

ARTS & CULTURE

Bay Area Holiday Lights: 17 Dazzling Displays of Winter Wonder

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Published Dec. 01, 2022 • 4:30pm



Holiday lights are on display at Union Square in San Francisco on Dec. 21, 2020. | Miikka Skaffari/Getty Images

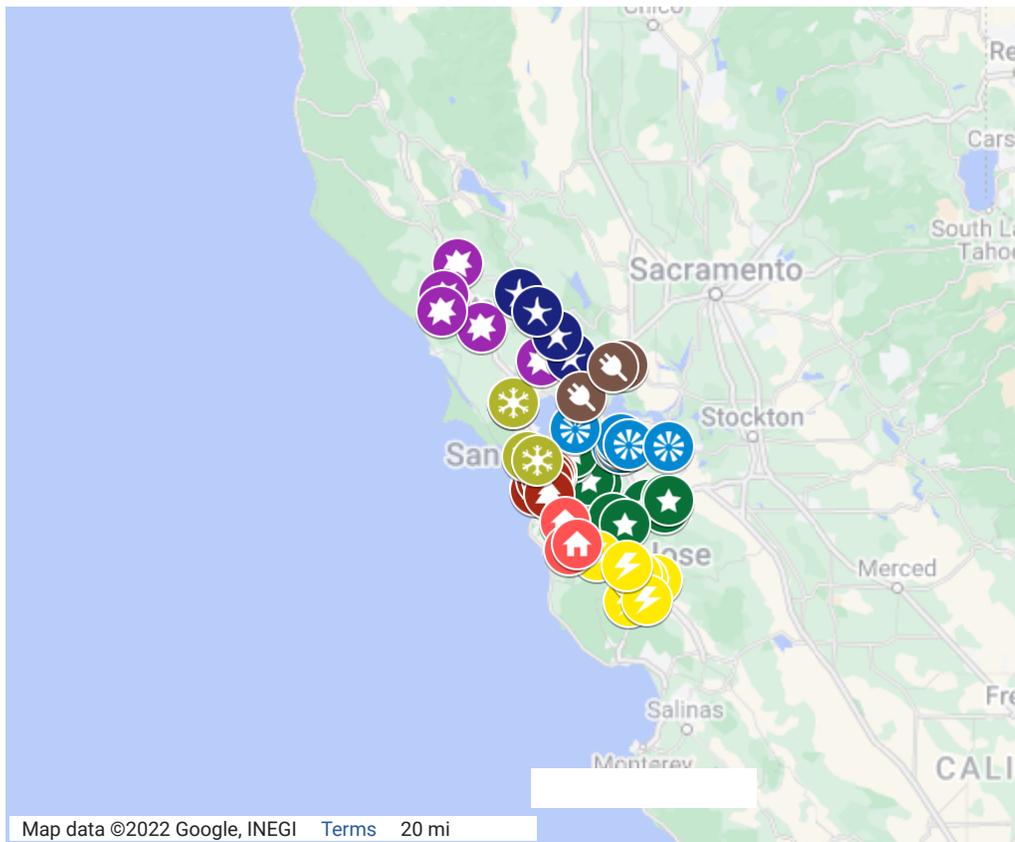
Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali, Saint Lucia Day—
celebrations of light are a common element of many global
wintertime traditions.

Here in the Bay Area, we certainly love the comfort of a bright light on a cold night. From the illuminated shop windows of Union Square in San Francisco to the *Glowfari* at the Oakland Zoo—and from a twinkling train ride through the East Bay foothills to a waterfront festival in Sausalito—the Bay Area has holiday lights aplenty.

With that in mind, The Standard has compiled a list of dazzling local light displays to visit this December.

The Best Holiday Lights in the SF Ba... ☆

About



San Francisco

Union Square

Downtown San Francisco

The massive tree anchoring Union Square is aglow, and you can make a whole evening out of visiting it. Book a [one-hour ice skating session online](#) to practice your twirls and then take a spin around Macy's to gaze at the adorable (and adoptable) animals in the shop windows and get some holiday shopping done Downtown, where local stores could use your business. If you're in the mood for more holiday treats, check out the 12-foot castle made entirely of sugar in the lobby of the [Westin St. Francis](#). (JZ)

 [333 Post St.](#)

 [\(650\) 364-8300](#)



A projection at 301 Pine St. in San Francisco a part of "Let's Glow SF" hosted by Downtown SF on Dec. 9, 2021. | Elliott Alexander for The Stanard

[The World Tree of Hope at Grace Cathedral](#)

