

Old-Fashioned Holiday Cheer

Where Orlando; Orlando, Fla.; December 2002

Though its name might suggest otherwise, in Winter Park, Fla., there's no snowy December. But the little city, named in the late 1800s by founders who were escaping chilly New England winters, creates a festive mood for the rituals of the holiday season.

"Our city celebrates the winter holidays as through the eyes of a child," said Chip Weston, the city's director of cultural development. "Time-honored traditions, from an old-fashioned holiday parade to classical concerts in Central Park, have been making memories for generations."

Gift Shopping

In the heart of Winter Park is upscale Park Avenue, the antithesis of air-conditioned malls with 10 blocks of desirable shops and charming Central Park bedecked for the holidays. Many of the original buildings along the brick street date back to the early 1900s, and their eclectic architectural details add charm and sophistication to the avenue. Giant, old-fashioned holiday cards—hand-painted by local schoolchildren—decorate the lampposts, and shopkeepers prop open their doors to welcome customers.

Though trendy national retailers like Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware are top draws, one-of-a-kind boutiques (some tucked in hidden courtyards) and sidewalk cafés add panache to the Park Avenue experience. Even more boutiques are in the historic Hanibal Square District two blocks west of Park Avenue, and nearby Winter Park Village shopping center is a flurry of activity with more shops, movie theaters and restaurants.

Music of the Season

With sunny afternoons and no flurries forecast, a free outdoor concert of holiday classics by the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra from 4-6 p.m. **Dec. 1** officially kicks off the city's holiday season. Concertgoers of all ages pack elaborate picnics and lounge on the lawn, where youngsters can chase squirrels instead of building snowmen.

Cultural Christmas

Rich colors and sweet music set the tone for the annual "Christmas in the Park" celebration in Central Park at 6 p.m. on **Dec. 5** (rain date Dec. 6). For more than 20 years, the Morse Museum of American Art has been bringing its rare, turn-of-the-century Tiffany windows outdoors for this spectacular—and sacred—show. If you're wondering where the magnificent collection originated, seven of the windows are memorials with religious themes, produced by Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company for the chapel of the Association Residence in New York City, founded in the late 1800s by a group of wealthy New Yorkers as a genteel private charity for elderly, indigent women. When the chapel was threatened with demolition in 1974, Hugh and Jeannette McKean, the couple who assembled the Morse collection, bought its Tiffany windows.

As daylight wanes to dusk, the softly lighted windows enchant passersby as the Bach Festival Brass Choir, the Bach Festival Children's Choir and the 150-voice Bach Festival Choir fill the air with Christian, Jewish and holiday music. An eighth Tiffany window, the popular "Christmas Eve" featuring a figure resembling Father Christmas holding the Christ child, draws the biggest crowds. If you want to see more of the Louis Comfort Tiffany collection and his celebrated 1893 chapel, the museum, at 445 N. Park Ave., is open free from 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. on **Dec. 24**.

All Aglow

The city's Christmas tree lighting happens at **5:30 p.m. Dec. 6**, along with the unveiling of the winner of the annual holiday card competition. More than a dozen years ago, the live cedar tree was donated to the city by local TV news anchor Bob Opsahl and planted in Central Park. Opsahl returns each year for the first official lighting, followed by the announcement of the elementary school student who created this year's winning holiday card—on a 3-foot-X-4-foot piece of plywood. This contest was started more than half a century ago, with local school children's winning entries hanging on Park Avenue's lampposts each holiday season.

Nostalgic Celebration

Rise and shine early on **Dec. 7** for the annual pancake breakfast and the 50th annual Winter Park Christmas Parade. It's an all-you-can-eat extravaganza (\$5, \$3 children) with pancakes, sausage, coffee and juice, with seating at communal tables in Central Park. Finish by 9 a.m. to catch the start of this old-fashioned parade that winds down Park Avenue, a two-hour spectacle starring plenty of local children and, of course, Jolly Old St. Nicholas.

Children can catch Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus again from **Dec. 16-20** as they visit Park Avenue and Winter Park neighborhoods from 6:30-9 p.m. each evening. Their antique sleigh may be powered by a tractor, but little ones don't seem to notice as they wave—and await a wave in return, believing in the magic of the season.