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## Twelve days of Christmas in Waterloo region

Sat., Nov 19, 2016 | By Anne Bokma



CastleKilbride | photo special to the spectator

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This weekend 1,800 residents will be outnumbered by the thousands of lights that will twinkle in their little town during St. Jacobs Sparkles (until Nov. 20) when Victorian carollers, free horse-drawn shuttles, food sampling and festively displayed shop windows will add to the already abundant allure of this charming village.

The event kicks off a stocking-stuffed Yuletide season in Waterloo region (encompassing St. Jacobs, Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge). No need to blow the end-of-year travel budget on far-flung destinations when there are a host of holiday happenings practically right next door.

Here are 12 ways to enjoy the 12 days of Christmas in Waterloo's winter wonderland.

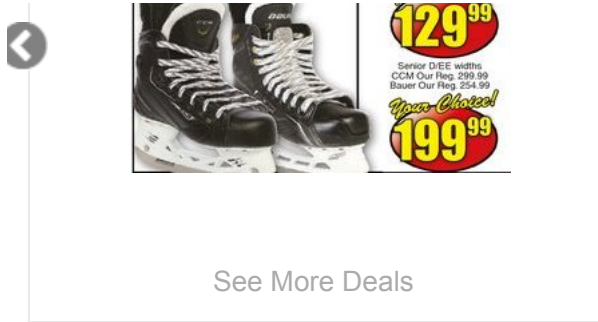
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#1 Reason Men Pull Away





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**Day 1:** St. Jacobs Farmers' Market is Canada's largest year-round market (open Thursdays and Saturdays) with thousands of inspired items that make for great gifts (from Celtic art to local pottery and handcrafted wooden ornaments). In the food department alone it promises "fowl, fruits, fennel, fritters, fettuccini, fudge, fish, falafels and fenugreek." Skip the Christmas baking and head to Gracie's Cookies instead for dozens of holiday treats from shortbread to gingerbread, peanut butter balls to peppermint patties. Be sure to stop at The Fritter Co., which has been making fresh hot apple fritters for 30 years — on the day we visited there were 10 people working frantically behind the counter to keep up with the demand.

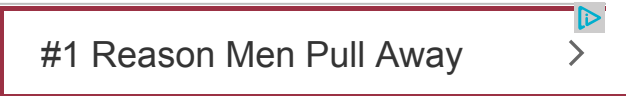
**Day 2:** Climb aboard one of the last steam engines in operation in Canada for a ride through the countryside with Santa, Mrs. Claus and their team of helpers. The Santa Train, operated by the Waterloo Central Railway's team of 45 volunteers, runs three times a day on weekends until Dec. 18 and makes a two-hour round trip, departing from the St. Jacobs Market.

**Day 3:** Continue your rail journey by viewing the massive 3,000 sq. ft. hand built model railway display at the St. Jacobs and Aberfoyle Model Railway. The special Christmas train includes a boxcar carrying a dozen decorated Christmas trees, another with candy cane lights and stacks of presents, and one with Santa and all his reindeer, including Rudolph with a lit-up nose that's easy to spot during the magical night scene transition. The trains tour through the southern Ontario landscape of the 1950s, which includes a couple of nods to Hamilton: the Royal Connaught Hotel and the Tivoli theatre. This isn't any push-button operation — you can see the six operators high up in their control booths controlling all the switches and knobs, Star Trek style.

**Day 4:** Get in the festive spirit with a professional stage show from Drayton Entertainment, which hosts three holiday offerings in the area until December 24. The energizing Red Rock Diner, a celebration of early rock 'n' roll anchored by the character of pioneering Canadian DJ Red Robinson, is at St. Jacobs' Schoolhouse Theatre, a clever and contemporary remake of Cinderella plays at the St. Jacobs Country Playhouse and the musical comedy Sister Act gives audiences a reason to stand up and rejoice at Dunfield Theatre in Cambridge.

**Day 5:** Waterloo's Wonders of Winter Festival of Lights features 80 impressive displays lit up by more than 100,000 lights. Free 15-minute evening horse-drawn trolley rides are offered on weekends until Dec. 31.

**Day 6:** The 1877 mansion of James Livingston, Canada's "Flax Mill King" is located in Baden, just 20 minutes outside Waterloo, and is famous for its (and the eye") wall and ceiling





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Christkindl Market featuring a candlelight procession and carol sing, lighting of a giant spruce tree, a live nativity, skating, 30 choirs, bands and dance groups as well as 90 European-themed food and gift vendors.

**Day 8:** The ceremonial lighting of Kitchener's Victoria Park takes place on Saturday, Dec. 3. This annual Christmas Fantasy event includes live music, free hot chocolate, a visit from Santa and trolley rides around the park.

**Day 9:** Billed as "the largest drive-thru holiday light display in southwestern Ontario," the Gift of Lights at Binghamans runs until Jan. 1. It's a two-kilometre drive featuring a 200-foot light tunnel and more than 30 static and animated displays. \$20 per car.

**Day 10:** The "Flight of White" holiday exhibit at the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory (Dec. 1-Jan. 29) features the addition of thousands of live rice paper butterflies, a large white relative of the monarch butterfly, flying freely through the conservatory. A mass of lush white poinsettias and sparkling white lights completes the magical scene.

**Day 11:** Sit down to a scrumptious holiday repast with the famous Sunday buffet at the Cambridge Mill, operated by the same folks who run Ancaster's Old Mill and Burlington's Spencer's at the Waterfront. The setting is sublime — a 19th century mill with stunning views of the Grand River — and so is the food. Our favourites: fresh shucked oysters with Grey Goose Vodka, flambé crepes, leg of lamb and bread and butter pudding with maple syrup. Even Santa would need to loosen a notch on his belt with this feast.

**Day 12:** We've saved the best for last — there's no better spot to bed down for the night than Cambridge's Langdon Hall, one of the most luxurious retreats in the country, built as a summer home for the great-great-grandson of John Jacob Astor in 1898. Eight new suites have recently been added to the resort, which sits on 75 acres of gardens, Carolinian forest and 10 km of hiking trails (snowshoes are available). There's 5-Diamond dining, a fancy spa and rooms you won't want to leave. Soak in the deep tub and get cosy in front of the wood-burning fireplace. Then turn in for the night in the deep downy comfort of a bed fit for royalty. We guarantee sugar plums will be dancing in your head.



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