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CELEBRATE
THE SEASON

Ho Ho Hops

It's the most wonderful time for a beer BY BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ



Merry Taj IPA from The Lost Abbey

frankincense and myrrh. For another stocking stuffer, try The Lost Abbey's sister operation, **Port Brewing's** Santa's Little Helper — a chocolaty imperial stout that is cranked out year-round.

Karl Strauss Brewing, the reigning Champion Mid-size Brewery of the Year (according to judges at the 2016 Great American Beer Festival, the country's largest and most definitive annual brewing competition), has celebrated Christmas in fluid form since 2010. That year, the San Diego-based brewery launched its

"12 Days of Christmas" program, with a limited-edition beer brewed each year. The intention is to get to a dozen different offerings by Christmas of 2021. This year's entry is a smoked imperial porter name **Seven Sharks A-Circling**, referencing the creatures' southerly winter migratory patterns along our shores.

Also driving down the dark-beer route is East Village brewpub **Monkey Paw** with its holiday mainstay, Santa's Pet Monkey, **Pacific Beach AleHouse** with its coffee stout (served on nitro for extra creaminess), and downtown's **Mission Brewery**, with a peanut butter-infused version of its popular **Dark Seas** imperial stout. The always envelope-pushing **Stone Brewing** is bringing back its exotic **Xocoveza**, a milk stout developed



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HOLIDAY BEERS HAVE historically been designed to be big-bodied, full-flavored, high-alcohol quaffs to stave off winter chills while warming the cockles of one's heart and aiding merry-making. In the San Diego coastal region, December temperatures have been known to drop to the 60s, but that's hardly a polar freeze. So, San Diego's brewers don't need to subscribe to many traditional ale styles when crafting their holiday liquid treats. Variety is as much a spice for these beers as using cinnamon, nutmeg, or clove this time of year.

San Marcos-based **The Lost Abbey** rebels against many holiday beer tenets and brews the only India pale ale in its entire portfolio. It is a big, hop-heavy double IPA dubbed Merry Taj (pronounced "meritage"). This IPA is stylistically juxtaposed against the brewery's other yuletide mainstay, Gift of the Magi. The latter is a breadly, 10 percent alcohol-by-volume (ABV) Belgian-style biere de garde brewed with

by a local homebrewer who won Stone's annual amateur brewing competition and earned the honor of having his gold medal recipe brewed and distributed internationally. This stout strives to taste like Mexican hot chocolate with the addition of cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla beans, and chilies. Then there's the "white stout" named **Polar Opposite** from **Miramar's 32 North Brewing**, which uses chocolate and coffee to give a golden-hued beer all the robust, roasty flavor of a traditional dark beer.

What are the holidays without a little goodwill? A portion of proceeds from a number of this year's wintertime brews will go to local charities. Beer to the Rescue, a local fundraising effort benefiting the Lupus Foundation of Southern California, will receive donations in association with a pair of beers — Aunt Joy, a dark English-style mild ale produced with coconut to mimic the flavor of an Almond Joy candy bar from **Bitter Brothers Brewing** in Bay Ho, and a dark, Belgian-style strong ale brewed with myriad holiday spices by **Miramar's AleSmith Brewing** called Noël. At **Kearny Mesa's Societe Brewing**, you can get a bottle of **The Urchin**, a luxe, cranberry-infused sour ale for the budget-busting price of \$50. Or, bring in a 50-pound donation of food for the brewery's annual holiday food drive and get that same bottle of beer for just \$5.



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Still thirsty? Harness up the reindeer and head east to **Santee's Finest Made Ales** for its holiday-spiced brown ale. On the way back, make a drink stop at **El Cajon's Burning Beard Brewing** for the hilariously named Belgian quadruple-style beverage, **Panic at the Monastery**. **Kearny Mesa's Kilowatt Beer's** Cleveland-style

Christmas Ale has a unique Midwestern wassailing appeal with the addition of cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and honey. San Diego County's newest beer biz, **Eppig Brewing** in North Park, is contributing on



Xocoveza Winter-Spiced Mocha Stout from Stone Brewing

the fermentation-front with **Moment of Weakness** — a dark American sour ale brewed with cherries and (sugar) plums.

This much magnificent merriment might merit an extended lay-over by **Saint Nick** this year. But who could blame the jolly guy? It takes more than milk and cookies to sustain one on a warp-speed global excursion. **BE**



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