

# Robb Report

# HOLIDAY HOT LIST

YOUR EXCLUSIVE GUIDE TO THE BEST OF THE SEASON



**120+** FESTIVE DINNERS, PARTIES,  
CONCERTS, SHOPPING SPREES & MORE

NEW YORK CITY \* MIAMI \* LOS ANGELES \* ORANGE COUNTY \* SAN FRANCISCO \* WINE COUNTRY

BY EVERETT POTTER

**T**he holiday season in Manhattan is a heady time for shoppers, show lovers, and anyone who likes to revel in the merry feeling in the air. Cheerful window displays at Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Henri Bendel light the streets. Holiday markets fill with tourists and the high-intensity energy of the city. From the 30,000 lights adorning the great tree at Rockefeller Center to The Nutcracker playing at Lincoln Center, the holidays are indeed the high point of the year in New York.

**The Surrey** ([thesurrey.com](http://thesurrey.com)) on the Upper East Side, a very exclusive and very private hotel on one of the city's toniest blocks, will be trimmed in Sotheby's Diamonds with an exclusive gift collection on display (see page 12).

**The Four Seasons Hotel New York** ([fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)) in midtown, where it's high style on Park Avenue, has enlisted its head chef and pastry chef to teach and feed guests before showing them to choice seats for the Rockefeller tree lighting (see page 14). Downtown, the **Crosby Street Hotel** ([firmdalehotels.com](http://firmdalehotels.com))—in the heart of stylish SoHo and colorfully decorated by London's Kit Kemp of Firmdale Hotels—is planning an elaborate English Christmas Day meal complete with beef Wellington and chocolate cranberry pudding cake (see page 14).

To find out what else is going on in the city during the holidays, we spoke with the experts on each neighborhood. Director of sales North America at the Crosby Narell Devine, Les Clefs d'Or chef concierge at the Surrey Lorena Ringoot, and Four Seasons concierge agent Tina McLelland share their personal recommendations in the following insider's guide to the best of the season. >>

CHRIS SORENSEN/GALLERY STOCK

# NEW YORK CITY

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Each year, more than a million people watch the Rockettes high-kick to holiday tunes during the Radio City Christmas Spectacular.

## MAIN ATTRACTIONS

When booked through the **Four Seasons, private horse and carriage rides in Central Park** ([fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com), from \$250) come with a few surprises. The 30-minute trip for up to four guests begins at the corner of Central Park South and 5th Avenue, passing all the park's major sites. During the ride, guests can enjoy fresh hot chocolate and cookies.

Throughout the winter season, make a VIP reservation to go ice skating in Central Park at **Wollman Rink** ([wollman skatingrink.com](http://wollman skatingrink.com), \$72 per person for a VIP ticket). Close to the 6th Avenue and 59th Street gateway to the park, the rink guarantees no waiting in line, skate rentals, and reserved seating and unlimited refreshments in a heated, rink-side tent for up to three hours (skating is

unlimited until you leave for the day). General admission priced from \$11 per adult.

This year's **New York Botanical Garden Holiday Train Show** ([nybg.org](http://nybg.org), from \$20 per adult) is the largest ever, running now through January 18. Model trains zip through a quarter mile of 150 miniaturized familiar sights, including the Statue of Liberty and

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the Empire State Building, built from natural materials like bark and nuts. Beyond the trains, the 250-acre garden hosts holiday film screenings, a cappella music, and winter wonderland tree tours.

Located in Flushing, Queens, an approximately 35-minute drive from Manhattan, **Gingerbread Lane** ([nysci.org](http://nysci.org), \$15 per adult) is a masterpiece that currently holds the Guinness World Record for the largest gingerbread village. From now through January 10 at the New York Hall of Science, Jon Lovitch's 500-square-foot holiday creation made of edible gingerbread, icing, and candy will whet your appetite, but you will have to wait for a taste until January 10, when the houses are given away on a first-come, first-served basis to a line of eager prospectors.

Prepare for sensory overload when visiting **Dyker Heights**, a Brooklyn neighborhood about 45 minutes by car from midtown Manhattan. It's known for over-the-top displays of holiday lights that cover virtually every house in the neighborhood. Wander block by block to really appreciate the details that make this wondrous display a favorite of locals and tourists alike.

