

Step-by-step: Grottos

Great for: **CHILDREN**

Fun factor: ★★★★★

Effort: ★★★★★

£ potential: £££££

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

1 **Once a date** has been agreed, start scouting around for a Santa or have several Santas working in shifts. Enlist some volunteers as elves, helping to manage those waiting, and organising presents. Source a Santa outfit – can you borrow one from a local community group or church?

2 **Decide what form** your grotto will take. With the right decorations and a sprinkle of imagination, you can transform almost anywhere into a grotto! Find examples from PTAs at [pinterest.com/ptaplus](https://www.pinterest.com/ptaplus). Use 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.

3 **Source your gifts**, taking into account your costs and potential profit. Aim to pay around £1.50 per child. Gifts might include selection boxes, books, or toys. On average, PTAs charge around £3 to visit Santa, including a gift. Buy toys in bulk – take a look at our online suppliers directory (pta.co.uk/suppliers).

4 **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 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. Will 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, start selling slots.

5 **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 plenty of time to set your grotto and have plenty of volunteers to hand.

6 **On the day** you'll need several volunteers to ensure the grotto runs smoothly. 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. Keep a few slots for children who haven't pre-booked.

Tips and advice

Finding 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, grandads 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?

Two Santas: To avoid queues, many PTAs use a two-Santa system. If you plan to do this, make sure parents are made aware beforehand, and be cautious of having them both walk around your fair at the same time!

DBS checks: While there is no requirement for Santa to undertake a DBS check, it is best practice to make sure that your volunteer Santa is aware of child protection procedures, and understands how you would like them to interact with the children. Have another person in the grotto when the children are present – that person should be DBS checked. Encourage parents and carers to accompany their children into the grotto, too.

Sponsorship: In an ideal world you want your grotto gifts to cost no more than £1.50 per child, but better still, find a sponsor to foot the bill! It's an easy concept to sell to a local business – you can be specific about how the money will be spent (emphasising the joy that these presents will give the children), and the exact amount required. Offer to have a sign saying 'This grotto is sponsored by [xxx] company', giving them recognition.

For more ideas and advice, visit pta.co.uk

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