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Families Can Dip into San Francisco for a Classic and Fun Holiday Excursion

By A. K. Carroll



Check out the many holiday activities in San Francisco. Photos A.K. Carroll

Sexy. Sleek. Innovative. Progressive. San Francisco is a city at the forefront of all that is new and now. Yet even this cutting-edge city with its myriad startups and high tech toys, has an older, softer, more romantic side, and it comes out more boldly as Christmas draws near. Lamorindans can give into their longings for a slower, softer season with a trip to historic Nob Hill and a holiday weekend in nostalgic San Francisco.

Let this list be a guide to indulging a desire for an old-fashioned Christmas.

1. Though it would be quicker and cheaper to order an Uber, if you've time to spare, opt to ride the Powell Street cable car to the top of Nob Hill. Sit or stand beside fellow travelers out purchasing parcels and exploring the sites. You may even decide to detour through the fee-free Cable Car Museum.

2. Indulge in an elegant three-tiered afternoon tea on the 21st floor of the historic Mark Hopkins (Top of the Mark). Snack on savory finger sandwiches, homemade scones and decadent sweets served on 90-year-old china while taking in elevated views of city by the bay.

3. Summon your inner child as you enter the lobby of the elegant Fairmont hotel and admire the construction of a whimsical edible two-story gingerbread house. Put on your holiday best and Instagram a photo in front of the stunning lobby tree, or purchase a flute of bubbly from the lobby champagne bar and sit back on an ottoman as you gaze in admiration.

4. Venture downhill and finish all of your offline shopping in one go with a trip to the Westfield Centre and the shops near Union Square. Browse the racks at Saks, gush over glitter at Tiffany's, snag a cappuccino from Nespresso, and even if you don't make a purchase, be sure to check out the holiday décor in north-facing windows of

with a killer wine list and cocktails to boot. Adventurous eaters may favor the ocean trout crudo, served with warm cumin crème and tender mustard seeds.

8. For a truly special occasion, don suits and skirts and make reservations at Michelin notable Acquerello, an intimate family-owned restaurant that marries Old World Italian with classic culinary flair, serving prix fixe and tasting menus alongside an extensive library of wines.

9. Pause from the rush of holiday activity and seek respite within the walls of imposing Grace Cathedral, a “house of prayer for all people” and marvel of French Gothic architecture. Meander along indoor and outdoor labyrinths, enjoy choral evensong, or simply wonder and ponder the art and aesthetic.

10. Stop by Davies Symphony Hall for a holiday performance of classic seasonal favorites, from the formidable Handel's Messiah to a live musical performance of “A Charlie Brown Christmas.”

11. Encounter the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future at A.C.T.'s annual production of “A Christmas Carol.” Adapted from Charles Dickens's 1843 novella, the story of Scrooge is arguably the least commercial and most inclusive of modern Christmas creations.

12. No need to stay up all night waiting for Santa, you can spy him and his sleigh in the rotunda of the Westfield Centre or the lobby of the Intercontinental, along with complimentary hot apple cider and cookies.

Holiday options abound. Whether you're making new memories or drawing on time-honored traditions, celebrate the season in which older and better can coincide.



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