

LIFE

# Holiday Lights 2023: Where To See the Bay Area's Most Festive Showcases

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Isabella Stamos admires the light installation "Entwined" in Golden Gate Park on opening night on Dec. 1, 2022. | Eloise Kelsey for The Standard

From the top of San Francisco's Salesforce Tower to the peak of Oakland's Temple Hill, dozens of brilliant holiday light displays will brighten up the Bay Area this month.

If you're drawn to holiday lights like a moth to a flame, here are 15 spots across the region where you can celebrate the spirit of the season in 2023.

## San Francisco

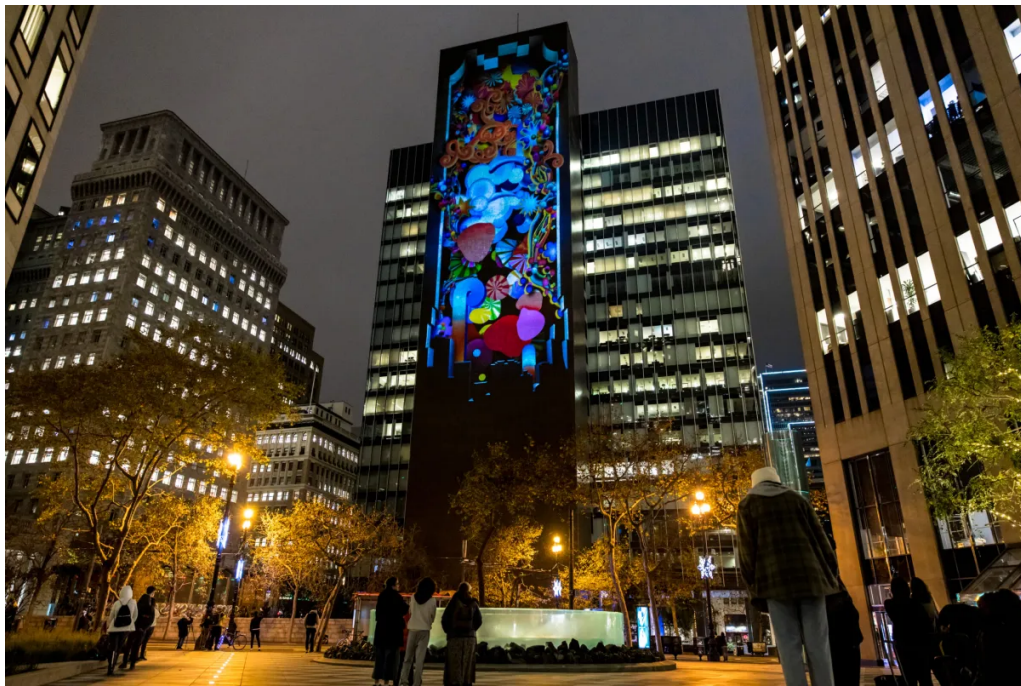
### Let's Glow SF

 Nightly through Dec. 10, 5-10 p.m.

 Various Locations

 Free

Let's get the most technologically impressive display out of the way first. From Dec. 1 to 10, Downtown San Francisco's skyline will be illuminated with scintillating projections on city landmarks once again for the third annual Let's Glow SF holiday light festival.



People look at projections outside of One Bush Plaza in San Francisco as part of Let's Glow SF. | Courtesy Let's Glow SF

Wintry-themed artworks titled *Snowflakes*, *Wonderland* and *Skywaves* animate the top of Salesforce Tower, while icy

*Glacial Gates* brings some seasonal wonder to the outdoor gathering space at the new Landing at Leidesdorff. But the Ferry Building is the star of the show as multimedia artist Yann Nguema's *Anima Lux*—accompanied by a score by French electronic music project *Zero Gr4vity*—casts a “visual poem” onto the building's facade for its 125th anniversary.

## Union Square's Winter Wander-Land

 Various dates through Jan. 1

 Union Square, Downtown San Francisco



The Macy's Christmas tree at Union Square is illuminated for the 2023 holiday season. | Benjamin Fanjoy/The Standard

Union Square is dressed up in its holiday best as Macy's Christmas tree at the center of the plaza stands 83 feet tall, bedecked with ornaments and a red star on top, through Jan. 1, but there is more to admire. From Dec. 7 to 15, the 25-foot Bill Graham Menorah will glow over the scene, and the famous department store's windows showcase adorable

adoptable kittens and puppies through Dec. 31. You can also take a whirl on the ice rink, which hosts an array of performances and skate nights all season, or stroll through the arctic-themed Winter Walk on Stockton Street, featuring food trucks, roaming live performances and sit-downs with Santa.

