

illinois

Winter in Central Illinois



dashing through illinois

**Small and mid-size towns with
big holiday spirit**

Over the river and through the prairies to Central Illinois we go. Browse artisan shops for the perfect present or ornament. Be dazzled by light festivals that make everything merry & bright. Pet a real reindeer or ride in a one-horse open carriage and have the happiest holiday season.



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📍 Day 1 Rantoul, Champaign, Monticello, and Springfield

The holidays are for spending time with family, and there's nothing better than seeing the kids' eyes light up. To start the day, discover Rantoul's **Hardy's Reindeer Ranch**, a quirky attraction where you can get up close and personal with a herd of authentic Alaskan reindeer. With rebuilt and restored century-old barns and 5,000 Christmas trees, this is the perfect holiday setting for families and groups looking to get away from fast-paced city life. It's open through December 28th.

Keep the mojo going in downtown Champaign. You'll find different family-friendly activities each weekend in December, like a scavenger hunt around the area's small businesses, special holiday shops, eye-catching window displays and even carriage rides!

Follow up that family fun by getting your food fix at either **Everyday Kitchen** or **Seven Saints**. The former puts a creative spin on comfort food – from bison meatloaf to duck confit quesadillas – while the latter features quintessential Midwestern favorites like sliders and cheese curds. Or you can head to Monticello to try the family-owned **3Ravens Food & Spirits** for incredible burgers, appetizers, and top-notch whiskey.

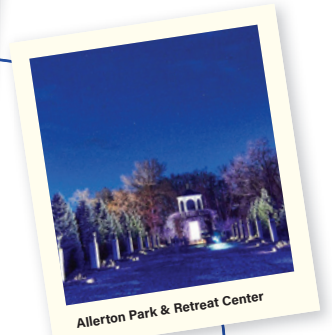
Once you're in Monticello, check out Illinois Maker **Prairie Fire Glass**, which creates one-of-a-kind, handcrafted jewelry, ornaments and vases – which are ideal stocking stuffers and hostess gifts. As the sun starts to go down, experience the holiday magic of the **Allerton Park & Retreat Center's** illuminated winter walk, where you'll follow a beautiful, meandering path through the park grounds lined by twinkling lights.



Hardy's Reindeer Ranch



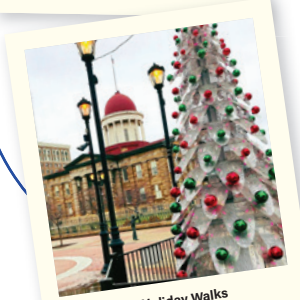
Prairie Fire Glass



Allerton Park & Retreat Center



Dana Thomas House



Old Capitol Holiday Walks



Obed & Isaac's Microbrewery and Eatery



President Abraham Lincoln Springfield - a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel



SCHEELS

In downtown Springfield, the holiday vibe will be in high supply. Experience it all, from a tour at the historical **Dana Thomas House** to **ice skating** at the Old State Capitol. Speaking of the historic statehouse, the **Old Capitol Holiday Walks** program offers a variety of special events each weekend throughout the holiday season, including carriage rides, a Mistletoe Market, and performances on the plaza.

You'll have worked up an appetite by the time you arrive in Springfield, where you can enjoy killer flatbreads and award-winning beer at **Obed & Isaac's Microbrewery and Eatery** or partake in traditional fine dining at the historic **Maldaner's Restaurant**. If a cozy Irish pub is more your speed, grab a drink at **D'Arcy's Pint** and indulge in a Springfield delicacy – the horseshoe (choice of meat on a bed of Texas Toast, piled high with fries and then smothered with D'Arcy's famous cheese sauce).

If you're fading fast, don't worry – your accommodations aren't far. History enthusiasts will want to make camp at **President Abraham Lincoln Springfield - a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel**, which is just steps from Bank of Springfield Center and the **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum**. Or check into the **SpringHill Suites Marriott**, conveniently located next door to **SCHEELS**, a popular experiential sporting goods store with arcade games, a Ferris wheel and more.

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Day 2 Springfield, Peoria, and East Peoria

After a restful slumber, fuel up for the day with a piping hot cup of joe at Illinois Maker **Custom Cup Coffee**, or swing by **Cafe Moxo** for breakfast favorites like cheddar bacon biscuits or baked strawberry pecan French toast. Then head to **Wildlife Prairie Park** in Hanna City. This 1,800-acre zoological retreat is home to 60 different species and over 150 native Illinois animals. Cougars, bobcats and black bears – oh my!

You've braved the brisk conditions to explore the great outdoors – you deserve a hearty meal. Warm up with wood-fired pizzas at **Sugar Wood Fire Bistro**, a quick-casual space with an inviting open-kitchen layout. The pizzas can be paired deliciously with a craft beer or glass of wine if you so choose.

You started the day with a nature expedition, and now it's on to cultural activities. Pique your curiosity at the **Peoria Riverfront Museum and Dome Planetarium**. Not only does this public museum of art, science, history, and technology feature fascinating exhibits, it also offers beautiful views of the river and downtown Peoria. Be sure to check if a classic holiday movie will be playing during your visit!

As darkness descends, brighten the evening at the 38th annual **Festival of Lights**, a beloved local tradition that combines massive light displays, festive floats and joyous holiday music. The fest runs from November 25 to January 2, and online tickets are not available, so be ready to purchase tickets at the entrance booth.



Unwind after an active day by filling up on smoked meats and unique plates like pulled pork tortas or Asian-style tacos at **The Blue Duck Barbecue**. Or perhaps you'd rather enjoy fine Irish dishes like shepherd's pie and Guinness pot roast, in which case you should check out **Kelleher's Irish Pub**.

When it's finally time to get some shuteye, stay overnight at the **Embassy Suites - East Peoria**, a scenic riverfront hotel within walking distance of several local attractions.

Day 3 Peoria

Cap off a relaxing morning at the hotel with a visit to **Childers Eatery**, a local favorite with elevated brunch fare and a wide selection of fresh-squeezed juices.

Finish off your holiday shopping list – or partake in some post-holiday retail therapy – at the **many shops in Peoria**, where you can find both well-known brands and one-of-a-kind gifts. West Main Street is home to an eclectic group of small shops, art studios, and specialty shops, giving you an excellent opportunity to support local before heading home.



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