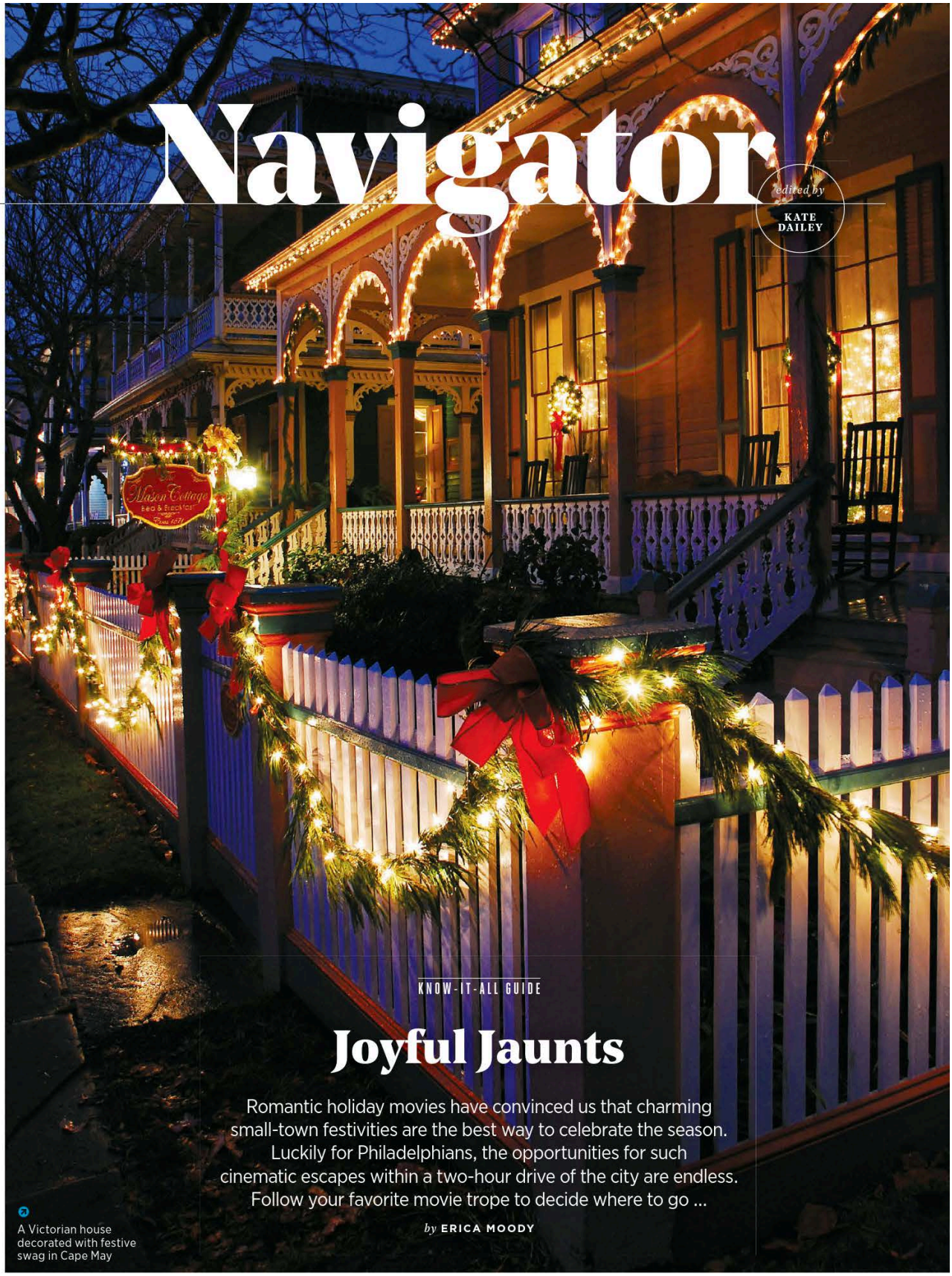
Navigator

edited by KATE DAILEY



KNOW-IT-ALL GUIDE

Joyful Jaunts

Romantic holiday movies have convinced us that charming small-town festivities are the best way to celebrate the season. Luckily for Philadelphians, the opportunities for such cinematic escapes within a two-hour drive of the city are endless. Follow your favorite movie trope to decide where to go ...

by **ERICA MOODY**

A Victorian house decorated with festive swag in Cape May

ISTOCK EDITORIAL/GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES



Below: A live toy soldier at Congress Hall; right: Beach Plum Farm's stand at the West End Garage.



