



Christmas in San Francisco- The Best San Francisco Christmas Events for 2023



Christmas in San Francisco is not to be missed! There is something extra special about “The City by the Bay” during the holidays. San Francisco Christmas events include ice skating, candy decorations, Victorian-era villages, and Nutcracker teas.

There are even light peeping opportunities aboard a red fire engine, in a groovy 70s-style VW van, or from a trolley car! Check out our favorite events for Christmas in San Francisco. *Updated for 2023!*

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Union Square Holiday Attractions



Union Square, Photo by Drew Altizer/ San Francisco Travel

Union Square is the most iconic city spot for Christmas in San Francisco. An elegant outdoor plaza, it is rimmed by upscale stores where Christmas wishes come true. We're talking Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Neiman Marcus.

Never fear; there's more than retail therapy to enjoy! Once the square's massive Christmas tree is officially lit, the area transforms into a holiday wonderland. Here's a rundown of Christmas events in San Francisco you shouldn't miss:

Looking for more Christmas events in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond? Check out our guide to [Christmas events in Northern California](#).

Visit the Sugar Castle at Westin St. Francis



The Sugar Castle, Photo by Kristine Dworkin

Stop by the Landmark Lobby at the [Westin St. Francis](#) to check out the Sugar Castle! It simply wouldn't be Christmas in San Francisco without this sweet tradition! A one-of-a-kind rotating 12-foot-tall winter wonderland features brilliantly colored ornaments, elaborate gift boxes, candies, and Christmas trees, the Sugar Castle weighs over 1200

pounds, has over 20 grand circular towers with illuminated windows, and is surrounded by a charming village and a running train.

This year, visitors will enjoy the unique opportunity to see the “inside” of the castle through an innovative augmented reality experience.

The hotel’s mascot, Francis the Dog, will also roam the castle. Those who spot him will be rewarded with a special prize at the concierge desk. **The castle will be on display from November 22, 2023 – January 2, 2024.**

Light the Menorah

If your visit coincides with Hanukkah, you’re in for a treat! Many shoppers take a break from the Union Square holiday hustle and bustle to gather around the stunning **25-foot-tall mahogany Menorah.**

Built by the late Bill Graham, a well-known Bay Area concert promoter, a candle for the eight-day Jewish festival of light is lit each day.

Readings, songs, activities, and children’s arts and crafts are also a part of this hopeful occasion.

*The **Menorah lighting** will occur from December 7 through December 14, 2023.*

The Macy’s Christmas Tree and Safeway Holiday Ice Rink



Safeway Holiday Ice Rink, Photo by Scott- Chernis/San Francisco Travel

Situated right in the center of the Christmas events in Union Square, the **Safeway Holiday Ice Rink** is a perfect blend of winter fun and holiday magic.

Located at the base of Macy's Christmas tree, you can spin amid 33,000 twinkling LED lights. *The ice rink is open from November 1, 2023, through January 15, 2024.*

Be sure to book tickets in advance online; this activity will surely sell out – especially on the weekends.

*Spend more time in SF. Discover the top 10 **things to do in San Francisco with kids.***

Adopt a Pet from the Macy's Windows



What better Christmas gift is there for a child than a cute puppy or a cuddly kitten? Christmas in San Francisco is not complete without a visit to Macy's store windows.

They become an [adoption center](#) for dogs and cats needing loving families! **This event has placed over 8,800 animals in forever homes and raised nearly \$400,000 for the San Francisco SPCA.**

It's not easy to walk by these colorful windows and resist the temptation to take a sweet creature home with you! Kittens play amid specially constructed sets, and puppies look in bewilderment at all of the human faces pressed up against the exterior of the store windows. They are just too cute!

The Great Dickens Christmas Fair



The Great Dickens Christmas Faire, Photo by Robin Fadtke

One of the greatest ways to celebrate Christmas in San Francisco could also be classified as a time travel portal. You will swear you've been transported to Victorian London when the **Great Dickens Christmas Fair** takes over the **San Francisco Cow Palace**.

An immersive adventure into Victorian London, the Great Dickens Christmas Fair is complete with period holiday decorations, pubs, dance floors, festive shops and costumed actors, and entertainment that are all in keeping with the spirit of the Victorian Era.

This year's event takes place November 18 – December 17, 2023.

