Traditional Christmas: Solvang

Solvang is a tiny village known for its unique Danish architecture and European knickknacks. This small town goes big for the holiday season. The quaint city of Solvang is well-known for its local bakeries and eateries, and also its architecture that is reminiscent of small European towns. Ring in the festive season with traditional Danish goods and dazzling Christmas lights strewn around the streets.

If you are looking for a cozy traditional Christmas, Solvang is a great place to visit. During the holiday months, Solvang is renowned for Julefest, which features a wide range of festive events, performances, food, and more. Truly unique from the grand events put on by large cities, Solvang's quaint atmosphere makes it one of the best Christmas towns in California to visit this holiday season.

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Where Is Solvang located?

Solvang is a small Danish-inspired city in Santa Barbara County nestled in the Santa Ynez Valley of Southern California. If you are looking for a festive getaway, Solvang is located just over 2 hours away from the city of Los Angeles.

Accommodations And Travel Tips

Where To Stay

The small historic town of Solvang has a wide variety of accommodations from charming bed and breakfasts to luxury ranch resorts. As it is a smaller city, most stays are located within walking distance from the downtown area and the main attractions. For the full experience of a small Christmas town experience in Southern California, we recommend local bed and breakfasts for a great way to meet the locals.

How To Get Around

Do not worry, Solvang is a walkable city. Stroll through the pedestrian-friendly town to enjoy its unique European-style architecture and festive decorations that turn on the holiday charm.

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Tips From A Local

Solvang is a dog-friendly area, so if you have a furry friend, this area may be one to put at the top of your list.

We Spent 24 Hours in Solvang for Julefest: Ostriches, Pastries, Light Shows & More



Holiday Events And Attractions

Solvang's annual Julefest is a Danish-style Christmas season celebration. The events begin on November 24, 2023, and run until January 6, 2024. This magical event makes Solvang one of the best California Christmas towns to get in the holiday spirit. The month-long celebration brings holiday cheer with dazzling Christmas lights, family-friendly events, festive music, unique holiday shopping, and local culinary treats.

Maker's Market

Maker's Market is a unique Victorian-style Christmas celebration modeled after traditional European night markets, sure to bring out the Christmas spirit. Catch the market on December 6 from 5 to 7 p.m. for some unique Christmas decorations and artisan offerings. The Christmas town market showcases rows of local crafters and artists who gather at Solvang Park. This open-air holiday market is the perfect place to pick up locally made Christmas gifts for your loved ones this holiday season. Get some shopping done under the magical twinkling lights while enjoying the Christmas decorations and seasonal delights.



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The advertisement features a central image of a person in a yellow jacket standing in a field with a large blue and black butterfly. The image is framed by a red border. The text 'Giant Butterfly' and 'Generate' is overlaid on the image. The 'Buy now' button is located on the right side of the advertisement.

Solvang Christmas Tree Burn

The Solvang Christmas Tree Burn is another one-of-a-kind holiday festivity. The occasion is scheduled after the Christmas season on January 5, 2024. As its name suggests, the Christmas Tree Burn is a fire safety demonstration that is supervised by the Santa Barbara County Fire Department. The annual event is one of the largest of its kind and is a great wrap-up to mark the end of the month-long Solvang Julefest celebration. While the Christmas trees are burned, the Christmas village also offers grand holiday festivities including live music and entertainment.

Light & Music Show

Every night in Solvang Park, you can enjoy a spectacular 10-minute music and light display every hour. Get in the holiday spirit by enjoying the Christmas lights and festive music right in the heart of this Christmas town.

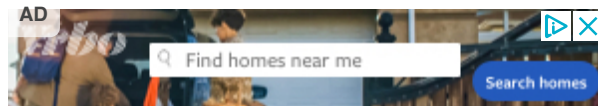
Nisser Adventure

Nisser is the Danish word for “gnome.” Join in the holiday fun in town by searching for the group of Solvang nissers scattered throughout downtown Solvang. If you happen to track them in town, you can pop into the visitor center to pick up your special Solvang souvenir. Hint: The visitor center also offers a list of clues for common hiding spots that the nissers typically like to hide. Involve the whole family in this nisser adventure.

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Santa Claus Village

Every Saturday leading up to Christmas Day, Santa Claus Village is set up at Solvang Park. Be sure to get your camera ready, as this is a great opportunity for the kids to meet Santa Claus and snap a picture of Christmas in California.

Candlelight Tours

The Candlelight Tours are offered on several days throughout the festival and are a great way to enjoy holiday music while strolling through the streets of this Christmas wonderland. The lights parade will need to be booked in advance but is truly a unique way to celebrate Christmas. Each participant receives an LED candle to hold throughout the tour, lighting up the streets of the small town. In addition to belting your favorite Christmas carols, the tour also allows you to learn about the rich history of Solvang and the Danish traditions that are still celebrated today.