A GRINCH REDISCOVERS THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT ...

Cape May

▸ **Mom-and-pop shops** and quaint B&Bs dot this charming seaside town that transforms into a winter wonderland come Christmastime. The ornate Victorian homes and walkable streets that attract summer visitors to this Jersey Shore point are now full of wreaths and mistletoe.

Carriage and trolley rides provide cozy blankets for passengers and offer holiday themes—one's even led by Mrs. Claus herself.

WHERE TO STAY From bed-and-breakfasts like the Colonial Revival-style **Dormer House** (*from $185 per night; dormerhouse.com*) to high-end hotels like historic **Congress Hall** (*from $219 per night; caperesorts.com*), you'll find folks relaxing on rocking chairs and sipping hot chocolate next to decked-out firs as the surf's gentle roar mingles with Christmas music in the background. Congress Hall even sets up a winter shopping village on its lawn each year.

BEST SPOT FOR A SELFIE Bundle up for a beachfront stroll and take a pic at the historic **Cape May Lighthouse**. Or pose by a colorful Victorian gingerbread house that's festooned in garlands.

MOST FESTIVE ACTIVITY Christmas shopping at the tiny boutiques lining the picturesque **Washington Street Mall**.

WHERE TO EAT Instead of lobster rolls at picnic tables, think tomato bisque by the fire—all the seaside charm without the sand in your toes. Winter igloos have been set up on the Grand Lawn of Congress Hall for outdoor dining. Not a beach person? There's a 62-acre working farm just a few miles from downtown that feels like you've entered a rustic wedding venue. **Beach Plum Farm** (*beachplumfarmcapemay.com*), complete with a market, a kitchen, and overnight cottages, takes farmhouse chic to new levels, offering a magical woodsy atmosphere on a sustainable working farm. Its holiday farm-to-table dinners—think pine garlands, string lights, and long candlelit tables—start at $124 per person. That includes a welcome reception, seasonal cocktails and hors d'oeuvres around a woodland fire, and a multi-course family-style seated meal. It all wraps up with a Christmas sing-along hayride, new friends—and maybe even a new love interest.

CAPE RESORTS



Christmas Candylane at Hersheypark

THERE'S A HOLIDAY BAKING COMPETITION ...

Hershey

► **Hershey is just** the place where two people would fall in love at a Christmas bake-off, have heart-to-hearts over hot cocoa, or indulge in a playful food fight while making Christmas cookies (with none of the dough touching the leading lady's perfectly curled hair).

Cocoa rules the town that was built specifically for Hershey company employees in 1903—you'll find the beloved bean in everything from your hotel shampoo to your hummus. And while the small town provides year-round thrills, the holiday season is when "The Sweetest Place on Earth" really shines.

MOST FESTIVE ACTIVITY Visit **Hershey Sweet Lights**, two miles of electric displays enjoyed from the comfort of your own car.

BEST SPOT FOR A SELFIE With several live reindeer! Hershey is the only place in the Northeast where you can meet all nine of Santa's crew. Just head to the Reindeer Stables at **Hersheypark**'s Christmas Candylane (*hersheypark.com*).

