

25 BEST PLACES TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

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Display until December 31, 2012

\$4.95 U.S./CAN.



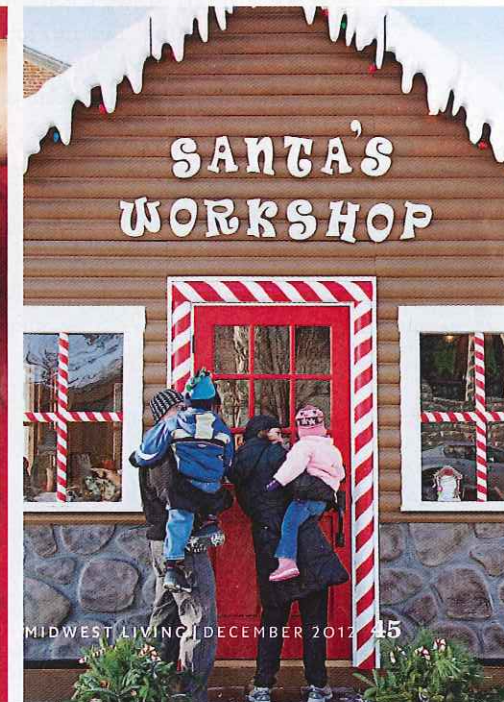
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A pretty creek, a downtown teeming with carefully preserved limestone buildings and some of the best shopping in the region await visitors in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. We're pretty sure you'll agree: Christmas shopping never looked—or felt—this good.

a Christmas Presence

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A

chill settles into the woods as Paradise Ranch's two ebony Percherons effortlessly pull our wagon through a forest gaily lit with thousands of colored lights. Snuggling under a horsehair blanket, I decide this ride is just as delightful sans snow. As we near the barn, a loud, throaty "Ho, ho, HO!" greets us. It feels quite simple, but the experience proves a great way to kick off my visit to Cedarburg, Wisconsin.

Every winter, the city of 11,400 (about 20 miles north of Milwaukee) holds Five Festive Friday Eves between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The celebration features a signature event each weekend at Cedar Creek Settlement, an 1864 woolen-mill-turned-shopping center. This weekend it's Christmas in the Country and an art fair. Smaller events—ornament making, concerts, the wagon ride I took—flesh out the festivities.

As I unpack in my cozy third-floor bedroom at the Stagecoach Inn, the floorboards creak and groan. The B&B on Washington Avenue, Cedarburg's main drag, was built in 1853 as a stagecoach inn. I learn a few stories about its history the next morning when owner Brook Brown sits down with me over a steaming mug of coffee. The inn has been a hotel, a restaurant, a tavern, then an ice cream parlor during Prohibition. Today, it stands among six blocks of specialty shops



tucked in pretty cream-color limestone buildings backed by the shimmering ribbon of Cedar Creek.

Soon, I'm heading down the street with excited shoppers. I pass an enormous gingerbread house by the community center, then a man selling fragrant popcorn from a wagon. Holly-splashed welcome

mats drape over a white picket fence at From the Heart, which specializes in holiday decor. I force myself to pass, intent on getting to the art fair. But I can't resist Floral Expressions, festooned with snowflake-laden birch trees, poinsettias and velvet ribbons. Pushing through the front door, I stop and ooh out loud. The shop is a riot of greens, reds and golds, with ornaments, swags and collectibles arranged in stunning displays.

Trolleys ring their way through town, carrying shoppers between Cedar Creek Settlement and the booths at the Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Arts. At the Settlement, I purchase locally blown glass ornaments for my kids, etched copper earrings for a friend and homemade spice rubs for my mom; at the museum, I snag an enormous ceramic serving bowl decorated with spirals for myself. But the bowl is pretty heavy, and I'm a half-mile from the inn ... and there's a complimentary wine tasting at Cedar Creek Winery. As Cedarburg's holiday lights twinkle on, I sip wine creek-side, surrounded by packages that signal a successful day.

