



The only fully underground drive-through holiday light show in the world is in Louisville, Kentucky, inside a former limestone mine. Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Go deep into holiday festivities in Louisville

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By Katherine Rodeghier

Holiday light shows have become ubiquitous in the U.S. Dozens of displays designed to lift the spirits brighten the dark days of winter across the country. But Louisville, Kentucky, has perhaps the most unusual display. And you don't have to wait until dark to enjoy it.

It's 100 feet below ground.

Each holiday season, Louisville Mega Cavern puts on [Lights Under Louisville](#), a drive-through light show inside a former limestone mine. Turn off your car lights and idle past 7 million points of light in more than 900 light and laser displays set to holiday music. Lower your car windows if you like; the temperature inside the cavern hovers around 58 to 60 degrees. The drive takes about 30 minutes, but you could wait in line that long just to enter if you go on a weekend. Choose a weekday morning instead.

The largest man-made cave system in North America, Louisville Mega Cavern also has the world's only fully underground zip-line course. It offers narrated tram tours detailing its past and walking tours revealing hidden passages and geological features.

Neighborhood happenings

After you emerge from down under, you'll find a full menu of holiday activities in Kentucky's largest city.



Visitors see Victorian mansions decorated for the holidays during the Old Louisville Holiday Home Tour. One of them, the Louisville Bourbon Inn, is the top-rated bed-and-breakfast in the country. (Katherine Rodeghier)

Peek inside properties decked out for the holidays during the [Old Louisville Holiday Home Tour](#) on Dec. 5-6. The Old Louisville neighborhood boasts the largest collection of restored Victorian

homes in the country. Among them is the [Louisville Bourbon Inn](#), a Richardsonian Romanesque mansion from the 1880s.

“People line up on the sidewalk around the building waiting to enter during the tour,” said Allen Mitchell, one of the owners.

Beautifully displayed Christmas trees, garlands, ribbons, bows and all manner of holiday tchotchkes fill every room.

The eight-room inn is not only a must-stop on the home tour, but it’s also a great place to stay. It became the No. 1 bed-and-breakfast in the U.S. last year when it took the top prize in Tripadvisor’s Travelers’ Choice Best of the Best Awards. Guests served Mitchell’s biscuits and gravy for breakfast will taste the People’s Choice Gravy Cup winner in Louisville’s annual Biscuits & Gravy competition. Mitchell said he bases his version on his grandmother’s recipe.

During the Paristown neighborhood’s [Fête de Noël](#), strap on ice skates for a spin around an outdoor rink, watch Louisville bar and restaurant teams vie for the Golden Skillet trophy in a game of curling using cast-iron skillets and see an ice show. “Nutcracker on Ice” and “Drag Queens on Ice” are perennial favorites. The French-themed six-week festival has pop-up bars serving hot chocolate and cocktails, trackless train rides and the Brent Street Holiday Market reminiscent of Christmas markets in Europe.



Patty Brownings’ Derby Balls bakery turns out Kentucky’s iconic bourbon balls year-round in Louisville’s Paristown neighborhood. (Katherine Rodeghier)

Paristown has a year-round food hall, café and Derby Balls bakery turning out Kentucky's classic bourbon balls. Take in a performance at Old Forester's Paristown Hall, taste bourbon at Uncle Boojie's Distilling Co. and tour the factory of Stoneware & Co., founded in 1815 as one of the oldest stoneware manufacturers in the country. In its Paint Your Own Pottery Studio, you can make your own work of art. Its retail shop has an array of stoneware creations, some with a holiday theme.

Speaking of shopping, spend time exploring the boutiques, art galleries and antiques shops in NuLu, short for [New Louisville](#), in the hip East Market District of downtown. Look for home decor in Red Tree, women's clothes and accessories in Six Sisters Boutique and locally made bath products at Peace on Earth. Try modjeskas, caramel-covered marshmallows, a specialty at family-owned Murth's Candies, established in 1921.



Bobby Lauster and Heatherlyn Stickel serve holiday-themed cocktails at the pop-up Miracle on Market in Louisville's NuLu neighborhood. (Katherine Rodeghier)

Sip some Jingle "Balls" Nog or a Christmapolitan at [Miracle on Market](#), a pop-up bar celebrating its ninth year pouring holiday libations and serving tasty bites in NuLu. For a more substantial meal, cross the street to La Bodeguita de Mima Cuban Restaurant & Rum Bar. Live music plays every night. Patrons may join a conga line on Friday and Saturday nights.

Make an ornament; see the trees

Try your hand, or more accurately your breath, by blowing your own glass ornament at [Flame Run](#), a hot shop and gallery downtown. A glassblowing artist demonstrates the technique, then invites you to fill your lungs and puff away at a glowing glob of glass he's just taken from a

2,100-degree oven. Browse the work of professional glass artists in the shop upstairs and pick up a piece or two to take home.



Glassblower Steven Tanner puts the finishing touches on a visitor's glass ornament during a make-your-own ornament workshop at Flame Run hot shop and gallery. (Katherine Rodeghier)

In nearby Museum Row, you'll see all manner of holiday ornaments hanging from 230 trees spanning three floors of the [Frazier History Museum](#). Local schools, businesses and other organizations decorate trees during Lights on Main. Visitors vote for their favorites.

The museum, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, documents Kentucky history in exhibits and tours. Walk into its Bourbon Bottle Hall and you'll be flanked by nearly 400 bottles of amber liquid from every distillery currently in production in Kentucky. If that whets your taste buds, know the museum is the official starting point of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.

When night falls, head over to [Waterfront Botanical Gardens](#) to stroll pathways illuminated with giant glowing flowers, shimmering snowflakes and twinkling archways during Gardens Aglitter. Buy a pair of 3D glasses for an alternate perspective of the light show.

Bringing the kids? Take them to [Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom](#). The theme and water park is decked out with more than 300 Christmas trees and displays of more than 1.5 million lights. Go slip-sliding down the largest snow tubing hill in the state. The park's wave pool is covered in real snow for a 175-foot-long thrill ride.

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If you go

Information: Louisville Tourism: gotolouisville.com/

Getting there: Louisville is about 300 miles from suburban Chicago. Nonstop flights are available on Southwest Airlines, United Airlines and American Airlines.

Where to stay: Louisville Bourbon Inn: louisvillebourboninn.com/

Where to eat:

La Bodeguita de Mima Cuban Restaurant & Rum Bar in NuLu: labodeguitademima.com/

Buck's Restaurant: Continental cuisine served on artfully mismatched china; live piano music nightly in Old Louisville. buckslo.com/

The Brown Hotel: The iconic Hot Brown open-face sandwich was invented 100 years ago at this landmark property. brownhotel.com/dining

Sources:

Lights Under Louisville: lightsunderlouisville.com/

Old Louisville Holiday Home Tour: oldlouisville.org/holiday-home-tour

Fête de Noël in Paristown: paristown.com/fetedenoeel

NuLu: nulu.org/

Miracle on Market: miracleonmarketlouisville.com/

Flame Run: flamerun.com/

Frazier History Museum: fraziermuseum.org/

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Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom: kentuckykingdom.com/explore-the-park/festivals-events/christmas/

<https://www.dailyherald.com/20260930/travel/go-deep-into-holiday-festivities-in-louisville/>