

It's beginning to look a lot like...

GOING OUT

Mariah! Ice rinks!
Drive-in pantos!
The capital is at its
best at Christmas
— **Katie Strick**
picks the highlights

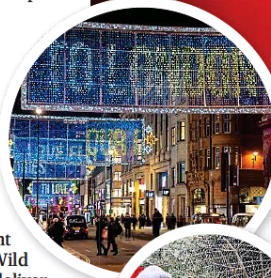
OK, it's not going to be the festive season you expected. But the capital at Christmas is magic, whatever the year and thanks to the (slightly) relaxed restrictions, Londoners can now enjoy a few weeks of festive fun. From Christmas tree crawls to distanced ice rinks and drive-in pantomimes — this is your guide.

Tree chic

The silver lining to 2020? Everyone is happy to get their Christmas hat on. Mariah Carey's annual belter *All I Want For Christmas Is You* returned to the Top 40 nine days earlier this year than 2019 and artificial tree sellers are reporting sales up 140 per cent this year from last. Bloom & Wild and Green Elf Trees are even delivering real full-sized trees for anyone stuck at home or shielding.

Out on the streets, London's megatrees are already shining bright, so create your own Christmas crawl: Coal Drops Yard has an interactive People's Tree that lights up with the movements of visitors (warm up with a hot chocolate or a cocktail at Vermuteria afterwards); Covent Garden boasts a 60ft-tall Norwegian spruce adorned with 30,000 lights; and Trafalgar Square had its virtual lighting-up ceremony on Thursday. The plus-side to virtual viewings is you can catch up on YouTube.

To max out on festive cheer, add a tour of the capital's twinkliest lights: Oxford Street's 27 LED curtains, Kew Gardens'



Ho, ho, ho: Mariah Carey, top, Oxford Street's LED curtains and Green Elf Trees. Right, from top, a winter cabin at Pergola, Macaulay Culkin in *Home Alone* and Will Ferrell in *Elf*

one million twinkling bulbs and the Tate Britain's illuminated "brave new world" winter display are among this year's most spectacular.

Merry feast-mas

2020 might have ended in tiers but Covid can't stop the festive feasting. Use the "substantial meal" rule as an excuse to try London's best dishes. Islington's Irish bar Homeboy is offering a selection of souped-up snacks from taco chips to chicken fillet rolls, Dalston tequila specialist Hacha is plating up Mexican favourites from kitchen partner Maiz Azul, and Old Street bar Tayêr + Elementary has enlisted French residency Kitchen FM to cook for guests.

London Bridge has a shiny new open-air rooftop called Winter Heights serving up Ginger Pig hot dogs, cinnamon-topped hot toddies and bottomless fondue. Winter terraces at Vinegar Yard in London Bridge, The

Laundry in Brixton and the magic garden at Flight Club Victoria are also now open for drinking and dining among the twinkling lights.

Mindful merriment

Need a pre-Christmas spruce after a year of Zoom? Head to House of Lady Muck on Mare Street to sort out your nails and brows. You can add on a head massage for £15 — much needed after this year. Gyms are open too — and a quick hit of endorphins could be a merry way to kick off pandemic party season. Boom Cycle, Digme and Flex Chelsea are holding festive fitness classes (Santa hats encouraged) while virtual fitness platform dance Sing is putting on classes from dance to pilates throughout December.

Add some sparkle

December brings a wel-

come chance to dust off that sequined party dress, even if it's just for dancing around the living room on your work Christmas Zoom (experts say bauble earrings and bold lipsticks are the this year's Christmas beauty trends - check out Wolf and Badger in Coal Drops Yard

for statement earrings by Yaa Yaa London). Better still, take your sequins for a spin

IRL. Hampton Court and The Queen's House in Greenwich are hosting socially distanced ice rinks (masks are essential), and the festive igloos and winter cabins are back open for

(six-person) business at Aviary, Pergola Paddington and Skylight rooftop.



It's show time

You can still get your carols fix this year. St John's Church in Notting Hill, The Chapel at The Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich and St Gabriel's Church in Pimlico are all hosting socially distanced carol services for household bubbles, and many of the capital's top choirs are taking their services online. Action For Children's takes place tomorrow, presented by Jon Snow, Childline's features Leona Lewis on Thursday, and danceSing on Demand has a free virtual carols by candlelight service on December 20. Festive screenings are back on for December, too. The Parking Lot Social in Syon Park is hosting a drive-in Christmas cinema with screenings of *Home Alone*, *Elf* and *Love Actually*, and from this week you can even do drive-in for a panto. Expect live DJs and a Christmas food market before the show, then a professionally produced production of *Cinderella*. Party season is back on (oh yes it is!).

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