

19 Best Polar Express Train Rides You Can Take This Christmas

All aboard!

By [Judy Koutsky](#) and [Grant Rindner](#) Aug 17, 2020



AMAZON PRIME

You've put up your [twinkle lights](#), [made your list](#), and checked it twice, and streamed just about every [Christmas movie Netflix has to offer](#). Ready for even more seasonal cheer? A

scenic train ride on a Polar Express (inspired by the classic children's book) is lovely way to revel in the holiday magic with your family. If you're planning your next winter getaway, consider one of these destinations which offer the best Christmas train rides in the U.S. through some of the most charming towns, complete with a visit from Santa himself, cookies galore, and of course, hot cocoa. P.S. wearing matching pajamas is encouraged.

Though there's debate around the safety of train travel in the U.S. as the coronavirus pandemic continues, the professionals responsible for many of these Christmas train rides are taking extra precautions, and are announcing special regulations as we approach the holidays. And while some journeys are already cancelled this year, there are still options for taking a yuletide ride everywhere from upstate New York to Texas and Arizona. Read on for more info about 2020's Polar Express Christmas train schedules. Some of these trains are operating at limited capacity, so if you want a yuletide ride, you should act fast.

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GRAND CANYON POLAR EXPRESS

Grand Canyon Railway Polar Express, Williams, Arizona

The Grand Canyon Railway's Polar Express ride is 90 minutes of festive, holiday fun. Trains leave throughout November and December at 5:30 and 7:30 (the earlier train is especially good for the younger set). Taking passengers from the wilderness of Williams, Arizona (about 30 miles from

Flagstaff) to the North Pole—where Santa Claus and his reindeer are waiting. You can also upgrade to the Polar Express package which includes a night at the Railway Hotel.

Tickets start at \$49

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ADIRONDACK CHRISTMAS TRAIN

Adirondack Christmas Train, Utica, New York

For families who want something a little different, the Adirondack Christmas Train is quite unique. It leaves at 11:30 am and is a full-day adventure (ten hours in duration). Departing Utica Station, it takes passengers to Old Forge's Christmas on Main Street. Families will travel in vintage coaches (comfortable, yet classic) where they'll take in the beautiful winter scenery. Once in Old Forge, you'll spend the day shopping on Main Street, enjoying carriage rides, and then watching the lighting of the Christmas tree. After that, it's back to Utica.

Tickets start at \$38

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BRANSON POLAR EXPRESS

The Polar Express at Branson Scenic Railway, Branson, Missouri

Celebrating its 13th year, this Branson, Missouri Polar Express gives 400 passengers golden tickets for a 40-mile trip through the Ozark Mountain foothills. This historic 1906 depot is located in downtown Branson—a town that loves Christmas. The vintage railroad passenger cars, dating back to the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, is the scene of the 1 hour and 15 minute ride that passes a one-mile-long lighting display with thousands of lights.

Branson Scenic Railway has [released a message](#) about how COVID-19 will affect their train rides.

Prices start at \$36

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SANTA WINE TRAIN

Santa Wine Train, Napa Valley, California

The famous Napa Valley Wine Train takes a holiday detour to the North Pole, transforming into the Santa Train from the end of November until the end of December. During the hour and a half long show, the train transforms into a winter wonderland, decked out with wreaths and lights. It also comes complete with cookies and hot chocolate, a photo booth, letter writing to Santa, holiday music and games. The family-friendly activities include visits with holiday favorites like Santa and his elf, as well as a take home ornament for children.

The Wine Train is slated to reopen on December 4, so more information will be [available here](#).

Tickets start at \$40

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SKUNK TRAIN

Magical Christmas Skunk Train, Mendocino County, California

Step back in time for a magical ride through the redwoods on the Skunk Train in Mendocino County. Since 1885, the historic Skunk Train has made its way through old redwood groves, over scenic trestle bridges, through spectacular tunnels, and into the heart of the Noyo River canyon. During November through the end of December, the Skunk Train offers a special celebration on the "Magical Christmas Train," featuring reindeer games, Christmas sing-alongs, and a special visit from Santa. Riders are even welcome to bring their pets to join in on the holiday cheer.

