

TIME OUT! SUNDAY

Your Planning Guide for Entertainment & Travel

November 10, 2013

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Southern cities help visitors find the

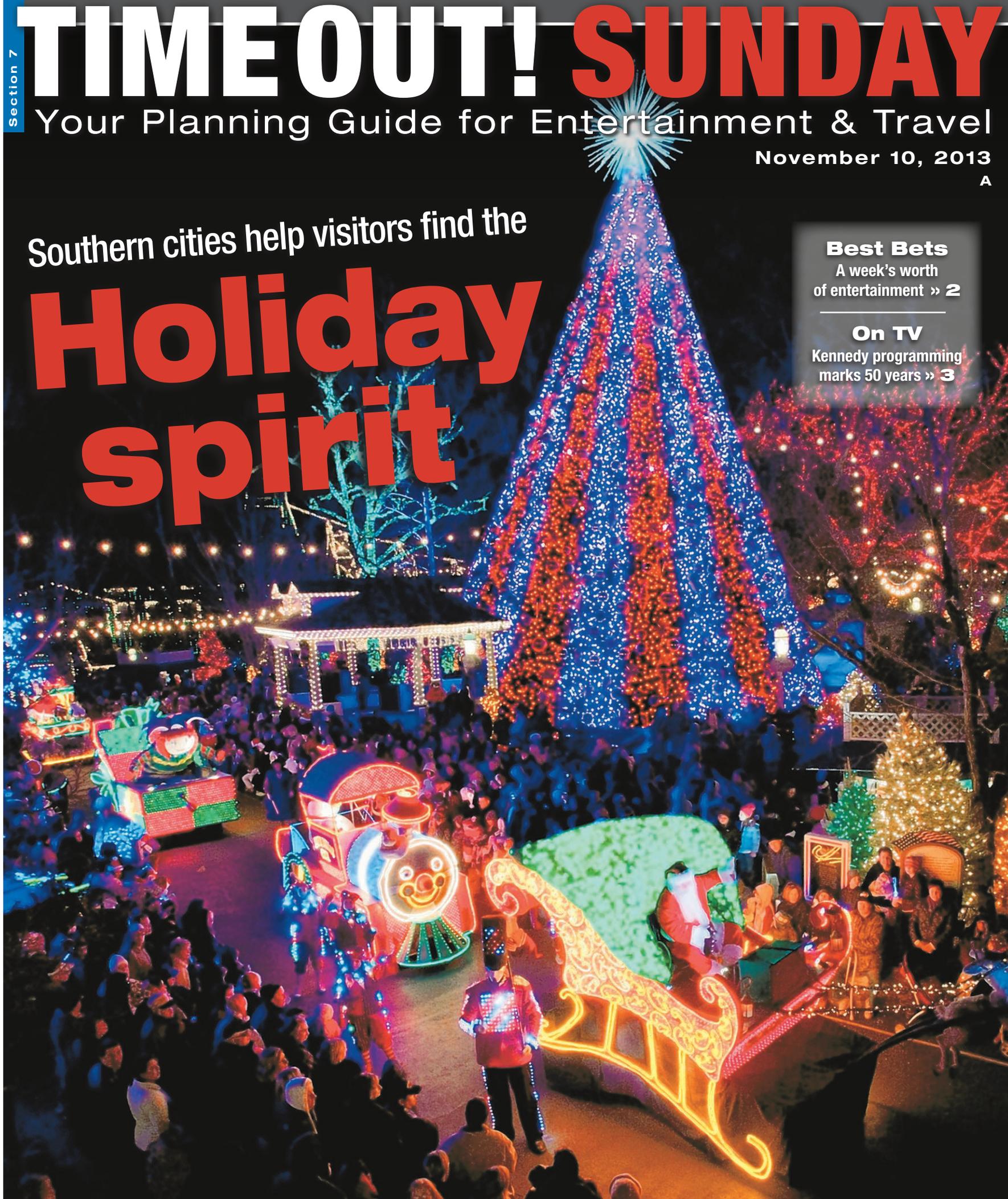
Holiday spirit

Best Bets

A week's worth of entertainment » 2

On TV

Kennedy programming marks 50 years » 3



Kicking off the holidays

Cities in the mid-South help visitors find the Christmas spirit

By Katherine Rodeghier
Daily Herald Correspondent

If you have an itch to get out and get your Christmas fix, you'll find no shortage of destinations that put on a happy holidays face for visitors, especially in the mid-South. Parades, light displays and holiday shows bubble over with Christmas cheer in November and December.

