

# Branson During the Holidays: Something for Everyone

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Branson during the holidays doesn't disappoint.

We may not be able or willing to travel far this holiday season, but that doesn't mean we can't celebrate in style. Branson, a Missouri Ozarks town surrounded by lakes and wooded hills, transforms into a winter wonderland from early November through Christmas.

More than 1,500 decorated trees, drive-through lighting displays, a Polar Express, skating rinks, and special Christmas shows brighten the season. And that's just for starters.

A popular destination for families, multi-generational reunions, girlfriend getaways, and romantic weekends, Branson offers an astounding variety of things to do and see no matter what time of year. What's more, it's within a day's drive of one-third the U.S. population.

Getting people to actually visit, however, can be another matter. I've been covering Branson for various publications and websites for the past 30-some years. That's long enough to know that while this town of fewer than 13,000 residents has diehard fans, it also has its

detractors. Those with dim memories from long ago describe it as a hick town for country music. Others dismiss it as a “mini Las Vegas.” The truth is, Branson has changed tremendously over the years. It truly does offer something for everyone.

“I did a one-hundred-and-eighty on Branson,” confided one friend just last week. “I thought I was allergic and I thought it was all country, but now I’ve been two or three times, and it’s a blast. All you have to do is open your mind. There’s so much to do.”

## Why Branson is a blast during the holiday season

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The Track Family Fun Park

Love music and live entertainment? Branson offers 100 different shows performed in 40 theaters. While you can still hear country music, Branson’s lineup includes gospel, classical music, and hits from the ‘50s, as well as variety and dinner shows. You’ll also find Broadway productions, illusionist acts, comedy, and acrobatics.

Are museums your thing? You’ll find museums dedicated to toys, the history of fishing, vintage cars and trucks, the Titanic, dinosaurs, veterans, and more. Animal lovers may visit an aquarium, a butterfly palace, and refuges for animal rescues.



If you're into adventure, try careening down hills in roller coasters, flying among trees on various ziplines, or testing your skill on climbing walls for all levels. Choose from miniature golf, real golf, go-kart tracks, game arcades, fishing, boating (and marinas with rentals), and even a public sandy beach. Shopping options range from outlet and craft stores to antique and specialty shops. Whenever I'm in town, I can't resist dropping by College of the Ozarks for its fruitcake made by students, who work instead of paying tuition.

You can be in the thick of it on 76 Country Boulevard, home to most of Branson's attractions, shows, motels, and restaurants. Or, you can see how it all began in historic Downtown Branson. But you can also get away from it all, on more than 80 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails and at nature reserves, state parks, and, most notably, Mark Twain National Forest.

Still not convinced? Spend time at these two standouts, and then tell me what you think.

## Silver Dollar City

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Silver Dollar City

I like to describe Silver Dollar City as a theme park for people who hate theme parks, it's that well done.

The setting is as good as it gets, smack dab in the wooded hills of the Missouri Ozarks, with spring's blossoming dogwoods and autumn's colorful leaves a bonus. The whole park is a recreation of an 1880s Ozarks town. Staff dress in period costumes, craftsmen demonstrate their skills, specialty shops sell crafts and accessories. In addition, there are live shows and more than 40 rides and attractions. It even has a natural cave, the site's original attraction and a tourist destination since the 19th century.

But during the Christmas season, Silver Dollar City is absolutely magical. It literally lights up the sky with its 6.5 million lights that outline many buildings, as well as structures and figures created just for the occasion. Walking among them is like being inside a 3D kaleidoscope.

Nightly parades feature Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and his cohorts, the Frisco Silver Dollar Sing-Along Steam Train, live shows just for the holidays. Most impressive of all: A custom-designed, 80-foot tree flashes a mesmerizing display of fleeting lights and high-tech animated imagery synced to music. I'm a word person, yet even I can't come up with the right ones to describe how remarkable this tree is.

If you see only one attraction in Branson, especially during the holidays, Silver Dollar City should be it. Everything else pales in comparison.

## **Big Cedar Lodge and nearby attractions**

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Simply put, [Big Cedar Lodge](#) is a first-class act.

Commanding more than 4,600 acres of rugged Ozarks countryside on Table Rock Lake, Big Cedar Lodge is a wilderness resort offering grand lodges, cottages, log cabins for families of all sizes and even glamping. Guest facilities and amenities include a spa, miniature golf course, pickleball courts, board games, paddle boats, boat rentals, swimming pools, a sandy beach, a lazy river, fitness center, and sand volleyball. Seasonal activities like family campfires and visits from Santa's elves are another draw.

But you don't have to stay here to enjoy all the area attractions associated with Big Cedar Lodge.

## **Fun Mountain**

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Nearby is Fun Mountain, a family entertainment center with bumper cars, bowling, laser tag, climbing walls, and other things to do.





Lost Canyon Cave Trail

## Top of the Rock

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Top of the Rock offers the highest elevation in the county. But that's not the only reason to visit.

The most inviting golf course you're ever likely to see, The **Top of the Rock Golf Course**, a **Jack Nicklaus Signature Course**, makes me wish I played. For a jaw-dropping panorama of the Ozarks and Table Rock Lake, dine at **Osage Restaurant**.

The **Lost Canyon Cave Trail** is the ultimate adult entertainment. Drive your own electric cart past stunning rock formations and waterfalls, over Amish bridges, and into a cave, complete with—get this—a drive-up bar. And, **The Ancient Ozarks Natural History Museum** shows an impressive collection of items relating to the natural history of the Ozarks, Native American art, and Western Art.

## Dogwood Canyon Nature Park

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Farther afield is Dogwood Canyon Nature Park, a slice of Ozarks paradise with spring-fed streams, waterfalls, and a private wildlife refuge. In case you didn't know, Johnny Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops, is the big name behind Big Cedar Lodge, so it's probably not surprising that all these attractions display the same craftsmanship and rustic flair as his shops and lodge.

If all this isn't enough to make skeptics reconsider what they think they know about Branson, my answer to them is "Bah humbug!"

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## READ MORE

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On *USA Today 10 Best*: Learn more about Branson during the Christmas season from Beth Reiber's article, [10 Reasons Why Branson Is Worth A Visit During the Holiday Season](#).

On Getting on Travel: Looking for a holiday getaway on the East Coast? Read [Rose Palmer's story about the Brandywine Valley](#).

| [A Perfect Long Holiday Weekend in the Brandywine Valley](#)

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## What's appealing to the over-50 luxury traveler?

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Branson is within a day's drive of one-third of the U.S. population, with St. Louis, Kansas City, and Tulsa less than a four-hour drive

There are morning, afternoon and early evening live shows

Although traffic can be heavy on 76 Country Boulevard, numerous color-coded relief roads get you quickly to your destination

There are many attractions geared toward adults (there's even a half-mile zipline with a seat), as well as many opportunities for shopping

Branson is especially welcoming to veterans, including a Veterans Homecoming Week in early November, patriotic tributes at live shows, memorials, and the Veterans Memorial Museum

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## Take note

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You'll need your own car in Branson, but parking is mostly complimentary and there's a free trolley that runs through downtown to Branson Landing shopping center

Book accommodations early for the Christmas season

Some accommodations require a minimum stay during peak season and on weekends

## COVID-19 Update

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Read about Branson's COVID-19 policies at the [Branson/Lakes Area Convention & Visitors Bureau website](#).

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**Disclosure:** The author's visit to Branson during the holidays was hosted by the Branson/Lakes Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

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*All photo credits: Beth Reiber*

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## IF YOU GO

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For more on Branson, visit [ExploreBranson.com](#).

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