THE 2026 HOLIDAY SEASON

Middle Tennessee's

Book-Early *Holiday Guide*

The holiday events that sell out every year,
and exactly when to book them.

SUMNER COUNTY · NASHVILLE · WITHIN 2 HOURS

Kindred Roots
at The Frame Group

615-852-6689

✦ A NOTE BEFORE YOU BOOK

The best nights of the season are *spoken for early*

One of our first Christmases here, we spent Christmas Day downtown with the kids up on the rooftops in t-shirts. Other years it's been 30 degrees and my whole family is freezing.

Tennessee weather keeps you guessing in December. What doesn't change is this: the holiday events everyone talks about sell out, and most of them go on sale long before Thanksgiving. The train rides, the Nutcracker, the Christmas shows at the Ryman, the candlelight tours. By the time the tree is up, a lot of them are gone.

So I did the homework. This guide covers the ticketed holiday events in Sumner County, Nashville, and anywhere within about two hours of Hendersonville, sorted by how quickly they go. If you're new to Middle Tennessee, or thinking about moving here, it's an easy way to start some traditions of your own.

✦ HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

- SELLING FAST — History of selling out, or limited seats. Book this week.
- BOOK NOW — On sale now. Buy ahead for the dates you want most.
- OPENS SOON — 2026 tickets not posted yet. Set a reminder for early November.
- FREE — No tickets needed. Just show up.

8	7	3	2 hr
SELLING FAST BOOK THIS WEEK	ON SALE NOW BUY AHEAD	OPENING IN NOVEMBER	FARTHEST DRIVE FROM HENDERSONVILLE

Drive times are from downtown Hendersonville. Dates and prices were checked in late October 2026 against each organizer's own website. Plans and availability change, so confirm before you buy.

Carissa

CARISSA TRENT, REALTOR® · MOM OF FOUR

✦ AT A GLANCE

Your *booking* list

EVENT	DATES	STATUS
Book *this week*		
Amy Grant & Vince Gill at the Ryman Downtown Nashville · 25 min	*Dec 14–23*	SELLING FAST
Breakfast with Santa, The Hermitage Hotel Downtown Nashville · one morning only	*Wed, Dec 23*	SELLING FAST
Santa Express train Tennessee Central Railway Museum · 25 min	*Four Saturdays*	SELLING FAST
North Pole Limited train Chattanooga · about 2 hr	*Nov 13–Dec 23*	SELLING FAST
Nashville's Nutcracker TPAC, Nashville · 25 min	*Nov 27–Dec 27*	SELLING FAST
Cheekwood Holiday LIGHTS Timed entry · 35 min	*Nov 20–Jan 3*	SELLING FAST
Holiday Spirits Lantern Tour Andrew Jackson's Hermitage · 28 per tour	*Dec 7–8, 13–15*	SELLING FAST
Enchanted Garden of Lights Rock City, Lookout Mountain · 2 hr 15 min	*Nov 13–Dec 31*	SELLING FAST
Book *ahead*		
A Country Christmas + ICE! "Home Alone" Gaylord Opryland · 20 min	*Nov 6–Jan 2*	BOOK NOW
Opry Country Christmas Grand Ole Opry House · 20 min	*Nov 30–Dec 22*	BOOK NOW
Glow Wild Nashville Zoo · 30 min	*Nov 13–Jan 3*	BOOK NOW
Nutcracker Tea, The Hermitage Hotel Downtown Nashville	*Nov 27–Jan 3*	BOOK NOW
Nashville Symphony holiday concerts Schermerhorn Symphony Center	*Dec 2–20*	BOOK NOW
Galaxy of Lights Huntsville Botanical Garden · about 2 hr	*Nov 13–Dec 31*	BOOK NOW
Santa Claus Express Kentucky Railway Museum · about 2 hr	*Dec 5–20*	BOOK NOW
Set a *reminder*		
Christmas by Candlelight at Cragfont Castalian Springs, Sumner County · 20 min	*December*	OPENS SOON
Christmas by Candlelight at Wynnewood Castalian Springs, Sumner County · 20 min	*December*	OPENS SOON
Christmas tours at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage Hermitage · 20 min	*Late Nov–Dec*	OPENS SOON

✦ ONE · CLOSE TO HOME

The *lights* worth a ticket

Driving around to look at lights is free. These are the walk-through spectacles, and the good nights go first.

