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25 Best Christmas Towns in the USA

From coast to coast, here are the most charming towns to spend Christmas in.

By [Katrina Brown Hunt](#) | Updated on November 3, 2022

✔ Fact checked by [Jillian Dara](#)



PHOTO: JEREMY SWANSON

Nothing quite compares to the joy of holiday decorations. The sight of a town decked out with boughs of holly, among other Christmas decor, can send warmth all the way down to your toes – even in the midst of a blizzard. Whether you're returning home to see family and find yourself

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met with holiday cheer, there's always a reason to visit one of the best Christmas towns in the USA. So, with that in mind, we've gathered 25 of the best holiday destinations in the country for you to travel to in December.

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01 | **Aspen, Colorado**

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PHOTO: JEREMY SWANSON

A combination of luxe living and quaint charm helped this Rocky Mountain town become one of the merriest in the country. Wandering along Cooper Avenue, you may chance upon cookie exchanges, public s'mores roasts, or elf meet-and-greets. And don't miss the three most famous hotels in town while you're here for the holidays. The lobby of the [Hotel Jerome, Auberge Resorts Collection](#) often hosts carolers, while [Ajax Tavern](#) and [Element 47](#) at [The Little Nell](#) both serve fabulous holiday meals. Looking for a bird's-eye view of the decorations? You can take in the holiday splendor from on-high at [W Aspen's](#) sky residences.



PHOTO: MONIQUE MEADOWS

Travelers may be drawn to this former artists' colony in Maine as a beach getaway, but the holiday season brings the perks of winter on the sand: lower prices and overall calm, with just enough festivity to keep things humming. Mid-December's [Christmas by the Sea](#) festival typically includes a bonfire on the beach and visits with Santa. From Ogunquit, you can also easily reach two shopping areas for getting through your list: [the Kittery Outlets](#) and, an hour away, Freeport, where you can shop at the L.L. Bean Flagship store and pose with the famously big boot. For distinctive local shopping, browse the [Harbor Candy Shop](#), where the gift boxes pack in holiday charm.

03 | Vail, Colorado

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PHOTO: CHRIS MCLENNAN, VAIL RESORTS

Ski season kicks into high gear during the holidays in this Colorado wonderland. December brings fresh powder, the village tree lighting, and New Year's Eve festivities. Vail is not only one of the best Christmas towns in the USA, it is also known for both good coffee and good cocktails – try local favorites [Yeti's Grind](#) and [Loaded Joe's](#) in the morning, and tuck into cocktails at [Root & Flower](#) in the evening. You might ring in the New Year at [Flame](#) – the fine dining restaurant within [Four Seasons Resort and Residences Vail](#), before moving on to innovative cocktails at [The Sebastian - Vail, a Timbers Resort](#). Finally, lay your head to rest at the ever-charming, alpine-chic [The Lodge at Vail, a RockResort](#), which boasts a heated outdoor pool flanked with gorgeous fire pits.

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Nantucket, Massachusetts

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PHOTO: MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF TRAVEL & TOURISM

The banner event during the holidays in this island town started in the 1970s when local shopkeepers stayed open later in order to prevent locals from having to travel to Cape Cod for their holiday shopping. Today, during the annual [Christmas Stroll](#) – typically the first weekend in December – you can shop downtown amid dozens of seven-foot, decorated Christmas trees, and take part in wine tastings, ghost walks, and home tours. Pick up some gifts at [Murray's Toggery Shop](#) (the mothership for holiday-ready Nantucket reds) and [Jessica Hicks](#), the boutique of a local jewelry designer. For more tree-gazing, go to the [Whaling Museum](#), which displays 80 trees decorated by local artists, merchants, and kids.

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Orlando, Florida



PHOTO: UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

Make it a Christmas no one will ever forget with a visit to the country's theme park capital. At Disney World, you can attend [Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party](#) on select nights between November 8 and December 22, which includes a Christmas-themed fireworks show and classic attractions like the Jungle Cruise and Space Mountain completely decked out in festive cheer. Meanwhile at [Universal Studios](#), there is nowhere more dreamy than [The Wizarding World of Harry Potter](#) at Christmastime, when the scenery is topped with a layer of snow and holiday spirit. Not to mention, this is the best time of year to enjoy a hot butterbeer.

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Breckenridge, Colorado



PHOTO: NATHAN BILOW

Breckenridge gets revved up during the holidays as ski season swings into high gear. Indeed, this resort town skates the fine line between thrills and low stress. During the month of December, festivities abound, from the tree lighting to the [Race of the Santas](#), a half-mile footrace where all runners must be dressed as Santa Claus. Travelers will also fall for the charming après-ski options in Breck, from the house-made brews at [Breckenridge Brewing](#) to the martinis and flights of Colorado beers at [Base 9 Bar](#).