WHAT TO DO AFTER Stop by the newly opened **Chocolatier** at Hersheypark for Reese's Peanut Butter Hummus, cheeseburgers topped with chocolate-drizzled potato chips, and mac-and-cheese with chocolate barbecue sauce, among other curious concoctions. At **Hotel Hershey** (*prices vary; hotelhershey.com*), the more adult-friendly hotel in town, spa treatments incorporate chocolate-scented massage oil, chocolate sugar exfoliator, and even chocolate milk whipped into a foaming bath.

IF YOU CAN'T GET AWAY ...

Then take advantage of Philly's holiday festivities.

Everything Is Illuminated

The **Tinseltown Holiday Spectacular**, presented by Dietz & Watson, runs at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center at Oaks and boasts 1.2 million light bulbs, shopping, dining, an eco-friendly ice-skating rink, photos with Santa, and Gritty Claus appearances (*through January 2nd; tinseltownholiday.com*). The Philadelphia Zoo's "**LumiNature**" nighttime zoo experience is back, this time with more than a million lights, including 500 twinkling flamingos and a 100-foot-long aquarium tunnel (*through January 9th*). If you live near Hamilton in Jersey, the after-hours experience "**Night Forms**" at the Grounds for Sculpture promises vibrant art viewing (*through February 27th; groundsforsculpture.org*).

Get Tipsy at Tinsel

Sip a snow-globe-shaped cocktail at this over-the-top pop-up bar that takes over Midtown Village this month. This year's **Tinsel** decor is influenced by the *Nutcracker* and features custom artwork by local artist Scott Johnston, who pays tribute to Christmas villains like Krampus and Jack Skellington (*through December 31st; @TinselPhilly on Instagram for more*). Check out the **Yule Lodge**, a back-patio winter wonderland at Rittenhouse's Butcher Bar where you can indulge in "Moose Milk" cocktails with vodka, Fernet-Branca and Irish cream (*butcherbarphilly.com*). Or taste spiced mulled-wine cocktails at **Brauhaus Schmitz** on South Street (*brauhausschmitz.com*).

Indulge in Holiday Sweets

You can't beat **Isgro Pastries** in South Philly for cannoli and a platter of the best-selling ricotta cookies (*bestcannoli.com*). Head to Chestnut Hill for a yule log from **Night Kitchen**—a delicious light sponge cake with dark chocolate icing and fondant snowmen (*nightkitchenbakery.com*). And for a touch of nostalgia, visit **Shane Confectionery**, the oldest candy store in the U.S. There, you'll find classic confections, seasonal goodies, and arguably the best hot chocolate in the city, at the speakeasy-style Shane's Chocolate Café. If you wish, ask for a dash of brandy or cognac in your Thomas Jefferson's Drinking Chocolate, as the president himself preferred (*shanecandies.com*).

HERSHEY'PARK

A CRUMBLING INN IS SAVED BY ALTRUISTIC TOWNSPEOPLE …

Bethlehem

▸ **If there's any city** where the holiday spirit conquers all, it's "Christmas City USA," founded and named by Moravian settlers on December 24, 1741. In this Lehigh Valley burg, Christmas music serenades pedestrians, and cobblestone streets provide old-world charm.

Everyone you meet seems plucked from a "Countdown to Christmas" feature—from a museum employee who writes mystery novels to the Mr. and Mrs. Claus who are married in real life to the jubilant hotel staff stringing 35,000 lights every year so that guests and townspeople alike can experience the magic of the holidays.

WHERE TO STAY The **Historic Hotel Bethlehem** (*from $269 per night; hotelbethlehem.com*) is home to an authentic Hallmark-worthy storyline. In 1998, the landmark property was on the brink of being demolished when two Lehigh University alums began working on a plan to build a partnership with other alumni and friends to save the beloved hotel. Thanks to them, the property is thriving and as grand as it was in the 1920s. Folks love it so much that some even stick around after they die—just ask management about the friendly ghosts.

