

Enjoy the Holidays in Missouri

Written by Mary Oberreither
Monday, 18 November 2013 14:41

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Independence, Mo. – If you thought getting your home ready for the holidays was time consuming, imagine decorating more than 20 rooms in anticipation of 2,000 guests.

That's the challenge facing a group of nearly 30 volunteers working up to nine hours a day preparing Vaile Mansion in Independence for its annual holiday celebration. The beautiful landmark home will have more than its halls decked from Nov. 29-Dec. 30, when it hosts a "[Victorian Winter Wonderland](#)".

“These volunteers spend hours and hours getting the mansion ready,” says Carolyn Hanes, chairperson of this year's holiday event and herself a volunteer decorator. “Even the smallest tree can take up to two hours to decorate.”

Multiply that time by anywhere from 50 to 75 trees and you get some idea of how much effort volunteers and Vaile Mansion staff put into this event.

And that's just for the trees.

Vaile Mansion, built in 1881 for Col. and Mrs. Harvey Vaile, features 31 rooms and includes nine marble fireplaces, painted ceilings and a 48,000-gallon wine cellar. The home, known as one of the best examples of Second Empire architecture in the U.S., cost more than \$100,000 to complete. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

During the holidays, the mansion retains its Victorian charm by ensuring era-appropriate

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traditions are honored. One such example is a five-foot-tall Christmas tree hung upside down to replicate the look of a chandelier; it's found in the grand entryway.

"That's original Victorian – that's how they used it," says Hanes. "It's kind of our showpiece every year."

That showpiece, along with the attention to detail given every section of the mansion, keeps visitors coming back year after year, Hanes says.

"I think people are just blown away by the chandeliers, marble fireplaces and the 14-foot ceilings," Hanes says. "We're able to have 12-foot-tall trees in a room, and the rooms are very spacious. It's so opulent ... every room is filled to the brim."

Hanes says event organizers like to refer to Vaile Mansion as "America's Christmas Castle," though she points out people from around the world have taken notice of the annual event. In 2012, visitors from 20 countries were represented in the guestbook.

One of the major highlights of the month-long event is the annual twilight tour, held the first Sunday in December (Dec. 1 this year). The twilight tours include live music and refreshments for attendees.

"It's getting dark (when tours begin) and everything is sparkling inside," says Hanes. "A lot of people enjoy coming in the evening because you get to see what the mansion looks like 'after hours.'"

Victorian Winter Wonderland tours at Vaile Mansion are 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday thru Saturday, and 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, from Nov. 29 to Dec. 30 (no tours Dec. 23-25). Admission is \$6 for adults; \$3 for ages 6-18; and free for children ages 5 and younger.

The twilight tours event is 4 p.m.-7 p.m. Dec. 1; admission prices are the same.

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Vaile Mansion is located at 1500 N. Liberty St. in Independence. Call [816-325-7430](tel:816-325-7430) or visit VaileMansion.org for more details.

Across the state from Vaile Mansion, the city of St. Charles hosts one of Missouri's most popular celebrations, [Christmas Traditions](#) .

From Nov. 29-Dec. 24, Main Street, in the downtown historic district, comes to life with music and costumed actors portraying beloved holiday characters. Don't miss appearances by Santas from around the world, shopping and dining options along Main Street and the beautiful decorations adorning the entire district.

Every Saturday and Sunday during the festival, Santa and Mrs. Claus lead a parade (each begins at 1:30 p.m.), while Wednesdays and Fridays bring late-evening shopping options.

Carolers, along with a local fife and drum corps, take part in live performances presented during the annual Christmas Traditions festival, where horse-drawn carriage rides are available.

Find details and the full schedule of activities online at StCharlesChristmas.com .

Throughout Missouri, seasonal celebrations take place in large cities and small towns, offering visitors an array of choices, from parades and drive-through light parks to live music and regional cuisine. Here's a look at more Missouri celebrations designed to get you in the mood for this splendid season.

For other holiday happenings, check out the [Missouri Division of Tourism's blog](#) , which has a more complete listing of events.

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- In St. Joseph, Krug Park (3500 St. Joseph Ave.) and Hyde Park (8th Street and Hyde Park Ave.), along the city's famed Parkway, become [Holiday Park and the South Pole](#) from Nov. 29-Jan. 1, 2014. A tradition since 1981, the scenic holiday drive features a dazzling display of lighted arches, trees, winter scenes and the Italianate buildings of Krug Park.

- Kansas City's Country Club Plaza – a 15-block retail, dining and entertainment district – hosts one of the most well-known lighting celebrations in the Midwest. Thousands of revelers join in the festival-like atmosphere on the opening night of [Plaza Lights](#). Live music and fireworks are part of the fun from 5 p.m.-8 p.m. Thanksgiving night; the official flip of the switch is 6:53 p.m. The lights shine through Jan. 12, 2014.

- In St. Louis, [Holiday Magic](#) fills the America's Center (701 Convention Plaza) Nov. 29-Dec. 1, offering entertainment and shopping. Carnival rides, a vendors' district and hands-on arts and crafts projects for kids are part of the excitement. Holiday Magic is 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday.