Solvang Trolley Christmas Light Tour

If you are looking to rest your feet after a long day of shopping and enjoy some holiday lights, the trolley tour is for you. The Solvang Trolley runs throughout the main roads and takes you on a tour of the holiday lights and decorations. Grab a cup of hot cocoa, sit back, and relax!

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When planning a trip to Southern California, Solvang is one of the top Christmas towns that will truly bring the holiday magic. Whether you want to spend Christmas Day away from the big city or are looking to spend a couple of days during the holiday season, Solvang has a wide variety of events that make it the perfect Christmas destination for the whole family.



Winter scene in Lake Tahoe

PHOTO CREDIT: THOM MILKOVIC / UNSPLASH

2. Best For A White Christmas: Lake Tahoe

While Southern California is recognized for its white beaches and palm trees, the northern part of the state has several great destinations if you are looking to spend Christmas in a winter wonderland. We find that Big Bear Lake is highly frequented and can be a bit too crowded during this time of year. South Lake Tahoe is one of our top magical Christmas towns in California as it offers a wide range of activities and events to get you in the holiday spirit.

Where Is Lake Tahoe located?

Lake Tahoe is located in northern California in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The area is known for its charming mountain lakes and winter wonderland views during the Christmas season. While most people gather at Big Bear Lake for winter activities, South Lake Tahoe is another great destination to enjoy a White Christmas and get wild with some winter activities.



Accommodations And Travel Tips

Where To Stay

The choices are endless, as Lake Tahoe offers everything from campgrounds and cabins to hotels and casinos. We recommend booking a cabin to experience the White Christmas that Lake Tahoe has to offer.

How To Get Around

Lake Tahoe is a visitor-friendly destination that offers multiple ways to get around town without a car. Explore the wonder of this Christmas town on foot, as the paths are well-marked and paved. Lake Tahoe also offers several bus routes that run through the South Shore to areas like Nevada and elsewhere. Some of the most notable bus lines include the Tahoe Transportation District (TTD) and the Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transportation (TART).

Tips From A Local

Weather changes quickly in Lake Tahoe. While the city offers a truly magical winter wonderland experience for the holidays, it is also common for visitors to get snowed in. Be sure to plan ahead if you are looking to spend Christmas in Lake Tahoe this year.



Heavenly Holidays 2019 Tahoe South



Holiday Events And Attractions

Heavenly Holidays Family Festival

The Heavenly Holidays Family Festival runs from November 24 to December 31, with events happening all month long. To kickstart the season, a giant Christmas tree is lit with twinkling lights beginning at 6:30 p.m. The tree will be lit nightly by Santa at 5:30 p.m. to bring warmth to chilly winter nights. Enjoy a free cup of coffee and enjoy some festive tunes. Throughout the month, Heavenly Village is strung with thousands of Christmas lights teeming with Christmas spirit. The month-long celebration also features fun events for the kids such as Breakfast with

Santa, Meet your Favorite Characters, face painting, and more. If looking for a more adult-curated California Christmas, the festival also highlights events such as Sip and Shop and the Champagne and Chocolate Tasting to get everyone in the family into the holiday spirit.

Winter Sports

Lake Tahoe is home to several resorts for you to try out some new winter sports. Check out Heavenly Mountain Resort, Kirkwood Mountain Resort, or Sierra-at-Tahoe if you are looking to get an early start on the ski/snowboard season. The resorts offer something for all abilities from bunny slopes to untracked chutes. If skiing and snowboarding sound a bit too adventurous, there are also various activities such as ice skating, sledding, or renting a snowmobile to get in your winter fun.

Festival Of Winter Lights

This annual tradition will be held this year on December 8 and 9. The Festival of Winter Lights is a perfect way to enjoy the festive Christmas décor at this free outdoor holiday market. Some of the most notable activities include the Borges Winter Carriage Rides, Holiday in History at the Museum, Kids Activities with the Tahoe Art League, Photos with the Christmas Fire Engine, The Trail of Lights, and Visits to Santa's House. The festival is lined with Christmas trees decked out with holiday decorations and it has something to offer for everyone in the family.

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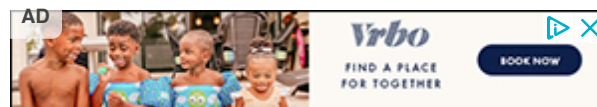
Ice Skating

Lake Tahoe has no shortage of ice skating rinks, especially during the holiday season. Get into the holiday spirit by showing off those figure eights while marveling at the twinkling lights and festive tunes playing in the surroundings. Check out the ice skating rinks at Heavenly Village and Edgewood Tahoe Resort for some fun for you and the kids.

Magic Shows

What sets Lake Tahoe apart from places like Big Bear Lake is its availability for a winter wonderland experience while also offering a big-city casino. Check out some of the most popular magic shows Tahoe has to offer when visiting Southern California this year. The most notable shows include Magic Fusion and Magic After Dark. Magic Fusion is a genius blend of comedy and magic that the whole family can enjoy. Magic After Dark is an edgy and sophisticated magic show that is perfect for adults.

