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## 12 Things to Do in New York at Christmas

### 1. See the Rockettes Christmas Spectacular

If you splurge for one activity, make it the [Rockettes Christmas Spectacular](#) at Radio City Music Hall.

This Christmas production has been a beloved tradition since 1933 and seeing a show is one of the best things to do in New York at Christmas.

The 90-minute show has 3D elements, flying frost fairies, a live nativity, elaborate props, and is filled with Christmas magic.

While the show varies each year, the Parade of the Wooden Soldiers and the Living Nativity are two iconic numbers that are included every year. They even have live camels and sheep!

Leading up to the opening night, the Rockettes rehearse for 6 hours a day, 6 days a week, for 6 weeks. All their hard work pays off and the precision of the dancers will blow you away.

During peak times, there are up to 4 shows a day. If you are flexible with times, they often offer last-minute discounted tickets for certain shows that aren't sold out.

While you're by Radio City Music Hall, be sure to check out Candy Cane Lane and the giant ornaments that decorate the sidewalks nearby.

The 1221 Avenue of the Americas office building across the street also has a beautifully decorated courtyard with a Christmas tree that you can walk through.

### 2. Go Ice Skating at Rockefeller Center

One of the most popular things to do in New York at Christmas is ice skating at Rockefeller Center.

Its popularity is due in part to being featured in the movie, *Elf*, and also because you'll have the chance to glide under the twinkling lights of the iconic Rockefeller Christmas tree.

The price increases during peak days and times, so plan your visit accordingly.

Even if you don't plan to ice skate, it's still worth stopping by to see one of the most famous Christmas trees in the world.

Each year, the head gardener at the Rockefeller Center searches high and low for the perfect Norway Spruce to stand in the plaza. It really is incredible to see it in person!

While you're at the Rockefeller Center, I would recommend booking tickets to the [Top of the Rock Observation Deck](#). It boasts one of the best unobstructed views of the city.

If you are planning to visit multiple tourist attractions in addition to Top of the Rock, the [CityPass](#) offers discounted rates for the best value.

Check the [calendar](#) for more holiday events at Rockefeller Center, including the Candy Cottage immersive experience, the Apres ski chalets, and visits with Santa.

A few more iconic Christmas trees around the city include the Christmas tree at the New York Stock Exchange, the New York Public Library, the Lotte New York Palace Courtyard, and under the arch at Washington Square Park.

The Origami Tree at the American Museum of Natural History and the Angel Tree at the MET are also worth seeing, but you'll need to pay admission to go into the museums.

### 3. Feel Like a Kid Again at FAO Schwarz

FAO Schwarz is located at Rockefeller Center and is one of the most iconic toy stores in America.

The store was first founded in Baltimore in 1862 and moved to New York in 1870. It is considered the oldest toy retailer in the US and is worth a visit, especially during the holidays.

You'll be greeted by toy soldiers at the entrance before being transported into what looks like Santa's real-life workshop.

The 20,000-square-foot toy store is a fantasyland for kids and for adults who want to feel like kids again!

Be sure to check out the floor piano that was made famous by Tom Hanks' character in the movie, *Big*.

There is also a musical clock tower, life-sized stuffed animals, and plenty of interactive displays to keep you entertained for hours.

Jellycat Diner is also a fun newer addition to the store where you can order plushies in the shape of your favorite New York street vendor foods. They'll even be packaged up in cute little to-go boxes!

### 4. See the Window Displays on 5th Avenue

One of the best free things to do in New York at Christmas is to admire the window displays at the department stores along 5th Avenue.

I would recommend visiting both during the day and at night for a completely different experience.

Holiday window displays first started popping up along 5th Avenue in the late 1800s and have provided nostalgic Christmas magic for over a century.

The decorations have now expanded to include not only window displays, but the entire exterior of buildings as well. The whole street is decked out with holiday cheer!

One of the best displays is at Saks Fifth Avenue.

Not only do they have ornate window displays, but the Christian Dior & Saks "Carousel of Dreams" is an impressive installation that spans nearly the entire 10-story building.

Every night, from 5-11 pm, there is a free light show at the Carousel of Dreams that runs every 10-15 minutes.

A few more of the best holiday displays can be found at Bergdorf Goodman, Cartier, and Louis Vuitton.

For a fun experience during the holidays, or any time of year, book reservations for breakfast at Tiffany's on 5th Avenue!

## 5. Walk Through Central Park

Central Park is worth visiting in every season.

In the spring, you'll find new blooms and a promise of warmer days to come. In the summer, the lawns are filled with families having picnics and outdoor movie showings.