Head down to these festive destinations:

Memphis, Tenn.: Have a blue Christmas at Elvis Presley's home, Graceland. The King loved Christmas, a time when he decorated his home inside and out, invited friends and family to gather and gave presents to loved ones and local charities. Every year the Graceland staff sets up hundreds of blue lights along the driveway and brings out the original decorations Elvis chose, including both sets of his front lawn



COURTESY OF BIG CEDAR LODGE
The Christmas Elf reads bedtime stories to children at Big Cedar Lodge near Branson, Mo.

displays, a Santa with sleigh and a life-size Nativity. Indoors, his red holiday draperies are put up along with a Christmas tree and a variety of Presley family Christmas artifacts and décor. The lights come on Nov. 22 for the Graceland Lighting Ceremony and stay on through Jan. 8, Elvis' birthday.

At Shelby Farms Park, which spreads across more acres than New York's Central Park, you can see the largest holiday light show in the mid-South when more than 2.5 million lights come on for Starry Nights. Grab a cup of hot chocolate at Mistletoe Village, roast s'mores around a campfire, take the kids to the Starry Petting Zoo and ride a camel.

The Memphis Zoo, one of the country's top zoos, puts on Zoo Lights, a six-week-long after-hours light show, and Zoo on Ice with ice rink and skate rentals inside a 5,400-square-foot tent. The Memphis Botanical Garden has Snowy Nights in My Big Backyard where you and the kids can play in "snow" inside a giant snow globe, decorate cookies, play games and take in a musical light show on the Leaping Lawn.

The Peabody Memphis, a grand hotel downtown, kicks off the holidays on the day after Thanksgiving. After the famous Peabody ducks march from their rooftop quarters down to the lobby fountain, local choirs will begin performing throughout the day. Then the Memphis Symphony Orchestra and Opera Memphis take the stage as the ducks return to the roof and



COURTESY OF LOUISVILLE CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU
Downtown Louisville, Ky., brightens the evening sky during Light-Up Louisville on the night after Thanksgiving.

Santa makes an appearance to light the tree in the lobby. For the rest of the holiday season, choirs perform in the lobby after the morning duck march. The hotel's pastry shop puts out a large gingerbread display.

Louisville, Ky.: An underground light show? You bet. The only one on the planet is held inside the Louisville MEGA Cavern, a former limestone quarry that stretches for 100 acres underneath Louisville. Every night you can drive your car through 17 miles of underground passageways to view Lights Under Louisville's more than 800 lit characters and 2 million lights.

Old Louisville is the country's largest Victorian neighborhood, and on Dec. 7 and 8 nine dwellings don holiday finery and open for the annual Old Louisville Holiday Home Tour. Walk the neighborhood and

go inside to imagine a time when women dressed up for holiday parties in bustles and dapper gentlemen sported tails and ties. You can book a Victorian Tea at the Conrad-Caldwell House Museum. The high Victorian tea features English teas with samplings of savories and sweets favored in the 19th century.

Light-Up Louisville has been a tradition in downtown Louisville for more than 30 years with 40 Nights of Lights added more recently to stretch the fun to Jan. 1. Lights-Up kicks off the city's holiday season on the day after Thanksgiving when Santa arrives and fireworks explode overhead. But every night for 40 nights you can enjoy a light show synchronized to music and stretching four blocks from the Fourth Street Live! Entertainment district to the Galt House Hotel.

The Galt House puts on its annual KaLightscope holiday attraction with larger-than-life luminaria, a life-size gingerbread house, Christmas Village and Candy Cane Forest with animated characters and a kiddie train ride. Your family can have Christmas tea with the Snow Fairy Princess, breakfast with Santa and attend the Colors of the Season Holiday Dinner Show. During the Sing 'n' Joy International Choral Festival and Competition, Nov. 28 through Dec. 1, you can experience the culture and traditions of choirs from around the world as they show off their musical skills in free concerts as well as ticketed events.

Pigeon Forge, Tenn.: Many of the musical stage shows in this tourist town en route to Great Smoky Mountains National Park begin adding Christmas performances in

November, including the Smoky Mountain Opry, Country Tonight and Dixie Stampede, where the Wise Men arrive on camels. Several of the year-round attractions also get Christmas-y. At the Titanic Museum, you'll see the re-creation of the ill-fated vessel decorated for the holidays. Snow-making equipment makes sure the parking lot is dusted in white stuff.

The biggest attraction is Dollywood, the Smoky Mountain theme park named for Dolly Parton. During the park's Smoky Mountain Christmas Festival, your kids can tell Santa their Christmas wishes at Santa's Workshop and the whole family can enjoy four million lights and holiday meals at the park's restaurants. With Dolly at the helm, it's no surprise musical entertainment is big at Dollywood. Check out holiday shows

travel



COURTESY OF DOLLYWOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS
Kids get into the holiday spirit during the Smoky Mountain Christmas festival at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tenn.



