



**Dec. 11, 2024**

## **Home for the Holidays**

Most travelers that I know try to be home during the holidays. Luckily for us Nebraskans, our home measures about 500 miles across from the northwest corner to the southeast corner and about 200 miles across from north to south. Heck, even driving Interstate 80 through Nebraska from east to west, or vice versa, would take you 455 miles! Here's a selection of some of my absolute favorite holiday destinations in Nebraska.

### **Christmas at Union Station**

The Durham Museum is where you have to go to see Omaha's "Official Christmas Tree." This year's tree, which was harvested in Omaha, stands an impressive 40 feet tall inside the museum's Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall.

Before it became the museum known to Omaha residents as simply "The Durham," this Art Deco building began life in 1899 as the Union Passenger Terminal, or Union Station. Decades later, as many as 10,000 train passengers passed through the terminal each day. Railroad history is a big part of the museum.

The Durham's holiday season includes Family Nights with Santa, a Holiday Cultural Festival, and a Holiday Concert Series. The Noon Year's Eve event on December 31 features live music, crafts, a balloon drop at noon, and other activities especially for families with children. The Durham Museum's holiday season lasts through Jan 12, 2025.

### **Minden – Nebraska's Christmas City**

For more than 100 years, the Kearney County Courthouse dome in Minden has glowed with colorful lights each holiday season. The tradition dates to 1915 and today Minden proudly proclaims that the display includes 12,000 lights. The courthouse dome shines gold while the windows glow red and green. In 1996, Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson proclaimed Minden as Nebraska's Christmas City.

The community's annual Light of the World pageant dates to 1946. Local residents become actors for the pageant that takes place on the Courthouse Square. There is no admission fee to attend. The pageant traditionally takes place the Saturday after Thanksgiving, and also the first two Sundays in December.

The famous Minden Opera House plans concerts and an artist reception as part of its holiday season offerings. For the Polar Express Family Event, children are invited to bring a pillow, a blanket, and come dressed in their pajamas.

### **Christmas at the Mansion**

Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City is impressive anytime of year. Add ornate holiday décor to the 52-room mansion and the home of Arbor Day inventor J. Sterling Morton becomes an even more popular destination. Of course there are trees. Holiday music and themed collections will put even the most reluctant Grinch into the holiday spirit. The event takes place Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through January 5, 2025. Admission is charged, and a Nebraska Park Permit is required for vehicles entering Arbor Lodge State Historical Park.

### **Christmas at the Cody's**

William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody and his wife, Louisa, were known for the extravagant holiday parties hosted at their North Platte mansion. Today, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission keeps that tradition alive with this event held at Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park in North Platte.

The centerpiece of the park is the Codys' 1886 Victorian mansion. Some might argue that the Cody barn is the real star of the attraction. Both structures, and the ground, are illuminated with holiday lights for the event. Visitors can sample cider, roasted chestnuts, and cookies. If conditions allow, visitors can gather around the firepit to roast marshmallows. The horse-drawn rides may be cold, but the carolers singing holiday tunes will add warmth to the experience.

Admission is charged, and a 2024 Nebraska Park Entry Permit is required for vehicles to park on the grounds.

### **Ericson Lake Trail of Lights**

In Wheeler County, holiday traditions include this family fun event that began in 2021. Visitors meet at the Lake Ericson Dam to climb aboard the hayrack. Each ride winds for a half hour through 30 acres of scenic trails around the tranquil Sandhills lake. Admission is charged. Afterwards, many visitors warm up at the world-famous Hungry Horse Saloon in downtown Ericson, or on the east edge of town at the Wagon Wheel Saloon & Steakhouse.

This event happens in early December and has already taken place for the 2024 holiday season. I hope you'll put it on your holiday events calendar for next year.

Happy holidays, safe travels – and watch for reindeer!