In the fall, the sidewalks are carpeted in golden leaves, and in the colder months the park is transformed into a winter wonderland.

The holidays are especially a great time to visit because street musicians fill the air with holiday music. I love being serenaded by Christmas music while walking under the tree tunnel at The Mall.

The Bethesda Terrace is also one of our favorite places to go since you'll most likely find the most beautiful music echoing throughout the arcade.

You can also go ice skating in the shadow of towering skyscrapers at the Wollman Rink in Central Park.

## 6. Watch the Christmas Concert at St. Patrick's Cathedral

St. Patrick's Cathedral is one of the most impressive buildings in New York City. Construction of the ornate cathedral began in 1858 and it was completed in 1878.

It is worth stopping by to admire the interior and time, but it is especially worth a visit during the holidays. You'll find wreaths adorning the columns and a nativity scene on display.

Every December, the church holds a [Christmas concert](#) that is worth attending if you have the chance. Christmas Eve Mass is also a memorable experience, but you'll need to reserve tickets in advance.

The Church of the Heavenly Rest also has a [Christmas Eve Children's Pageant](#) that is a beloved tradition.

## 7. Visit the Winter Village at Bryant Park

The Winter Village at Bryant Park is a festive event where you'll find plenty to do.

It features ice skating, bumper cars on ice, cozy igloos, a curling cafe, visits with Santa, The Lodge rinkside food court, and holiday pop-up shops.

Be sure to stop by the Baked Cheese Haus Raclette food stand.

At this food stand, a wheel of artisanal Wisconsin cheese is heated and then the bubbling melted cheese is scraped onto potatoes or a baguette sandwich.

It is phenomenal and hits the spot on a cold winter day! Be sure to order a cup of hot caramel apple cider to go with it.

There are two different stalls at Bryant Park, one serves the melted cheese over baguette sandwiches and the other serves it over potatoes.

We only tried the cheesy potatoes, but I heard the sandwich is delicious too.

You also have to get hot chocolate from the Max Brenner stall. This thick and creamy Italian hot chocolate is made with melted chocolate blocks mixed with fresh vanilla cream and it is to die for!

Max Brenner also has shops in Times Square and Union Square where they serve food in addition to their hot chocolate.

If you are looking for more of the best spots to find hot chocolate in New York, be sure to check out Angelina Paris, an adorable French patisserie with flaky pastries and decadent hot chocolate.

Eat Pretty serves hot chocolate topped with pink whipped cream and decorated gingerbread men.

Glacé offers a s'mores hot chocolate creation that is topped with toasted homemade Italian marshmallow fluff.

## 8. Visit Macy's on 34th Street

If you're looking for the real Santa Claus, head to Macy's at Herald Square. According to the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*, this is where the real Santa resides.

Santa has been visiting Macy's in New York for over a century and has been delighting children every holiday season since.

Every year, he ushers in the holiday season as the grand finale of the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade before heading to Santaland on the 8th floor of Macy's.

Santaland was created in 1977 and has become so popular that you now need to make reservations five days in advance to visit Santa.

Even with reservations, you can still expect to wait for 1-1 1/2 hours to sit on Kris Kringle's lap.

Macy's is still worth visiting during the holidays, even if you don't visit Santaland.

The Macy's on 34th Street at Herald Square is the brand's flagship store. It is the largest department store in the US with 11 floors and over 1 million square feet of retail space.

It's one of the best places to go holiday shopping in New York!

It was built in 1902 and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Be sure to ride the historic wooden escalators between the 2nd and 9th floors that were installed about a century ago.

The Macy's holiday window displays are also an iconic part of Christmas in New York and can't be missed!

They even had some fun interactive ones when we visited, like this sing-a-long window display.

## 9. Admire the Christmas Tree at the New York Public Library

The New York Public Library's Stephen A. Schwarzman Building adjacent to Bryant Park was constructed in 1895 and is a treasured historic landmark.

As you step into the main lobby, you'll be greeted with a beautifully decorated Christmas tree and garland hung on the marble staircase.

Be sure to stop by the Treasures permanent exhibition where you can see over 200 rare items in the collection.

The exhibition room is free to visit and some of the treasures include the original Winnie the Pooh and Friends, an early copy of the Bill of Rights, a lock of Beethoven's hair, Charles Dickens's writing desk, a copy of the Declaration of Independence handwritten by Thomas Jefferson, and so much more.

You'll also notice that the iconic lion statues outside the library have wreaths adorning their necks.

These lions were named "Patience" and "Fortitude" by the city mayor during the Great Depression as a reminder for New York residents to stay strong.

