



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

FOR REVIEW
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WALK THROUGH ILLINOIS' WINTRY WONDERLAND

'Tis the season for cheerful events and exploring holiday magic in Illinois

CHICAGO (November 16, 2009) – Celebrate the season in Illinois and discover a wonderland of holiday events and wintertime festivals across the state. Illinois offers a flurry of festive happenings as popular attractions showcase the spirit of the season – marvel at massive light displays, interact with characters from old-fashioned Christmases, or tempt your taste buds with the hottest peppers in the state. With events and activities as unique as each winter snowflake, Illinois transforms into the land of seasonal delights and merriment.

The winter celebrations listed below make it easy enjoy each region of the state and rediscover the magic of the season with your family and friends.

CHICAGO

By the time the first frost covers the ground, Chicago is ready to welcome winter. One of the most anticipated and visited markets in the city, **Christkindlmarket at Daley Plaza**, Nov. 26 – Dec. 24, kicks off in time for the holidays. Visit this seasonally delightful German heritage festival and bazaar and witness the plaza transformed into a holiday wonderland where you can procure German trinkets and taste delicious holiday fare such as savory sausages and sweet waffles. Be sure to grab a glass of Gluhwein, a traditional German holiday hot spiced wine to please your palate and warm your heart, in a take-home souvenir mug.

For more information, contact Christkindlmarket (312-644-2662, christkindlmarket.com).

Visit the **Winter Wonderfest at Navy Pier**, Dec. 4 – Jan. 3, when Navy Pier turns into a magnificent winter spectacle of attractions, food and more. A festive spot for both city dwellers and visitors, the Winter Wonderfest transports patrons to a land of beautiful, ornate winter scenes and brings the magic of the holidays to life. A great family destination, kids can enjoy a pop-up jungle gym and inflatable games and train rides, just to name a few.

For more information, contact Winter Wonderfest at Navy Pier (312-595-7437, winterwonderfest.com).

Lace up your skates and glide through an ice rink in the heart of the city at the **McCormick Tribune Ice Rink in Millennium Park**, open for the season Nov. 18 – March 14. The scenic rink has been a staple of winter festivities in Chicago for nine years, drawing over 100,000 skaters annually. Bring your own skates, or rent them for \$10 to enjoy a brisk glide around the rink with your friends and family. Afterwards, warm up with some hot chocolate, browse the surrounding shops or stroll through Millennium Park to see how it transforms in the winter months.

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Governor Pat Quinn

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism

For more information, contact Millennium Park (312-744-6050, millenniumpark.org).

CHICAGOLAND

Visit the Chicago Botanic Garden as the **Wonderland Express Returns to the Garden**, Nov. 27 – Jan. 3. Take a trip through a wonderland of twinkling lights and holiday beauty where 750,000 lights sparkle outside, while inside, a 10,000 square-foot exhibition of miniature trains winds over bridges, past waterfalls and through more than 80 mini-replicas of Chicago's favorite landmarks. A brand new ice skating rink will be on the Esplanade for visitors to enjoy, or they can choose to snowshoe on the paths of the McDonald Woods.

For more information, contact the Chicago Botanic Garden (847-835-5440, chicagobotanic.org).

Nearly 1 million twinkling lights illuminate the zoo's walkways during **Brookfield Zoo's 28th Annual Holiday Magic**, every weekend in December. After visiting Santa at the Candy Cane Corner, enjoy ice-carving demonstrations, magicians and live musical performances, sample holiday treats and browse the gift shops with hundreds of unique items. New this year is the Wild Lights Spectacular light show at Roosevelt Fountain.

For more information, contact Holiday Magic at Brookfield Zoo (708-688-8361, czs.org/czs/holidaymagic.aspx).

Enter a world of exquisite Christmas extravagance at "**A Glimpse of Christmas Past**" at the **Cuneo Museum**, Nov. 27 – Dec. 31. The stunning mansion will be decorated in holiday finery; lights, garland, decorated trees and poinsettias add festive beauty to an already breathtaking backdrop. And the **Winter Wonderland Holiday Light Show** at the museum, Nov. 27 – Jan. 2, is a Lake County tradition. The thousands of twinkling lights and captivating holiday displays create an enchanting experience for all.

