

# Sprucing up Rock Center

**R**OCKEFELLER CENTER is more than just a building, an easily recognizable square with gorgeous fountains, and a skating rink in the winter: it's a massive complex that includes 19 buildings on 22 acres. It sprawls between 48th Street and 51st Street and Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Midtown Manhattan, highlighted by the gorgeous sunken square in the middle we all know and love. Of the 19 buildings, 12 are original Art Deco structures commissioned by the Rockefeller family.

Tourist highlights of Rockefeller Center include the magical view of Manhattan from the Top of the Rock (look how big Central Park is!), ice skating in the square

(is that Buddy the Elf??), the iconic Rainbow Room, and so much more.

Without a doubt, the most well-known element of the area's mystique is the annual installation of the magnificent Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree. To quote the folks at Rockefeller Center: "It's more than a tree. It's a symbol of the spirit of the city and the people who create its traditions."

From the moment a perfect tree is chosen in the fall, to the exciting timeline of its journey to the city, to the decorating process, to the televised lighting, the glory and beauty of the tree dazzles our eyes, captures our imagination, and serves as the official welcome to the Christmas season.

But what do we really know about the tree itself?

## History of Rockefeller Center Christmas Trees

The first tree was a small, 20-ft. balsam fir purchased when workers at Rockefeller Center pooled their money. The decorations were hand-made garlands, courtesy of their families. In 1933, the tree became an official annual tradition, and the first tree lighting ceremony was held.

Fast-forward through a ton of fascinating history, and we most recently enjoyed the 2020 tree, a glorious Norway Spruce clocking in at 75-ft.-tall, 45-ft. wide, and weighing 11 tons.

As a matter of fact, over the past several decades, ALL of the Rockefeller Center Christmas trees have been Norway spruce!

## Why Norway Spruce?

Norway spruce is a non-invasive species from Europe with roots in America dating back to pre-Civil War. In October 2016, it became the first new U.S.-grown, fully tested softwood species to be tested for strength values since lumber testing began in the 1920s; the species was folded into the SPFs grouping and approved by the American Lumber Standards Committee, following testing from University of Maine's Structures and Composites Center, and approved for construction and industrial applications.

NELMA, the not-for-profit rules writing agency and steward of the lumber industry in the Northeast and Great Lakes, oversaw the entire Norway spruce testing process and now oversees the grading of the lumber by NELMA-member mills.

Grown primarily throughout New York state, Norway spruce is found in Maine, down into New England, and



ROCKEFELLER CENTER 2020 Tree Lighting, courtesy of Diane Bondareff AP Images for Tishman Speyer.