

LIFESTYLE

# Los Angeles: 25 dazzling facts about what just might be the world's tallest Christmas tree



The Citadel Outlets shopping center in Commerce is home to a 115-foot Christmas tree, a white fir that came from California's Shasta-Trinity National Forest. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

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Where else but in Los Angeles does holiday cheer come with statues of bizarre winged bulls topped with bearded human heads — *and* what's purported to be the world's tallest cut Christmas tree? The 115-foot tree,

more than twice as high as the letters in the Hollywood sign, currently lights up a spot at the [Citadel Outlets](#) shopping center in Commerce.



The purported largest cut tree in the world at Citadel Outlets is flanked by lighted palm trees, keeping a Southern California vibe. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

Why such a super-size tree? “The scale of the building is quite large and tall,” says Steven Craig, whose company owns and operates the modern-day retail fortress whose historic design copies elements of a king’s palace from ancient Assyria. “The things we’ve done fit in quite nicely. Proportionally, it looks fantastic.”

Indeed, the stately white fir covered in lights, bows and jeweled ornaments the size of bocce balls fits right in. Whether it’s the tallest hardly matters. It’s less than 10 miles southeast of downtown L.A. and free to visit, for those who resist the urge to spend money shopping.

Here’s everything you need to know before you go.



The Citadel Outlets have hosted record tall cut Christmas trees for six years, though no one officially keeps such records. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

**1. From top to bottom**, the tree is as tall as six giraffes standing on each other's backs or three telephone poles stacked on top of each other. Also, it's 20 feet longer than a regulation basketball court. "It's the largest live-cut tree in the world, and we track these things closely," Craig says. "To the best of our knowledge, none is any taller." (It doesn't appear anyone keeps records on the size of live Christmas trees.)

**2. This is the sixth year** in a row the Citadel has hoisted a record tree. By the way, [Guinness World Records](#) says the tallest cut Christmas tree ever was a 221-foot Douglas fir displayed in 1950 at a shopping center in Seattle.



The Rockefeller Center Christmas tree in New York City stands just 77 feet tall. The blue Norway spruce is topped with a Swarovski star. (Diane Bondareff / Associated Press/Images for Tishman Speyer)

**3. Here's how the Citadel's tree stacks up with others:** It would tower over the more famous 77-foot [Rockefeller Center](#) Christmas tree, a Norway spruce, and the planted 30-foot Colorado blue spruce that's the [National Christmas Tree](#) in Washington, D.C.

**4. It's real fir.** The white fir (*Abies concolor*) comes from private timber companies that have holdings in the [Shasta-Trinity National Forest](#) , a 2.2-million-acre swath of land north of Redding, Calif. White firs, which are evergreens, grow at higher elevations primarily in the West.





Carmen Vazquez and Alfonso Rios from Mexico embrace for a selfie by the 115-foot tree at the Citadel Outlets. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

**5. The tree**, weighing 18,000 pounds, was going to be cut down anyway, likely to be sold as lumber. Victor Saucedo of [Victor's Custom Christmas Trees](#) in Laguna Niguel selected the Citadel's tree long before December. Months earlier he hiked into the forest to find and identify trees that would make for the best holiday displays for now and future years. "We cut off only private land owned by timber companies which raise and harvest trees for lumber or fuels," or from private landowners who do the same, Saucedo writes in an email.

**6. Saucedo brings in** a large crane to cut the tree. The crane then raises it horizontally in midair and places it on a flatbed truck; the tree never touches the ground. He prunes lower branches of nearby tall trees to add to the fullness of the tree when it's installed.

**7. Where the big tree** once was, a dozen new saplings are planted to keep the forest going.



The tree, on a flatbed truck, takes about three days to transport from the Shasta-Trinity area in Northern California to L.A. (Citadel Outlets)

**8. The flatbed truck** then prepares for the 600-plus-mile drive to L.A. Per California road rules, the driver can travel with such an oversize load only between 2 and 5 a.m.



The 115-foot-tall Christmas tree arrives at Citadel Outlets in October. (Citadel Outlets)

**9. It takes about three days** for the journey to the Citadel. After the tree arrives, it takes about a week to drill holes and add branches.



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The Christmas tree is hoisted into place at Citadel Outlets in October. (Citadel Outlets)

**10. The tree is put up** before Halloween during a lull in the center's foot traffic; it's unsafe for visitors to be around the site. Workers clear out an 8,000-square-foot area to work their magic on the tree and swing it into place. It was illuminated Nov. 11.

**11. The tree is sprayed** with green flame repellent to give it color and keep visitors safe in case of a fire.



It takes about 10,000 ornaments to decorate the 115-foot-tall white fir tree at Citadel Outlets in Commerce. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

**12. It glows every night** with more than 18,000 LED lights and 10,000 ornaments and bows.





Viviana Cruz, lifted by her father, Rafael, gets her picture taken at the 115-foot Christmas tree at the Citadel Outlets. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

**13. It costs** \$150,000 for the tree, the transport, the whole shebang. It's a project close to Craig's heart. "We're a traditional company based on traditional values," he says, adding that families from the L.A. area come year after year to take photos in front of the tree.



