

Chris Amat/Courtesy Fairmont Banff Springs

22 Snow-Filled Christmas Vacation Ideas

by J U D Y K O U T S K Y

December 3, 2019




These hot spots are going all out for the holidays this year.



If you're looking for Christmas vacation ideas, you're probably looking to plan the ultimate **holiday dream**: a wintry getaway with snow-capped trees, quaint cabins, and maybe a musical number or two. Some place that pretty much guarantees snow and traditional holiday moments (queue up the Hallmark Channel!), so you can't help but get into the spirit. At these 22 places, you'll find everything from Santa on skis to sleigh rides in the snow (though we can't promise any dance routines). Plus, many spots in Europe and in the States that are known for their **Christmas markets**. Keep reading for our best Christmas vacation ideas, and don't be surprised if your family thinks this is the best holiday trip yet.

1. Resort at Squaw Creek, Lake Tahoe, California

Make a child's dream come true this Christmas with breakfast with Santa, holiday cookie decorating, and a holiday bear factory at 

hotel

Resort at Squaw Creek, Lake Tahoe

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Resort at Squaw Creek, Lake Tahoe. The resort also offers its yearly Kids' Night Out New Year's Eve Bash; ski-in, ski-out access all day, an on-property ice rink, dog sledding, and horse-drawn sleigh rides.

2. The Resort at Paws Up, Montana

Located on 37,000 acres of untamed Montana wilderness, 


hotel

The Resort at Paws Up

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The Resort at Paws Up has plenty to do around the holidays—including horse-drawn sleigh and wagon rides, gingerbread-house building contests, cookie decorating, visits with Santa, and plenty of outdoor fun like dogsledding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and winter ATV riding. We're pleasantly exhausted already.

3. Munich, Germany

While there are more than 20 Christmas markets in **Munich** alone, the market at Marienplatz is the most traditional and features more than 150 stands. There's even a market inside the market: the Krippenmarkt, which sells everything you could possibly want for your manger. More than 3 million visitors attend the market held in front of the Munich Town Hall each year. You'll find mulled wines, crafts, and plenty of German delicacies. Book a stay at the 

hotel

Bayerischer Hof

Bayerischer Hof, just five minutes from the market. An iconic luxury hotel in Munich, it dates to 1841. Their advent package includes tickets to the Munich Christkindl market (you'll get vouchers for food and activities).


Looking down at the Marienplatz holiday market in Munich.

Getty

4. Prague

Since the **city** is so compact, it's easy to hit the two biggest markets (which are five minutes apart) in the Old Town Square and Wenceslas Square. You'll find traditional Czech goods like wooden puppets and dolls as well as quintessential foods such as hams roasted on spits, barbecued sausages (klobása), and cakes and pastries (trdelník). Don't miss the nativity complete with live animals located in front of the massive Christmas tree.

5. Mohonk Mountain House, New York

This National Historic Landmark resort will make you feel like you're visiting Christmas past, with traditional activities like a family yule log hunt, a trim-a-tree party, and holiday craft-making and caroling. Scattered throughout the 

hotel

Mohonk Mountain House

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An elevated escape

Mohonk Mountain House are spectacular kissing balls (mistletoe on a whole other level) and elaborate gingerbread creations, as well as intricately decorated Christmas trees. Outside, a 60-foot Austrian Pine sparkles with 1,500 LED lights perfect for spotting reindeer tracks, which you can actually do with the resort.

6. The Ritz-Carlton, Bachelor Gulch, Colorado

The 

hotel


The Ritz-Carlton, Bachelor Gulch

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The Ritz-Carlton, Bachelor Gulch knows how to do Christmas right. Think holiday fireworks, children's ski parades, family snowshoe tours, hot chocolate, and a s'mores bar by the outdoor fire pit. Count down the 12 days to Christmas by writing letters to Santa, decorating ornaments and cookies, and building delicious gingerbread houses.

Fairmont Banff Springs is a winter wonderland.

