

A tale of **two** holidays

Two itineraries, one mission: whether you're a local or a tourist, here's how to maximize merriness

By Celia Shatzman

THE OPTIONS OF WHAT to see and do in the Big Apple are endless, so we asked Sonia Benavides, assistant chef concierge of the InterContinental New York Times Square (interconny.com), to do the work for you. The hotel embraces the spirit of the season with Create-Your-Own Cookie workshops, in-suite festive holiday decorations and special menus. Benavides created two itineraries, one for locals and another for tourists, that maximize the best of New York at this merry time of year.

FOR LOCALS

► Visit **The Morgan Library & Museum** (themorgan.org) to see the original manuscript of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

► On Dec. 12-15, the Paul Winter Sextet will host the **Solstice Celebration** (solsticeconcert.com), a music and dance concert, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

► Avoid ice-skating tourists at Rockefeller Center, and opt instead for the chic rink at the **Standard Hotel** (standardhotels.com/high-line); then grab drinks at the Top of the Standard bar.

► Take in Christmas Eve service (4 p.m. or 11 p.m.) at **St. Thomas Church** (saintthomaschurch.org) on 5th Avenue

to hear the Boys' Choir. The choir school is the only church-affiliated boarding school of its kind in the U.S.

► Five hundred tuba players toot holiday tunes on the rink for **Tuba Christmas** at Rockefeller Center (tubachristmas.com). The 3:30 concert is always packed, so skip the crowds by showing up around 12:30 to catch dress rehearsal.

► Warm up with a cup of spiked hot cocoa at **Gramercy Tavern** (gramercytavern.com) or indulge in John W. Campbell's Egg Nog (Woodford Reserve bourbon, Appleton rum, egg, heavy cream and agave nectar) at **The Campbell Apartment** (hospitalityholdings.com).

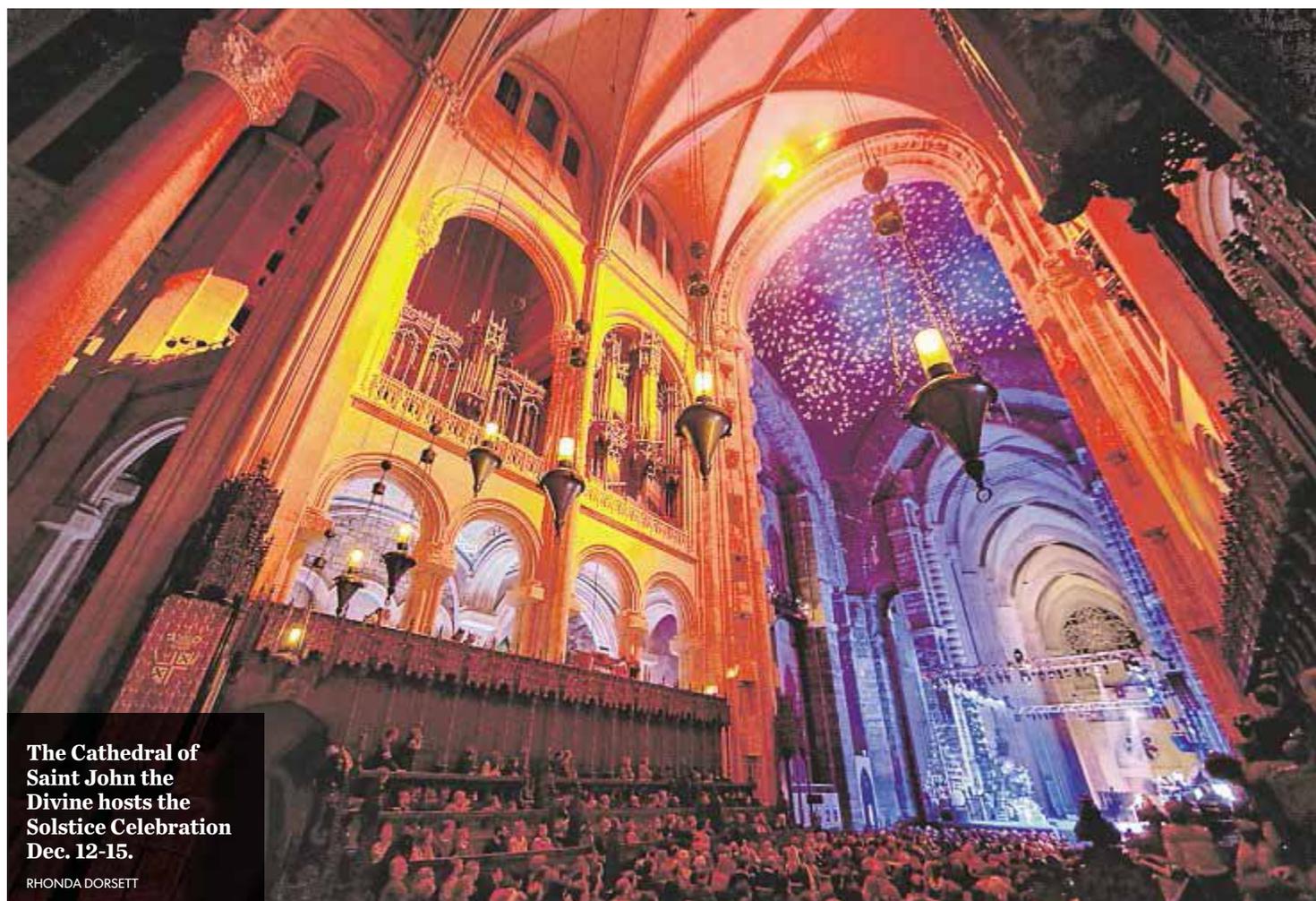
► The holidays are all about eating.