For more information, contact the Cuneo Museum (847-362-3042, cuneomuseum.org).

NOTHERN

The sky will light up in festive colors throughout the **21st Annual Holiday Festival of Lights**, Nov. 29 – Dec. 31, display in Rockford. More than 50 lighted displays are featured throughout Sinnissippi Park. Drive through the scenic park to view breathtaking seasonal exhibits and see why this festive drive hosts more than 120,000 spectators each year.

For more information, contact Rockford Fire and Ice (815-965-0768, rockfordfireandice.com).

Take a stroll through a real life winter wonderland in Rockton. The **Christmas Walk Weekend in Rockton**, Dec. 4 – 6, kicks off the holiday season with a full calendar of events and fun for the whole family. The festive holiday and Christmas decorations will paint a perfect background for reindeer sightings, elves and, of course, snowmen walking the streets. Lights will be twinkling from the stores, and plenty of hot chocolate and treats will be served to enhance the spirit of the season.

For more information, contact Rockton Christmas Walk (815-624-7625, rocktonchristmaswalk.com).

A favorite holiday tradition, the **Freeport Luminary Walk**, Dec. 5, is an enchanting evening full of holiday magic. Take a guided hike through hundreds of glowing luminaries and encounter special guests along the route who will share their holiday themed stories. End the night in front of a roaring fire at the lodge and listen to live holiday music. Enjoy sweet treats as you warm up or visit the Children's Holiday Giving Store.

For more information, contact Freeport Park District (815-235-6114, freeportparkdistrict.org).

CENTRAL

Visit **Hardy's Reindeer Ranch** in Rantoul to see the famous herd of Alaskan reindeer. The ranch plays host to visitors from across the nation who've come to see the beautiful relatives of Santa's eight legendary friends. The 100-year-old barns, which have been recently restored, house the animals and five acres of fertile farm grounds produce more than five thousand Christmas trees. Take your family for a day in the country to see the reindeer and pick out a magnificent tree to cut down and bring home to decorate.

For more information, contact Hardy's Reindeer Ranch (217-893-3407, reindeerranch.com).

It is time to rock around the Christmas tree at the **Holly Jolly Jasper County Christmas** celebration, Dec. 4, 11 and 18, in downtown Newton. The annual event is modeled after Burl Ives' Christmas hit, "Holly Jolly Christmas," and brings the musical magic to life. From the arrival of Santa Claus to puppet shows and carriage and wagon rides, there is something for everyone at the celebration. Enjoy family pictures, carolers, and arts and crafts from the previous centuries.

For more information, contact Jasper County Tourism (618-783-3399, newtonillinois.com).

Join the Dana-Thomas House Foundation to celebrate the holiday season in the grand manner of Mrs. Dana during the **Holiday Season at the Dana-Thomas House**, Dec. 2 – 31. The house is beautifully decorated, and live, classical music is preformed on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Evening tours are available to enjoy the house under candlelight. Other special events include a Children's Story Hour in the Library, Family Night and Luminaria Sunday when 1,000 candles in paper sacks line the walkways around the house.

For more information, contact the Dana-Thomas House (217-788-9452, dana-thomas.org).

WESTERN

Peoria welcomes the spirit of the holidays with the **East Peoria Festival of Lights** holiday light show, Dec. 4 – 31. Help kick off the 25th year of the light extravaganza at the holiday parade taking place on Nov. 27 when 30 floats glide down the street of East Peoria, and intricate shapes evolve to giant masterpieces decorated with hundreds of mini and LED lights. The floats are then showcased throughout the city at various holiday festivals including Filipe's Wonderland, where cars can drive through to marvel at the floats from their cars.

For more information, contact the East Peoria Convention and Visitor Bureau (800-365-3743, cityofeastpeoria.com).

Celebrate 20 years of holiday magic and whimsical lights at the **21st Annual Windmont Park Lighting/Drive of Lights**, Dec. 6 – Jan. 1, in Kewanee. The lighting ceremony commences with the annual holiday parade and honors the beautiful displays created by the Windmont Park

lighting committee. The motifs celebrate and truly capture the spirit of the holiday season as thousands of twinkling lights outline bridges, fences and luminaries surrounding the lagoon.

