

FEATURES

There's plenty worth celebrating about this holiday season at hotels, pubs and restaurants throughout Taipei

Eat, drink and be merry

BY HO YI
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Not sure where to eat Christmas dinner this week? Not to worry. Taipei's hotels, restaurants and bars are preparing all kinds of meals and goodies to cater to every holiday need. Read on for an exhaustive list of places that are offering multi-course set menus, Christmas dinners, turkey hampers for takeout, and other goodies. Readers should note that hotel prices are subject to a 10 percent service charge. Christmas specials are on offer on Wednesday and Thursday, and that orders for gift baskets and hampers should be made three days in advance, unless otherwise noted.

CHRISTMAS DINNER (HOTELS)

In keeping with the spirit of Christmas, the **Grand Hyatt Taipei** is teaming up with the Taiwan Foundation for Rare Disorders (罕見疾病基金會) for a donation campaign to help people suffering from rare disorders who have been deprived of opportunities for a good education or medical care. The hotel's restaurants are also getting ready for Christmas revelers with specially crafted feasts. The **Bel Air** appeals to the delicate palate with a NT\$3,500 set meal featuring fresh premium ingredients such as salmon caviar, truffle and lobster. Seared foie gras and pinot noir sauce, champagne and orange sherbet, roasted venison fillet with mushroom crust, bone marrow and truffle jus and spicy chocolate soup with fresh berries, warm gingerbread pudding, and single-malt ice

cream are the centerpieces. **Ziga Zaga** entices Christmas revelers with its Italian set menu (NT\$3,500) of roasted quail with fava bean ragout and balsamic glaze, beef tenderloin with crisp duck liver, pumpkin gnocchi, sautéed baby spinach and Madeira glaze, and lentil cappuccino with truffle tapanade and cottachino sausage.

To add to the Christmas atmosphere, pastry chef Martin Thompson is preparing a wide selection of seasonal specialties including Dresden-style Christmas stollen, panettone Milano and cinnamon ice cream for the afternoon tea buffet (NT\$680) at the **Cha Lounge**. Call (02) 2720-1200 X3198 or X3199 for reservations.

The mood is more international across town at the **Shangri-La Far Eastern Plaza Hotel**, where the **Marco Polo Restaurant** on the 38th floor promises a romantic night with its stunning view of the city and Christmas Eve dinner set for two (NT\$6,400

or NT\$7,600 for a window seat) that features tuna tartare with crispy cake, salmon roe and mustard dressing, cream of leek soup with lobster tail, and tortelloni with porcini mushrooms and prosciutto. The entree is pan-fried veal tenderloin wrapped in pancetta and served with roasted pumpkin, zucchini parmigiana and black truffle sauce.

Christmas dining Japanese-style is a tasteful experience at **Ibuki Japanese Restaurant**, where the NT\$3,200 set menu includes an array of seafood such as king crab, toro sashimi, sea urchin and abalone. A seven-course Shanghai-style set menu can be found at the **Shanghai Pavilion** (NT\$1,500 for lunch and NT\$3,000 for dinner). For reservations, call (02) 2378-8888.

French head chef Bernard Noel and pastry chef Delcourt Laurent teamed up to create holiday season menus for the **Grand Formosa Regent**. Under a glittering three-story-tall Christmas tree on the hotel's first floor, **Azie** is offering a Christmas special (NT\$2,000) that includes pan-fried sea bass with zucchini and tomato saffron sauce, and chicken consommé with pesto. Main course options are pan-fried beef fillet wrapped with mushroom in truffle sauce or salmon with risotto spinach and basil sauce.

The NT\$3,000 Christmas Eve set menu at **Robin's Grill** is geared toward carnivores with dishes such as Wagyu rib-eye beef with potato croquette in red wine sauce, beef tenderloin fillet with vegetable potato croquette in truffle sauce, and roasted turkey with chestnut potato croquette in gravy. Call (02) 2523-8000 to make reservations.

Over at the **Sherwood, Toscana Italian Restaurant** is presenting a six-course Christmas Eve dinner set (NT\$3,200) consisting of marinated yellow fin tuna with avocado and salmon roe, mustard cress and 10-year-old balsamic vinaigrette, wild porcini mushroom cream soup with scallop, baby mussel and white truffle foam, and oven-baked US prime beef tenderloin served with foie gras and thyme jus. Call (02) 2718-1188 for more information.

