



## December travel sparkles at Christmas-themed destinations

Many just an hour to a couple of hours' drive away

**M**ansions, mountains, waterfronts and more are aglow during the Christmas holiday season and it seems that each display is more festive and impressive than the last. Now with gas prices plunging, why not travel a bit to take in some of the spectacular and unique holiday displays and celebrations.

The following is a list of not-too-far destinations with Christmas attractions that can make for a memorable family trip or a short weekend getaway for couples:

**Magical Lights on the Lake**  
Lake Lanier Islands Park, Ga.  
53 miles from Decatur

Lake Lanier Islands Resort's 16th annual Magical Nights of Lights holiday celebration is billed as the world's largest animated light extravaganza. Visitors

drive through more than six miles of twinkling, holiday light displays and a nativity scene complete with live actors and animals. The magic runs through Dec. 30 from 5 to 10 p.m. nightly. Cost is \$30 to \$40 per car. Plus there's the Holiday Village with carnival rides, pony rides, marshmallow roast and Santa Shop. For more information, go to [www.lakelanierislands.com](http://www.lakelanierislands.com).

**Christmas spirit in the North Georgia Mountains**  
Helen, Ga.  
83 miles from Decatur

Tree lightings, a Christmas parade, holiday caroling, visits with Old St. Nick and the first annual Christkindlmarket are what's waiting for visitors in Helen. Not to be missed are the horse-drawn carriages, white lights, imported and local food specialties and holiday

shopping. On Friday, Nov. 28, Helen gets in the *weihnachtliche stimmung* of the season with the Annual Lighting of the Village. On Dec. 6, the annual Christmas Parade marches through the main street of the German-themed village of Helen. Visit [www.helenga.org](http://www.helenga.org) for all the details.

**Fantasy In Lights**  
Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Ga.  
86 miles from Decatur

Now in its 17th year, this outdoor light and sound show has glittered for millions of visitors. This year, Fantasy In Lights brightens the night with eight million lights creating more than a dozen holiday scenes. After riding through this show, visitors can head to the Christ-

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mas Village, a warm retreat with handcrafted gifts, a Santa shop, food court, candy store and even a cookie decorating station. The lights come on nightly beginning at 6 p.m. through Dec. 30. Tickets to Fantasy In Lights range from \$9 to \$22 per person. Visit [www.callawaygardens.com](http://www.callawaygardens.com) for more information.

### Christmas parade in the Mountains

Gatlinburg, Tenn.

191 miles from Decatur

If Tennessee piques one's interest, consider trekking to Gatlinburg for the annual holiday parade. U.S. Olympic Team medalists **Monica Abbott** and **Kevin Stone** are the grand marshals for the 33rd annual Fantasy of Lights Christmas Parade, which will take place on Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m. in downtown Gatlinburg. Visitors can experience more than 100 parade entries, including marching bands, equestrian units, millions of holiday lights and helium balloons. Characters reminiscent of **Charles Dickens'** era, a cappella caroling and special appearances by Zeno the Gatlinburg Bear™ are part of the city's Winter Magic Tunes & Tales™, which will be in full swing downtown on Friday and Saturday evenings through the weekend before Christmas (Dec. 20). And this holiday event is even a bit green as Gatlinburg's Winter Magic has made a conversion of its 3 million lights from incandescent to LED illumination. New light displays for 2008 include snowmen, dancing fountains, a 20-foot rocking horse, children from around the world as well as animated displays of holiday themes and wildlife. For more information on events in Gatlinburg, visit [www.gatlinburg.com](http://www.gatlinburg.com) or call 1-800-588-1817.

### Christmas at Biltmore

Biltmore Estate, Asheville, N.C.

203 miles from Decatur

Tradition reigns at **George W. Vanderbilt's** esteemed Biltmore Estate during the Christmas season with more than 100 decorated trees, 1,000 wreaths and bows, 1,800 poinsettias, miles of evergreen garland and thousands of ornaments and lights on display. Inside Biltmore House a 35-foot Fraser fir will spend the holidays in the 70-foot high Banquet Hall, adorned with lights and surrounded by gifts. Each room will be decorated to feature prominent traditions from the country represented. Hanging stars, a snowy white forest and glittered Eiffel Towers are just a few of the details that can be seen throughout the house. Holiday music completes the experience, filling the halls with Yuletide cheer. Visitors to the Christmas Candlelight Evenings will be treated to an array of entertainment including choirs, ballet dancers, traditional caroling, pantomime, marionettes and stories of Vanderbilt holiday traditions. Complimentary daytime decorating seminars are also planned. Christmas at Biltmore runs through Jan. 4, 2009. Tickets are priced from \$29.50 to \$59. Children age 6 and younger are free with a paying adult. For more information call 877-BILTMORE, or visit Biltmore's Web site at [www.biltmore.com](http://www.biltmore.com).



Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Ga.



Gatlinburg, Tenn.



Biltmore Estate, Asheville, N.C.