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Lewisburg, West Virginia



PHOTO: AARON MAXWELL

Grande dame hotel [The Greenbrier](#) is the epicenter of the holidays in the Lewisburg area. The 18th-century resort trims the lobby with opulent decorations. Beyond the hotel, the town is peaceful and quietly lit with seasonal lights and low-key attractions.

08 | Beaufort, North Carolina

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PHOTO: THE CRYSTAL COAST TOURISM AUTHORITY

Winter weather doesn't really kick in until January in this [Outer Banks](#) town, so the holiday season is typically still a good time to paddle a kayak or take a boat tour along Taylor's Creek. The Christmas lights take to the water, too: one of the biggest holiday events is the [Crystal Coast Christmas Flotilla](#), a twinkling-lights-strewn boat parade held on the first weekend in December.

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Carmel-by-the-Sea, California



PHOTO: © TRAVEL PICTURES / ALAMY

This California town with a rocky coastline doesn't experience much in the way of winter weather, but the chilly air makes the crashing waves and neighboring wine country seem all the more enticing. Carmel has its own tree lighting — a huge resident tree at the corner of Junipero and Ocean avenues — and the quiet days of early December also make it a little easier to get a table at nearby restaurants like [La Bicyclette](#) and [Flying Fish Grill](#).

10 | Park City, Utah

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PHOTO: DAN CAMPBELL

The holiday season ushers in serious wattage — star-powered and otherwise — in this Utah mountain town. In late November, Park City lights their iconic tree and celebrates with the annual Electric Parade. During the holidays, kids and sweet enthusiasts of all ages will love the gingerbread display at [Stein Eriksen Lodge](#).

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Santa Rosa Beach, Florida



PHOTO: VISIT SOUTH WALTON

The holiday season coincides with the kickoff of high season in this northwest Florida town. So it's a good place to browse for gifts for everyone on your list. While browsing Santa Rosa, be sure to shop for timeless pearl necklaces and earrings at [Shimmering Seas Jewelry](#) and perfect-for-display cookbooks at [Kitchen Garden Books & Antiques](#).

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Myrtle Beach, South Carolina



PHOTO: COURTESY OF BROOKGREEN GARDENS

Late fall and early winter are a good time to score lower rates in this family-friendly town, but that doesn't mean that the place has gone totally quiet. Showstoppers around Myrtle Beach include the twinkling Christmas trees and 2,700 hand-lit candles at [Brookgreen Gardens](#) as well as the Festival of Trees— with themed trees for all 50 states — at [Ripley's Aquarium](#).

13 | **Santa Fe, New Mexico**

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PHOTO: JEFF GREENBERG/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Santa Fe is always unique and at Christmastime, the city proves itself once again with its holiday traditions. The most lovely is the [Canyon Road Farolito Walk](#), which flips the script on conventional Christmas lights by setting up a trail of small lanterns that sets the town aglow. And although you might be thinking deserts and adobe buildings, you can still have a White Christmas in Santa Fe by taking a trip up to the [Ski Santa Fe](#) resort in the Rocky Mountains.

14 | **Newport, Rhode Island**

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PHOTO: THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY

If a flashing-neon-colored holiday makes you cringe, head to this gorgeous town in Rhode Island, where only white lights are encouraged on homes and restaurants, to conjure an old-fashioned candlelit vibe. Touching on its upscale history, the [Mansions of Newport Tour](#) takes you on a stroll through Gilded Age architectural icons like [The Breakers](#), the Elms, and the Marbles, all decked out in sumptuous trees, fine china, and decorations. Since crowds are lighter, it's a good time to try Newport's best restaurants like the French-inspired [Bouchard Restaurant](#).

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Annapolis, Maryland



PHOTO: © D. TROZZO / ALAMY

This military town along the Chesapeake Bay does plenty of pomp, circumstance, and tailgating during the holiday season. Annapolis boasts a plethora of Christmas lights, notably strewn on boats and along the water's edge. Downtown Annapolis also keeps its shops lit and open until midnight on a few Thursdays during December, which is called [Midnight Madness](#).

16 | Paso Robles, California

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PHOTO: [CECILY RAY PHOTOGRAPHY](#)

Forget green: the prime holiday color in this Central Coast town is red, as in pinot noirs, cabernets, and syrahs. During the holidays, wineries offer low-key tastings, music performances, and great gift opportunities; check out [Parrish Family Vineyard](#), whose tasting room is a short walk from downtown's City Park. For some seasonal house envy, go to [Hearst Castle](#), about an hour away, which is adorned much as it might have been for former resident William Randolph Hearst.