Like free? We do! Here are our favorite [free things to do in San Francisco](#).

The Nutcracker Ballet



The San Francisco Ballet Nutcracker, Photo by Flickr/ScillyStuff

Another opportunity to revisit Victorian Christmas traditions arrives at San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House in the form of the Nutcracker.

Audiences have made the San Francisco Ballet's sparkling production featuring young Clara and a cast of characters from the Kingdom of Sweets, a holiday tradition dating back to 1944. ***The Nutcracker runs from December 13 -30, 2023.***

Walk Through Gingerbread House at the Fairmont Hotel



The Fairmont's Grand Lobby is all ready for Christmas, photo by Kristine Dworkin

Christmas in San Francisco has included the time-honored tradition of afternoon tea at the [Fairmont Hotel](#) since the establishment opened in 1907. The hotel offers afternoon tea service in the same style it was served 100 years ago. Make your reservations soon! ***Holiday teas are offered from November 24 – December 31, 2023.***

Don't miss the two-story, life-sized Gingerbread House in the hotel's grand lobby! It has become a must-see attraction for guests from near and far.

The two-story Victorian Gingerbread house is 22 feet high and 23 feet wide and made with hundreds of real gingerbread bricks baked by the hotel pastry team, pounds of See's Candies, a ton of royal icing, and candy décor.

View Christmas Lights from a VW Bus or Fire Truck



Check out the holiday lights from this groovy ride, photo courtesy of San Francisco Love Tours

Christmas in San Francisco means holiday lights and plenty of them! Experience the twinkly magic aboard a shiny red fire engine or a 70s-style VW van. This is a great way to get to some of those truly special spots without thinking about navigating traffic or dealing with parking!

Dress warmly, particularly if you select the fire truck experience!

An open-air ride traversing the city's famous hilly landscape is bound to be chilly. [San Francisco Fire Engine Holiday Lights Tour](#) is a 90-minute city excursion with seasonal sights in Union Square, Embarcadero, and Market Street.

If you decide to hitch a ride aboard a VW Hippie bus, [San Francisco Love Tours](#) take groups of six out for a festive drive to the best holiday lights views and Christmas displays on Lombard Street, the Palace of Fine Arts, the Embarcadero, the Castro, and more. Each tour includes 2 city photo stops.

This two-hour guided tour also includes a holiday sing-along cuddled up with the family! ***This year's tours run from November 24 through December 30, 2023.***

Christmas Events at the San Francisco Zoo

When it comes to Christmas in San Francisco, even the [San Francisco Zoo](#) gets in on the festive fun! The zoo has special holiday events that will delight the elementary school set. Among them:

- **Reindeer Romp:** Santa's reindeer friends, Belle, Holly, and Peppermint, return for a visit through New Year's Day.
- **Zoo Lights:** The zoo is lit up with magical holiday lights on selected dates. There is also seasonal entertainment and hot beverages to enjoy.

The San Francisco Zoo has not yet published its offerings for 2023.

Let's Glow SF



Let's Glow at the Pacific Stock Exchange

Four buildings in the Financial District have light displays on them nightly from December 1 -10, 2023. [Let's Glow SF](#) shines on the Pacific

Stock Exchange, One Bush Plaza, Station J, and the Hobart building from 5 – 10pm. The shows are 5 minutes long and play every 10 minutes. They are accompanied by music.

Pier 39 HapPIER Holidays Celebration



Pier 39 is one of the most popular destinations for tourists in San Francisco, so it is no surprise that they have a special 60-foot Christmas tree that comes to life every half hour. The tree has thousands of lights and ornaments synchronized to holiday music.

Pier 39 has not yet published its offerings for 2023.

Fisherman's Wharf Lighted Boat Parade

Christmas in San Francisco isn't limited to land-based activities. This is the "City by the Bay," after all! Head to San Francisco's famous wharf area for a festive boat parade.

The vessels are decked out in seasonal decorations and covered in lights. They can be seen from iconic spots such as Pier 39, Fisherman's Wharf, Fort Mason, and Crissy Field. This year's parade will occur on December 16, 2022, at 6 p.m. After, stop in [Ghiradelli Square](#) for a sweet treat.

Fisherman's Wharf has not yet published its offerings for 2023.