Return to the 19th century for a most authentic rendition of Charles Dickens' **A Christmas Carol at Merchant's House Museum** ([merchantshouse.org](http://merchantshouse.org), from \$40 per person), on select dates through Christmas Eve. The Lower East Side venue hosts a one-hour retelling of the holiday classic by "Charles Dickens" himself—the actor John Kevin Jones, who transforms into the tale's many characters throughout the performance. The act is based on the 1867 Steinway

Hall performance given by Charles Dickens himself.

For many children growing up in New York, there is only one *Nutcracker*, and that's **George Balanchine's The Nutcracker** ([nycballet.com](http://nycballet.com), from \$35 per person). The New York City Ballet's annual Lincoln Center performances accompanied by Tchaikovsky's score may be the city's most cherished holiday event, running on select dates from November 27 through January 3.

The holiday classic **Radio City Christmas Spectacular** ([radiocity.com](http://radiocity.com), from \$49 per person) stars the Rockettes high-kicking to everything from selections from *The Nutcracker* to holiday favorites like "March of the Toy Soldiers." The signature eye-high kicks, precision choreography, and showstopping numbers are why more than a million people see the show every year. Multiple performances run daily through January 3.

Through December 26, holiday-inspired performances at **Carnegie Hall** ([carnegiehall.org](http://carnegiehall.org), from \$10 per person) range from Handel's *Messiah* to a family-friendly *Charlie Brown Christmas* show with The New York Pops. On December 18 and 19, The New York Pops' It's Christmas Time in the City features holiday music performed by Tony Award nominees Stephanie J. Block and Brian d'Arcy James.

The 42nd annual **Tubachristmas** ([tubachristmas.com](http://tubachristmas.com)) will be held on December 13 at 3:30 pm next to The Rink at Rockefeller Center. Joyous and unconventional, this Christmas tradition welcomes hundreds of tubists to play carols and other

crowd-pleasers in front of the resplendent tree.

The December 13 **Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church 11th Annual Carol Sing** ([mapc.com](http://mapc.com)) features the Saint Andrew Chorale and MAPC's children's choirs. Both adults and kids enjoy this free concert featuring traditional readings and songs sung by schoolchildren and a post-show reception. This year promises excerpts from Saint-Saëns's charming "Oratorio de Noël" and Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols."



## 37th Annual Midnight Run in Central Park

For those who want to start their year with an adrenaline rush but avoid the crush of Times Square, try the 37th annual Midnight Run in Central Park (entry fees from \$55 per person). Well-wishers and runners, many of them in outlandish costumes, start gathering around 10 pm, but running the four-mile loop commences as the clock strikes midnight, when 15 minutes of fireworks launch in the heart of the park. While the race attracts the super-fit and the not-so-fit as well as plenty of children, it is refreshing to note that in this most competitive of cities, the focus of the event is on fun. ([nyrr.org](http://nyrr.org))



Ice skating under the great tree at **The Rink at Rockefeller Center** remains among the most iconic of New York holiday traditions.

Make a VIP Skate Reservation to avoid lines at **The Rink at Rockefeller Center** ([therinkatrockcenter.com](http://therinkatrockcenter.com), from \$60 per person for a VIP ticket), arguably ground zero for holiday festivities in the Big Apple. Skating under the lights of the tree is magical and

while it's a small rink, 90-minute sessions are restricted to just 150 skaters at a time, so it's always enjoyable, a must-do for holiday visitors. General admission priced from \$25 per adult and season passes from \$275 are valid through March 27.

## Most Coveted Gift Collection at the Surrey

Just in time for the holiday shopping season, Sotheby's Diamonds presents the Most Coveted Gift Collection at the Surrey (from \$75,000). The display features a true convergence of art and design with modern twists on settings of diamond cocktail rings and necklaces available for purchase on-site at the exclusive Upper East Side hotel. ([thesurrey.com](http://thesurrey.com))



## HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Possibly the most fun and festive holiday market in the city, the **Union Square Holiday Market** ([urbanspacenyc.com](http://urbanspacenyc.com)) captures the creative energy of downtown. Dozens of vendors sell their wares, which are typically homemade, imported from developing countries, or the work of talented artisans. For gifts that are literally out-of-the-box, find this market, open now through December 24, under candy cane-like, red-and-white-striped tents. Do not miss the adjacent food market for fresh apple cider and other hot food and drink.

