

BANNER ELK, N.C. – As the Christmas season arrives, Banner Elk gets in the holiday spirit the first weekend of December with A Small Town Christmas, Dec. 1-3.

The three-day event takes place throughout town, beginning with a classic holiday play on Friday; continuing with a full day of crafts, shopping and a parade on Saturday; and concluding with a visit to an Avery County choose-and-cut Christmas tree farm on Sunday.

Choose-and-cut lodging packages are available, which include one night's lodging, a full breakfast, a Banner Elk Cafe coupon and a Christmas tree voucher from Elk River Evergreens.

A new offering this year is a Friday night performance of "A Christmas Carol" by Ensemble Stage at the Historic Banner Elk School. The professional theater company relocated to Banner Elk earlier this year. A second performance will take place at 2 p.m. on Sunday.

"Ensemble Stage has provided us so much to look forward to," says Jo-Ann McMurray of the Banner Elk Chamber. "They have added to this town, and we're thrilled that they're here."

Festivities begin early on Saturday with the Reindeer Run 5K at 8:30 a.m. sponsored by the local YMCA. Breakfast with Santa follows at Dunn's Deli. Activities throughout the day include story time with Santa at the Book Exchange and a candy cane hunt in Tate-Evans Park. Several downtown businesses offer ornament and cookie decorating and other crafts.

At 6 p.m. on Saturday, the parade of lights makes its way down Main Street, ending in Tate-Evans Park where there will be a tree lighting, mini-train rides through the lights and luminaries, Christmas music and visits with Santa.

"Banner Elk at Christmas is like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting," says Nancy Owen with the Town of Banner Elk. "All the local businesses and residents get involved."

Throughout the weekend, Apple Hill Farm, about 15 minutes from downtown, hosts tours of the working alpaca farm. After meeting the animals, visitors shop the farm store for scarves, blankets and other locally made items.

Sunday is reserved for that special tradition of visiting one of the many tree farms in Avery County, picking out just the right Christmas tree, cutting it down and hauling it home.

For more information about A Small Town Christmas, including details about the choose-and-cut lodging packages, visit www.BannerElk.com or call (828) 898-8395.

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