If you are looking for the best Christmas towns in California that have the best of both worlds, Lake Tahoe is the one to bookmark. While offering the most serene White Christmas scenes that California has to offer, Lake Tahoe also features big-city events and shows that cater to all ages.





Trolley in San Francisco during Christmas
PHOTO CREDIT: JUSTIN SULLIVAN / GETTY IMAGES

3. Best For A Big City Christmas: San Francisco

If you are looking for the best Christmas towns in California for a big-city Christmas, San Francisco is where you want to be. Reminiscent of a New York City Christmas, the vibrant city of San Francisco embodies the spirit of the holidays during the winter time. The big city features over-the-top decorations, festive celebrations, and much more. The most notable area in San Francisco for the holidays is the decked-out Union Square, which is transformed during the holiday season. With its distinguished atmosphere of city sights and holiday festivities, San Francisco is one of the most notable Christmas towns in California for a good reason.

Where Is San Francisco located?

San Francisco, located within what is known as the Bay Area, is located in northern California. If driving from Southern California, it is about a 7-hour drive from Los Angeles. Well-known for its

iconic Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco is the place to spend your California Christmas if looking for an all-around festive experience.

Accommodations And Travel Tips

Where To Stay

As many of the festivities are centered in Union Square, we highly recommend staying in the surrounding areas. This area offers a range of hotels for you to choose from that are great for solo travelers and families. Fisherman's Wharf and Nob Hill are also great locations that offer a variety of transportation options to get around as well.

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How To Get Around

As a bustling city, San Francisco offers a wide range of transportation options that are great for travelers. If you do not have a car, you can get around using ride-share apps, taxis, buses, or the city's all-electric trains known as the BART. It is a fast and inexpensive method of transportation that takes you around the city.

Tips From A Local

If you are looking to utilize public transportation, be sure to grab a Clipper Card. This card is the easiest way to use all the different public transportation options including the BART, Metro, cable cars, and Muni buses.



Union Square Christmas tree in San Francisco

PHOTO CREDIT: KIMBERLY WHITE / GETTY IMAGES FOR MACY'S, INC.

Holiday Events And Attractions

Union Square

Union Square is home to several traditional holiday events that are iconic to Christmas in California. Join in on Union Square's Winter Walk, which features live entertainment, holiday shopping, and yummy holiday treats. The walk is lined with Christmas trees, painted ornaments, and twinkling lights. Also in Union Square, Santa is stationed at Macy's, which is a great opportunity for the kids to meet and take a picture with him. If you are tired of all the holiday shopping, the ice skating rink at Union Square is also a great festive activity for the family, open from November until January 15.

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Let's Glow SF

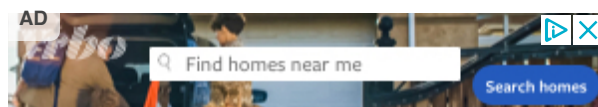
A new addition to the holidays, Let's Glow SF is a projection show that features local holiday artwork displayed on the large buildings of the Financial District. The show begins in December and is free to the public. Enjoy a cup of hot cocoa and tasty holiday treats while relishing in the Christmas décor and bright artwork of local artists.

Napa Valley Wine Train

While not exactly in San Francisco, the Napa Valley Wine Train offers a unique holiday experience that is a must for a true California Christmas holiday. There are several different trains including Cookie Car, Gourmet Holiday Express, Jingle on the Rails, and Very Merry Vista Dome. Not far from San Francisco, we definitely recommend a detour to visit this special holiday tradition.

Honorable Mentions For California Christmas Towns

While we mentioned our top three best Christmas towns to check out when visiting Southern California, there are several other notable destinations worth looking into if you have some extra time.



Big Bear Lake

A shorter drive from Los Angeles, Big Bear Lake is another great place to experience snow and participate in winter activities.


Newport Beach

Located in Orange County and known for its coastal vibes, [Newport Beach](#) has an extravagant boat parade you won't want to miss.

Anaheim

Home to Disneyland and just minutes away from Newport Beach, Anaheim is also home to a host of festive fun. If visiting Disneyland, be sure to stay for the Christmas Fantasy Parade to see some of your favorite characters decked out in holiday themes.

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San Diego

Located in Southern California, San Diego is another popular family destination. Catch the unique lights at the San Diego Zoo, ride the San Diego Trolley, shop in downtown San Diego, or join in on the festivities at Hotel del Coronado.

Altadena

If you are looking for a quick drive-through activity, Christmas Tree Lane is one of the best dazzling light displays in Southern California.

Celebrate Christmas In California The Right Way This Holiday Season

If you and your family are spending the holidays in California, any one of these towns will bring you a truly magical Christmas.



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DUTTONNE CHONG

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Duttonne is a freelance writer born and raised in California. A true explorer and free-spirit, she is always on the go. From learning and immersing herself in the different cultures of places around the globe to embarking on outdoor treks in nature, she continues to experience all that the world has to offer....

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