Escape the cold and explore **The Grand Central Holiday Fair** ([grandcentralterminal.com](http://grandcentralterminal.com)), open now through Christmas Eve. Several dozen artisans fill Grand Central's Vanderbilt Hall with handcrafted jewelry, clothing, and gifts. An hourly light show plays off the dramatic constellations on the terminal's vast vaulted ceiling.

Museum shops can be a welcome surprise at holiday gift giving time, and none more so than the shop at the **Neue Galerie** ([neuegalerie.org](http://neuegalerie.org)) on Fifth Avenue and 86th. On display are many well-crafted pieces including jewelry, paper goods, and home furnishings of European design that harken back to the turn of the 20th century.

Through January 3, shop **Winter Village at Bryant Park** ([wintervillage.org](http://wintervillage.org)), next to the stately New York Public Library and surrounding the city's only free ice rink. Expect an array of crafts and artworks from more than 125 vendors and sample the wares of the many pop-up restaurants.

TOP: BRIAN LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES



See the spectacular New York Harbor Fireworks show on New Year's Eve from a Classic Harbor Line cruise.

## EXCLUSIVE EVENTS

Enjoy **Christmas Eve Dinner at Aquavit** ([aquavit.org](http://aquavit.org), price upon request), the Nordic restaurant in midtown that was awarded two Michelin stars in 2015. Presentations in past years have featured a traditional Swedish *julbord*, or smorgasbord, including Christmas ham, Swedish meatballs, herring, ginger snaps, and glogg, a Nordic mulled wine.

If you don't have an Italian *nonna*, book a table Christmas Eve at this beloved Italian restaurant in the East Village. **Feast of the Seven Fishes at Hearth** ([restauranthearth.com](http://restauranthearth.com), price upon request) typically follows the traditional meal eaten by Italians on Christmas Eve, featuring octopus carpaccio, bean soup with shrimp, and linguine and clams.

As the only Firmdale property not in London, the Crosby Street Hotel

brings English traditions stateside with its **Christmas Day menu at The Crosby Bar** ([firmdalehotels.com](http://firmdalehotels.com), \$115 per person). The restaurant's four-course holiday meal includes such old-world favorites as beef Wellington alongside new-world temptations like Hudson Valley foie gras. Save room for chocolate cranberry

pudding cake with Grand Marnier ice cream.

Formal wear is welcome on the **Classic Harbor Line New Year's Eve Fireworks Cruise** ([sail-nyc.com](http://sail-nyc.com), \$346 per person) aboard the *Manhattan*, a replica of the famous commuter yachts of the Roaring Twenties. The 3.5-hour trip includes hors d'oeuvres, desserts, wine, beer, live music, and an unbeatable vantage point for the New York Harbor Fireworks show.

**Christmas Day at The Russian Tea Room** ([russian-tearoom.nyc](http://russian-tearoom.nyc), \$125 per adult) brings a taste of the old country to Manhattan, when borscht, chicken Kiev, Tea Room blintzes, and other classics drive away the wintry chill in one of the most festively decorated dining rooms in the city.

