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TRAVEL TIPS AND INTEL | HOLIDAY TRAVEL

## America's Best Towns for the Holidays

by Katrina Brown Hunt November 2, 2015

Johnny Johnston has lived in Los Angeles for 20 years, but when he goes home for the holidays, he finds himself enchanted all over again by the winter wonderland where he grew up: Vail, CO.

"From the moment you drive into the valley, the streets and public spaces are all lit with Christmas lights, creating a Norman Rockwell moment," says the broker for Sotheby's International Realty. Even if his mom still hassles him about what shirt he wears to his aunt's dinner party, "Vail is the most beautiful place I've ever seen for the holiday season."

### No. 9 Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA

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This California town with a rocky coastline doesn't experience much in the way of winter, but the chilly air makes the crashing waves and neighboring wine country seem all the more enticing. Carmel has its own tree lighting—a huge resident tree at the corner of Junipero and Ocean avenues—and the quiet days of early December are often perfect for a holiday getaway.

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Many *Travel + Leisure* readers agree, applauding the Colorado mountain for its seasonal cheer courtesy of high-end department-store shopping, notable restaurants, and Christmas lights.

Plenty of the top 25 holiday towns offer creative spins on holiday traditions, too, whether they look like winter wonderlands or not. In a South Carolina town, you can have your turkey dinner in barbecue sauce. In one mountain town, the annual tree lighting involves a faux pine made of recycled skis. And in places from Healdsburg, CA, to Charlottesville, VA, you can pick up holiday gifts—local wines, French linens, or antique cookbooks—that you'd never find at the mall back home.

Another kind of holiday magic (low-season rates and fewer crowds) can create a blissful version of Silent Night. That's why Far Hills, NJ, resident Gavin Macomber has spent a few Christmases by the beach in Nantucket, MA. "It's fun to walk around town sipping hot chocolate and watching snow fall," says the founder of [Andegavia Cask Wines](#). "Nantucket is particularly peaceful this time of year—which makes it an ideal place to escape to during the holidays."