Explore that notion with the **Gourmet and Fusion Dessert Tasting & Culture Tour** with New York Food Tours (foodtoursofny.com). For 2.5 hours, trek through the East Village, Flatiron and Union Square to sample a variety of international treats, ranging from hot chocolate to Asian-inspired desserts to Italian pastries.

► Get in the seasonal spirit by giving your time at **Toys for Tots** (toysfortotsnyc.org). Volunteers are needed during the pre-holiday rush to pick up and deliver boxes of toys and to assist with distribution at the warehouse.

► Don't miss **Holiday Under the Stars**, an installation made of 12 hanging luminaries in the Time Warner Center's (theshopsatcolumbuscircle.com) lobby. The display changes to accompany just for the show. Top it off with a cup of rich hot chocolate from Bouchon Bakery (bouchonbakery.com).

► Holiday concerts have been an annual event at **Jazz at Lincoln Center** (jalc.org) since 1989, when the Wynton



The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine hosts the Solstice Celebration Dec. 12-15.

RHONDA DORSETT



THINKSTOCK

For tourists, a holiday visit isn't complete without taking a whirl in one of New York's iconic ice skating rinks.



No one should miss seeing Radio City Rockettes perform with Santa Claus.

ASTRID STAWIARZ FOR USA TODAY

Marsalis band and The Lincoln Center Classical Jazz Orchestra presented A Classical Jazz Christmas. Be sure to catch a show this season.

FOR TOURISTS

► Don't miss the world-famous Rockettes in the **Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular** (radiocitychristmas.com), celebrating its 85th anniversary.



COURTESY NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

The Holiday Train Show, featuring models of New York City landmarks, continues through Jan. 13.

► The heartwarming movie *Elf* (elfmusical.com) continues on Broadway through Jan. 6.

► Each year the **American Museum of Natural History** (amnh.org) kicks off the season with its Origami Holiday Tree. Starting in July, volunteers begin folding the 500 Origami creations that hang from its branches. Volunteers are on-site to teach museum guests the art of origami. Other must-see trees include the Chorus Tree at South Street Seaport, the Divine Peace tree at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and, of course, the Rockefeller Christmas Tree.