## Entwined



Dec. 7-April 28, 2024



Peacock Meadow, Golden Gate Park



[sanfranciscoparksalliance.org](https://sanfranciscoparksalliance.org)



Free



Light art installation "Entwined" returns to Golden Gate Park for the fourth time this month. | Eloise Kelsey for The Standard

The Winter staple *Entwined* returns once again to Golden Gate Park's Peacock Meadow. The luminescent field of trees by Bay Area artist Charles Gadeken routinely transfixes audiences with its signature sugar cube-shaped foliage. This year, it's joined by a new addition called *Elder Mother*, a willowy, 30-foot-tall metal sculpture originally constructed

for Burning Man that incorporates six QR codes on its “leaves,” allowing visitors to control the patterns themselves.

## **Chinatown Holiday Lights Festival**



Dec. 6, 6 p.m.



California Avenue to Broadway Street, Chinatown



[sfchinatownmerchants.org](http://sfchinatownmerchants.org)



Free

This inaugural light festival brings a festive glow to the full stretch of Chinatown, inviting visitors to explore the neighborhood’s many shops for the holidays. A lighting ceremony on Dec. 6 features live performances, traditional Chinese music and appearances by local dignitaries.

## **East Bay**

### **Fourth Street Holiday Lights**



Through Dec. 31



Fourth Street, Berkeley



[fourthstreet.com](http://fourthstreet.com)



Free

Lined with shops and restaurants, Northwest Berkeley’s Fourth Street sparkles nightly through the end of the year—and hosts a series of festivities, too. In addition to shopping Marine Layer or Anthropologie, you can peruse holiday mart pop-ups on Dec. 9 and 16. Carolers come from 1 to 3 p.m. on Dec. 23, and Santa also stops by from 1 to 4 p.m. that day as well. A fantastical drive-by parade, featuring appearances by the Grinch, snow queens on stilts and Elsa from *Frozen*, animates the commercial corridor on Dec. 16. Not only can

you send correspondence to Santa from a special mailbox, you might even get a reply from one of his elves.

## Oakland Temple Hill

 Through Dec. 31

 4770 Lincoln Ave., Oakland

 [templehill.org](http://templehill.org)


 Free

More than 100,000 lights shimmer and bounce off the fountains and greenery of Oakland's palm-studded Art Deco Mormon Temple, halfway between the flats and the hills. With breathtaking views of the bay, its gardens are open to the public and illuminated from dusk until 9 p.m. nightly through the end of December. The church also hosts a series of performances, from choral concerts to the *Nutcracker*.





Oakland Temple Hill's grounds and palm trees are illuminated for the holidays. | Courtesy Oakland Temple Hill

## Glowfari

 Through Jan. 28

 9777 Golf Links Road, Oakland

 [oaklandzoo.org](http://oaklandzoo.org)

 \$22-\$26





Oakland Zoo's Glowfari features giant animal lanterns, like this walrus. | Courtesy Oakland Zoo

Journey through this odyssey of light at the Oakland Zoo, where giant lanterns shaped like tigers, alligators and giraffes lanterns guide your way. The wildly popular experience doubles down on the winter theme with puffins and polar bears in its menagerie, although there are plenty of mountain lions, a larger-than-life octopus and even a field of flora and fauna inspired by Madagascar. Admission is free for kids under 2 and kids at heart over 76.

## **Alameda's Christmas Tree Lane**

 Dec. 3-31


 3200-3299 Thompson Ave. between High & Fernside,  
Alameda

 [facebook.com/christmastreelane](https://facebook.com/christmastreelane)

 Free


Residents of this East Bay block pull out all the stops for holidays, transforming their yards with decorations inspired by everything from *Star Wars* to *Paw Patrol*—even throwing cello concerts on their front lawns. As in years past, special mailboxes line the street so that you can send off a missive to Santa when you stop by. Check Christmas Tree Lane Alameda's [Facebook page](#) for updates on special performances and appearances by the big jolly guy himself.

## The Garden of D'Lights

 Though Jan. 6

 1552 Bancroft Road, Walnut Creek

 [ruthbancroftgarden.org](http://ruthbancroftgarden.org)

 \$12-\$29





Imagine Joshua Tree—in neon. A former farm, Walnut Creek's Ruth Bancroft Garden is transformed into a psychedelic lightscape with rays of purple, pink and blue light bouncing off giant succulents, cacti and palms. It may not evoke a snowy New England farm, but the Garden of D'Lights' groovy desert vibes are a nice palate cleanser for when you've had your fill of ho-ho-ho. Admission for children under 4 is free.