7. Banff Springs, Alberta

Christmas at the 

hotel

Fairmont Banff Springs

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Fairmont Banff Springs castle means Santa's coming to town. Visit Santa's very own suite to check out his active toy workshop, write your own letter, decorate stockings, and have him read you a story. Plus, there's the Santa brunch (his helpers will be present, too) and Christmas Eve tea. Located in picturesque Banff Springs, this resort really is a winter wonderland.

8. Vail, Colorado

Feel free to pluck candy canes from 

hotel

The Lodge at Vail

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The Lodge at Vail's festive lobby Christmas tree after your day on the slopes. Enjoy holiday cookie decorating with the in-house chef (those are some gourmet cookies) and get your photo with Santa and his six-foot-four elf. If you want a little holiday TLC, get a Christmas massage with peppermint and evergreen oils or a spicy cider foot scrub—after all, Christmas isn't just for kids.

9. Omni Mount Washington Resort, New Hampshire

Your family can take a winter wagon ride to nearby Rocks Estate, where you can find the perfect Christmas tree for your room. The staff at the 

hotel

Omni Mount Washington Resort


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Omni Mount Washington Resort will relocate the tree and even decorate it for you, so your holiday vacation really does feel like a home away from home. Plus, there's plenty of holiday outdoor fun like ice skating, sleigh rides, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and both Alpine and Nordic skiing.

10. Woodloch Resort, Pennsylvania

Enjoy a picturesque wagon ride through an illuminated Festival of Lights trail at this Poconos **family resort**. Sing holiday carols and partake in the annual yule log hunt, go shopping at their holiday craft fair (which features more than 40 local crafters), take part in the Gingerbread Wars (only for the most competitive among your family), and of course enjoy plenty of winter activities like their on-site winter Olympics.

11. Park City, Utah

Kick your holidays off by heading to Park City for **Snowfest**, a 16-day festival at Park City Mountain including holiday musical acts, fireworks, a torchlight parade, Santa on the slopes, and plenty of parties and celebrations throughout the month of December. A good spot to stay? The 

hotel

Montage Deer Valley

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Montage Deer Valley, which offers ski-in/ski-out access and plenty of holiday charm.

The family-friendly Viennese Christmas Market at City Hall is a must-see in Austria.

Getty

12. Vienna, Austria

With more than 20 different official advent markets, **Vienna** has plenty of holiday spirit. At Viennese Christmas Market at City Hall, there's a special kids section, where they can learn how to make cookies and candles—Austrian-style. Plus, there are plenty of international choirs singing holiday carols.

13. Skaneateles, New York

Jump into the holidays with Christmas past in **Skaneateles**, where Charles Dickens' **A Christmas Carol** comes to life every Saturday and Sunday starting the day after Thanksgiving and through Christmas Eve. Dickens and his cast of more than 50 characters interact with residents and visitors in the streets, stores, and restaurants. You'll be serenaded by Christmas carolers, watch reenacted scenes from the book, and enjoy chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Don't miss the free carriage rides over the river and through the woods, plus the hot chocolate, cider, and doughnuts that pop up everywhere. Look out for **breakfast with Santa** at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo—your kids will be making crafts and decorating cookies while Mrs. Claus and the elves serve a holiday meal.

14. North Pole, New York

Visit the real North Pole (in New York, that is). This frozen fantasy transforms into a wonderland each year. Check out Santa's blacksmith, where magical reindeer shoes are made, visit the always popular reindeer barn, and make a stop at Santa's house for a visit with the man himself.

15. Olympic Hotel, Seattle

This **historic hotel** has an abundance of holiday experiences for the whole family, including signature traditions like an oversized gingerbread house, made with more than 4,000 real gingerbread bricks. Holiday Tea with Santa includes sing-alongs, gifts from Santa, and themed treats. Get in the spirit by giving; a \$5 donation that benefits local charities will get you a bag of roasted chestnuts, which you can eat while in the Festival of Trees in the lobby. The decorated trees, each with their own theme and style, honor young patients from Seattle Children's Hospital.

16. Breckenridge, Colorado

From its race of the Santas and Christmas Eve services to its scenic sleigh rides and New Year's Eve on-mountain torchlight parade, **Breckenridge** is the perfect destination to get families in the holiday spirit. Plus, there's caroling, a holiday dog parade (all furry friends are invited), and a reindeer run for kids under 12.

