

## Opinion

### Happy Holidays in New York City

If I hear one more “Happy Holidays” I shall look the jolly greeter hard in the eye and blurt out: “It’s Merry bloody Christmas... okay?”

Seriously, apart from the wishy-washy political correctness of the all-encompassing Happy Holidays’ theme (I know, I get it, there’s a host of Yuletide celebrations besides my ‘Merry Christmas’ like Kwanzaa, the African-American holiday, or Jewish Hanukkah), we are having a jolly good time.



The most intriguing Christmas shop window displays where no expense is spared has to be Bergdorf Goodmans on Fifth Avenue, but Lady Gaga’s Boudoir in Barneys, Madison Avenue was worth a detour.

Children’s hot chocolates topped with marshmallows and sugary crepes served from twee alpine huts by handsome ski bum types (one for the mums). Warming cheese fondues enjoyed from comfy seats furnished with fluffy red blankets to stave off the chilly late December air. All with a view of Mr Zookeeper artfully completing circuits of the small rink. And after a few glühweins... us parents joined the children on the ice, like regular Torvill and Deans, or was it Thumper and Bambi?

**FAO Schwarz, Fifth Avenue.** NYC’s toy nirvana as advertised on the backseat TV screens of every single yellow cab journey I’ve made this month. My children waited a whole year for their visit. They weren’t disappointed, except for my youngest who asked where the “real toy car” was. I think he was referring to the one in the advert driven by a precocious-looking toddler (dressed like an adult—such an Upper East trait) dodging a live monkey scurrying across a steamy jungle-clad aisle (what? are we back in Bukit Tunku?).



Helen Hickey

Helen Hickey is a British expat who has recently moved from the jungles of Kuala Lumpur to another of the concrete variety, New York City. She writes to escape her four young children and secure what little remains of her sanity.

New York City is “the best” at Christmas locals say. It’s true. It comes alive with hoards of must-dos; we’ll never do them all, not in a lifetime of Decembers and unfettered access to Carlos Slim’s bank account.

Here’s a potted version of the outings we’ve managed (to afford) during our first Christmas in the glittery Big Apple:

**Ice skating with film stars at the oh-so-trendy ‘The Standard’ hotel, in West Village.** Ok. So the evil zookeeper (Clark Gregg) from Mr Popper’s Penguins movie was ice skating with his daughter at the Standard’s outdoor ice rink. It qualifies.



Fortunately, this \$24,999.99 Barbie doll foosball table wasn't going to fit into the girl's Christmas stockings...

The hot pink Barbie doll foosball table with a price tag of \$24,999.99, one of ten made worldwide, caught my girls' attention. But first prize for the ridiculous was awarded to two overly excited twenty-somethings giving a live performance of Chopsticks on what must be the largest piano on the planet—they were jiggling erratically across the top of it, pressing the keys with their feet (and hands following a forward flip). Hard to explain; got to be there.

### **Radio City Christmas Spectacular, Rockefeller Centre.**

Not a peep from the marveled audience during the one-and-half-hour show consisting of close to 40 dancing girls called

The Rockettes dressed as leggy showgirls (one for the dads), Santas, or as part of a Christmas Nativity and joined by three live camels, a flock of sheep and a donkey.



A visit to Radio City's Christmas Spectacular, starring the Rockettes (dressed as Santa's reindeer below), has been a New York Christmas tradition since 1933.

### **Lady Gaga's hairy shopwindow display at Barneys, Madison Avenue.**

Lady Gaga was there too, well, a mannequin of, and literally everything in her boudoir was covered in hair: a frizzy blonde chaise longue, black braided stiletto and a ginger-lock framed mirror. Very weird. But in keeping I guess with NY's most provocative lady of fame.

### **The New York Botanical Gardens annual holiday train.**

Following a NY tradition for the past twenty years, we made our first trip to the Bronx area to see model trains merrily winding their way around a miniature Manhattan.

The twist to this exhibit, housed in a giant greenhouse, was that buildings—including Lady Liberty herself, the wedding cake shaped Chrysler Building, Metropolitan Museum and hundreds more—were painstakingly made from plants, nutshells and fungus. “I just saw the Polar Express train mummy!” my seven-year-old cried as we walked under George Washington Bridge constructed from pine bark, twigs and magnolia leaves.

And for New Year's Eve my friend—a fellow Brit and a relative 'newbie' like ourselves recently emailed certain options for the big night:

“Well, after some research I managed to find:

a “Gala Night” at the Mandarin Oriental for \$1500 per head which clearly Jason [hubby] blew out of the water straightaway,

an over 35's night at the Bryant Park Grill followed by ice skating and broken legs!

got laughed at loudly when I called the Standard to see if they had any tickets left for the Debbie Harry concert at the rooftop bar!”

Ahem, none above I don't think.

Times Square is the big draw here. Only I have heard you have to be there at 3pm to save your spot of concrete—and with four children under nine—maybe not.

My hubby wishes to wander the streets of NYC, maybe nipping via the Rockefeller Center to see

the famed Christmas tree. The 75-year-old Norway Spruce from Pennsylvania reaches a heady 74 feet and is topped with a 25,000 Swarovski crystal studded star.

Me? Well, I've a dreamy idea of finally taking that ride through Central Park on a horse-drawn carriage, children too—after all they are old enough now to remember what we did on New Year's Eve 2011 in NYC. And, please, finally, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!



Tiffany's at Christmas, very theatrical, and if you leaned into the Fifth Avenue displays to see the moving carousels you can smell the strong pine scent of the surrounding foliage