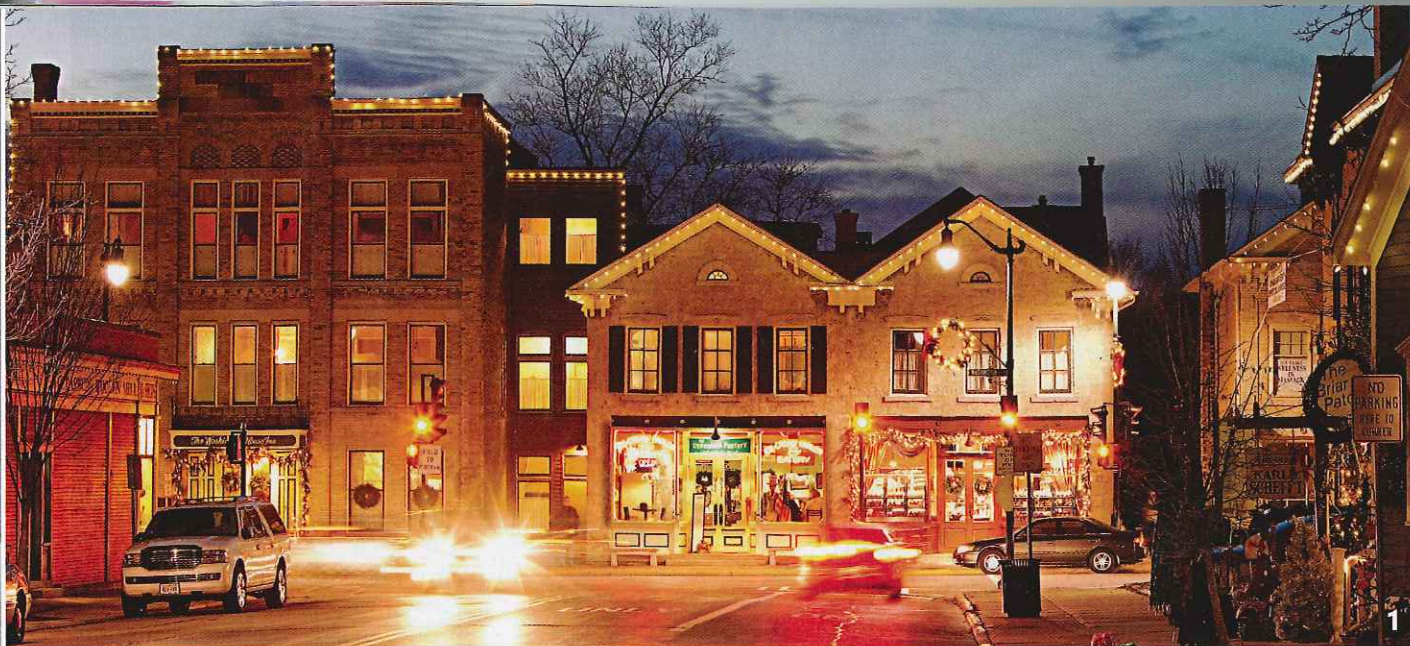


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HOLIDAY MAGIC

1 The amazing decor outside Floral Expressions hints at what shoppers find inside. **2** Festive bolts of fabric at Ye Olde Schoolhouse. **3** Dusk makes sleigh rides at Paradise Ranch near Cedarburg, Wisconsin, enchanting.



Trip guide

What to do

Cedar Bridge Park Admire Cedar Creek through the lattice trusses of Wisconsin's only remaining covered bridge (262/377-4510).
Downtown Dough A haven for bakers, with 2,000 cookie cutters (262/387-0311; downtowndough.com).
Five Festive Friday Eves Celebrate the season at these weekend events, including live music, entertainment and complimentary cider (866/626-7005; cedarcreeksettlement.com).
Floral Expressions Designer Ron Reel sells beautiful flowers, gifts and more (262/377-6361; floralexpressionsbyron.com).
From the Heart A big, yellow house on Main Street sells seasonal crafty gifts and Christmas decor (262/376-1016; fromtheheartcedarburg.com).
Lillies The sustainable, fair-trade shop sells handmade clothing and jewelry from Nepal and Peru (262/377-7047; lilliesgoods.com).

Marline's Garden Goodies This garden accessories shop blooms with seasonal decor, whimsical sculptures and art (262/375-5050).
Paradise Ranch A 30-minute horse-drawn ride (in a wagon or sleigh, depending on snow) takes you past 50,000 colored Christmas lights (262/825-7500; paradiseranchwi.com).
Rivoli Theater The Art Deco building has returned to service as a movie house, thanks to the community's support (262/377-1010; rivoliocedarburg.com).
Soulshine Arts Hot Glass Studio and Gallery During the holidays, drop into this glass studio for a peek at their ornaments or attend a class to create your own (262/442-9624; soulshine-arts.com).
Weeds Gift Shop Home and garden goods, plus seasonal finds like ornaments and woolen hats, await in this ecofriendly and upcycled shop (262/377-0999; lilliesweeds.com).
Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Arts In August 2011, an 1850s refurbished barn became the museum's new home, showcasing an impressive permanent collection and lively

traveling exhibits. Admission charged (262/546-0300; wiqltmuseum.com).
Ye Olde Schoolhouse This too-cute quilting store tucks into an 1887 schoolhouse off Cedarburg's main drag (262/377-2770; yeoldeschoolhouse.com).

