

RALEIGH, N.C. — New events at Carowinds and Tweetsie amusement parks will add more than 5 million lights to the brilliant displays from the mountains to the coast of [North Carolina](#). Between Thanksgiving and early January, travelers can find revved-up spectacles, soul-stirring experiences and enchanting authenticity under winter's clear skies.

"The holidays in North Carolina are hard to resist," said Wit Tuttell, executive director of Visit North Carolina. "We have a 535 million-year-old chimney where Santa works out. The perfect Christmas tree — the Fraser fir — grows on our mountainsides. North Carolina is home to America's grandest holiday house, the Moravian sugar cookie capital, and an antebellum Jonkonnu tradition. That's a lot of magic."

At Carowinds in Charlotte, [WinterFest](#) strikes lively notes with live shows and strolling performers plus a 70-foot tree and lavish displays. Eighteen rides, hands-on activities and a holiday menu sweeten the festival which runs Nov. 24-Dec. 30.

Tweetsie, the Wild West theme park in Blowing Rock, decks the mountainside in holiday lights for the inaugural [Tweetsie Christmas](#), running weekends from Nov. 24 to Dec. 30. Engine No. 12, the vintage steam locomotive known as Tweetsie, delivers Santa to his workshop before boarding passengers for a ride along a decorated route. Activities in the village further fill the evening.

In the season of making lists, the holiday highlights below create a starting point for a holiday trip. From there, [VisitNC.com](#) fills in details about lodging, dining, attractions and events with easy-to-use filters to refine the search. [Travel deals](#) can lighten the load, and a [Celebrate History and the Holidays](#) sweepstakes will reward a lucky winner with a two-night stay in Winston-Salem.

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- [USS North Carolina](#), Wilmington, Nov. 25: Aboard the most decorated battleship of World War II, visitors can fly an American flag with Santa, type a wish list on USS North Carolina radio message paper, and call the North Pole from the radio room.
 - [Chimney Rock Park](#), Dec. 2 and 9: How could Santa resist a 315-foot granite monolith shaped like a chimney? As he has done for more than two decades, the man in red will warm up for his Christmas Eve chimney-thon by rappelling down this iconic natural landmark.
 - [Sylvan Heights Bird Park](#), Dec. 2, Scotland Neck: The park, home to the world's largest collection of waterfowl, hosts Breakfast With Santa, featuring holiday activities and a photo op.

Nov. 3-Jan. 7, Asheville

America's largest home has a larger-than-life tradition that involves 55 decorated Christmas trees inside the 250-room mansion. The trees reach a crescendo with a 35-foot Fraser fir in the seven-story-high Banquet Hall. Out front, a lighted 55-foot-tall Norway spruce is encircled by 20 illuminated evergreens, and 35 additional trees are decorated at Biltmore Winery, Antler Hill Village, restaurants and other points on the 8,000-acre estate. New this year: At the winery, 7,000 globe-shaped ornaments hang from the ceiling to create the feeling of being inside a bottle of sparkling wine. Through Jan. 6, visitors can catch the glow in a candlelight tour of Biltmore House.

Dec. 1-26, McAdenville

In this mill town west of Charlotte, the 375 Christmas trees on view outnumber the households in a celebration that started in 1956 with nine evergreens. From modest (6-foot tree, 500 lights) to dazzling (90-foot-tree, 5,000 lights), the displays blaze a trail to the heart of town, where trees ring the lake and reflect their colors. With a car count in the hundreds of thousands on the 1.3-mile route, be prepared to relax and enjoy a very slow ride, especially on weekends — or cover the route by foot.

Nov. 14-Dec. 31, Winston-Salem

Winston-Salem acquired elements of its rich culture from the Moravians who settled there in the 18th century, and their holiday traditions make Old Salem Museum and Gardens an ideal place for distilling the holiday spirit. Visitors can create special memories on [candlelight tours](#), hear holiday music or attend the [Moravian Candle Tea](#), presented by the Home Moravian Church. Stop by Winkler Bakery for fresh-baked scents from the wood-fired oven and shelves stocked with [sugar cookies](#), American Heritage Chocolate and other treats.

Nov. 19-Dec. 31, Concord

Whether you come with visions of sugar plums or the fantasy of passing Jimmie Johnson on the straightaway, Charlotte Motor Speedway's holiday spectacle delivers a winning experience. Three million lights pulse in synchronized displays along a 3.75-mile course that takes you onto the quad oval. The best time to go is Thursday-Saturday or Christmas week, when you can visit a Bethlehem Village, petting zoo and Santa in the Speedway Christmas Village. Complete your plans with dinner at the [Speedway Club](#) (open to all for the run of the show) and a photo op at the new scenic overlook above Turn 4.

