



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

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ILLINOIS SHINES BRIGHT THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Holiday celebrations light the way to great getaways

CHICAGO – Illinois sparkles this winter with a treasure of lights festivals, candlelight walks and joyous celebrations. Holiday cheer extends throughout the state as millions of twinkling lights illuminate sleigh rides, historical house tours and parades, showcasing just the right trimmings for a perfect holiday getaway in Illinois.

Chicago

The **Magnificent Mile Lights Festival** features a weekend full of activities that set the stage for the holiday season with decorated store windows and sparkling lights on November 20 and 21. The city bustles with activity, including ice-carving demonstrations, caroling and live Disney musical shows on an outdoor stage at Pioneer Court (401 N. Michigan Avenue). The festival's main event – the holiday lighting of North Michigan Avenue – is a *bona fide* crowd pleaser. Mickey Mouse and his Disney friends lead the way down the Magnificent Mile as more than one million white lights from Oak Street to Wacker Drive are lit. The evening concludes with holiday fireworks exploding in the night sky over the Chicago River.

For more information, contact the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association (312-409-5560, www.themagnificentmile.com).

An urban holiday celebration takes place November 26 at the **91st Annual City of Chicago Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony** at Daley Plaza. With the flip of a switch, spectators will be dazzled with a display of lights and ornaments on the city's great tree. Another legendary tree stands not too far away on State Street in Marshall Field's Walnut Room restaurant. For decades, families have traveled to the famous Walnut Room to view the giant tree, followed by a stroll to see the store's holiday window displays. This year's windows tell the classic story of "Snow White," a favorite sure to enchant the whole family.

For more information, contact the Mayor's Office of Special Events (312-744-3370, www.cityofchicago.org/specialevents); Marshall Field's (312-781-4483, www.marshallfields.com).

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The Museum of Science and Industry celebrates **Christmas Around the World** and **Holidays of Light**, November 19-January 9. Christmas Around the World began as a United Nations salute to American Allies during World War II. At that time, the two-week festival featured one lone pine tree, redecorated each day by a different community as a symbol of unity and harmony. Six decades later, Christmas Around the World has grown to a forest of 51 trees, each decorated by various Chicago communities according to a theme, which this year is Tinseltown Holidays. The Holidays of Light exhibition honors holidays that celebrate light or enlightenment, such as Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa and Hanukkah, among others.

For more information, contact the Museum of Science and Industry (773-684-1414, www.msichicago.org).

Chicagoland

Chicago Botanic Garden's Celebrations! A Festival of Lights, Flowers and Music, November 26-January 2, in Glencoe is a floral and entertainment dreamland. Guests can take a carriage ride around the grounds that are covered with bright red poinsettias and trimmed evergreens or they can explore the indoor gardens on foot. Visits with Santa, holiday storytelling and various musical performances help create lasting memories.

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

The **23rd Annual Holiday Magic Festival at Brookfield Zoo**, November 26 and 27, December 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, and December 26-January 2, celebrates the season in fun and unusual ways, such as inviting guests to sing carols to the animals. Each night, one million colored lights illuminate the walkways that lead to special holiday happenings, including professional ice-carving demonstrations, musical performances, magicians, and photo opportunities with animals in the Children's Zoo.

For more information, contact the Brookfield Zoo (708-485-0263, ext. 879, www.brookfieldzoo.com).

The annual **Lighting of the Lights** ceremony, November 24 in St. Charles, illuminates the city so a very special guest from the North Pole can find his way. The night also celebrates the season of shopping with trolleys and horse-drawn carriages transporting visitors from one retailer to another. Kids can enjoy a free holiday movie and concert, various decorated trees created by the children of the community, and a visit to Santa's Workshop.

For more information, contact the Downtown St. Charles Partnership (630-513-5386, www.dtown.org).

Just an hour outside of downtown Chicago is the **Cuneo Museum and Gardens** in Vernon Hills. From November 26-January 2, this 1914 European villa offers tours through its 25 decorated rooms, as well as a self-guided driving tour through the **Holiday Festival of Lights** on

the Cuneo grounds. Drivers can view lighted exhibits depicting Reindeer Row, Candycane Lane and Zooland.

For more information, contact the Lake County, Illinois Convention and Visitors Bureau (847-362-3042, www.lakecounty.org).

Northern

Oregon's Candlelight Walk, November 27, offers a magical experience for visitors, featuring live music, a performance of the comedic play "Scrooged," and an elaborate Nativity scene located on the Coliseum lawn downtown. The tree-lighting ceremony thrills kids of all ages when the guest of honor, Santa himself, flips the switch. For those looking to get a head start on holiday shopping, Oregon's many specialty and collector shops offer extended hours.

For more information, contact the Oregon Area Chamber of Commerce (815-732-2100, www.oregonil.com/events-candlelight.html).

Galena's **Night of the Luminaria**, December 18, lights each corner of town from the rolling hills and parks to Main Street and the riverfront levee. More than 5,000 luminaria cast a glow on this historical town, making it the perfect night to take a trolley ride while sipping hot chocolate. The DeSoto House, the oldest operating hotel in Illinois, offers a special Night of Luminaria dinner during which visitors can eat by candlelight amidst the white twinkling lights that surround the hotel's courtyard.

For more information, contact the Galena Chamber of Commerce (815-777-9050, www.galenachamber.com).