MOST FESTIVE ACTIVITIES Bethlehem is the only place in the United States where you can experience the joys of a **Live Advent Calendar**. It's like a tree lighting, but more exciting: Hundreds of residents gather each night leading up to Christmas, and a child is selected from the audience to knock on the Advent calendar door. Everyone leaves with a treat in this free celebration. The **Moravian Museum** houses replicas of the first documented Christmas tree in the nation, which, naturally, was recorded in Bethlehem. The **Bethlehem Garden Club**, along with Historic Bethlehem Museum & Sites, decorates more than 25 trees with a different theme annually—this year, it's classic Christmas movies. And don't leave without buying an authentic German ornament at the open-air **Christkindlmarkt**.

BEST SPOT FOR A SELFIE On a **Bethlehem by Night Bus Tour** (*christmascity.org*), a guide in period dress will take you to the **Star of Bethlehem** on the city's South Mountain and point out historic buildings along the way, including spots where George Washington and John Adams are known to have stayed.

WHAT TO DO AFTER If you're staying at the hotel, it's perfectly positioned on Main Street, across from the **Chocolate Lab**, where you can snag hot cocoa to go, and the **Moravian Book Shop**, the oldest continuously operating bookstore in the world. Dine on the heated patio at **Zest Bar + Grille** (*zestbethlehem.com*) for New American bites overlooking the Star of Bethlehem. Then step back in time for Jazz Age cocktails and small plates at the romantic **Bookstore Speakeasy** (*bookstorespeakeasy.com*). **Social Still** *(socialstill.com),* a distillery and restaurant built inside a Prohibition-era bank building, is a must for small-batch bourbon lovers. And be sure to try Rude Elf's Reserve, a deep chestnut ale with gingerbread notes created at **Fegley's Brew Works** (*thebrewworks.com*).

IF YOU'RE THERE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE Family-friendly **PeepsFest** (*steelstacks.org*) is a seasonal sugar rush featuring a 400-pound marshmallow creature that drops well before midnight, so the littles can get in on the fun.



Christmas huts line Bethlehem's Main Street.

DOUGLAS BENEDICT



Passengers prepare to hop aboard the North Pole Express on the New Hope Railroad.

VISIT BUCKS COUNTY

A CITY GIRL FALLS IN LOVE WITH A COUNTRY BOY …

New Hope

▸ **Nestled between Philly** and New York, New Hope is the perfect backdrop for a city mouse looking to find herself. This Bucks County town on the Delaware River has the best of both worlds—a blend of wholesome charm and cosmopolitan luxury.

You can imagine a big-shot ad exec leaving her job for a chance at the small-town life in New Hope, then hopping into the classic Ford truck of her new handyman beau for a future of happily-ever-after.

WHERE TO STAY ➔ The newly renovated **Logan Inn** (*from $310 per night; loganinn.com*) is more contemporary luxe than Colonial quaint. For example, there's a room inspired by the pop artist Keith Haring. Upscale features like soaking tubs, private balconies, spacious suites, a whiskey lounge, a cigar club, and an open-kitchen restaurant deliver cozy-chic city-meets-country vibes.

MOST FESTIVE ACTIVITY ➔ Find one-of-a-kind gifts at New Hope's hundreds of specialty stores, ranging from quirky gag purveyors and New Age shops to custom jewelers and fine-art galleries. Nearby **Peddler's Village** (*peddlersvillage.com*), with its red-brick pathways and Colonial-style buildings, displays a million twinkling lights across its 42 acres and hosts gingerbread competitions and parades featuring Santa as well as 65 unique shops.

BEST SPOT FOR A SELFIE ➔ Embark on New Hope Railroad's **Santa's Steam Train Ride** (*newhoperailroad.com*) on a restored early-20th-century passenger train before visiting Santa's Workshop at the station and snapping a pic with Old Saint Nick.

WHAT TO DO AFTER ➔ Head to the award-winning **Bucks County Playhouse** (a favorite of supermodel Gigi Hadid; *bcptheater.org*) for a show, then follow with a feast of locally sourced seasonal small plates at **Stella of New Hope** (*stellanewhope.com*) and a nightcap at **Ferry + Main**, Logan Inn's bustling restaurant bar.