Holiday LIGHTS at Cheekwood

SELLING FAST

NOV 20 – JAN 3 · NASHVILLE, 35 MIN · ADULTS $26–32 · YOUTH $20–26

Cheekwood's gardens and mansion, lit up after dark. Entry is by **timed ticket**, with start times every 30 minutes from 4:30 to 8:30, and once a time sells out it isn't sold at the door or by phone. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. On some Monday-to-Thursday nights there's a cheaper late-night entry at 8:30.

BOOK cheekwood.org

Glow Wild at the Nashville Zoo

BOOK NOW

NOV 13 – JAN 3 · NIGHTLY 5–9 PM · 30 MIN · $27 · UNLIMITED PLATINUM PASS $39 · PARKING $10

The zoo after dark, glowing with light displays, and **Santa is there every night from November 27 to December 24**, included with your ticket. Entry isn't timed, but December weekends get busy and tickets aren't refundable, so pick your night and buy ahead. Children under 2 are free but still need a ticket.

BOOK nashvillezoo.org/glow-wild

A Country Christmas + ICE! "Home Alone"

BOOK NOW

NOV 6 – JAN 2 · GAYLORD OPRYLAND, 20 MIN · PRICES VARY BY DATE

This year's ICE! is themed to *Home Alone*, and the resort fills with lights, a dinner show and character breakfasts. On the busiest dates, **Fridays and Saturdays from November 20, Thanksgiving week, and December 18–31**, the resort is open after 3 PM only to hotel guests and ticket holders. Buy online before you go.

BOOK christmasatgaylordopryland.com

✦ ALSO ON OUR LIST

FrankTown Festival of Lights, a drive-through show at the Williamson County Ag Expo in Franklin, runs Nov 20 – Dec 31, 5–9 PM (45 min). **Lucky Ladd Farms' Holly Jolly Festival of Lights** in Eagleville runs late November to December 23 (1 hr). Both were still posting 2026 ticket details when we checked.

✦ TWO · ON STAGE

Christmas in *Music City*

Amy Grant & Vince Gill: Christmas at the Ryman

SELLING FAST

DEC 14 – 23 · 12 SHOWS · 7:30 PM, PLUS 3 PM MATINEES DEC 19, 20, 22 & 23 · RYMAN AUDITORIUM

A true Nashville tradition, now in its 16th year. If there's one ticket on this page to buy today, it's this one. The matinees are the easiest way to bring the kids.

BOOK ryman.com

Nashville's Nutcracker

SELLING FAST

NOV 27 – DEC 27 · NASHVILLE BALLET AT TPAC · FROM $48

Nashville Ballet's version is set right here in Music City. The ballet says many performances traditionally sell out, and there are 2 PM matinees nearly every weekend, plus shows through Christmas week.

BOOK tpac.org

Opry Country Christmas

BOOK NOW

7 PM · NOV 30 & DEC 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22 · GRAND OLE OPRY HOUSE

The Opry's holiday shows, with guests including the Oak Ridge Boys on December 3 and Ashley McBryde on December 13. The Opry says tickets sell fast.

BOOK opry.com

Nashville Symphony at the Schermerhorn

BOOK NOW

ELF IN CONCERT, DEC 2 · HOME ALONE IN CONCERT, DEC 4–6 · MESSIAH, DEC 18–20

A full orchestra playing the score live while the movie plays on the big screen. *Home Alone* is the family pick, and *Messiah* is a beautiful night out for the grown-ups.

BOOK nashvillesymphony.org

For younger audiences

BOOK NOW

Ken Ludwig's 'Twas the Night Before Christmas at Nashville Children's Theatre, Nov 21 – Dec 27 (nashvillechildrenstheatre.org). **It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play** from Studio Tenn in Franklin, Dec 3 – 20 (studiotenn.com).

✦ THREE · FOR THE KIDS

Santa, tea & *a train ride*

The experiences with the fewest seats, so they go first.