17. Tromsø, Norway

Christmas in Tromsø is like no other. With a city this far north, the chances of seeing the Northern Lights are pretty likely, plus, you may see the Polar Light. The sun sets on November 26 and doesn't show up again until January 21, so you'll see colors like pink, yellow, and orange at sunrise and blue in the twilight hours. The lights from all the Christmas trees and holiday decorations mean you won't be in total darkness—but enough so that Aurora is sure to make an appearance in the evening hours. You may even spot some whales in the fjords as you take in the magic that is the holidays here. There are plenty of Christmas Markets around town—homemade food and unique Norwegian handicrafts make ideal holiday gifts.

Lightscape, at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Rikard Osterlund

18. Chicago

Few places do Christmas better than the **Windy City**. The **Chicago Botanic Garden's** Lightscape for the Holiday Season is a mile-long path where the night comes alive with color, imagination, and sound, from a choir of singing trees to a spectacular waterfall of light. Head to **Illumination at the Morton Arboretum** and walk a one-mile paved path amid interactive lighting effects. Next up, go to the Magnificent Mile Lights Festival, where one million lights are strung along Michigan Avenue. Don't miss ZooLights at **Lincoln Park Zoo**, where you'll see activities like musical light shows, live ice-sculpting, train and carousel rides, and a Light Maze. Cap off the day at the Christkindlmarket—Chicago's largest open-air holiday festival. Held in the heart of the Loop, this four-week market is modeled after the famous Nuremberg Christmas market, dating to 1545. There's plenty of shopping, and the market serves as a popular meeting place for family and friends.

19. Nemaquin Woodlands Resort, Pennsylvania

Two million holiday lights will be strung up after Thanksgiving to illuminate **this property** and give it festive cheer. Every Friday until Christmas the resort will feature live music, holiday train rides, festive food and drinks, and visits from Santa and Mrs. Claus. Season-long festivities include a gingerbread house workshop, holiday movies, and elf tuck-ins, complete with a bedtime story and toy-filled stocking. A standout tradition is the property's walk-in gingerbread house, which is constructed entirely on-site by the culinary team. It's a very Merry Christmas for all.

20. Wisconsin

In downtown **Milwaukee**, look out for the **Holiday Lights Festival**, which features thousands of colored lights and animated displays. Then travelers can hop on the **Jingle Bus** to experience the festive scenes around town, including at **Cathedral Square Park**. In Lake Geneva, travelers can bundle up and climb aboard Santa's Boat Cruise. The best way to see the area's thousands of lights and Christmas decorations is this magical, 40-minute Christmas cruise that's great for the whole family. Before or after, walk through the **Santa Cause Tree Festival**, an indoor winter wonderland that features towering, thoughtfully adorned Christmas trees supporting the **Geneva National Foundation**.

21. Sunriver Resort, Sunriver, Oregon

Sunriver is the real-life embodiment of a picturesque holiday scene—everything is covered in snow with twinkling lights. Take a horse-drawn sleigh ride through a snowy meadow, sip cocoa by the fire, hear bedtime stories from one of Santa's elves, or enjoy a holiday meal with all the fixings. Featuring more than 150 events and experiences catered toward families, festivities kick off November 23 with the **Grand Illumination** tree-lighting ceremony, and continue through New Year's Day.

22. Toronto

If there is one place where you can find snow during the holidays, it's Canada. In **Toronto**, head to Nathan Phillips Square for a beautiful light display before going to the **Toronto Zoo Lumina Night Walk**. Then, make your way to Canada's Wonderland Winterfest, which has a variety of entertainment for families. Lastly, for some adult fun, head to the Distillery District Christmas Market. Inspired by the Old World and influenced by the new, this month-long event celebrates the sounds, sights, and scents of Christmas—sip on mulled wine and European-style seasonal cocktails as you browse through the selection of hand-made ornaments, wood carvings, and crafts while listening to carolers. ✦

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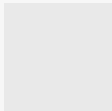
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