

healthy kids, happy families

# Parents

## BE MERRY!

50 crafts, cookies, and gifts guaranteed to bring the fun

THE YEAR'S BEST KIDS' BOOKS

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PEACE ON EARTH STARTS AT HOME

5 FRESH TWISTS ON PASTA DINNER

 host a cookie-decorating playdate!

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SIMPLE GAMES TO TEST YOUR BABY'S PROGRESS



# Holiday Wonderlands

Can't swing a visit to the North Pole? Head to one of these hot spots instead.

by KAREN CICERO

## Citywide Celebrations

### Leavenworth, WA

On the first three weekends in December, this town with tons of Bavarian charm hosts holiday concerts, a plaza light show, strolling carolers, chestnut roasts, sleigh rides, sledding,

screenings of holiday movies, and visits from St. Nicholas, who gives gold-wrapped pears to the children. And on November 29, kids even lead a lantern parade through Leavenworth, which is about two and a half hours east of Seattle. *Free admission; leavenworth.org*

### Dickens' Christmas

Skaneateles, NY  
This festival overtakes the town, about 40 minutes from Syracuse, in the Finger Lakes region, and runs on weekends from Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve. It offers a parade, horse-and-wagon rides, performances of

Kids love to sled in the village center of Leavenworth, which boasts more than a half-million lights.



**Let it snow! Clockwise from top: Expect indoor flurries at Great Wolf Lodge. Big Cedar Lodge has fab spots for sledding. This month often brings snow to Congress Hall's Grand Lawn.**



year from mid-November to early January. Among them: a Twinkle Light Boat Parade (where boats adorned with lights sail through the marina), the North Pole Express train ride, and "reindeer games" for kids. *Prices vary by event; grapevinetexasusa.com*

**Panama City Beach, FL**

Forget Times Square. The coolest New Year's Eve with the kids is this city's Family's Beach Ball drop. The event kicks off at 5:30 P.M. with live entertainment, face-painting, and other family fun. Then at 8 P.M., 10,000 inflatable beach balls are released on the Pier Park boardwalk—followed by a fireworks display. *visitpanamacitybeach.com*

**Hotels in the Holiday Spirit**

**Great Wolf Lodge**

Kids can experience indoor snow showers, eat in a giant gingerbread house, and earn a "snowploma" at this chain of 12 lodges, known for its indoor water parks. A Great Clock Tower Howl-iday Show, visits from Santa, and holiday crafts are also fun during Snowland, from November 29 to January 4. *Rates for a suite that sleeps four start at \$199 per night and include water-park admission with code SNOWLAND; greatwolf.com*

*A Christmas Carol*, Mother Goose storytimes, and appearances by Father Christmas. *Prices vary by activity; skaneateles.com*

**Waterfront Winterfest Philadelphia, PA**

An ice-skating rink, a light show, a heated lodge with food and family games, and a holiday market draw families to the city's waterfront at Penn's Landing from November 28 to March 1. Spend the night at Hyatt Regency Penn's Landing (within walking

distance of Waterfront Winterfest; weekend rates start at \$159 per night) and see other classic holiday attractions like the Comcast Holiday Spectacular and Reading Terminal's Holiday Railroad. *Free admission; waterfrontwinterfest.com*

**Indianapolis, IN**

Your gift from the city: 12 days when downtown attractions are free, including, on December 24, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Don't miss the 47-foot Yule Slide, the

reindeer-grooming station, the Snow Castle with pretend ice-fishing, and a performance of *A Seussified Christmas Carol*. Can't make it then? Jolly Days at the museum runs from November 22 to January 4 and is included with regular admission. *indydt.com/12freedays.cfm*

**Grapevine, TX**

There's a reason why this city outside Dallas dubs itself the Christmas capital of Texas—it holds more than 1,400 holiday events every



Ride, slide, and skate this winter. **From top:** Families can hop on the train at Santa's Village in New Hampshire or do figure eights at Waterfront Winterfest in Philadelphia. Kids think Gaylord Hotels' ice slides are the coolest.