Nob Hill

Decorated with more than 17,000 paper cranes with messages from people of all ages and faiths, the Christmas tree at Grace Cathedral is the largest origami tree in the world. Handwritten dreams for the future adorn the World Tree of Hope, a 15-year tradition and gift from the LGBTQ+ community to the city. The serene, stately atmosphere of Grace Cathedral offers the opportunity for reflection—a welcome counterpoint to the more bustling holiday festivities. Make it a classic (and indulgent) San Francisco afternoon and stroll across the street afterward to have a festive cocktail at the Top of the Mark bar with its great views or high tea at the Fairmont Hotel with its world class environs. (JZ)

 1100 California St.

 (415) 749-6300

San Francisco Decorated Boat Parade

Marina

Stake a spot along Crissy Field or Marina Green to watch this holiday boat parade put on by the St. Francis Yacht Club. Boats festively decorated by the club's membership sail along the shoreline and compete for prizes. Members can watch from the club, and the public can view the spectacle from the shore. (CJC)

 Crissy Field and Marina Green

 Dec. 16, 6-9 p.m.



Isabella Stamos plays inside the Light Installation 'Entwined' in Golden Gate Park on opening night on Dec. 1, 2022. | Eloïse Kelsey for The Standard

Entwined Meadow

Golden Gate Park

An updated version of Charles Gadeken's illuminated art installation returns to Golden Gate Park, lighting up one of the park's less-loved corners with luminescent trees and sculptural shrubbery. The whimsical collection of glowing trees and saplings pulse with ever-shifting LED lights; QR codes embedded in certain pieces allow visitors to program their own color patterns and sequencing. Live performances happen in the glittering forest twice a week. Check SF Parks Alliance's website for the full schedule. (CJC)

 Peacock Meadow, Golden Gate Park

 Dec. 1-March 12, 2023, 5-10 p.m. nightly

Visitation Valley Light Festival

Visitacion Valley

During this light festival, Leland corridor businesses will stay open late offering warm bites, beverages, karaoke, live jazz music and holiday movie showings as families and community members get the chance to interact with and explore light art made by local Bay Area artists. (CJC)

 Leland Ave. & Peabody St. to Campbell Ave. & Rutland St.

 Dec. 17, 5-8 p.m.



A projection at 345 Montgomery St. in San Francisco is a part of “Let’s Glow SF” hosted by Downtown SF on Dec. 9, 2021. | Elliott Alexander

Let’s Glow SF

Downtown San Francisco

San Francisco’s annual festival of projection art returns to the city’s core with an array of animated displays on Downtown facades created by artists from across the Bay Area and around the world. Whether you choose to post up at the

Pacific Stock Exchange or One Bush Plaza, you're sure to see something something spectacular. Visit *Let's Glow's SF's* website for the [full list](#) of locations. (CJC)

 Various locations

 [\(415\) 634-2251](tel:(415)634-2251)

 Dec. 2-11, 5-10 p.m.

Illuminate SF

San Francisco

Luminescent light displays come to life across San Francisco's various neighborhoods as part of this 10th annual festival of illuminated art. *Helical Trace*, the latest creation by artist Jim Campbell, who's known for [lighting up the top of the Salesforce Tower](#), joins the San Francisco Light Trail. The Exploratorium's *GLOW: Discover the Art of Light* also returns with with six artists illuminating Pier 15 with light sculptures of all shapes and sizes. And interdisciplinary artist Yu-Wen Wu's illustrated lanterns of barrier-breaking Asian Americans such as martial arts icon [Bruce Lee](#) and author Amy Tan create a luminous canopy in Chinatown on the 600 block of Grant Avenue. Check out Illuminate SF's [light art map](#) for the artworks' various locations. (CJC)

 Various locations

 Nov. 9-Jan. 2023

East Bay

Christmas Tree Lane

Alameda

This East Bay block is known for its we're-not-messing-around commitment to holiday decorations. This year will feature *Star Wars* and *Paw Patrol*-themed yards and a mailbox for letters en route to the North Pole—visitors can expect replies from the big man himself. The neighborhood-wide spectacle will be up and running from early December through New Year's Eve. (OCM)

 [3200 Thompson Ave., Alameda](#)

 Until Jan. 31



The lit-up animal lanterns attract thousands to Oakland Zoo on Nov. 16, 2022. | Tayfun Coskun/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Glowfari at the Oakland Zoo

