

SeaWorld San Diego Christmas Celebration: A Southern California Attraction Review

by Randy Crane, PassPorter Guest Contributor

One of my favorite Christmas traditions can be found in the place, "Where the season meets the sea."

That's SeaWorld's tag line for their Christmas celebration, and this will be the third year my wife and I have visited SeaWorld San Diego for their special seasonal activities (and food!). As with summer and Halloween, SeaWorld themes many of their shows for Christmas, and one of them is quite possibly my favorite Christmas event anywhere. More on that later, though.

Running weekends from November 17 to January 5, (with some exceptions that are more limited), SeaWorld San Diego's Christmas Celebration has several fun and unique offerings that make it a must-do Southern California Christmas visit. Perhaps best of all, everything below and more (with the exception of the food) are included with your Sea World admission.

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□Decorations & Dining -- SeaWorld has its own unique and breathtaking approach to holiday decorating. SeaWorld's Christmas Celebration decks the halls (and walkways) with holiday lights and festive decorations, featuring a tree with marine animal-themed ornaments that's 40-foot tall (the tree, not the ornaments), and Southern California's largest Christmas tree, the 320-foot Christmas Tree of Lights, glows at the center of the park from dusk to midnight.

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□Two special dining treats are found at opposite ends of the spectrum. At one end, Breakfast with Shamu and Santa offers guests a chance to enjoy a breakfast buffet just a few feet away from SeaWorld's killer whales. Santa makes a special appearance during the event, too! There is an extra cost for this and dates are limited. For reservations, visit www.seaworldsandiego.com.

My other favorite holiday food experience is a snack that's one of the staples of my holiday tradition; warm roasted nuts and steaming hot cocoa. It sounds simple, but sitting on a cold (well, cold for San Diego) night waiting for the Shamu Christmas show, sipping hot chocolate, and eating roasted nuts with a sweet coating (pecans or almonds, as I recall) is practically its own Christmas song waiting to happen.

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☐ Specially Themed Shows -- As with the other seasonal events, the Sea Lion & Otter show has its own special holiday story line. This year's is a new one, "Clyde and Seamore Save Christmas." "Biff," the hilarious stagehand, fills in for Santa, as poor O. P. Otter has made the Naughty List, again. Of course, the list goes missing and hijinks follow as Clyde and Seamore search it out.

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☐ Over in the Pets Playhouse, Chili Pepper and his friends (both furry and feathery) share their "Christmas Tails" show. It's an amazing show, featuring animals adopted from shelters and tons of holiday fun. This show generally has fewer humans in it than the regular Pets Playhouse show, and seeing all the fantastic behaviors these animals can be trained to do is so enjoyable.

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☐ Taking the place of the Sesame Street 4-D show in the theater back by Mission Bay is a show I've missed so far, but this year will be high on my list. The Polar Express 4-D Experience is based on the film of the same name. This magical experience takes viewers to the North Pole with a doubting boy who learns that, "The wonder of life never fades for those who believe." During the 18-minute show, guests experience amazing in-theater effects including snow, fog, and even the scent of hot chocolate. It may be worth it just for the hot chocolate smell!

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☐ SnowWorld -- This is a "winter wonderland" with snowmen, snowballs, and fun! Featuring more than 6,500 square feet of fresh snow each day, guests can enjoy sledding, a snowball target game, and even unscheduled visits with SeaWorld's arctic foxes. SnowWorld is open daily, but there are a couple of things you need to know about it.

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☐ SeaWorld promotes this as "fun for the whole family," but in my experience it's really only fun for adults if they want to sit and watch their kids. Anyone can make little snowmen, depending on how much snow you can gather, but pretty much everything else here is just for kids. The snowball target game is only for children (and the rules state that they are to, "refrain from throwing snowballs" anywhere else). Sledding is reserved for children between the ages of five and twelve years old. Besides the occasional visit from an arctic fox, there's not much else for anyone over 12 years old to do here.

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☐ Santa Claus -- On the other hand, everybody loves Santa, and Santa's Cottage is a great place to meet him and participate in some fun activities! Located outside the Seaport Marketplace (where the Clydesdales used to be), you can enjoy decorating Christmas cookies, visit Santa's special elves, and take a photo with Santa and your family.

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☐ New this year, two of Santa's reindeer-in-training are vacationing at

SeaWorld for the holidays. Jingles and Winter are in the reindeer corral next to Santa's Cottage. At 7 months old, Jingles is growing steadily and is already showing his first antlers. How often do you get to see a baby reindeer?

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□Shamu's Christmas Celebration -- It was while sitting in this show two years ago that my wife and I turned to each other and said, "We have to do this every year." There are classic Christmas songs and carols performed by two amazing soloists, a sign-language choir, community carolers, and a saxophonist! All of these performers are not just on the stage, but throughout the stadium. The Shamu family of killer whales is spotlighted, as well (more than in the nightly summer show, actually), with their behaviors feeling more natural and organically a part of what's happening than in some of the other shows they do. Words cannot express how beautiful, moving, even breathtaking this show is. This is Christmas to me.

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□This year, Shamu's Christmas runs weekends November 17 through December 16; and nightly December 22 through January 5. It's worth planning your visit to make sure you experience this show!

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□Bonus Tip: Two years ago, SeaWorld had an ice skating rink. They took that out last year, but if you still want to get in some skating on your San Diego Christmas vacation, the Hotel del Coronado has, for the eighth year, Skating by the Sea, an outdoor ice skating rink right at the Pacific Ocean. The Windsor Lawn is transformed into an ice rink with skating offered daily beginning the day before Thanksgiving. With this rink right next to the sand, it's as close to ice skating on the ocean you'll ever get. Even better, a portion of the skating proceeds will benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation® of San Diego!

About The Author: Randy Crane is a Travel Consultant affiliated with CruisingCo. & MouseEarVacations.com, and lives with his wife in Southern California. Along with his many Disney trips, he makes multiple trips to the San Diego area and loves to help people plan not only Disney trips, but Southern California vacations to all its amazing destinations. Contact him by email at RandyC@cruisingco.com

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