For more information, contact Kewanee Chamber of Commerce (309-852-2175, kewanee-il.com).

Grab your snow boots and skis for a getaway full of winter adventure at **Ski Snowstar Winter Sports Park** in Andalusia. With 28 acres of skiable terrain, all levels of skiers and snowboarders will find runs to suit their skills. Snowboarders can take it to the next level at the Terrain Park, and non-skiers or snowboarders can get their thrills at the Stargazer Tubing Hill with five lanes and a 68-foot vertical drop.

For more information, contact Ski Snowstar (309-798-2666, skisnowstar.com).

SOUTHERN

'Tis the season for holiday cheer, and what better way to celebrate than with an old-fashioned traditional **Metropolis Christmas Parade**, Dec. 5. Visit the timeless town of Metropolis to watch as Santa makes his grand entrance, listen to bands playing favorite holiday tunes as they march down the street, and wave to the parade floats created by community organizations as they glide through town.

For more information, contact the City of Metropolis Tourism (877-424-5025, metropolistourism.com).

Come out to the farms of Darn Hot Peppers to say "Feliz Navidad" to fellow pepper-lovers. At the **Darn Hot Peppers Holiday Open House**, Dec. 12, in Cobden, experience a Mexican twist on the holidays with plenty of Mexican Hot Chocolate, spicy cider and other delicacies such as pan dulce and tamales. Warm up with hot treats and spicy eats, including homegrown pepper samples that will keep your winter burning.

For more information, contact Darn Hot Peppers (217-774-2244, darnhotpeppers.com).

The **Olde Tyme Christmas**, Dec. 13, is an homage to Christmases past at Fort Massac in Metropolis. See reenactments of Christmas traditions from the French Colonial, American Revolution, Lewis and Clark, War of 1812 and the Civil War periods at this celebrated event. After reliving these scenes from the past and learning some old traditions to make new again, head to the visitors' center to spread holiday cheer with seasonal music and refreshments.

For more information, contact Fort Massac State Park (618-534-4712, dnr.state.il.us).

SOUTHWEST

Get up close and personal to beautiful eagles as they take flight at the **Locks & Dam Eagle Meet and Greet**, Jan. 17, 24, 31 and Feb. 7. Visitors will have an opportunity to see, learn and ask questions about the eagles and their habitats at the National Great Rivers Museum. Afterwards, enjoy eagle viewing in the area by taking a 75-minute trolley tour where you can watch eagles in their natural habitat.

For more information, contact the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau (618-550-9291, visitalton.com).

Walk through a winter wonderland during the **Rock Spring Park Christmas Wonderland Holiday Light Display**, Nov. 27 – Dec. 27, in Alton. See more than 2.5 million lights adorning trees and lighting displays throughout the park from the comfort of your vehicle as you cruise through the scenic drive with your family and friends. Be captivated by the holiday spirit and enjoy lovely holiday displays that evoke the warmth and joy of the season.

For more information, contact the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau (618-458-6986, visitalton.com).

The city of Belleville honors everyone's favorite holiday cookie with the annual **Gingerbread Walk**, Nov. 24 – Jan. 4. Take a leisurely stroll along East Main Street where dozens of edible gingerbread creations are displayed in shop windows. Register for the contest online and begin baking your Gingerbread dream house. Categories include Masters, Best of Show, Fantasy and Children's. Cash prizes are awarded and honors such as Mayor's Choice are given out. Stop at each window to marvel at these sweet scenes inspired from seasons' past, then duck inside the stores to warm up and shop.

For more information, contact Belleville Main Street (618-239-9428, bellevillemainstreet.net).

To experience the magic of the season's must-see attractions and activities, the Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers information on related one-of-a-kind attractions, events, accommodations and 3-Day Getaway ideas through the Bureau's Web site, www.enjoyillinois.com, or call the Illinois Call Center at 800-2CONNECT. Residents and tourists can obtain guides from any Tourist Information Center, local convention and visitors bureaus, or regional tourism development offices across the state.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Media materials and downloadable images are now available on the Illinois Bureau of Tourism online media center at www.illinoismediacenter.com. Additional photography, available electronically, may be obtained by contacting Amy Detmer at amy.detmer@edelman.com, 312-552-1142.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.