

# Step-by-step: Santa's grotto

**Great for:** Children **Fun factor:** ★★★★★ **Effort:** ★★★★★ **£ potential:** ★★★★★

Visiting Santa at the Christmas fair is an exciting experience for children, so make it truly magical!

## Step-by-step

- Seven to eight weeks before:** Once a date has been agreed, start scouting around for a Santa who is willing to don the famous red suit, and chat to children for three hours (or several Santas working in shifts). Enlist some elves as volunteers for the grotto, helping to manage those waiting, and organising presents. If you don't already have a Santa outfit (or three!), try to borrow one from a local community group or church. Large supermarkets sell Santa outfits from October, so get in quick if you're yet to buy! Elf outfits can usually be found in pound shops.
- Five to six weeks before:** Decide what form your grotto will take. With the right decorations (and a sprinkle of imagination), you can transform almost anywhere into a grotto. Start sourcing decorations – use large sheets of fabric to cover the walls, and have tinsel, a Christmas tree, empty boxes wrapped to look like presents, cotton wool and fairy lights. Have a large comfy chair for Santa.
- Three to four weeks before:** Source your gifts, taking into account your costs and potential profit. Aim to pay no more than £1.50 per child. Gifts might include selection boxes, books, or toys. On average, we have found that PTAs charge around £3 to visit Santa, including a gift. Buy toys in bulk.
- Two to three weeks before:** To make life easier, have a schedule where children and parents can pre-book slots to visit Santa. Think about how long each child will spend with Santa – will he read a short story, ask them what they want for Christmas, or is it just a quick hello? Allocate enough time for each child and ask them to arrive 10-15 minutes before their slot. Decide whether to have children go in individually or in groups. If in groups, how many can you fit into your grotto? Once your schedule has been drawn up, send letters home to parents or email them and start selling slots.
- The week before:** Promote your Santa schedule as often as possible – on your website, Facebook, noticeboard – to make sure no children miss out. Ask for full names and contact numbers of the parent or guardian who will be bringing them to the fair, to make sure you can contact them if they are late on the day. Aim to set your grotto up early, allowing plenty of time and having several volunteers on hand.
- On the day:** Have enough volunteers available to ensure the smooth running of the grotto. Try to give Santa the name of the child/children before they go in, so he can make his message personal. Give Santa a code word or signal when the time slot is nearing the end, so he can round it up nicely. If children turn up on the day and

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haven't bought a ticket and you have slots left, sell them a ticket and give them a return time.

## Tips & advice

**Santa and the elves:** Once you've agreed on a date, start scouting around for a Santa or have several Santas working in shifts. Enlist a group of volunteers dressed as elves to manage and entertain those waiting outside. Source a Santa outfit - can you borrow one from a local community group or church?

**Find a Santa:** If you're finding it hard to get a willing volunteer to don the red suit, try asking the local Rotary, Lions, Scouts, sports clubs or even a local councillor and appeal to dads, granddads and uncles. Failing that, as young children sometimes find a man in a big beard a bit scary, how about having a 'Mrs Christmas' instead?

**Have two Santas:** To avoid queues, many PTAs use a two-Santa system. If you plan to do this, be sure to alert parents beforehand, and avoid having them both walking around the fair at the same time!

**DBS check:** While there's no legal requirement for Santa to be DBS checked, it's good practice to make sure your volunteer Santa is aware of child protection procedures and understands how you would like them to interact with the children. Have another, DBS-checked person in the grotto while children are present, and encourage parents and carers to accompany their children inside.

**Make a grotto:** For a DIY grotto, use sheets of fabric to cover the walls, put up tinsel, a Christmas tree and fairy lights, then use empty boxes wrapped to look like presents with a large, comfy chair for Santa. If your PTA has a bigger budget, you can hire the entire thing!

**Buy presents:** Source your gifts, taking into account your costs and potential profit. Aim to pay around £1.50 per child, depending on how much you charge. Gifts might include selection boxes/chocolates/sweets, books, toys, teddies, games, colouring books and mugs. On average, PTAs charge around £3 to visit Santa, including a gift.

**Get sponsorship:** To maximise profits, find a sponsor to pay for the children's gifts. It's an easy concept to sell to a local business - be specific about how you'll spend the money (emphasising the joy these presents will give the children), and the exact amount required. Recognise the sponsor's generosity with a sign saying 'This grotto is sponsored by [xxx]'.

**Create a schedule:** Draw up a timetable and let hello? Allocate enough time for each child and ask them to arrive 10-15 minutes before their allotted time. Will children go in individually or in groups? If in groups, how many can you fit into your parents and children pre-book slots to visit Santa. Think about what the visit will involve and how long it will take: will Santa read a story, ask them what they want for Christmas, or is it just a quick room? Once your schedule has been drawn up, start selling slots. Promote your grotto schedule as often as possible - on your website, Facebook, noticeboard - to make sure no children miss out. Ask for names and numbers to make sure you can contact people if they are late on the day. Allow enough time to decorate your grotto and have plenty of volunteers to hand.