Where to eat

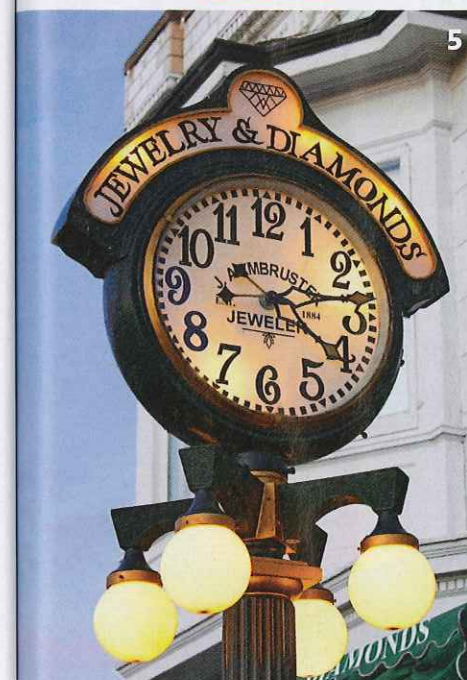
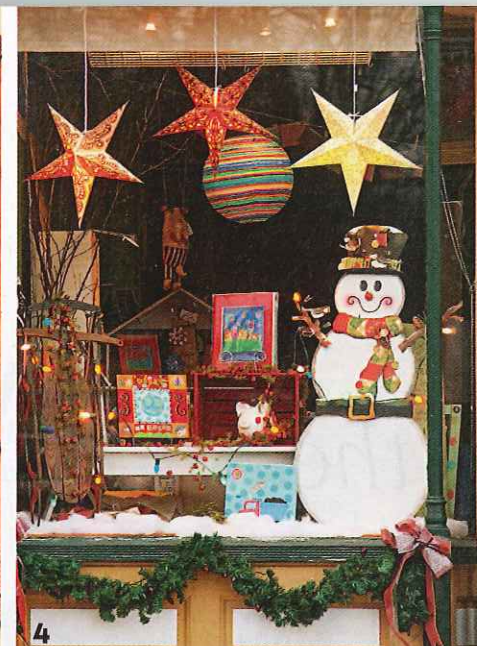
Amy's Candy Kitchen Amy's specializes in candy apples done right. They're pricey (from \$11.99) but big enough to share (262/376-0884; amysgourmetapples.com).
Anvil Pub and Grille Tucked into a former blacksmith shop, the eatery offers burgers, steaks and bread with a daily specialty butter (262/376-2163; anvilpubandgrille.com).
Cream 'n Crepe Cafe Don't try to resist the delicious dessert crepes stuffed with ice cream, mousse and berries; you'll also find soups and sandwiches. Located in Cedar Creek Settlement (262/377-0900; creamandcrepecafe.com).
The Farmstead Bar and Grill Locals line up for the steak and signature sides, which include sugar snap peas and garlic mashed potatoes

(262/375-2655).
Java House Warm up with a cup at this friendly coffeehouse, which uses freshly roasted beans and serves specialty drinks (262/375-8999; javahousewi.com).
Vintage Cafe and City Deli Refuel on this Tuscan-inspired deli's soups, salads and paninis, including a great sun-dried tomato (262/377-4001; vintagecafecedarburg.com).

Where to stay

The Stagecoach Inn Bed and Breakfast Built in 1853, this B&B maintains a homey feel with friendly innkeepers. Not staying here? Soak in its history in the on-site pub and candy shop. From \$100 (888/375-0208; stagecoach-inn-wi.com).
Washington House Inn The city's most iconic lodging, the 1886 inn features modern amenities, such as whirlpool baths, and holds a complimentary wine-and-cheese social hour. From \$125 (262/375-3550; washingtonhouseinn.com). **ML**

For more information or to plan your trip, contact the Cedarburg Chamber of Commerce (800/237-2874; cedarburg.org).



CEDARBURG HOLIDAY SAMPLER

1 Downtown Cedarburg shines at dusk, when twinkle lights brighten Washington Street's more than 70 specialty stores. **2** Originally opened in 1936, the single-screen Rivoli Theater shows second-run movies throughout the year and holiday classics during December. **3** A chalkboard at Weeds Gift Shop lists teas available by the glass that day; shoppers also can buy loose-leaf teas. **4** Storefronts seem pulled from a holiday postcard. **5** A vintage street lamp gives downtown Cedarburg a decidedly Victorian feel. **6** Each ornament boasts a different look at Soulshine Arts Hot Glass Studio and Gallery. **7** Classic country and Victorian decor define the 34 guest rooms at the Washington House Inn, where some rooms have king beds, fireplaces, whirlpools and skylights. **8** Carolers regale visitors with song at Cedar Creek Settlement. **9** Even if you're not a quilter, the selection at Ye Olde Schoolhouse amazes visitors.

