

City Lights

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By Krista Minard

It's cold—it's San Francisco, after all. It's also crowded—it's Union Square—but that adds to the happy energy. Your ankles are wobbly, and you don't dare look up at the window decorations on the top five of Macy's seven floors, or at the perfectly symmetrical Christmas tree nearby. You can smell sausages from the vending cart, and coffee and hot chocolate from the cafe. If you don't think too hard, you can imagine you're skating figure eights in perfect time to the holiday music. The Union Square Holiday Ice Rink epitomizes big-city Christmas like not much else.

In fact, for Northern Californians, no place rivals San Francisco at the holidays, with its decorations and lights, skyscrapers and department stores, all the hustle and bustle enhanced by the clang of the streetcars and honking Lyft drivers. Add in some of the season's special events—for example, in Union Square Park, you can catch Drag Queens on Ice and SantaCon (so many drunken Santas!) the second weekend in December—and you may find your shopping backdropped by more fun than usual.

Whatever you do, you're going to need somewhere to stay, because it's impossible to do San Francisco in a day trip at the holidays—too much to see, too much traffic. Here a few favorite places to spend the night:



Lodge at the Presidio. Photo by: Kentyn Reynolds

Lodge and Inn at the Presidio—How many times have we driven through the Presidio, always after a walk in the wind on Crissy Field Beach, and eyed the brick buildings that face the grassy meadow of the parade ground, asking, “How cool it would be to live here?” While some housing does exist in the Presidio, visitors have options for spending the night: Nowadays two inns grace the grounds of this National Historic Landmark District, and they’re within walking distance of one another. The Inn at the Presidio, which opened in 2012, has 22 rooms in a circa-1903 Georgetown Revival-style building; these fill up fast. The newer property, Lodge at the Presidio, opened this past summer with more space: 42 rooms spread out across its three stories, and many of those rooms look out on the Golden Gate Bridge. The property, which housed the Montgomery Street Barracks for the U.S. Army artillery, infantry and cavalry troops in the 1890s, today bears signs of its military past, with a gray, blue and white color palette and photos and artwork throughout. In the lobby, for example, “A Soldier’s Story” is a collage of military collectibles, including postcards, matchbooks and a torn playing card (a gesture indicating a shipping-out soldier’s hopes to return). Evening drinks and appetizers and morning breakfast (included in the rates, which start at \$275) are served in the spacious common area, and an outdoor fire pit beckons with views of the Golden Gate. One of the best aspects of the Presidio properties: the location, so near the visitors’ center, Walt Disney Family Museum, San Francisco National Cemetery and the miles and miles of trails that wind beneath the eucalyptus and cypress trees—a perfect place for a walk on a bracing December day when only nature can soothe the shriek of holiday madness. *Lodge at the Presidio, 105 Montgomery St. and Inn at the Presidio, 42 Moraga Ave.; (415) 800-1234; presidiolodging.com*