Oakland

While the real animals are sleeping, see the light-up variety at Oakland Zoo's *Glowfari*—a stunning display of oversized lanterns that includes everything from kangaroos to koalas, dinosaurs to jellyfish. With Santa in attendance every night in December and train rides through a world of mythical creatures, it's a perfect option for those with tots in tow. Timed tickets are required, so it's best to plan in advance. (JZ)

 [9777 Golf Links Road, Oakland](#)

 [\(510\) 632-9525](tel:(510)632-9525)

Dazzling Holiday Lights

Berkeley

Each night through the new year, the trees that line the Fourth Street shopping district are illuminated with holiday sparkle. On Dec. 10 and 17 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. a cast of LED-lit holiday characters—some on stilts—will join the light show, promenading in a “Holiday Fantasy Parade” that shoppers can enjoy as they drive down the street. (SH)

 [Fourth Street Shops, Berkeley](#)

 Until Jan. 2023

Temple Hill

Oakland

The striking Art Deco Mormon Temple is viewable atop the Oakland hills from most vantage points in the East Bay, and come the holiday season, the temple gardens become a

shimmering spectacle. Free and open to the public, Temple Hill gets lit at dusk each evening to accompany a series of dance performances, gospel concerts and kids' parties scheduled through the holidays. (SH)

 [4770 Lincoln Ave., Oakland](#)

 Nov. 25-Dec. 31

Old Town Niles

Fremont

On the eastern edge of the East Bay suburb of Fremont, the Niles District is a great place to spend an afternoon with family and friends. The main drag is lined with numerous antique shops, eateries and historical landmarks, including the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum. The Train of Lights, which runs through nearby Niles Canyon, makes for a family friendly nighttime excursion (tickets are currently sold out through December, but more may become available). It's a quiet enclave in a sprawling bedroom community, so there's not much nightlife to speak of, but after the sun goes down, the holiday decor lining the streets is ideal for an early evening stroll. (NV)

 [Niles Town Plaza, Fremont](#)

 [\(510\) 996-8420](#)

South Bay

Filoli

Woodside

The sprawling historic estate of Filoli—which includes 16 acres of formal gardens as well as a 56-room mansion—is the ideal canvas for holiday magic. The estate drapes its gardens with twinkling bulbs, and the historic home festoons Christmas trees in almost every room. Select weekends in December have Santa in attendance, with hot drinks and treats around the outdoor fire pits. Buy your tickets in advance, as the popular evening entrance time often sells out. But not to fret—the lights are on all day and visible even during the day. (JZ)

 86 Cañada Road, Woodside

 Nov. 19, 2022-Jan. 8, 2023

 (650) 364-8300

Christmas Tree Lane

Palo Alto

Given its proximity to Stanford University, the Stanford Shopping Center and the upscale commercial corridor of University Avenue, it doesn't take much planning to make a day out of a visit to Christmas Tree Lane in Palo Alto. While young children are sure to be awed by the elaborate front yard decorations, the kids-at-heart will appreciate the neighborhood's striking architecture and landscaping. (NV)

 1700-1800 Fulton Ave., Palo Alto

 Dec. 10-21, 5-11 p.m.

Enchant

San Jose

Local fútbol fans know PayPal Park as the home of the Bay Area's only Major League Soccer team, the San Jose Earthquakes. But Old Saint Nick is taking up residence there during the final month of the year. Hallmark has transformed the stadium into a winter wonderland. Enchant promises magical evenings of lights, ice skating, games and tasty treats. You can also book a chat with Santa and take a sparkly stroll through an illuminated maze. (OCM)

📍 1123 Coleman Ave., San Jose

📅 Nov. 25-Jan. 1

☎ (276) 262-4268



Fishing boats and yachts parade from Pier 39 to St. Francis Yacht club in San Francisco on Dec. 17, 2010. | Liz Hafalia/San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images

North Bay

Sausalito Winterfest 2022

Sausalito

See a festive display of boats float along the Sausalito waterfront during this Marin County boat parade. Fireworks follow at 7:15 p.m. Reserved seats are sold out, so you'll have to do your best to snag a free viewing spot along the waterfront. However, tickets are still available for the "Captain's After Party," if you want to go big on revelry after the seaside show. (CJC)

 Sausalito Waterfront: Gabrielson Park, Humboldt Ave. & Anchor St.

 Dec. 10, 6-7:15 p.m.

 \$30+

Calistoga Lighted Tractor Parade

Napa Valley

This charming wine country town dresses up for its annual tractor parade. See over 50 decorated tractors and floats cascade down Lincoln Avenue in celebration of the holidays and the city's agricultural heritage. (CJC)

 Lincoln Avenue, Calistoga

 Dec. 3, 7-8 p.m.

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