Santa Express

SELLING FAST

SATURDAYS · NOV 28, DEC 5, DEC 12, DEC 19 · TENNESSEE CENTRAL RAILWAY MUSEUM, NASHVILLE · 25 MIN

A 90-minute vintage train ride with Santa on board. Every seat is reserved and **all sales are final**, and the museum says most trips sell out quickly. Children under 2 can ride free on a lap. Children 2 and up need their own seat.

BOOK tcry.org · 615-241-0436

Breakfast with Santa at The Hermitage Hotel

SELLING FAST

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23 ONLY · DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE · RESERVATIONS ON RESY

One morning, in one of Nashville's most beautiful hotels. With a single date, this is the hardest Santa visit on the list to get.

BOOK thehermitagehotel.com

Nutcracker Tea at The Hermitage Hotel

BOOK NOW

SELECT DATES · NOV 27 – JAN 3 · $105 ADULTS · $50 UNDER 10

A dress-up afternoon tea in the hotel's holiday décor. Weekends in December go first. Cancelling within 7 days costs $55 per person, so lock in a date you're sure of.

BOOK thehermitagehotel.com

Nutmeg's Holiday Kitchen Character Breakfast

BOOK NOW

NEW FOR 2026 · GAYLORD OPRYLAND · 20 MIN

A new character breakfast at Gaylord this season. Pair it with ICE! on the same day.

BOOK christmasatgaylordopryland.com

✦ THE EASY SANTA VISIT

If the bookings above are full, **Santa is at Glow Wild every night from November 27 to December 24**, and the visit is included with your zoo ticket.

✦ FOUR · HISTORY BY CANDLELIGHT

Old homes, *lit for the season*

Middle Tennessee's historic homes open their doors at night in December. Group sizes are small, so tickets go quickly.

Christmas by Candlelight at Cragfont

OPENS SOON

DECEMBER · CASTALIAN SPRINGS, SUMNER COUNTY · 20 MIN

This one is in our own backyard. Last year Cragfont held candlelight tours at 6 and 8 PM on two Saturdays in December, and tickets were **extremely limited**. The 2026 dates hadn't posted yet when we checked, so watch the Tennessee Historical Commission's events page in early November.

WATCH tn.gov/historicalcommission

Christmas by Candlelight at Wynnewood

OPENS SOON

DECEMBER · CASTALIAN SPRINGS · 20 MIN

Just down the road from Cragfont, with its own candlelight evening (last year it was December 19). It's a separate ticket, so if you'd like both, book both.

WATCH tn.gov/historicalcommission

Holiday Spirits Lantern Tour

SELLING FAST

DEC 7–8 & 13–15 · 5:30 PM · ANDREW JACKSON'S HERMITAGE · $65 · AGES 12+

A 90-minute lantern-lit walking tour, capped at **28 guests**. Wine is offered to guests 21 and over. It's a great night out for couples.

