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## Natchitoches kicks off Holiday Trail of Lights

by Chéré Coen

The banks of the Cane River were lined with bundled-up sightseers, most of them anxious for the speeches to end. When the time finally arrived and the queen and children's groups finished singing, a host of local dignitaries gathered around the light switch. Like the impending jolts of electricity, a buzz traveled through the crowd.

Counting down to one, the massive electrical switch was pulled and Natchitoches transformed into a holiday wonderland, glowing in thousands of Christmas lights.

And so the Festival of Lights began.

It's part of the city's annual celebration and what Natchitoches is known for, with the exception of being the home place of Steel Magnolias. But even the play and the film allude to the festival that takes over the small historic town every holiday season that brings in half a million tourists.

The 82nd Festival of Lights used to begin the first weekend in December with live music, a Christmas parade, arts and crafts and more. That part of the festival still exists — this year it will be Saturday — but city officials moved the beginning to the Saturday before Thanksgiving to give more tourists a chance to visit Natchitoches and the lights.

"Turn on the Holidays" took place Nov. 22 after a day of activities and included a fireworks display. Not only is the historic downtown streets lit up, with strings of lights stretching from block to block, but the Cane River contains light displays along its banks, the bridges feature various moving light displays and there is a massive Christmas tree in the center of things. The 300,000 Christmas lights will remain on throughout the month of December and every Saturday night will include a fireworks show. In addition, there are carriage rides, a Christmas tour of homes, musical entertainment, cookies with Santa and an arts and crafts show, to name a few of the activities.

### Christmas Festival and Tour of Homes

The 82nd annual Christmas Festival will take place Saturday on the downtown riverbank and feature food and craft vendors, live music and children's activities. A junior parade rolls at 10 a.m. and the 2-mile main parade will begin at 1 p.m.



File photo by Matthew Minard

**The view down Natchitoches' main commercial strip during a previous Festival of Lights.**

Fireworks start at 6 p.m. and include a light show coordinated to high-energy Christmas music.

There will also be boat rides available on Cane River Lake and the shops in the Historic District will be open late.

The Christmas by Candlelight Holiday Tour of Homes will take place during the second and third weeks in December and will feature several historic homes in Natchitoches: Prudhomme-Rouquier House, Violet Hill, Nakatosh Condos, Cypress Place, Poete Street Condos, Two Goose, Green Gables, Tante Huppe and Secret Garden.

Natchitoches is the oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory, so historic homes here abound. The Prudhomme-Rouquier House, for instance, is an example of French vernacular half-timber construction and the largest known example of bousillage construction in the United States. Green Gables is a one-story Victorian house that includes a wraparound front gallery, ornate fireplaces and stained glass windows, plus original art and eclectic antiques from the 18th and 19th centuries. For more information on the Holiday Tour of Homes, go to the Natchitoches Historic Foundation at [www.historicfoundation.com](http://www.historicfoundation.com). For more information on the weekend's events, contact the Natchitoches Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau at (800) 259-1714 or go to [www.natchitoches.net](http://www.natchitoches.net).

### **Holiday Tour of Homes**

Wednesday, Dec. 10 and 17:

Prudhomme Rouquier House, Violet Hill and Poete Street Condos, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 12 and 19:

Nakatosh Condos, Cypress Place and Two Goose, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 13 and 20:

Green Gables, Tante Huppe and Secret Garden, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

### **Holiday Trail of Lights**

Nachitoches is one of six cities in two states that join forces every holiday season for the Holiday Trail of Lights. They join Shreveport and Bossier City in Louisiana and Jefferson, Marshall and Kilgore, Texas, as cities with massive light displays.

All cities are connected by interstates 49 and 20 and most are within an hour's drive of one another. Each city is unique in their light displays and events, giving tourists a new experience every stop on the Trail.

For a list of events and activities, go to [www.holidaytrailoflights.com](http://www.holidaytrailoflights.com).

*Next Week:*

The Trail continues: Christmas in Texas

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