Just an hour away from Galena, Rockford heralds the season with a touch of culture. Visitors can experience **Christmas Past** December 4 and 5 at Tinker Swiss Cottage, with classic decorations and holiday kids' activities. A breathtaking example of 1865 Victorian exotic architecture, Tinker Swiss Cottage impresses visitors with rich woodwork, murals and the Tinker family's original furniture, belongings and journals. Travelers may also stop for the **Annual Festival of Lights**, November 26-December 31, where nearly 100 luminary displays line the winding hills of Sinnissippi Park along the banks of the Rock River.

For more information, contact the Rockford Area Conventions and Visitors Bureau (800-521-0849, www.gorockford.com).

Central

Nighttime is the right time when more than 400 light displays dazzle passers-by at the **Victorian Splendor Lights Festival**, November 19-January 1, in Shelby County. The festival transforms Forest Park into a winter fantasy with 30-foot-tall toy soldiers, radiant angels and giant snowmen. Trolleys and horse-drawn carriages are available for touring the area.

For more information, contact the Shelby County Office of Tourism (217-774-2244) or

Shelbyville Chamber of Commerce (217-774-2221, www.shelbyville-il.net/victoriansplendor).

Christmas Time at the Dana-Thomas House in Springfield, December 19, gives visitors the chance to tour a house designed by Prairie Style architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, and celebrate with live music and turn-of-the-century decorations. Additionally, hundreds of luminaria line the home's exterior, creating a glow that complements Wright's famous architecture.

For more information, contact the Dana-Thomas House (217-782-6676, www.dana-thomas.org).

Western

Western Illinois shines brighter than ever November 27-December 31, during the **East Peoria Festival of Lights**. This is a landmark year for the festival as it celebrates its 20th anniversary and its recent ranking on the American Bus Association's Top 100 Events List. The Parade of Lights kicks off the festival with more than one million lights producing images that range from Santa Claus to menorahs. As fireworks light up the sky, more than 40 stunning floats participate in the parade and remain on display throughout December. Additional festival offerings include an enchanted snow-covered forest perfect for children, a narrated Nativity scene, and a marketplace with holiday decorations, elaborate gingerbread creations and baked goods. New this year is the **20th Anniversary Photo Contest** in which anyone can enter their pictures from past festivals. Entry forms can be found at www.cityofeastpeoria.com and must be postmarked by October 15.

For more information, contact the City of East Peoria (309-698-4711, www.cityofeastpeoria.com).

The **Avenue of Lights** in the quaint town of Quincy, December 1-January 1, is a dynamic lights festival that takes place in Wavering-Moorman Park and features artistic displays made by local volunteers. Last year, nearly 80 animated displays featured more than two million lights powered by 700,000 watts of electricity.

For more information, contact the Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau (217-222-7980, www.quincy-cvb.org).

Southern

The 14th Annual Lights Fantastic Parade, December 4, in Carbondale is the largest holiday parade in Southern Illinois, traveling from Illinois Avenue to Town Square. This year's parade features a winter carnival theme with pony rides and joyful carolers. Marching bands, dancers and more than 70 lighted floats also help draw bundled-up spectators from across the state.

For more information, contact the Carbondale Convention and Visitors Bureau (618-529-8040, www.cctb.org).

First Night Greater Centralia, December 31, is internationally sanctioned by the First Night International Association as a recognized New Year's Eve celebration, and begins with a giant conga line through the downtown area. Each year, nearly 2,000 visitors dance their way to the Central Recreation Center where live music, children's activities and talent contests are offered. Midnight fireworks ring in the New Year with a bang.

For more information, contact the Greater Centralia Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Office (618-532-6789, www.centraliail.com/tourism/events.html).

Southwest

As one of the American Bus Association's Top 100 Events, the annual **Way of Lights Christmas Display** in Belleville is a sight not to be missed. Held November 15-January 6 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, the drive depicts the Christmas story through light displays, electro-art sculptures and life-size figures. Travelers can experience the impressive exhibit by car, trolley or horse-drawn carriage, eventually stopping at an awe-inspiring Nativity scene. Festivities continue indoors where an elegant display of decorated Christmas trees, puppet shows, storytelling and other seasonal programs are featured. Visitors can extend their time in Belleville to meander along East Main Street for the annual **Gingerbread Walk**, November 26-January 2, where more than 70 intricate gingerbread designs add flair to local storefront windows.

For more information, contact the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows (618-397-6700, www.snows.org); the Tourism Bureau of Southwestern Illinois (618-397-1488, www.thetourismbureau.org).

Elsah, a picturesque country town in Southwest Illinois, hosts **Home for the Holidays** on December 4. Throughout the day the streets teem with visitors and carolers riding horse-drawn carriages or strolling from house to house on a historical tour. After the tree-lighting ceremony, the children of Elsay host an old-fashioned, charity bake sale in the historic schoolhouse.

For more information, contact the Great River Road Association (618-374-2821, www.greatriverroad.com/Cities/Elsah/elsahholiday.htm).

The Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers free travel resources with additional information on **3-Day Getaways**, holiday festivals, events and attractions. All are available by calling **1-800-2-CONNECT** to speak with an Illinois travel counselor or by visiting the Bureau's Web site at enjoyillinois.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Statewide photography is available electronically or in slide format. For artwork, contact Katie Markese at katie.markese@edelman.com, 312-297-7561 or Amy McGee at amy.mcgee@edelman.com, 312-240-2829.

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.