- Holidays of yesterday are the focus of events at the [Old Courthouse in downtown St. Louis](#). Each Saturday leading up to Christmas, the Old Courthouse shows what holidays were like: relive Christmas 1763 at the Dec. 7 event (noon-4 p.m.); move forward to 1813 at the Dec. 14 happening (noon-4 p.m.); and get a glimpse of 1863 St. Louis from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. on Dec. 21.

- Get a taste of German heritage at the [Kristkindl Markt](#), Dec. 7-8, at Stone Hill Winery in Hermann. This traditional German market features crafts, food, entertainment, hot soups and mulled wine. Saturday's event is 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday's is 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Stone Hill Winery is located at 1110 Stone Hill Highway; admission is free. A similar event takes place 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Dec. 14 and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 15 at the Hermannhof Festhalle, 237 E. First St. The Festhalle event includes an open-air Hofgarten, a full menu at the Mill and live entertainment.

- In the Lake of the Ozarks area, holiday activities abound in a variety of cities. Linn Creek, for example, hosts the [Holiday Market](#) at the Camden County Museum from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on Nov. 22-23. The market includes vendors selling a variety of holiday-themed goods (get your Christmas shopping done!); the museum is located at 206 S. Locust St.

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- Elsewhere near the Lake, popular drive-through light parks are found in Laurie and Versailles. In Laurie, [St. Patrick's Festival of Lights](#) is billed as the area's oldest light park, dating to 1981. The festival includes 4,000 strings of lights and focuses on Jesus and his mother, Mary. The Shrine is located at 176 Marian Drive; there is no admission charge. In Versailles, the [Unity Circle of Lights](#) runs from Nov. 28-Jan. 1, 2014, in Versailles City Park. The park features up to 40 lighted displays, including several animated holiday scenes. The park is open from sunset until midnight daily; there is no admission charge. The park is located at the junction of Highway 5 and Highway 52.

- In Springfield, enjoy the opportunity to shop and hear live music at the 19th annual [WinterFest Visual and Performing Arts Festival](#). Held at the Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts (525 S. John Q. Hammons Parkway) this event features live music, local and regional artists whose works are on display and for sale, and a Broadway touring company's production of Disney's "Beauty and the Beast." Tickets for that show should be purchased in advance. Activities are 5 p.m.-10 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday.

- Carthage is home to [Mt. Moriah Lights](#) at Mt. Moriah Park. Enjoy more than 50,000 lights programmed to six different Christmas songs. The park is located at 15506 Nutmeg Road; hours are 5:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Friday-Sunday from Nov. 29-Dec. 8. From Dec. 13-Dec. 29, park hours are 5:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. daily (except for Dec. 22).

- Silver Dollar City in Branson hosts one of the largest holiday celebrations in the country, "[An Old Time Christmas](#)," running through Dec. 30. This annual celebration features more than 5 million lights, 1,000 decorated Christmas trees, a holiday light parade, two live shows and a five-story-tall special effects Christmas tree. Regular rides and attractions are open, weather permitting. Food and shopping add to the experience. Hours are 1 p.m.-9 p.m. Thursday-Friday, noon-9:30 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m.-9 p.m. Sunday.

- The [Holiday Christmas Festival in Ste. Genevieve](#) features a Christmas parade, carriage rides, more than 30 free music programs, carolers strolling the streets of the historic city and shopping specials in retailers and art galleries downtown. Activities are Dec. 7-8.

- In Salem, a unique holiday experience awaits at the [Trains and Trees](#) exhibit from Nov.

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26-Dec. 24 at the Ozark Natural and Cultural Resource Center (202 S. Main St.). The exhibit features an array of colorful, lighted trees decorated by individuals, businesses and organizations. The exhibit is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Saturday. Hours are 1 p.m.-5 p.m. on Dec. 22 and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

- You don't have to wait for Black Friday to find great gift ideas at the [Christmas Arts and Crafts Extravaganza](#) in Cape Girardeau, Nov. 22-23. In its 43rd year, the event features artisans and crafters from across the Midwest; their wares will fill nearly 300 booths. An event so large, it takes two venues: the Osage Centre (1625 N. Kingshighway) and Show-Me Center (1333 N. Sprigg St.). The Extravaganza is one of three arts and crafts festivals happening in Cape Girardeau over this weekend. For more details, check out [VisitCape.com](#).

There you have it, a look at some of the events found in Missouri during the holiday season. Again, to find a more complete list, please visit the [Missouri Division of Tourism's blog site](#).

About the Missouri Division of Tourism

The Missouri Division of Tourism (MDT) is the official tourism office for the state of Missouri dedicated to marketing Missouri as a premier travel destination. Established in 1967, the Missouri Division of Tourism has worked hard to develop the tourism industry in Missouri to what it is today, an \$11 billion industry supporting more than 281,000 jobs. For more information on Missouri tourism, go to <http://www.VisitMO.com>.

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