THE LOCAL'S EDIT • 2026

The Tampa Bay Holiday Guide

A little local magic for the season.

CURATED BY TATIANA TAVLAN



WELCOME

A very Tampa Christmas

A note from your local guide

There is something special about the holidays in Tampa: sparkling waterfront nights, coffee before a shopping trip, and festive traditions without the winter chill.

I'm a Tampa native, Realtor® and interior designer. I put this guide together to help you discover local favorites, make memories and explore the neighborhoods that make our city feel like home.

Inside the guide

Coffee • Holiday lights • Date nights • Markets • Festive dining • Family fun • Santa photos • Calendar • Bucket list

Happy holidays,

Tatiana

COFFEE STOPS

Pre-shopping pick-me-ups

Start with a latte, then explore a neighborhood or shop local. Seasonal menus vary; ask the barista what's new.

Pura Vida

A bright brunch or coffee stop.

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Oxford Exchange

Coffee, books and a browse for gifts.

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Ginger Beard Coffee

A casual coffee stop before downtown plans.

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The Lab Coffee

A specialty coffee break.

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Ivry. Espresso & Flatbread

Pair espresso with a savory bite.

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Spaddy's Coffee Co.

An easygoing neighborhood coffee outing.

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Eclipse Cafe

Add another cafe to your holiday coffee crawl.

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LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Christmas lights

A few sparkling destinations worth making time for.

Christmas Town • Busch Gardens

Select dates Nov 13–Jan 4. Park admission required.

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Christmas in the Wild • ZooTampa

Public nights Nov 28–Dec 30, select dates. Nov 27 is a member preview.

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Riverwalk Holiday Spectacular

Nov 27–Jan 3. Enjoy the waterfront decorations on a stroll.

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Enchant Christmas • St. Petersburg

The 2026 event returns to Tropicana Field; check ticket dates.

Explore / details

Riverwalk Tree Lighting

Nov 29, 5–8 PM. The Sail Plaza / convention center area.

Explore / details

FOR TWO

Holiday date nights

Three easy ways to turn an evening into a memory.

Skate & sip

Book ice skating at Winter Village, then grab a warm drink and walk along the Riverwalk. Skating: $17 adult, $15 under 12; rentals included.

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Cruise under the lights

Book River of Lights on select nights through Jan 3. The 9:15 PM happy-hour sailing is intended for adults.

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Dinner & a festive stroll

Choose a Water Street restaurant and take a walk beneath the neighborhood lights. On Dec 3, add the Holiday Promenade.

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SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES

Holiday markets

Find something thoughtful and locally made. Check organizer calendars before heading out.

Holiday Promenade • Water Street

Dec 3, 5–9 PM. Local makers and festive performances.

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Merry Midtown

Dec 19, 10 AM–2 PM. Midtown Commons. Local gifts and Santa.

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The Market at Water Street

Dec 20, 10 AM–3 PM. Free entry; over 60 vendors.

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Davis Islands Holiday Market

Dec 12, 10 AM–2 PM. Vendor calendar lists this date; confirm with the organizer before visiting.

Explore / details

EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY

Holiday-ready sips & eats

Our restaurant shortlist. Confirm holiday decor, menus and hours directly before visiting.

Nueva Cantina

Mexican bites and margaritas.

Explore / details

Strandhill Public

Pub fare and a festive evening out.

Explore / details

Willa’s

A cozy dinner date or brunch.

Explore / details

Small Giant

Water Street dinner and drinks.

Explore / details

Rreal Tacos

Tacos and margaritas for a casual outing.

Explore / details

Plan ahead

Reserve dinner on busy weekends and ask about seasonal specials or nonalcoholic festive drinks.

FAMILY ADVENTURES

Festive fun for tiny humans

Make a little magic with these family-friendly outings.

Winter Village

Nov 20–Jan 3. Skating is $15 for under 12, including rentals; book online.
Explore / details

Winter Village Express

Nov 29, Dec 6, 13, 20. Hourly departures 3–7 PM; reserve seats.
Explore / details

Christmas Town

Select dates through Jan 4. Holiday shows, lights and rides.
Explore / details

Christmas in the Wild

Select public nights Nov 28–Dec 30. Lights and seasonal entertainment.
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Holiday Lighted Boat Parade

Dec 19, 6:15 PM. Find a public viewing spot along the Riverwalk.
Explore / details

The Nutcracker

Check the Straz calendar for performance dates and tickets.
Explore / details

PICTURE-PERFECT MEMORIES

Santa pics

Bring your camera and check photo packages and reservation policies.

Bass Pro Shops

Santa's Wonderland. Check free-photo reservation calendar.

Explore / details

International Plaza

Nov 9–Dec 24. Closed Thanksgiving; hours vary.

Explore / details

Armature Works

Nov 28, Dec 5, 12 & 19 | 1–4 PM. Free Santa photos.

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Tampa Theatre

Nov 29: free lobby photos at 2 PM; movie at 3 PM.
Miracle on 34th Street (1947). Details supplied for this guide.

Explore / details

Color Me Mine • Hyde Park

Dec 6, 10 AM–noon. Date supplied by curator; confirm booking.

Explore / details

The Shops at Wiregrass

Santa's cottage. Check photo sessions and reservations.

Explore / details

YOUR CALENDAR

Save the date

Dates below are supported by the current event listings reviewed for this edition.

Nov 9–Dec 24	Santa photos • International Plaza
Nov 13–Jan 4	Christmas Town (select dates)
Nov 20–Jan 3	Winter Village
Nov 21–Jan 3	River of Lights (select dates)
Nov 27–Jan 3	Riverwalk Holiday Spectacular
Nov 28–Dec 30	Christmas in the Wild (select dates)
Nov 29	Riverwalk Tree Lighting • 5–8 PM
Nov 29	Santa at Tampa Theatre • 2 PM
Dec 3	Holiday Promenade • 5–9 PM
Dec 5	Santa Fest & city tree lighting
Nov 29; Dec 6, 13, 20	Winter Village Express
Dec 6	Paint with Santa • 10 AM–noon (supplied)
Dec 19	Merry Midtown • 10 AM–2 PM
Dec 19	Lighted Boat Parade • 6:15 PM
Dec 20	The Market • 10 AM–3 PM

Tap event names for available details. Dates may change.

MAKE IT MEMORABLE

The holiday bucket list

Ten little ways to make the season your own. Tap a box to check it off in a compatible PDF viewer.

- [ ] Sip a festive latte
- [ ] Take a picture with Santa
- [ ] Go ice skating at Winter Village
- [ ] Shop from a local maker
- [ ] Watch the lighted boat parade
- [ ] Try a festive dinner spot
- [ ] Ride the holiday streetcar
- [ ] See a holiday stage performance
- [ ] Take a Christmas lights stroll
- [ ] Watch a classic Christmas movie

Make memories, not just plans.

YOUR LOCAL CONNECTION

Meet Tatiana



Tampa native.

Realtor® and interior designer with a passion for helping people discover Tampa, find a home and create a space they love.

Thinking about moving to Tampa or exploring a new neighborhood? I'd love to connect.

Explore Tampa homes

Follow on Instagram

Engel & Völkers Tampa Downtown

Local real estate • Interior design • Tampa lifestyle

Wishing you a beautiful holiday season!