BOOK thehermitage.com

Christmas Tours at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage

OPENS SOON

LATE NOVEMBER – MID DECEMBER · HERMITAGE · 20 MIN

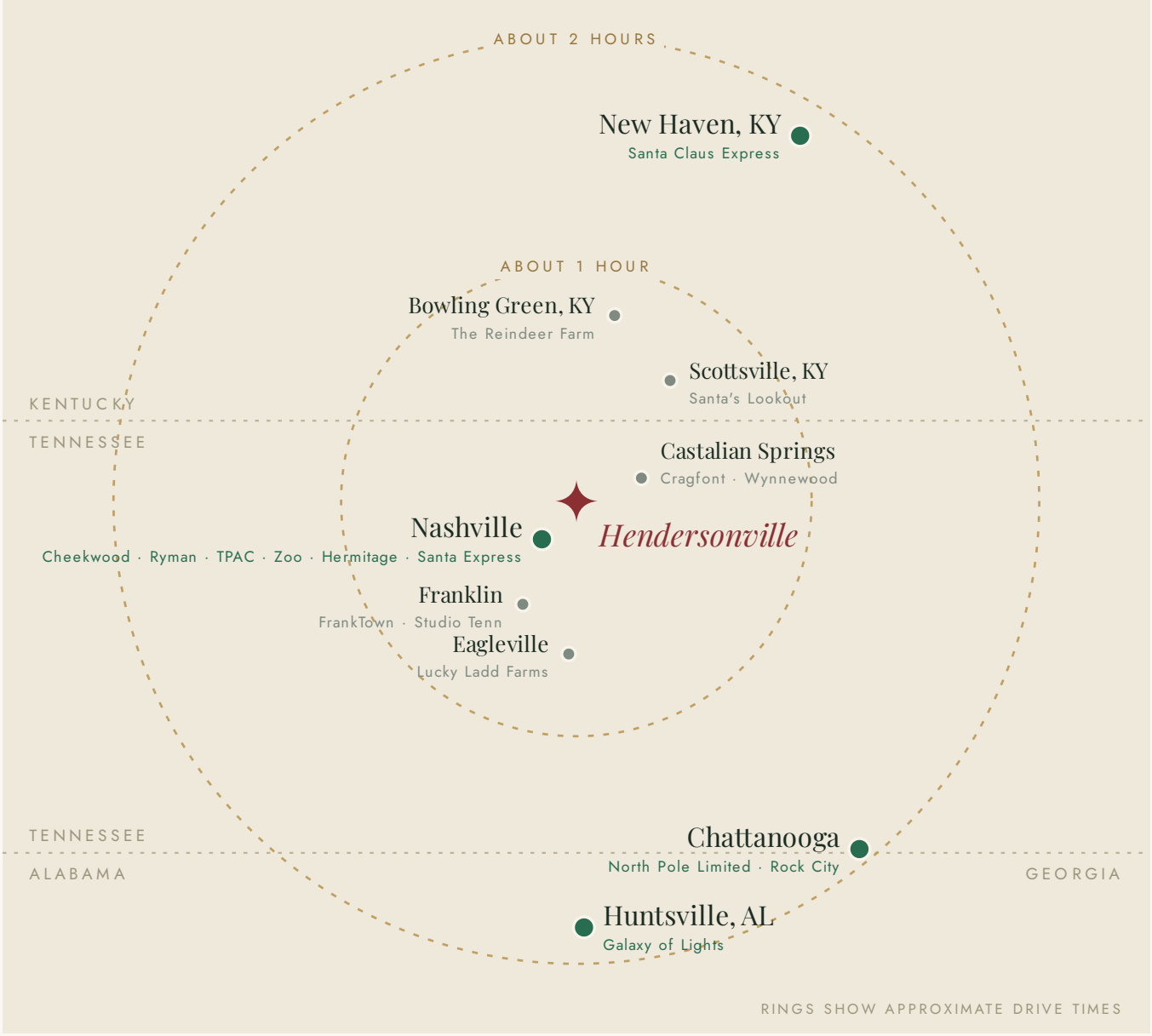
Evening tours of the mansion, decorated for a Christmas from Andrew Jackson's era. Last year they ran on Friday and Saturday evenings from late November into mid December. Look for the 2026 dates in early November.

WATCH thehermitage.com

✦ FIVE · WORTH THE DRIVE

Everything within *two hours* of home

One of the best things about living in Hendersonville is how much is within reach. Chattanooga, Huntsville and Kentucky are all easy day trips.



✦ FIVE · WORTH THE DRIVE

Day trips that *sell out*

North Pole Limited

SELLING FAST

NOV 13 – DEC 23 · TENNESSEE VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM, CHATTANOOGA · ABOUT 2 HR · FROM $38

A 60–75 minute train ride to the North Pole with Santa, cocoa and cookies. The museum says it **sells out every year**, starting with weekends and evenings close to Christmas. Upgrades include the Elves & Bells car (from $100) and Santa's private car (from $190, up to four people). Everyone age 1 and up needs a ticket.

BOOK tvrail.com

Enchanted Garden of Lights at Rock City

SELLING FAST

NIGHTLY NOV 13 – DEC 31 (CLOSED DEC 24) · LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN · 2 HR 15 MIN · ADULTS $31–49 · AGES 3–12 $21–39

Rock City's famous trails, lit up at night. Tickets are **timed and sold online only**, and Rock City says nights sell out in advance. Santa is there nightly through December 23.

BOOK seerockcity.com

Galaxy of Lights

BOOK NOW

NOV 13 – DEC 31 · HUNTSVILLE BOTANICAL GARDEN · ABOUT 2 HR

A walk-through light show on most nights, with drive-through nights December 6–15 and 28–31 ($40 per car). Walking tickets are timed, and the Evergreen Express tram ride (an extra $6) sells out quickly.