COURTESY OF ELVIS PRESLEY ENTERPRISES, INC.
It's a blue Christmas at Elvis Presley's Memphis home, Graceland, as blue lights line the driveway.

such as "Dollywood's A Christmas Carol," "Christmas in the Smokies" and "O' Holy Night."

Pigeon Forge extends the celebration of the holidays through February with a series of Winterfest events. During the Winterfest Trolley Tour of Lights, you'll view five million holiday lights from the comfort of a heated, enclosed trolley accompanied by a guide who will share stories about Pigeon Forge history and the most famous holiday displays.

It's Christmas year-round at the Inn at Christmas Place, a Bavarian-themed hotel where the lobby and

guest rooms are decked out in holiday décor and a two-story glockenspiel plays Christmas carols hourly. A Singing Santa will entertain you on guitar in evening concerts and at breakfast. Across the street, you can get lost at Christmas Place, the largest Christmas store in the South.

Branson, Mo.: America's live entertainment capital goes over the top with Christmas shows, about 110 of them, in November and December. In memory of Andy Williams, who was "Mr. Christmas" in Branson,

See **SOUTH** on page 13

the show goes on at the Moon River Theater. Tony Orlando puts on a holiday show with seasonal favorites along with his greatest hits. During the “Christmas in Hollywood” song-and-dance show you’ll hum along to tunes from Christmas movies like “White Christmas.”

The Branson Area Festival of Lights Drive-Through leads motorists along a one-mile route past 175 light displays. At the historic 160-acre Shepherd of the Hills homestead, you can follow the Trail of Lights with Christmas lights and animation scenes. As a grand finale, you’ll go 230 feet up in a glass elevator at Inspiration Tower for a Santa’s-eye-view of the lights from above.

Branson-area attractions transform themselves for the holidays. The Branson Scenic Railway converts its vintage passenger cars for kid-friendly Polar Express excursions through the Ozarks and you’ll find the Showboat Branson Belle decks its decks with holiday décor for lunch and dinner shows as it cruises Table Rock Lake.

Silver Dollar City theme park stays open until Dec. 30 for An Old Time Christmas. Park workers began putting up 4 million lights in August to flip the switch on Nov. 2. The centerpiece is a five-story tree with energy-efficient LED lights synchronized

to music to the tune of up to 100 light changes per second. Twice nightly the Holiday Light Parade comes through the park with lighted musical floats and costumed characters. Among the indoor shows you can see are two original musical productions, adaptations of “It’s a Wonderful Life” and “A Christmas Carol.”

Silver Dollar City puts a big emphasis on American crafts, so you can check off your Christmas list with unusual items from more than 20 craft stores. Pick up a few pointers for preparing holiday meals at the park’s Midwest Living Culinary & Craft School, or leave the cooking to someone else at park vendors and restaurants serving prime rib, turkey and dressing, apple dumplings and make-your-own s’mores.

Children of guests at Big Cedar Lodge can be tucked in at night by the Big Cedar Christmas Elf, who will deliver a stocking to your room and read the kids a Christmas bedtime story. Everyone enjoys the Holiday Wagon Light Tour by horse-drawn carriage through the 800-acre property. After viewing holiday lights, you’ll have hot cocoa and s’mores by a campfire as Christmas carols are sung.

• *Some information for this article was gathered during research trips and writers’ conferences in Pigeon Forge and Memphis, Tenn., Branson, Mo., and Louisville, Ky.*

PORTLAND from page 12

teases an almost jerky flavor and texture. Don’t be afraid to ask for a sample.

There is no shame in eating the gravlax straight up. But you also could get a bagel — the salt bagel would be a delicious choice — or a potato and onion knish.

Now take your deli goodies next door to a Portland institution, Stumptown Coffee Roasters. The coffee — particularly when served up as a gorgeous whole milk latte — is as good as its reputation suggests, smooth, yet bold in a way that a certain national chain could only wish to be.

After you grab your coffee, head into the adjoining lobby of the Ace Hotel, where chairs and couches welcome you and an oversized (massively

so) coffee table anchors the room.

Ready to explore? Start by crossing the street, where in an architecturally stunning alley-like mall is hidden the tiny candy shop known as Quin. But this is no ordinary sugar load. This is artisanal candy of the highest order, all dreamed up by candy maker Jami Curl and made from local ingredients. Grab a bag of the Jacobsen sea salt caramels (made with Oregon salt by local producer Ben Jacobsen), and maybe some of the strawberry gumdrops.

Ready for a rest? Head across the street where you’ll find the amazing indie bookseller Powell’s Books. You could lose yourself — and delightfully so — in here for hours. Or even just long enough until dinner.