There will be Christmas carols sung by a children's choir and singers dressed as Santa Claus and angels at the **Sheraton Taipei** on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Free candy and other holiday treats will be handed out to diners by Santa and his helpers.

The hotel's French restaurant, **Antonine**, is celebrating the holiday season with dishes like sautéed duck liver on eggplant confits, braised fresh abalone with truffle essence, and fillet of Napoleon fish with champagne sauce (set menus are NT\$2,900 and NT\$3,600), while hearty Italian menu is on offer at **Pizza Pub** (NT\$1,800). To find out more, call (02) 2321-1818.

The **Westin Taipei** is going for a livelier mood with Christmas Eve specials (NT\$980 and NT\$1,580) at its **Churchill bar**, followed by live jazz performance starting from 9pm until late when patrons can enjoy an unlimited supply of cranberry cocktails, red wine and seasonal desserts for NT\$999 per person. Tel: (02) 8770-6565.

For something more casual and wallet-friendly, the **Howard Plaza** is serving a buffet lunches and dinners at its **Rainbow Terrace, Champs Elysees** and **Le Louvre** restaurants on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, which are priced between NT\$699 and NT\$1,500. A French Christmas Eve set menu (NT\$1,990) is available at the **Rosewood**. Tel: (02) 2700-2323.

The **Landis** is offering French set menus at **Paris 1930** (NT\$3,400) featuring royale of foie gras with chestnut cream and quail egg, roasted monkfish with mashed potato, green asparagus and bacon, and hollandaise and pan-fried duck breast with baby spinach, semolina beignet, raspberry and rhubarb sauce as entrees. More French-themed specials are available at **La Nouvelle Braserie** (set menu NT\$1,300). Tel: (02) 2597-1234.

The Christmas spirit takes on a supernatural tone at **Sunworld Dynasty Hotel** with two fortunetellers giving free tarot readings at **Le Parc Cafe**, where diners can enjoy a Christmas-themed buffet for NT\$800 per person. Tel: (02) 2719-7199 X3310.

CHRISTMAS DINNER (PUBS AND RESTAURANTS)

For those who wish to celebrate in an intimate, relaxing setting, Christmas dinners and parties can be found at pubs and bars across the city. From Wednesday to Friday, **JB's** (02-2364-8222) will serve a traditional Christmas supper (NT\$750) with roast beef and turkey, sausage meat stuffing wrapped in bacon, and traditional English sherry trifle for dessert. The set menu is served from 2pm until 10:30pm.

The **Brass Money** (02-2547-5050) is offering a Christmas Eve dinner buffet (NT\$699) between 6pm and 10pm. The "around the world" turkey set meal returns to **Citizen Cain** (02-2708-4557), where diners can choose from turkeys served Italian-, Mexican- or American-style. The restaurant/bar has lowered the set menu's price from NT\$590 to NT\$488 this year because of the economic downturn.

Traditional turkey Christmas dinner will be served at **On Tap** (02-2741-5364), where diners can play board games or watch classic Christmas television shows, on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The set menu (NT\$550) includes turkey with all the trimmings, homemade single-malt mince pie, and one glass of red wine, white wine or beer.

At **Carnegie's** (02-2325-4433) a Christmas all-day turkey spread runs from tomorrow through next Sunday, except for Christmas Eve. The set menu (NT\$490 for lunch and NT\$680 for dinner) includes roast turkey with sage and onion stuffing, pork sausages, and traditional Christmas pudding. For Carnegie's Christmas Eve set dinner (NT\$1,500), the entree selection is a traditional English turkey set or prime Angus rib-eye steak, with unlimited house wine between 6pm and 9pm. Turkeys can be ordered for takeout (NT\$2,900) three days in advance.

CHRISTMAS HAMPERS AND OTHER GOODIES

Hotels throughout Taipei are offering a great variety of Christmas hampers and gift baskets for those who prefer to enjoy the Christmas

season at home. The **Far Eastern Plaza's** **Marco Polo Restaurant** and **Shang Palace** are presenting turkey hampers and Peking roast duck, respectively, which are priced at NT\$2,500 to NT\$4,500 and come with a bottle of house wine (Marco Polo) or champagne (Shang Palace).

The **Cake Shop** on the hotel's first floor is serving an array of Christmas goodies and gift baskets priced between NT\$1,460 and NT\$16,000. The holidays treats include chocolate Santa Clauses, gingerbread trees, white truffle oil and Dom Perignon. Orders can be made one day in advance by calling (02) 2378-8888 X5867.

