

San Francisco's Union Square

Set in the heart of San Francisco's premier shopping district, a vibrant 2.6-acre plaza hums with activity. Each December, a large menorah and an 83-foot-tall Christmas tree decked out in 33,000 twinkling lights brighten the square. On the surrounding sidewalks, roving carolers in Victorian garb stroll past over-the-top seasonal store window displays. Area code is 415.

■ Practice toe loops or simply glide to the music at the 6,000-square-foot **Holiday Ice Rink** (Nov. 5–Jan. 19). Don a bathing suit and figure skate during the Polar Bear Skate on New Year's Day. unionsquareicerink.com.

■ Is it teatime? At the **Rotunda** inside the Neiman Marcus department store, shoppers fortify themselves with finger sandwiches, tartlets, and other tasty dainties beneath a stained glass dome and overlooking the square. 150 Stockton St., 249–2720, neimanmarcus.com.

■ A Ching dynasty wooden Buddha gazes across the sales floor in **Gump's**, a retail icon since 1861. The goods here run mostly to classic, pricey items for the home, but you'll come across more affordable treasures too, such as a blown-glass ornament in the form of a San Francisco Giants jersey for \$18. 135 Post St., 982-1616, gumps.com.

■ The 42 taps and extensive bottle list at **Mikkeller Bar**—an outpost of the famed Copenhagen beer bar—boast many hard-to-find European and domestic brews. Pair with pub grub like a house-made bratwurst. 34 Mason St., 984-0279, mikkellerbar.com.

■ Miserly Scrooge, cheerful Tiny Tim, and other characters from **A Christmas Carol** come alive during the American Conservatory Theater's annual production based on the Charles Dickens novel. Dec. 5–28 at the Geary Theater. 415 Geary St., 749-2228, act-sf.org.



Pro-Union Civil War victory rallies gave this hip shopping destination its name.

■ Indulge in hot chocolate and truffles on the **Holiday Lights & Chocolate Tour**, which includes a stop at Union Square. The three-hour guided walk lets you burn off those delicious calories. 312-1119, gourmetwalks.com.

■ The spirit of fictional detective Sam Spade haunts the **Burritt Room and Tavern**, a dark, modern-era speakeasy tucked into the Mystic Hotel. You can sip a Hanky Panky at the bar or repair to one of the curtained booths in the restaurant for satisfying fare such as a savory sourdough pancake with fried brussels sprouts and creamy mustard dressing. 417 Stockton St., 400-0561, burritttavern.com. — CHRISTOPHER HALL