



Take a break from holiday shopping to refuel at Tyler Florence's new Miller & Lux Provisions, a patisserie in Union Square Plaza with a view to the ice rink and tree. (Courtesy of [@millerandluxprovisions](#))

## The Ultimate Christmas Staycation in San Francisco

By [Clara Hogan](#) Dec 05, 2023

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**San Francisco may not be a winter wonderland like New York City, but that's also why it's great: Here, you can take in the magic with just a light jacket required.**

Plus, SF dazzles with holiday splendor in December even without snow. Posh hotel halls are decked out with decor, restaurants roll out special menus, and Christmas markets pop up in nearly every neighborhood. It seems the city's going all out this year, even more than ever, and the historic Union Square is right at the heart of it all.

Whether you live in SF or beyond, take our perfect itinerary for a weekend holiday staycation.

### **Friday Night: Historic Hotels + Modern Holiday Fare**



Get in on this Feliz Navi-Daddy at Cavaña's Latin American-themed Nochebuena pop-up.

(Courtesy of [@cavana.sf](#))

If you're plotting an overnight staycation, now is the time to check in at one of SF's historic hotels in downtown or Nob Hill, which feel more opulent than ever at the holidays.

## Check in.

The **Palace Hotel's** (*2 New Montgomery St.*) Christmas trimmings were Instagram-able well before there was Instagram; don't miss a photo op in the lavishly decorated lobby or Garden Court restaurant where you can also enjoy **high tea** and rub elbows with Santa. // For the best proximity to Union Square's ice rink, tuck in at the **Westin St. Francis** (*335 Powell St.*) where young princes and princesses will delight in the Sugar Castle display. // The **Fairmont** (*950 Mason St.*) of course, is home to the iconic, and ever-jaw-dropping two-story **gingerbread house**.

## Dine at a Nikkei-style wonderland.

For dinner, head to buzzy rooftop bar **Kaiyo** (*701 Third St.*) where a themed winter experience features a virtual yuletide fire, tropical holiday decor, menu specials, and gingerbread cookies with Peruvian cacao served in a Christmas mug for dessert.

## Have a nightcap.

Walk over to Kaiyo's sister rooftop bar, **Cavaña** (*Luma Hotel, 100 Channel St. 17th floor*), for a spirited nightcap at the Nochebuena pop-up. Here festive decor pairs with playful cocktails like the Sweet Baby Jesús (tequila, banana, toasted pepita, cinnamon, egg, and cream sherry).

## Saturday: Sweets, Champs, Shopping + Shows







Nothing says Christmas in San Francisco like seeing 'The Nutcracker' at SF Ballet.

(Erik Tomasson)

### **Pastries and shopping in Union Square.**

Don't let the "doom loop" headlines deter you: Union Square is definitely worth a visit to feel merry and bright. Start the day at Tyler Florence's new cafe, [Miller & Lux Provisions](#) (350 Powell St.), with a latte and pastry such as the Tahitian vanilla custard croissant. Take a seat at an outdoor table to do some solid people watching around the Union Square Christmas tree and holiday ice rink. (PS: Florence has also opened a rotisserie, serving spit-roasted chicken and sides, on the other side of the plaza).

Once fueled, it's time to get some shopping in and, despite what you might have heard, there are plenty of stores left to take your cash (pro tip: [Banana Republic has a shiny new flagship](#)). While you're wandering, enjoy the [Winter Walk](#), Union Square's popular seasonal tradition that's back this year (December 15-24) after a pandemic-related hiatus. Two pedestrian blocks are transformed into a wonderland with food trucks, a beer garden, local vendors, activities for kids, and live music nightly.

**Have a bubbly afternoon.**





Rest your feet and order a pick-me-up at the Westin St. Francis' [Pop! Lounge](#), a seasonal Champagne bar tucked off the hotel's lobby. Sip Moët & Chandon bubbles along with bites from [California Caviar Co.](#), charcuterie boards, and sweets on a plush velvet sofa with a festive Union Square view.

### **Dinner and a show, but make it hella festive.**

The [Vault Garden](#) (555 California St.) hosts its annual winter event from November 24th through January 10th. Make reservations to imbibe on specialty cocktails like Santa's Pick-Me-Up (tequila, mezcal, coffee syrup, vanilla, and bitters) and feast on raw bar offerings, share plates, and entrees in a twinkling tent with lounge-y seating.

'Tis the season so splurge on theater tickets. For the most classic experience, sashay over to the [SF Ballet](#) (301 Van Ness Ave.) for a presentation of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* (Dec. 13-30) —after all, this is where the American holiday tradition began back in 1944. // Make your way to the [SF Symphony](#) (201 Van Ness Ave.) where a spate of holiday programming features characters from *Charlie Brown* to *Peaches Christ*. // Make the holidays gay at the **SF Gay Men's Chorus'** [Holiday Spectacular](#), which you can catch at Sydney Goldstein Theater (275 Hayes St.) on December 8th and at the Castro Theater (429 Castro St.) on December 24th. // Feeling a little bah-humbug? You can't be a Scrooge at [A.C.T.](#)'s annual adaptation of the Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* (Tony Rembe Theater, 415 Geary St.).

### **Be naughty, have a nightcap.**

If those over-the-top Christmas cocktail bars are your bag, you'll [find plenty of 'em](#) in SF. But for a little more elbow room within walking distance of Civic Center performance halls, head to [The Madrigal](#) (100 Van Ness Ave.) where seasonal cocktails are inspired by classic holiday movies—think *Wet Bandits* and *Angel's Wings*.

## **Sunday: Festive at the Ferry Building**





The Ferry Building's halls are decked for holiday revelry, gift shopping, and craft and decorating workshops.

(Courtesy of [@ferrybuilding](#))

While you could swing by in the evenings for Let's Glow SF (5pm to 10pm, through Dec. 10), mornings are still our favorite time to pop into the [Ferry Building](#) (1 Ferry Building, Embarcadero) which, come holiday season, becomes one of our go-to spots for gift shopping. Stuff their stockings with finds from Book Passage, Rechiutti Chocolates, and Fog City Flea.

In December, there's much going on here, including sessions for cookie decorating and craft making (Sunday, Dec. 10 and 17) and holiday patio pop-ups with Rye on the Road and Peaches Patties (Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 16). Plus, [Creativity Explored is popping up](#) every Saturday through December 16th with an array of artwork for purchase that supports neurodiverse and disabled Bay Area artists.

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