► George Balanchine's vision of sugar plum fairies, toy soldiers and the Rat King returns to **The Nutcracker at the New York City Ballet** (nycballet.com), running through Dec. 30.

► A December visit isn't complete without taking a whirl in one of New York's iconic ice skating rinks. There's **Central Park's Wollman Rink** (centralparknyc.org), **Citi Pond at Bryant Park** (citipondatbryantpark.com), and **Rockefeller Center** (therinkatrockcenter.com).

► Hit up the holiday markets at **Bryant Park, Union Square, Grand Central Terminal and Columbus Circle**—all offer a variety of unique

handcrafted and artisan goods.

► Get your picture snapped with St. Nick at **Santa's Wonderland at Macy's** (macys.com), the country's largest department store.

► Take a two-mile stroll and go **window shopping through Midtown**, and be sure to catch the imaginatively decorated windows at Macy's, Lord & Taylor, Saks 5th Avenue, Bergdorf Goodman, Barneys and Bloomingdale's.

► More than a dozen model trains chug around New York City landmarks like the old Yankee Stadium, Statue of Liberty and Brooklyn Bridge at the **New York Botanical Garden's Holiday Train Show** (nybg.org/hts), on display through Jan. 13.

► A 200-voice chorus performance by the **New York Philharmonic** (nyphil.org) of Handel's "Messiah" makes for a mesmerizing holiday concert.

EVERY GIRL NEEDS A SHOPPING HOLIDAY

New York is indisputably one of the greatest fashion cities in the world, with the retail scene to prove it. Fashionistas can stay in the center of all the action at The Surrey (thesurrey.com), located on Madison Avenue and surrounded by a stellar roster of boutiques. It's also home to Cornelia Spa, the perfect way to destress during this hectic time of year. **Lorena Ringoot**, the Surrey's Chef Concierge, is a connoisseur on local shopping and shares her insider picks.

FOR LOCALS:

>>**CALYPSO ST. BARTH:** "This boutique has a fantastic selection of well-made women's styles that appeal to and work on almost everyone."

>>**DIPTYQUE:** "I absolutely adore this Parisian perfumery. The Baies candle provides a warm floral scent that's perfect for any room."

>>**RAG & BONE:** "They offer the best in structured, casual pieces with just enough edge. Their accessories stand out the most, especially their collections of sturdy, stylish boots and hats."

>>**REBECCA TAYLOR:** "I love Rebecca Taylor's silk dresses with whimsical details. This boutique is brand new and a refreshing destination for even the most seasoned New York shopper."

FOR TOURISTS:

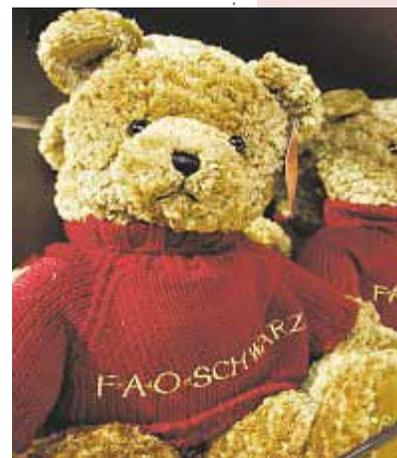
>>**INTERMIX:** "It's the best place to find the little black dress that's anything but traditional to spice up your wardrobe."

>>**BARNEYS NEW YORK:** "You can always buy the latest up-and-coming designers at Barneys, and their displays are hip and trendy."

>>**BERGDORF GOODMAN:** "For the person who has everything, I suggest going [here]. Plus, they are celebrating their 111th anniversary this year!"

>>**FAO SCHWARZ:** "It doesn't matter if you are 5 or 50, FAO Schwarz will bring out the child in anyone. Just think about Tom Hanks in the famous piano scene from *Big*."

>>**SCOOP:** "When looking for that great accessory, I always love to go to Scoop—I find the most unique belts and one-of-a-kind jewelry."



STAN HONDA, USA TODAY