**Gaylord Hotels**

All four locations (near Orlando, Dallas, Nashville, and Washington, D.C.) feature ICE!, a massive exhibit with colorful themed ice sculptures and giant ice slides for kids on select dates from mid-November to January 3. (Don't worry about freezing—you're lent a parka when you enter.) Elsewhere around the resorts, you'll find gingerbread-house workshops; photos with Santa; appearances from *Shrek* characters including Gingy, the Gingerbread Man; and scheduled snow flurries in the atrium of some locations. Admission to ICE! starts at \$22 for 12 and up, \$12 for ages 4 to 11, and free for kids 3 and under, depending on the date and location. *Packages that include a hotel stay start at \$256 per night; marriott.com/gaylord*

**The Omni Grove Park Inn Asheville, NC**

It's the home of the National Gingerbread House Competition, and all the amazing creations are on display from November 19 to January 1. A giant sleigh and 80 decorated trees in the lobby add to the festiveness. Kids can meet Santa and sing carols with the resort's mascot, Major Bear. While you're in town, check out some of the seasonal festivities at the

Biltmore House & Gardens estate, especially Antler Hill Village, the grounds where Santa hangs out. *Rates start at \$289 per night; omnihotels.com/GrovePark*

**The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa Riverside, CA**

From November 28 to January 6, nearly 4 million lights adorn this historic hotel about an hour from Los Angeles. Your kids will also be dazzled by 400-plus animatronic characters, horse-drawn carriage rides, and snow in the lobby. *Rates start at \$199 per night; missioninn.com*

**Congress Hall Cape May, NJ**

Twelve-foot-tall toy soldiers and giant candy canes greet families at this seaside retreat from November 28 through December 31. Kids can meet Santa, decorate gingerbread houses, and ride the outdoor holiday train and carousel. The town also decorates its classic Victorian homes and holds storytimes and other family events. *Rates for a two-night stay start at \$298, including breakfast; caperesorts.com*

**Big Cedar Lodge Ridgedale, MO**

When it's decked out with lights from November 1 to mid-January, this resort near Branson looks like a gingerbread village. It offers dozens of holiday activities, including lighted wagon tours, hot cocoa around a bonfire, Santa-hat decorating, and storytime with Mrs. Claus. An extra touch: You'll find a

decorated Christmas tree in your log cabin. *Log cabins start at \$185 per night; bigcedar.com*

### Hotel Del Coronado San Diego, CA

Swim or skate? That's what the kids will have to decide at this Victorian resort on the beach that sets up an outdoor ice rink for the holidays. A drop-off camp entertains kids ages 3 to 12 with cookie decorating and holiday scavenger hunts so you can get yourself a seasonal spa treatment. *Rates for the Sea & Skate package with an ice-skating lesson and \$25 daily resort credit start at \$329 per night; hoteldel.com*

## Decked-Out Destinations

### Santa's Village

Jefferson, NH  
It's always Christmas at this small theme park that has a super-cute reindeer carousel and a sleigh ride. But on weekends from November 22 to December 21, the park gets in the spirit even more with a musical light show and cookie decorating. Mrs. Claus serves free wassail (a mix of cider, juice, and spices) to families in line for Santa. *\$29 per person for ages 4 and up, younger kids are free; santasvillage.com*

### Hersheypark

Hershey, PA  
What's even better than chocolate? Two million lights, real reindeer, and 30-plus fun rides. Visit Hersheypark Christmas Candylane on select dates from November 14 to December 31. Stay at Hershey Lodge and drive through Sweet Lights, 2 miles of wooded trails with 600 nighttime displays. *Christmas Candylane is \$13 per person, Sweet Lights is \$25 per vehicle. Lodging rates including admission to both activities plus other experiences start at \$285 per night; hersheypa.com*

### Stone Mountain Christmas

Atlanta, GA  
Meet-and-greets with Rudolph, a nightly parade, and a train ride represent just a sliver of the fun at this park on select dates from November 8 to January 4. *\$30 for ages 12 and up, \$25 for ages 3 to 11, free for younger kids; stonemountainpark.com*

### The Christmas Ranch

Morrow, OH  
This walk-through light park outside Cincinnati boasts giant animated Christmas trees and a toy factory on select days from November 28 to December 31. Kids

can also take a train or a wagon ride. Part of the proceeds benefit national children's charities. *Light-show tickets cost \$15 per vehicle; thechristmasranch.com*

### Mega Cavern's Lights Under Louisville, KY

Take a half-hour ride through an underground light display with dozens of themes including Fairytale Land and Santa's Toy Shop. *Tickets cost \$25 per noncommercial vehicle; louisvillemegacavern.com*

### Callaway Gardens

Pine Mountain, GA  
It's the ultimate light display! More than 8 million bulbs sparkle in the annual Fantasy in Lights, which runs on select dates from November 14 to December 30. The kids can ooh and aah at the 15-plus illuminated scenes from your family's own vehicle, or for more fun hop on the Jolly Trolley. Stay overnight at The Lodge and Spa at Callaway Gardens; packages that include tickets and breakfast start at \$219 per night. *Fantasy in Lights tickets start at \$17 for 13 and up, \$8.50 for ages 6 to 12, free for younger kids; callawaygardens.com* ☺