Check for [amazing deals on family-friendly hotels in San Francisco](#).

Find more [Christmas events near you!](#) Trekaroo has guides for dozens of cities across the country.

Pin this to bookmark all the holiday fun; we update it yearly:



Featured photo by: [Shutterstock](#)

By [Kristine Dworkin](#)

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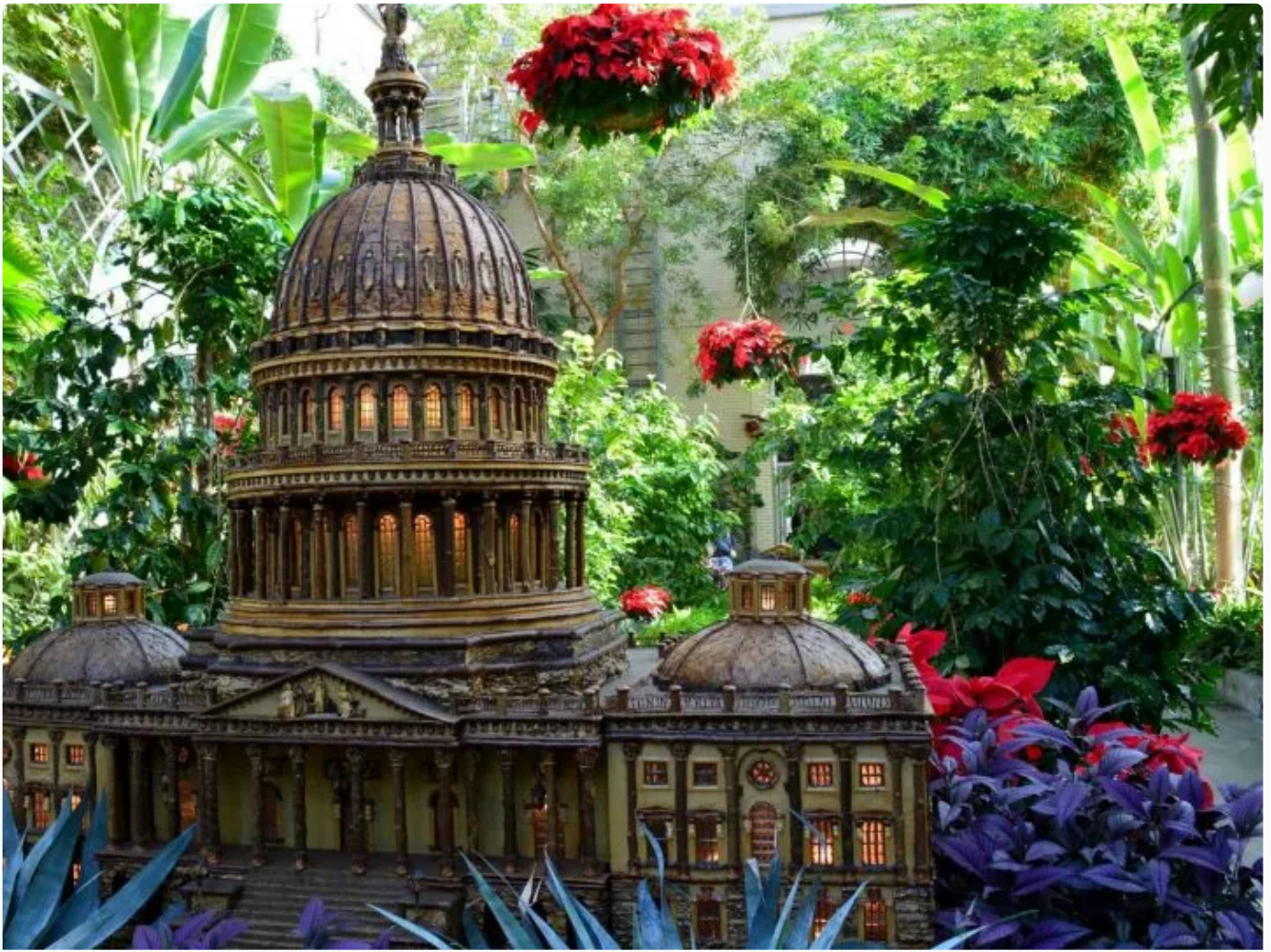
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