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Travel: Texas Trio

Chere Coen

Jefferson, Texas, was a booming town when steamboats used its massive bayou to move cotton from New Orleans through the heartland of America. When the freed logjam at Shreveport diverted the bayou's flow, the town's commerce went with it.

"Jefferson has remained virtually unchanged since the late 1880s," said Juanita Wakefield Chitwood, director of tourism.

And that's not a bad thing. The population 2,200 Texas town an hour outside of Shreveport offers dozens of bed and breakfasts, two historic hotels, charming antique shops and boutiques, carriage rides, ghost tours, an independent bookstore and train rides along the bayou. The quaint town makes for a perfect getaway for couples but also a fun-filled experience for children, with its boat rides and soda fountain at the Jefferson General Store.

Jefferson is also the perfect town to be part of the Holiday Trail of Lights, six cities in Louisiana and Texas that combined forces to give tourists millions of holiday lights along interstates 49 and 20, all within an hour of each other. The other two Texas cities are nearby Marshall and Kilgore.

In addition to Jefferson's sparkling light displays and real cedar boughs adorning historic buildings, there are plenty of special activities. The Historic Jefferson Railway travels along Big Cypress Bayou adorned in 300,000 lights every Thursday through Sunday, through Dec. 28 with a special New Year's Train departing at 7



The historic Starr Family Home in Marshall, Texas, is decorated for the holidays. | Photo by Cheré Coen



The Kilgore Snow Hill will be open for visitors on Dec.12 and 13 this year. | Submitted photo

p.m., 8 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. Dec. 31. Other activities include the 26th Annual Christmas

Candlelight Tour of Homes, the Christmas Music Concert and Jefferson Riverboat Rides, Dec. 11-13 and The Big Toy, a melodrama, Dec. 11-13 and 19-20.

About 30 minutes away is Marshall, Texas, a town built around a magnificent courthouse and square and boasting with pride of its annual light displays, ice skating, holiday tour of homes and Santa arriving by train on Dec. 13. This year, the town will offer a free Santa's Workshop, where children can build toys to take home and write letters to Santa that will be posted on the spot, and the Snowbound in

Texas train-inspired puppet show on Dec. 20 at the Michelson Museum of Art. Be sure and stop by eclectic Blue Frog Grill on the square, a delightful bistro with a trio of outstanding chefs, including a dessert chef that offers free cookies to every diner at the end of each meal.



Derricks make up part of the Christmas in the Oil Patch in Kilgore, Tx. | Submitted photo

Kilgore offers a Christmas display like none other in America. The small town experienced an oil boom in 1930 when the downtown became the "world's richest acre" because of its dense concentration of oil derricks. Those derricks are gone, but have been replaced with replicas in honor of the town's history. Kilgore's Christmas in the Oil Patch consists of Texas stars topping those derricks, plus thousands of lights all over town.

One of the highlights of Christmas in the Oil Patch is the Kilgore Snow Hill, offering real snow for sledding on Dec. 12-13, and the Winterfest with Santa, carriage rides and entertainment.

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