BOOK hsvbg.org

Santa Claus Express

BOOK NOW

DEC 5, 6, 12, 13, 19 & 20 · KENTUCKY RAILWAY MUSEUM, NEW HAVEN, KY · ABOUT 2 HR · $28–33

A vintage train ride with Santa through the Kentucky countryside. Brunch with Santa (from $58) is a sweet add-on. The museum's advice: book early for Santa rides.

BOOK kyrail.org

✦ CLOSER TO HOME, JUST OVER THE STATE LINE

The Reindeer Farm in Bowling Green (about 1 hr) sells timed tickets online for weekends from mid-November. **Santa's Lookout** in Scottsville, KY (about 50 min) hosts Christmas in the Country on weekends in December. Reserve its Lookout Express train ride ahead.

✦ SIX · HOW WE BOOK THE SEASON

A booking plan from a *mom of four*

01 **Book the hardest tickets first.** The Ryman, the Santa Express, the Hermitage Hotel's Breakfast with Santa and Cheekwood's December weekend slots. Grab those this week, then build the rest of the month around them.

02 **Set reminders for early November.** Cragfont, Wynnewood and the Hermitage Christmas tours usually post their dates around then, and the tickets are very limited.

03 **Choose weeknights for lights.** Weeknights are calmer, and Cheekwood offers a cheaper late-night entry on some Mondays through Thursdays.

04 **Read the refund policy before you click buy.** The Santa Express and Glow Wild are final sale, and the Hermitage Hotel charges for late cancellations.

05 **Count the little ones.** Babies are often free but may still need a ticket. Cheekwood and Glow Wild want one for children under 2, and the North Pole Limited needs one for everyone age 1 and up.

A Nashville Saturday

Saturday, December 19

2 PM	**Nashville's Nutcracker** matinee at TPAC.
DINNER	An early dinner downtown before the evening crowd.
EVENING	**Cheekwood Holiday LIGHTS** on a timed entry you booked in October.

A Chattanooga overnight

Any weekend from mid November

FRIDAY	Drive down after school and do the **Enchanted Garden of Lights** at Rock City.
SATURDAY	Ride the **North Pole Limited**, then head home. You'll be back in about two hours.

✦ SEVEN · NO TICKETS NEEDED

Our *hometown* traditions

Once the tickets are booked, fill in the rest of the calendar with the free events that make a small town feel like home.

Sat, Nov 7	Portland Holiday Market & Merriment	Heritage House Antiques, 450 N. Broadway, 10 AM – 4 PM.
Opens Nov 8	David Wright: An American Master at Monthaven	Monthaven Arts & Cultural Center, Hendersonville. Runs through January 10.
Sat, Dec 5	White House "Red, White & Christmas" Parade	3 PM along US-31W to Municipal Park.
Sat, Dec 5	Portland Christmas Festival & Parade	The festival on Main Street runs 3–5 PM, and the parade follows at 5:30.
Early Dec	Hendersonville Christmas Parade & Tree Lighting	Memorial Park. Last year the parade was on a Sunday afternoon, with the tree lighting after. Watch hvilletn.org for the 2026 date.
Early Dec	Deck the Hulls Christmas Boat Parade	Lit-up boats on Old Hickory Lake at dusk. Sanders Ferry Park is a great place to watch.
Sat, Dec 12	Gallatin Christmas Parade	Downtown Gallatin, noon to 2 PM.
Dec 12–13	Dickens of a Christmas	Downtown Franklin goes Victorian for the weekend, with costumed characters, carolers and vendors.

✦ NEW TO THE AREA?

The town Christmas parades are the fastest way to see what each community is really like. If you're deciding between Hendersonville, Gallatin and the towns around them, spend a December Saturday at a couple of them.

From our family *to yours*

I moved my four kids from Illinois to Hendersonville, and now I help other families make the same move. If your family is thinking about a move to Middle Tennessee, I'd love to help you figure out which town fits, what it really costs, and how to time it with the school year.

And if you just want to know which Santa line is shortest, I can help with that too.

Carissa

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