## 10. Visit the Columbus Circle Holiday Market

Columbus Circle hosts a fun European-style holiday market with plenty of stalls selling local goods, souvenirs, food, and sweet treats.

It's a great place to buy unique Christmas gifts and sample some holiday foods.

You can order a bowl of cacio e pepe where the steaming hot pasta is tossed inside a hollowed cheese wheel.

And be sure to get a cup of hot cocoa and a warm apple cider donut.

We like the hot chocolate at Hudson Cabin and No Chewing Allowed.

The Shops at Columbus Circle is an indoor mall next to the market that is also decked out with Christmas lights.

You'll find colorful giant glass stars hanging from the ceiling with lights that are synced to music.

On select evenings during the holiday season, you can catch a free Broadway Under the Stars event on the 2nd floor balcony.

## 11. Eat at a Holiday-themed Restaurant

While many of New York's restaurants have some sort of Christmas decor, certain restaurants and bars are known for going all out during the holidays.

A few of the most popular ones include Lillie's Victorian Establishment, Papillon, Oscar Wilde, Magic Hour Rooftop Bar and Lounge, and Rolf's Bar.

Just keep in mind that you'll need to make reservations as tables book up far in advance during the holidays.

## 12. Stop by Grand Central Terminal

Stop by Grand Central Terminal to see the Main Concourse decked out with holiday cheer and bustling with holiday travelers.

You'll also find a holiday fair located inside Vanderbilt Hall. This is the longest-running indoor fair in the city with 40 local vendors.

Be sure to stop and see the holiday train show at the [New York Transit Museum Gallery & Store](#) located in the Shuttle Passage just off the Main Concourse.

## A few more of the best things to do in New York at Christmas:

- **Empire State Building:** Channel your inner Buddy the Elf at the Empire State Building. Book [tickets](#) to the observation deck and enjoy the S'mores N'more holiday themed hot chocolate bar. Other [holiday events](#) include a screening of Elf at the Empire State Building, visits with Santa, holiday photo ops, and more.
- **The Plaza:** This ritzy hotel has been featured in several holiday movies including *Home Alone: Lost in New York*, and *Eloise at the Plaza*. The hotel is generally only open to guests and residents during the holiday season, but you can make reservations for high tea, although it is quite pricey.
- **Union Square:** Union Square hosts a holiday market with over 180 vendors, and has been ranked as one of the best holiday markets in the US.
- **Glide at Brooklyn Bridge:** Go ice skating under the Brooklyn Bridge then warm up with a cup of white hot chocolate or hot apple cider at the nearby Brooklyn Ice Cream Factory. The ice cream shop is housed in a restored 1920s Fireboat House. Be sure to stop and take a ride on the historic Jane's Carousel as well.
- **Times Square:** Take in the sights and sounds of Times Square and stop by the NYE Wishing Wall. Here, you can write your wish for the new year on a piece of confetti that will rain down on Times Square at midnight on New Year's Eve. You can also reserve tickets for [Frosty's Christmas Pop-up Bar](#) at Times Square.
- **Hudson Yards:** Shine Bright at Hudson Yards is one of the best Christmas light displays in the city with over 2 million twinkling lights. You can also go ice skating high above the city at The Edge Ice

Rink, visit Santa's Secret holiday speakeasy, go shopping at the holiday pop-up market, see The Vessel covered in lights, and take photos with Santa.

- **New York Botanical Garden:** Reserve tickets in advance for the Holiday Train Show, NYBG Glow, and Bar Car Nights at the NYBG in the Bronx.
- **Cocoa and Carols:** Take a festive [holiday cruise](#) along the Hudson River.
- **Santacon:** Santas of every kind take over the city on the 2nd Saturday of December each year for this fun and festive event.
- **Stone Street:** This cobblestone pedestrian-only street is one of the oldest streets in the city. During Christmas, you can find pop-up holiday shops, bars, and festive decorations.
- **Dyker Heights:** Take a [bus tour](#) to see one of the most extravagant neighborhood light displays in the city!
- **Watermark at Pier 15:** Get in the holiday spirit at [Santa's Winter Wonderland](#), a holiday pop-up experience right on the waterfront.
- **The Nutcracker Ballet:** Book tickets to see a production of the beloved Nutcracker ballet at Lincoln Center.
- **Brooklyn Botanic Garden:** Lightscape is a fantastic walk-through holiday light display located at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.
- **Winter Whirl:** Go roller skating at this holiday-themed roller rink located inside the Shops at the Oculus.

I hope this guide will help you discover the best things to do in New York at Christmas, happy holidays!