## South Bay

### Holidays at Filoli



Through Jan. 7



86 Cañada Road, Woodside



[filoli.org](https://www.filoli.org)



\$27-\$45

The posh gardens of Filoli's Woodside estate aren't just exclusive to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meetings between world superpowers. If following in the footsteps of U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping isn't your thing, you can pretend you're in a Christmas episode of *Bridgerton*. Originally built as the private residence of gold mine owner William Bowers Bourn II, Filoli's 54,000-square-foot, Georgian Revival-style mansion boasts 16 acres of English Renaissance gardens that are perfect for pictures in Regency or Dickens Fair attire. Admission is free for children under 5.

# Enchant



Through Dec. 31



1123 Coleman Ave., San Jose



[enchantchristmas.com](http://enchantchristmas.com)



\$25-\$33

At *Enchant: Santa's Magic Timepiece*, visitors to San Jose's PayPal Park are transported to a maze of wondrous light displays where you can skate through a forest of sparkling lights, tell Father Christmas your holiday wishes, sip on seasonal drinks in a festive winter village and play with entertaining elves. The only thing this balmy San Jose winter wonderland doesn't have is snow.

# Downtown Redwood City



Through Jan. 1



Courthouse Square, Redwood City




Free




Redwood City's downtown gets dressed up with garlands and lights for the holidays. |  
Courtesy Redwood City Improvement Association

Garlands, banners and lights decorate Redwood City's downtown throughout the holiday season. The community flips the switch on its tree on Saturday, and a menorah made from 27 painted canvases follows one week later. Periodically throughout the month, lucky visitors may hear a tune or two from the Merrie Olde Christmas Carolers, the world's oldest and largest professional caroling organization, who'll be spreading Christmas cheer in the streets. San Mateo's county seat showcases its holiday spirit with a dazzling holiday parade on Saturday, Dec. 2.

## **Palo Alto's Christmas Tree Lane**

 Dec. 16-31, 5-11 p.m.

 1700-1800 Fulton St., Palo Alto

 [christmastreelane.org](http://christmastreelane.org)

 Free

Since 1940, the residents of Fulton Street off Embarcadero Road in Palo Alto have decorated their homes with elaborate holiday displays. The tradition began with a game of bridge at the home of Judge Edward E. Hardy, where a talk about the holidays spurred the neighbors to string up wires along the street and purchase Yule trees to complement their glowing decor. Today, the rows of houses can be festooned with everything from a cutout of Santa climbing a chimney to a brilliant lantern of a horse pulling a carriage packed with presents.

## **North Bay & Wine Country Sausalito Winterfest 2023**

 Dec. 9-10

 Gabrielson Park, Humboldt Avenue at Anchor Street,  
Sausalito

 [winterfestsausalito.com](http://winterfestsausalito.com)

 \$25+

See Sausalito's waterfront shimmer with festively decorated boats during this annual Marin County tradition on Dec. 9. The lighted boat parade begins at 6 p.m., followed by fireworks and a "Captain's After Party" at waterfront restaurant the Spinnaker. The festivities continue with a jingle bell-themed 5K run on the morning of Dec. 10, followed by a celebratory brunch.

## **The Lights at Northgate Mall**

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📅 Through Dec. 30

📍 5800 Northgate Drive, San Rafael

🔗 [thelightsatnorthgatemall.com](http://thelightsatnorthgatemall.com)

🎫 \$12-\$22



Northgate Mall's new indoor light experience features a rainbow LED dance floor. | Chloe Jackman Photography/Courtesy Northgate Mall

If the chill of winter is making you yearn for the great indoors, head to this new indoor experience in San Rafael. More than 125,000 dazzling lights decorate seven rooms at Northgate Mall, where you can walk through corridors dripping with lights, tangles of tinsels and floating snowflakes. An interactive kids' zone features a brilliant LED dance floor and a wall you can scrawl on with glow-in-the-dark chalk. Admission for kids under 1 is free.

## **Calistoga Lighted Tractor Parade**

📅 Dec. 2, 7-8 p.m.

📍 Lincoln Avenue, Calistoga



Calistoga's annual tractor parade pays homage to the Wine Country town's agricultural roots. | Calistoga Chamber of Commerce & Visit Calistoga

This charming Napa Valley town dresses up for its annual tractor parade. From a John Deere tractor as green as the Grinch to a fire truck outfitted for Santa, see over 50 decorated haulers and floats as they cascade through the center of town in celebration of the holidays and the wine-soaked city's agricultural heritage.

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