Nov. 26-Jan. 4, Asheville

Sugar and spices lay the foundation for the competition at the Omni Grove Park Inn, and craftsmanship sets it apart. Arrayed in a Blue Ridge Mountain inn with marvels of its own, the edible architecture attracts tens of thousands of visitors. Even without the gingerbread, the inn's roaring fires, splendid décor and music raise holiday spirits.

Nov. 24-Dec. 26, various locations

Wrightsville Beach launches the holiday season Nov. 24-25 with the [North Carolina Holiday Flotilla](#), an extravagant boat parade on the Intracoastal Waterway. About two dozen boats, from personal watercrafts to yachts, channel their owners' creativity into delightful light displays against the night sky. The weekend includes a Friday night party, an all-day festival Saturday and then the main event followed by fireworks. Other holiday boat parades and displays include:

- [Swansboro Christmas Flotilla](#), Nov. 24 on the White Oak River.
 - [Ocean Isle Beach Flotilla](#), Nov. 25, Shallotte Point to the Ocean Isle Beach Bridge.
 - [Lighted Boat Parade](#), Nov. 25, Ocracoke.
 - [Christmas on the Sound](#), Dec. 1, Edenton Bay.
 - [Lighted Boat Parade](#), Dec. 1, Elizabeth City.
 - [Crystal Coast Holiday Flotilla](#), Dec. 2, Morehead City to Beaufort.
 - [Pleasure Island Christmas Flotilla](#), Dec. 2, Carolina Beach Boat Basin.
 - [Keelboat Christmas Flotilla & Lights Parade](#), Dec. 2, Lake Norman Yacht Club, Mooresville.
 - [Southport Christmas Flotilla](#), Dec. 9 on the Cape Fear River.
 - [Harbor Walk of Lights](#), Dec. 2-26, Washington. This flotilla alternative features more than 50 decorated boats docked in downtown marinas on the Pamlico River.
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Through Jan. 1, Bryson City and Spencer

Bedtime stories are best heard by people in pajamas, and that's the preferred attire for those boarding "The Polar Express," a train ride set to the soundtrack for the 2004 adaptation of Van Allsburg's modern classic. North Carolina's licensed expeditions ([Great Smoky Mountains Railroad](#) in Bryson City, Nov. 10-Dec. 31; and the [North Carolina Transportation Museum](#) in Spencer, Nov. 17-Dec. 22) have all the right details, including cocoa, cookies and a gift from Santa.

Nov. 17-Jan. 1, Clemmons

This holiday classic at Tanglewood Park features a 5-mile route with more than 100 displays in a picture-perfect woodland setting. In addition to well-rounded activities — including hayrides, horse-drawn carriage rides and an eco-minded gift shop — travelers can consider booking a room at the [Manor House Bed & Breakfast](#) at the park or [RV camping](#) (until Dec. 2).

Dec. 9 and 16, New Bern

Time travel across three centuries at the Tryon Palace complex, where historic figures return to life in holiday vignettes. Scenes unfold at the main palace and other homes as well as on the grounds, where fire eaters, sword swallows and acrobats perform. And the Tryon Palace [Jonkonnu Troupe](#) re-enacts a Christmastide tradition with roots traced back to Jamaica and the slave ships from West Africa. During a respite from their daily toils, revelers in masks and colorful clothing would spread merriment in a parade from house to house.

Nov. 17-Jan. 20, various locations

Spring bulbs, summer annuals and fall mums pale beside the brilliance of lighted displays at North Carolina's public gardens. At [Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden](#) in Belmont, Holidays at the Garden (Nov. 17-Dec. 31) features a must-see tree made of 300 orchids plus one-of-a-kind train displays. In Asheville, Winter Lights (Nov. 17-Dec. 31) returns to the [North Carolina Arboretum](#) with animated displays and activities to the 3-acre walking tour. Wilmington's [Airlie Gardens](#), often glimpsed in movies and TV shows, lights up with Enchanted Airlie (Nov. 24-Dec. 22). [Elizabethan Gardens](#) in Manteo laces traditional and fantastical displays into the gardens' stunning architecture for WinterLights (Nov. 25-Jan. 20). And [Cape Fear Botanical Garden](#) in Fayetteville synchronizes music with lights that shimmer over the Cypress Pond during Holiday Lights in the Garden (Dec. 8-30).

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