17 | Healdsburg, California

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Healdsburg, California is a charming Sonoma County town known for great restaurants and even better wineries. Visit [Flowers Vineyards & Winery](#) for the pinot noir and [Aperture Cellars](#) for the view, which is beautiful in any season. If you can make it over to Napa, grab a few bottles to go at [Faust](#). Stay the night at [Montage Healdsburg](#), where the charming decor, light-illuminated trees, and roaring fireplaces will put you in the holiday mood.

18 | Telluride, Colorado

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PHOTO: RYAN BONNEAU/TELLURIDE TOURISM BOARD

Telluride is a pleasantly quirky town and their flair comes through clearly this time of year. The town's big tree lighting happens on the Ski Tree, made of old skis, and accompanies a bonfire comprising more old-and-broken skis. Travelers will love the nightlife in any season. Go barhopping from the cozy lounges of [Madeline Hotel & Residences](#), [Auberge Resorts Collection](#) to [New Sheridan Hotel's Historic Bar](#), which has kept the same mahogany-paneled look since 1895.

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Leavenworth, Washington



Leavenworth, Washington at Christmas. PHOTO: CONNIE COLEMAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Leavenworth is an American town that looks more like a portal to Germany in the middle of the Washington Cascade Mountain Range. The town was built to resemble a traditional Bavarian village and the nearby mountains, poetically named The Enchantments, help allude to the idea that you really could be in Europe — especially during the Christmas season. Over half a million lights go up on [the first day of December](#) and every weekend until Christmas is chock-full with holiday activities like gingerbread house displays, carolers, and ornament giveaways.

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Portsmouth, New Hampshire



PHOTO: DAVID J. MURRAY, CLEAR EYE PHOTO

This waterfront New England town is steeped in history, with settlements dating back to the 1600s. Winter's a festive time to explore its 10-acre time capsule, the [Strawbery Banke Museum](#): during December, you can skate at its open-air Labrie Family Skate at Puddle Dock Pond, or walk the candle-box-lined paths to see decorated homes from centuries past. Portsmouth offers one big 21st-century draw, too: tax-free shopping statewide. Load up on classic toys and kids' books in town.

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Cape May, New Jersey



This Jersey Shore town has a strong Victorian streak — it's easily recognized by its quaint architecture — and the holiday season pushes it a little further on the Dickensian scale. The walkable Washington Street Mall gets draped in greenery and festive lights. To sweeten the season, drop by [the Original Fudge Kitchen](#), which also offers great fudge-and-saltwater-taffy gift boxes. If you have kids, check in to [Congress Hall](#), where the Grand Lawn across from the beach turns into a seaside winter wonderland complete with festive activities.

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Charlottesville, Virginia



PHOTO: HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ

During the holiday season, Charlottesville quiets down, as college students cram for finals and then head home. Still it's one of the best Christmas towns in the USA and visitors can head to the University of Virginia campus to watch the annual [Lighting of the Lawn](#) or to the [Ronald McDonald House](#) to see the impressive entries of the gingerbread display competition.

23 | Atlantic City, New Jersey

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PHOTO: ACA/PETER TOBIA

A casino and boardwalk don't exactly conjure images of plum puddings and carolers, yet travelers appreciate Atlantic City's wild weekend spirit and vivid people-watching around the holidays. Festivities this year include the Tree Lighting and Holiday Musical Light Show at [The Quarter at Tropicana](#). Plus, don't miss the Atlantic City Bazaar at the [Noyes Arts Garage of Stockton University](#).

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Natchitoches, Louisiana



PHOTO: ROBBIE CAPONETTO

Four hours north of New Orleans, you can find one of the brightest towns in Louisiana at Christmastime. Natchitoches, pronounced like nack-a-tish and named for its indigenous people, is one of the oldest settlements in Louisiana. During the holiday season, the whole city is lit up with impressive light displays and family-friendly festivities are in the books every weekend from Thanksgiving until December 25. However, the biggest event is the [boat parade](#) on December 10, when the Cane River light ups with Christmas spirit.

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Laguna Beach, California



PHOTO: MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

There's no chance of a white Christmas in this mild-weathered Orange County beach town. Instead of watching the sky for snowflakes, you can scan the waves for migrating whales – or focus your attention on the holiday Champagne, spirits, and pastries at the [Montage Laguna Beach](#). The gallery-lined town hosts the [Sawdust Winter Fantasy](#), an arts and crafts festival that spans five weekends in November and December, to get visitors into the holiday spirit.

Updated by [Maya Kachroo-Levine](#)

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