

NOLA holiday traditions: Lights, bonfires and caroling

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Mr. Bingle watches over young skaters at Celebration in the Oaks at City Park.
(Photo by Ryan Rivet)

So you're staying in New Orleans this winter break? Given that the coldest temperature ever recorded here was a balmy 6 degrees, and it hasn't fallen that low since 1899, you may as well brave the temperate weather and enjoy the wintry traditions and treats the Crescent City has to offer.

[Celebration in the Oaks](#) is an annual event held at City Park featuring hundreds of thousands of Christmas lights strung up in the park's enormous trees and a two-mile holiday train for children and adults.

New Orleans' iconic snowman, Mr. Bingle, is making his City Park appearance as well. Immortalized as a statue, the character that was created by the Maison Blanche Department Store in 1947 and cherished by many locals, hung outside the old MB on Canal Street every Christmas season through the 1990s.

Celebration in the Oaks costs \$8 and is open now through Jan. 4, excluding Dec. 24 and Dec. 31.

A little way up the Mississippi River, St. James Parish celebrates with a more than 200-year-old holiday tradition known as the [Festival of Bonfires](#). Every Christmas Eve at 7 p.m., the people of Gramercy, Litcher and Paulina, La., light dozens of massive teepee-shaped bonfire structures along the River Road on the levee.

This tradition is believed to have originated among the French and German settlers either to guide the faithful to midnight Mass, or to show "Papa Noel" the way to St. James Parish.

For those who'd rather spend Christmas Eve at home, St. James is also hosting a Festival of Bonfires December 13-15 with Cajun food and music.

Want to spread some Christmas cheer? Enjoy lifting your voice in song? Another great holiday option is the candlelit [caroling in Jackson Square](#) at 7 p.m. on Dec. 22. It's free, close-by, and candles and song sheets are provided.

Treat yourself and experience Christmas New Orleans-style this winter break!

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