Tickets start at \$50

[Book Now](#)

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BRUCE LEIGHTY

Chicago Transit Holiday Trains, Chicago, Illinois

The [Allstate CTA Holiday Train](#) is a holiday tradition unique to Chicago, which, due to popular demand, is now accompanied by the Elves' Workshop Train. Two trains provide twice the amount of fun and festivities to make the holiday extra special.

These deliver holiday spirit to thousands of riders but also food baskets to various charities throughout the city. The train began on the Blue Line in 1992 when a "Seasons Greetings from the CTA" sign was placed in front of an out-of-service train. Over the years, the holiday tradition has

evolved so that, today, the CTA Holiday train is wrapped with seasonal images and twinkling lights. As the train pulls into each station, Santa waves to the boarding riders from his sleigh on top of an open-air flatcar carrying reindeer and decorated holiday trees, while elves greet riders with candy canes. The train will generally travel all L lines in late November and December as part of regular rail service (Normal CTA fares apply).

Standard CTA tickets used

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AMAZON PRIME

Polar Express Train, Great Smoky Mountain Railroad, North Carolina

This 75-minute sojourn leaves from Bryson City and, soundtracked by the music of *Polar Express* composer Alan Silvestri, takes passengers on a ride through the wintery wilderness. Santa Claus himself makes an appearance, and provides each kid on board with a silver sleigh bell (as in the story). During the year, over 90,000 people typically ride the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad Polar Express Train, though capacity is quite likely to change due to COVID-19. Still, those who decide to take the ride will be rewarded with hot cocoa and caroling.

Tickets start at \$42

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GETTY IMAGES

Train to Christmas Town, Mount Hood, Oregon

For a tweak on the *Polar Express* formula, riders can book a trip on [The Train to Christmas Town](#), itself based on the children's book of the same name by Peggy Ellis and Jeffrey Lee. With original music, elves, cute polar bears, and so much more, this train is sure to surprise and delight children. The Mount Hood Railroad, which reopens on August 21, offers one of the premiere iterations of *Train to Christmas Town*. In just 90 minutes, you'll find yourself and your family filled with Christmas spirit.

Tickets TBA

Book Now

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Santa's Steam Train Ride, New Hope, Pennsylvania

This hour-long roundtrip from New Hope to Lahaska is a perfect day trip for families on the East Coast or in the Atlantic region. The ride includes fresh cookies, holiday music played live, and the opportunity for children to drop their letters to Santa off at the postbox directly. It's capped by a walk through New Hope, where riders will meet Saint Nick himself and see his elves hard at work on this year's batch of toys.

Tickets start at \$59.99

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PHOTO FROM BLUE RIDGE SCENIC RAILWAY WEBSITE.

Blue Ridge Scenic Railway, Blue Ridge, Georgia

COVID-19 has changed the rules for the Blue Ridge Scenic Railway Christmas ride, but it's still taking place. This year, Santa and Mrs. Claus won't be roaming the physical train, but will be available for photographs and brief visits. Young riders will be given sleigh bells and candy canes, as per tradition.

Rides start the day after Thanksgiving and run through December 23.

Tickets start at \$35

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PHOTO FROM BLUE GRASS RAILWAY MUSEUM'S TWITTER.

Santa Claus Trains, Versailles, Kentucky

Kentucky's Bluegrass Scenic Railroad and Museum runs a handful of Christmas train rides from late November to mid-December with an assist from the local fire department. The Santa component is tweaked for safety purposes, but he'll still be walking the aisles of the train and chatting with children, albeit clad in mask and gloves. While you wait, enjoy a 90-minute ride around the countryside and caroling.

Tickets start at \$17

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PORTLAND PRESS HERALD / GETTY IMAGES

The Holiday Express, Portland, Maine

Maine's Narrow Gauge Railroad Co. & Museum is behind this popular Christmas train ride, which drew more than 19,000 passengers last year. The station itself is decked out in Christmas lights, and festive music is pumped throughout the train as riders get a glimpse of Santa at work. The Holiday Express train is a crucial fundraiser for the museum itself, as it is fully volunteer staffed.