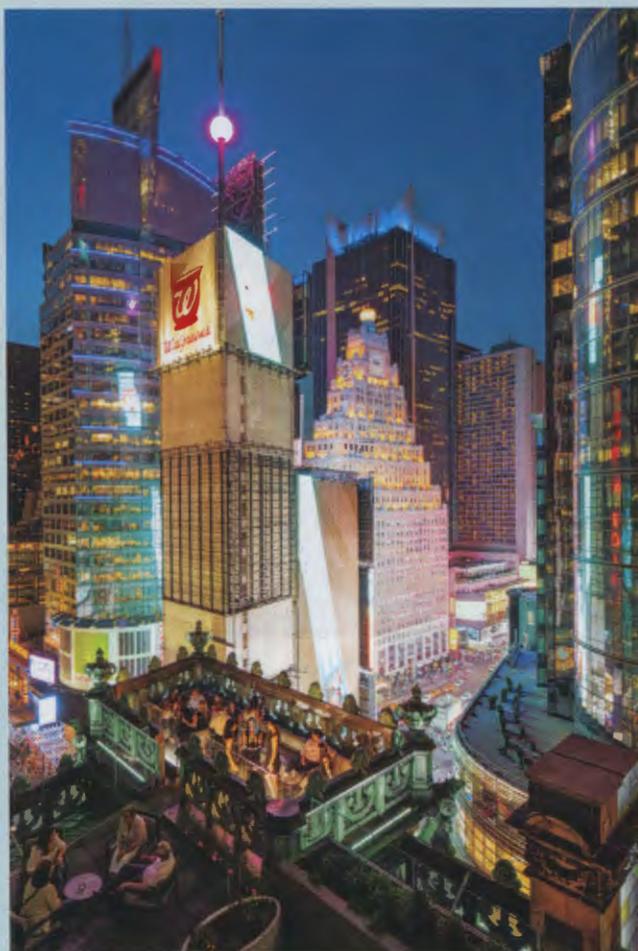
**Christmas Dinner at The Fourth** ([onefivehospitality.com](http://onefivehospitality.com), \$75 per person for three courses) will showcase oysters, duck, and chicken on an artisanal menu paired with a stellar wine list. Find the neighborhood brasserie from the husband-and-wife team behind

## Four Seasons Hotel New York's TY One On for the Holidays

On December 2, executive chef John Johnson and executive pastry chef Jasmina Bojic will host Four Seasons Hotel New York's TY One On for the Holidays (\$250 per person). During the cooking class chef Johnson will instruct guests on making a few classic holiday dishes, pairing each with a unique seasonal cocktail. Then guests will move into TY Bar for some of chef Bojic's sweet treats while watching the annual Rockefeller Center Tree Lighting Ceremony on the city's largest video wall. ([fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com))

The Three-Night New Year's Eve at the Knickerbocker package (from \$6,890 per couple) includes the city's hottest ticket come December 31. The reopened Knickerbocker Hotel's expansive St. Cloud rooftop peers over Times Square just 150 feet from the New Year's Eve Ball. The three-night package includes an exclusive invitation to dinner and dancing at the fourth-floor Charlie Palmer, followed by a rooftop reception around midnight at St. Cloud. Three Skypods at the rooftop's corners accommodate up to 20 people each and can be booked separately from \$70,000, including three nights' accommodation. Parties of up to 22 can book a three-night package reserving St. Cloud's Waterford Crystal Lounge for \$100,000. ([theknickerbocker.com](http://theknickerbocker.com))

## New Year's Eve at the Knickerbocker Hotel's St. Cloud Rooftop



One Five Hospitality just below Union Square in the East Village.

For jazz fans, it's a **New Year's Eve with Chris Botti** at the legendary Blue Note ([bluenote.net](http://bluenote.net), from \$85 per person). Shows start at 7 pm or 10 pm and include Champagne, party hats, and noisemakers. The Grammy Award-winning trumpeter's 11th Annual Holiday Residency show at the jazz club includes nightly performances from December 14 through January 10.

Fine dining, not partying, is what **New Year's Eve at Recette** ([recettenyc.com](http://recettenyc.com), \$150 per person) in the West Village will entail. The French favorite will serve a five-course menu including borscht, kielbasa, beets, parsnip, foie gras, and veal chop with a cauliflower and truffle gratin.

At the **New Year's Eve Gala at Daniel** ([danielnyc.com](http://danielnyc.com), from \$215 per person for three courses), one of the city's most famous and formal restaurants loosens up a little to ring in the coming year. The restaurant will offer a decadent six-course tasting menu (from \$625 per person), with a wine pairing option (\$250 per person). There will be a Champagne toast at midnight, a DJ, and dancing.

**Jimmy Buffett and the Coral Reefer Band at Barclays Center** ([barclayscenter.com](http://barclayscenter.com), from \$65 per person) on New Year's Eve will open with Huey Lewis and the News. The arena in the heart of hipster Brooklyn hosts Buffett's first-ever New Year's Eve performance in New York City. Nostalgic indeed, but that's the essence of New Year's Eve. 