🎄 The ABQ Mom December Bucket List

Every can't-miss holiday night in Albuquerque & Rio Rancho — 2026

🚨 Book These First — They Sell Out

- **Fri, Nov 27 · 8:00am sharp** — **Luminaria Tour tickets drop.** The Christmas Eve bus tour through Old Town is **free** (just a $1.50 processing fee), only 1,000 tickets, online only — they're usually gone within the hour. Set an alarm!
  🎟️ Tickets & info: cabq.gov — ABQ RIDE Luminaria Tour
- **River of Lights** — timed-entry tickets; the popular December nights sell out. Budget move: the **Value Nights ($15 adults / $10 kids)** cluster in the first week — Nov 29 & Dec 1–4.
  🎟️ Tickets: riveroflights.org
- **Trolley of Lights** (Dec 13–23) and the **Polar Express in Durango** — book both ahead.
  🎟️ Trolley: tourabq.com · Polar Express: durangotrain.com

✨ The Big Nights, In Order

- **Sat, Nov 28 – Jan 3** — **River of Lights**, ABQ BioPark Botanic Garden, 2601 Central Ave NW, 5–10pm nightly (last entry 8pm). $21 adults / $12 kids 3–12 / 2 & under free. Closed Dec 24, 25, 31 & Jan 1. Free Park & Ride from the Zoo!
  🎟️ Tickets: riveroflights.org
- **Nov 27 – Dec 24 · 12 select nights** — **Winter Wonderland NM**, EXPO New Mexico, 300 San Pedro Dr NE (enter Gate 3, Copper & San Pedro) — walk-through lights, Santa visits 6–9pm, live entertainment, a Holiday Art Market, and **free indoor mini golf** included with admission. Nights: Nov 27–29, Dec 11–13, Dec 18–20 & Dec 22–24. Fri & Sat 6–10pm; Sun & weekday nights 6–9pm. Tickets from $12.14. Special nights: Opening Night Nov 27, Local Heroes & Auto Club Night Nov 29, Winter Fashion Show Dec 12.
  🎟️ Tickets & info: winterwonderlandnm.com

- **Mon, Nov 30** — **Low Sensory Night** at River of Lights (quieter, more inclusive 💛) — plus **Under the Sea with Santa** at the ABQ BioPark Aquarium, 2601 Central Ave NW (also Dec 1–2 & 7–9; $32 ages 3+).
  🎟️ Tickets: riveroflights.org
- **Thu, Dec 3 · 5–9pm** — **Nob Hill Shop & Stroll**, Central Ave in Nob Hill — shops, lights, and treats. **Free — no tickets needed.**
- **Fri, Dec 4 · 5–9pm** — **Old Town Holiday Stroll**, Old Town Plaza — free! Tree lighting at 6pm in Plaza Don Luis. **Free — no tickets needed.**
- **Sat, Dec 5 · 5:15pm** — **Twinkle Light Parade**, Central Ave, Nob Hill — free. Central closes at 3pm, so arrive early or take the free Park & Ride from Lomas & University. *Same night, Rio Rancho:* **Winterfest & Parade**, Campus Park, Rio Rancho, 6pm — pick your parade! **Both free.**
- **Sun, Dec 13** — **Corrales Starlight Parade**, Corrales (start time TBA — check before you go). **Free.**
- **Dec 13–23 · 6 & 8pm** — **Trolley of Lights**, ABQ Trolley Co. from Hotel Albuquerque, 800 Rio Grande Blvd NW — Old Town, Rio Grande Blvd & Los Ranchos, ~75–90 minutes.
  🎟️ Tickets: tourabq.com
- **Thu, Dec 24 · Christmas Eve** — **Luminaria night.** Walk Old Town Plaza and the Country Club / Huning Castle streets for free, ride the **ABQ RIDE Luminaria Tour** (buses 5:30, 5:45, 6:15 & 6:30pm from the Albuquerque Convention Center, 401 2nd St NW — ticket from Nov 27!), or join the **Lights & Luminaria Bike Tour** (5:30, 6:45 & 8pm).
  🎟️ Bus tour tickets & info: cabq.gov — ABQ RIDE Luminaria Tour

