



Bryant Park

# Where to go in New York at Christmastime when Rockefeller is too much



By Nigel Roberts  
Photos by Nigel Roberts

**Beyoncé, Tony Bennett, Harry Connick Jr, and Jamie Foxx** were just a few of the entertainers who performed at the annual lighting of Rockefeller Center's Christmas tree—this year an eight-ton, 72-foot Norway spruce.

Decorators used more than 30,000 energy-efficient LED lights, strung together on five miles of wire to illuminate the tree. But they didn't stop there. They topped it with a 750-pound star made of 25,000 finely-cut crystals. It's a New York City tradition that dates back to 1931.

If there's a downside to the Rockefeller experience, it's probably the holiday crowd. An estimated

quarter of a million ice skaters will glide and slide on Rockefeller's rink this holiday season. One could hardly visit the Christmastime landmark without having that feeling of being trapped in the city's subway at rush hour.

The Rockefeller experience is unique, but there are a few good alternatives that are less congested and equally pleasant.

A 10-minute walk from Rockefeller Center, along Sixth Avenue, offers a memorable experience. Bryant Park's 51-foot Christmas tree, trucked down from Quebec, overlooks the park's 170 feet by 100 feet rink.

On the night following the nationally broadcasted festivities

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at Rockefeller Center, Broadway performers entertained merrymakers at Bryant Park's tree lighting ceremony. And on the rink, Olympic and synchronized skaters graced the ice.

Unlike Rockefeller's rink, the Pond at Bryant Park is seldom crowded and offers free admission and inexpensive rental of high quality skates. The rink opens at 8 a.m. every morning and closes at 10 p.m. on Sunday through Thursdays and at midnight on Friday and Saturdays.

For those who enjoy skating from a distance, Celsius restaurant offers a wonderful view of the tree and rink from within the warmth of its glass-walled building or from its outdoor terrace. Celsius' menu features reasonably priced meals for mid-town Manhattan (porterhouse steak at \$26) and appropriately named cocktails (polar bear mojito \$14).

Another popular alternative to Rockefeller Center is the historic Pier 17 of the South Street Seaport. Its modestly decorated Christmas tree, a 50-foot Douglas fir, stands tall at the center of its cobblestone streets.

With New York Harbor as its backdrop, along with towering ships and skyscrapers, Seaport Ice is arguably the most scenic of the three locations. Seaport Ice is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week, and general admission is \$5.

A variety of eateries are located at South Street Seaport, several of them offer some of the best seafood in the city. Located within walking distance of Wall Street, there are a variety of other restaurants in the area.

While it has no skating rink, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a Christmas tree that's worth seeing. Many say the Met's annual 20-foot blue spruce is the most elegantly decorated Christmas tree in the city. It features a collection of 18th century Neapolitan angels and cherubs, along with a carefully assembled Nativity scene at its base.

While Rockefeller Center is a one-of-a-kind Christmastime experience, consider some of the alternatives that offer a more leisurely—but equally memorable—holiday visit to New York.

[www.SouthStreetSeaport.com](http://www.SouthStreetSeaport.com)  
[www.ThePondatBryantPark.com](http://www.ThePondatBryantPark.com)  
[www.TheMetMuseum.org](http://www.TheMetMuseum.org)



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