The **Boutique** situated in the lobby of the **Grand Hyatt** is offering a wide selection of desserts, pastries and sweets, including chocolate Christmas trees made from premium truffles.

Turkey hampers (NT\$3,800 for 4.5kg to 5.4kg; NT\$5,200 for 6.4 to 7.3kg), roasted Virginia ham baskets (NT\$5,200) and baked salmon fillet baskets (NT\$6,400) are also available at the **Boutique**. Orders should be made two days in advance by calling (02) 2720-1200 X3198 or X3199.

The **Grand Formosa Regent's** **Azie Bun** is selling turkey hampers (NT\$3,000) formulated by chef Noel that give the roasted bird a special aroma using stuffing made from imported chestnuts and green apples. Gift baskets range in price from NT\$2,800 to NT\$4,800 and feature treats such as Grand Formosa's **Mac Choc** macaroons, gingerbread houses, and red and white wine. Tel: (02) 2523-8000 X3157.

Not to be outdone, the **Sherwood's** **Toscana Gourmet Corner** is presenting luxurious 5kg turkey hampers for NT\$4,800 to NT\$3,680. There are truffle hampers priced between NT\$2,500 and NT\$4,800 containing goodies such as truffle honey, handmade chocolate and Italian red wine. Orders can be made one day in advance by calling (02) 2718-1188.

The **Deli** at **Sheraton Taipei** has a variety of seasonal goodies including Christmas cakes and gingerbread houses as well as turkey, Virginia ham and steak hampers (priced between NT\$2,800 and NT\$3,800). The shop will donate 10 percent of this month's takings to the **Children Charity Association** (中華民國兒童慈善協會). Tel: (02) 2321-5858 X8373.

The **Westin's** team of pastry chefs is preparing a array of festival goodies including stollens, Christmas cakes, cookies and handmade chocolates, as well as gift baskets (NT\$4,500), and 5kg turkey (NT\$3,300) and Virginia ham hampers (NT\$3,500). Call the **Bakery** at (02) 8770-6565.

On offer at the **Landis' Gourmet Corner** is a turkey hamper (NT\$2,980) for six, as well as other festival baskets. Tel: (02) 2598-5558. Turkey hampers (NT\$2,800) and Hawaiian Christmas cakes (NT\$560) are available at **San Want Hotel** (02-2772-2121 X2126). The **Imperial Hotel** is offering a 6kg turkey hamper (NT\$3,200) at its **Tomatina Cafe** (02-2596-5111).

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Dreidel, spin and spin

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

Hanukkah, the Jewish holiday also known as the festival of the lights, begins at sunset tomorrow this year and lasts until sunset on Dec. 29. Taiwan's only synagogue, which is headed by Rabbi Ephraim Einhorn and located at the **Sheraton Taipei Hotel**, will observe the beginning of Hanukkah with a service starting at 5:10 pm tomorrow.

Hanukkah (also spelled as Chanukah) commemorates the re-dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem in 165 BC by the Maccabees, a group of Jewish dissidents, after their victory over the Hellenist Syrians, who had outlawed Jewish practices in Judea (the southern part of the historic Land of Israel).

As part of his campaign, Antiochus, the Greek king of Syria, desecrated the temple by ordering that it be used for the worship of Zeus, which included sacrifices



made on its altar. After their victory, the Maccabees reclaimed the temple and built a new altar and vessels for service, including a menorah. They could only find enough consecrated oil to light the menorah for one day, but it is said to have burned

for eight days, which Hanukkah commemorates.

The menorah holds eight candles representing the eight days the oil lasted in the temple, as well as an extra candle called a *shamash*, which is also lit each

night and often used to light the other candles.

Einhorn has sets of Hanukkah candles available at the synagogue for anyone who needs them.

Other traditions include making and eating latkes, or potato

pancakes, spinning the dreidel, a top, and giving gelt, or money, to children.

Einhorn founded the synagogue almost 30 years ago. The services there, including the tomorrow's marking the beginning of Hanukkah, are open to all, said Einhorn, who often hosts students from National Taiwan University (where he occasionally gives talks) who are curious about Judaism: "We have a saying above the door of the synagogue that says 'this is the gate of the Lord and all the righteous are welcome to enter' — that means all good people."

The synagogue is located in the **Sheraton Taipei Hotel**, at 12, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路一段12號). Call (02) 2321-5511 for more information. Rabbi Einhorn can be reached at (02) 2591-3565.

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