The front of the Citadel Outlets main building, with what's purported to be the world's largest bow. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

**14. The tree stands** about midway from either end of the shopping center, which started life as the Samson Tire & Rubber Co. in 1929. The front pillars and statues take their design from the ornate palace of King Sargon II, who in the 8th century BC ruled over Assyria (modern-day Iraq and Turkey).

CITADEL





A lamassu (shown here during a nonholiday time) is an ancient design of a creature with animal legs, bird wings and the face of a man. The statue is at the Citadel Outlets in Commerce. (Carlos Chavez / Los Angeles Times)

**15. What are those creatures?** The funny stone statues are called lamassu; they have animal legs, bird wings and human heads with long beards and hats. In ancient times, they were believed to be guardians who protected the kingdom. The Citadel adopted the lamassu as its quirky logo. You can find originals from Sargon's palace at the Louvre in Paris and other museums.



The red bow on the front of the Citadel Outlets being put up, with other holiday decorations in the foreground. (Citadel Outlets)



**16. The front of the building** is wrapped with a giant, lighted red bow. It's 36 feet wide and 21 feet tall. The bow is made of 18 loops 10 to 12 feet tall and finished off with 75-foot tails that drape down the front. It took 4,000 cans of paint and primer and 1.5 tons of glitter to make it.

**17. Below the bow**, the Assyrian wall, as the building's facade is called, is decorated with shimmering gold pillars topped with parapets outlined in white lights. The scene is an Instagram fever dream.

**18. The huge lamassu statues** that crouch at the front of the building wear lighted red bows around their necks. Below them you'll find a concrete bas-relief of the king himself, Sargon II, with a staff in hand.



The final five contestants of ABC's TV show "Boy Band" appeared at the Citadel Outlets' tree-lighting ceremony Nov. 11. (Citadel Outlets)

**19. Drivers heading north and south** on the 5 Freeway through Commerce have excellent drive-by views of the decorated facade. Enjoy the view but don't slow down or attempt to take a picture if you're driving.

**20. You can get a great photo** of the bow and the decorated front of the building on foot. Walk through the shopping center's food court and then cross Telegraph Road in the crosswalk to a concrete island (the 5 Freeway will be to your back). You'll be able to capture all the decorations on the front of the building in one shot.



The All-American Boys Chorus performed at the tree-lighting event at Citadel Outlets. (Citadel Outlets)

**21. Distances are far** at this 700,000-square-foot shopping center with more than 130 stores, so wear comfy shoes. I racked up more than 1,000 steps from the Disney Outlet on the western edge to the Starbucks on the other end near Telegraph Road. (Your steps may vary, depending on how many stores you wander into.)

**22. Santa Claus** will be in the house for anyone what wants a photo with their pet 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday. Santa is on deck 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. until Dec. 23, except Sunday, when he'll greet humans only until 6 p.m.



California Highway Patrol officer and mascot Chipper appear at the tree-lighting. (Robert Vega)

**23. The tree will** stand until a few days after New Year’s Day. After that, the Citadel will get ready for Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan. 25.

**24. After the holiday,** the tree’s ornaments will be removed and the tree will be recycled. Saucedo describes the process this way: “When the trees come down they are cut up and taken to the local green-waste facility, where they are chipped up for mulch. About three-quarters of the trunk of the tree is split and given away as firewood, cut for stepping stones, used in gardens or as landscape accents.”



Santa and his reindeer hang on a high wire over the Christmas tree at the Grove, which is a 101-foot-tall white fir. (Gina Ferazzi / Los Angeles Times)

**25. The Citadel tree isn’t alone in its stature.** L.A. has at least two other super-tall Christmas trees to marvel at and photograph. The white fir at the Americana at Brand in Glendale is 102 feet tall; the one at the Grove in Los Angeles is 101 feet tall.

## SoCal’s tallest of Christmas trees



The Christmas tree at The Americana at Brand in Glendale is 102 feet tall, also a white fir. (Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

## **The Citadel Outlets**

**Where:** 100 Citadel Drive, Commerce

**Hours:** 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. through Dec. 23, and until 8 p.m. Dec. 24. Closed Christmas Day. Free parking.

## **The Grove**



Decorations on the Christmas tree, also a super-sized white fir, at the Grove in Los Angeles. (Gina Ferazzi / Los Angeles Times)

**Where:** 189 The Grove Drive, Los Angeles

**Hours:** 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. through Dec. 23, and until 6 p.m. Dec. 24. Some shops are open Dec. 25. First hour of parking free; \$24 daily maximum.

**Americana at Brand**



A visitor takes a picture of the 102-foot Christmas tree at The Americana at Brand in Glendale. (Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

**Where:** 889 Americana Way, Glendale

**Hours:** 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sundays and Dec. 23; 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Dec. 24. First hour of parking free; \$18 daily maximum

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