Tickets start at \$30

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PHOTO FROM TEXAS STATE RAILROAD WEBSITE.

The Polar Express, Palestine, Texas

Departing from the historic Palestine Depot, this iteration of the Polar Express ride brings the best bits from the Chris Van Allsburg book and its film adaptation to life. A live reading is staged on board, hot chocolate and cookies are served, and Santa greets passengers aboard the train.

Tickets start at \$95

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PHOTO BY CASEY THOMASON

Candy Cane Express, Cordele, Georgia

The Candy Cane Express takes riders on a scenic journey through the vast farms of southern Georgia, also stopping at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site Museum. Act fast to secure a ticket, as there are only three trains departing from Georgia Veterans State Park on December 4, 5, and 12.

Tickets start at \$39.99

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PHOTO FROM HOCKING VALLEY SCENIC RAILWAY'S FACEBOOK.

Santa Train, Nelsonville, OH

The Hocking Valley Scenic Railway's Santa Train has been chugging along for three decades, beginning in late November and running just up until Christmas itself. Santa makes an appearance, Christmas music is played on repeat, and the frosty area is very often blanketed in snow.

Tickets start at \$21

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PHOTO FROM BOONE & SCENIC VALLEY RAILROAD WEBSITE.

Santa Express, Boone, Iowa

This Iowa ride is rich in history, and the story of the Santa Express is told during the ride. There's even a children's book, written and illustrated by Misty McNally, that tells the story of Santa riding the train in Boone that you can purchase alongside your tickets.

Tickets start at \$20

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PHOTO FROM JOURNEY TO THE NORTH POLE'S WEBSITE.

Journey to the North Pole, North Conway and Lincoln, New Hampshire

Departing from two locations in snowy New Hampshire, Journey to the North Pole is a two-hour ride through the state's (hopefully snowcapped) White Mountains. Young riders can chat with holiday elves, drop off their Santa letters, and hear an inspired reading of "The Night Before Christmas."

Tickets start at \$48

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PHOTO FROM THE COOPERSVILLE & MARNE RAILWAY'S WEBSITE

Santa Train, Coopersville, Michigan

You can ride with Santa (and a storytelling princess) on this 90-minute roundtrip from Coopersville to Marne, Michigan. Each Polar Express train car is adorned with holiday decorations, and elves will accompany riders on the journey. The Coopersville & Marne Railway is known for its holiday rides, including The Famous Pumpkin Train and the Bunny Train, too.

Tickets start at \$25

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PHOTO FROM CAPE COD CENTRAL RAILROAD WEBSITE

The Polar Express, Hyannis and Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts

On this 60 - 90 minute ride, golden tickets are dispensed, cookies are munched (and sealed in individually wrapped containers), and carols will be sung. Actors in character (and face masks) mill about each train car and keep riders entertained throughout the journey.

Tickets start at \$39

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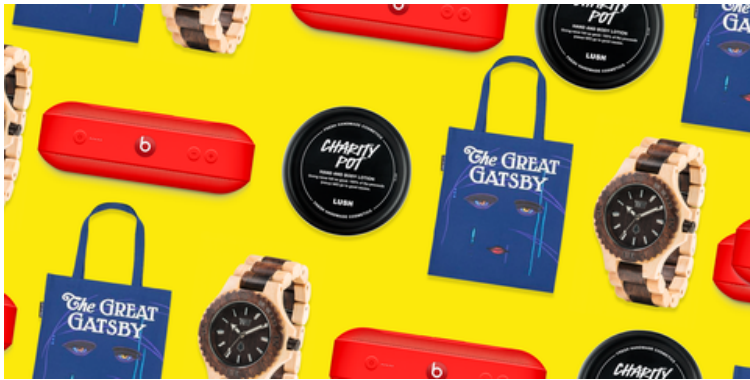


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