🚗 Worth the Drive

- **Thu, Dec 17** — **Pablo's Holiday Express**, Sky Railway, Lamy Depot, 152 Old Lamy Trail, Lamy — our family rides this day! Holiday trains run Dec 5–24. $64 adults / $34 kids 3–12 (NM residents $59/$29 with ID); 2 & under free on a lap.
  🎟️ Dates & tickets: Pablo's Holiday Express — dates & tickets (operator: skyrailway.com)
- **Thu, Dec 24 · sundown** — **Canyon Road Farolito Walk**, Canyon Road, Santa Fe — free and pure magic. Dress warm, park downtown, walk in. **Free — no tickets needed.**
- **December** — **The Polar Express**, Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, Durango Depot, 479 Main Ave, Durango, CO — runs Nov 20 – Jan 2, $67–$101. Our family's trip is Sun, Dec 6. Pajamas encouraged. 🚂

🎟️ Tickets: durangotrain.com

🎅 Even More December Fun — The Full Family Calendar

- **Wed, Dec 2 – Sat, Dec 5** — **Festival of the Cranes**, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge & Socorro Convention Center — thousands of sandhill cranes at sunrise and sunset. Refuge admission is free Dec 2–6; workshops and tours need registration. Worth the drive!
  🎟️ Register & info: friendsofbosquedelapache.org
- **Fri, Dec 4** — **Bernalillo Tree Lighting**, Bernalillo — free!
- **Fri, Dec 4 – Sun, Dec 6** — **The Nutcracker**, New Mexico Ballet Company at Popejoy Hall, 203 Cornell Dr SE (UNM) — Fri 7pm; Sat 2pm & 7pm; Sun 2pm.
  🎟️ Schedule & tickets: The Nutcracker at Popejoy Hall
- **Fri, Dec 4 – Dec 24** — **A Christmas Carol**, Albuquerque Little Theatre, 224 San Pasquale Ave SW — the classic, on stage all month.
  🎟️ Schedule & tickets: A Christmas Carol at ALT
- **Sat, Dec 5** — **Christmas at the Marketplace** — free! Plus the **Starlight Parade** — free!
- **Sun, Dec 6** — **Corrales Growers Market**, Corrales — free! Local gifts and goodies.
- **Mon, Dec 7 – Thu, Dec 17** — **Smile with Santa** — free Santa photos.
- **Sat, Dec 12 · 11am–6pm** — **Christkindlmarkt**, Winrock Town Center Park, 2100 Louisiana Blvd NE — free! German-style Christmas market with 100 vendors, Glühwein, and Santa (and Krampus!).
  🎟️ Info: abqgermanchristmasmarket.com
- **Dec 12–13 & 19–20 · 10am–4pm** — **Rail Yards Holiday Market**, Albuquerque Rail Yards, 777 1st St SW — free! 200+ local vendors; free Park & Ride from the Zoo.
  🎟️ Info: railyardsmarket.org
- **Sun, Dec 13** — **Merry Little Market** — free!
- **Sat, Dec 19** — **Humble Holiday Market** ($5) and **Sandia Peak Opening Day**, Sandia Peak Ski Area — ski season begins! 🎿
  🎟️ Sandia Peak info & tickets: sandia.ski
- **Sun, Dec 20** — **Santa's Helpers** — free!
- **Dec 21–23 & 28–30** — **Explora Winter Break Camps**, Explora, 1701 Mountain Rd NW — $85 members / $95 non-members per day; a lifesaver for school-break days.
  🎟️ Register: explora.us — Winter Break Camps

- **Thu, Dec 24 · Christmas Eve** — **Santa & the Fire Dept.** — free! Santa rides through town with the firefighters.
- **Sat, Dec 26 – Wed, Dec 30** — **Santa's Beach Bash**, ABQ BioPark Tingley Beach — Santa in vacation mode! $32 ages 3+ / $18 ages 2 & under, and it includes River of Lights admission.
  🎟️ Tickets: riveroflights.org
- **Thu, Dec 31** — **Noon Year's Eve**, Skidmore's Holiday Bowl, 7515 Lomas Blvd NE, 10:30am–2pm ($99/lane incl. shoes, pizza buffet, arcade play & a noon balloon drop — split it with friends!), the **Chile Challenge Kids Mile**, and the **Nob Hill Chile Drop** on Central Ave — free! 🌶️
  🎟️ Noon Year's Eve reservations: holidaybowlabq.com

💡 Mom Tips

- River of Lights lines are shortest about 20 minutes *after* each entry hour — don't join the top-of-the-hour rush.
- Twinkle Light Parade with littles: the Park & Ride beats the parking hunt every time.
- Christmas Eve luminarias: go early, drive slowly, and dim your headlights where neighbors ask.
- One more time for the people in the back: **Luminaria Tour tickets, Fri Nov 27, 8:00am, online only.** ⏰

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Dates & prices checked Nov 26, 2026 — events can change, so confirm before you go. Expanded edition includes events from @dukecityparents' December guide — thank you!