

# December at the Homestead: Walking in a winter wonderland

After dashing through the snow-covered fairways, we arrived at the Homestead in Hot Springs, Va. Already enchanted by the winter wonderland surrounding us, the kids dubbed it the “Christmas Castle” with its grand main entrance. We felt as if we’d just disembarked from the magical Polar Express – in the form of a minivan – and arrived at the North Pole via the Virginia Alleghenies. What could exude more holiday spirit than 40 sparkling Christmas trees spread over 3,000-acres? It became a game to see if we could find them all, and we made sure to track them all down.

According to tradition, the Homestead’s pastry team has created yet another amazing Gingerbread Village made with more than 80 pounds of gingerbread, 110 pounds of candy, and 260 pounds of sugar. Alas, it’s tough to explain to kids that they can feast their eyes, but not their stomachs.

Since “elves” had fully decked the halls prior to Thanksgiving with lights and ornaments galore, the resort was in full celebration mode. There are a slew of indoor and outdoor activities, even more than the amount of toys on your child’s wish list, believe it or not. Make sure to check out the various seasonal packages to receive the best rate suited to your interests.

With its ample novice area, J-bar lift, and ski school for ages 5 and up, the Homestead offers an ideal place for kids to learn to ski and snowboard. In addition, there is a chairlift and several trails for more advanced skiers. As a new attraction this year, night skiing will be available on Saturdays. And my favorite part is the lack of crowds, so you spend the majority of your time skiing, not waiting.

The slopes will open on Dec. 17, weather permitting. At the same time the KidsClub on Cottage Row will open a handy second location. Known as the Little Penguins Program, it’s located conveniently at the



*The Homestead at the holidays. Photo by Loretta Sherwood.*

“Igloo” just a snowball’s throw from the Mountain Lodge. The KidsClub welcomes potty-trained kids ages 3 and up for either full or half-day sessions at both locations. (Be sure to bring your child’s birth certificate.)

For more snow-filled adventures, tubing is another family favorite. Scheduled in one-hour blocks, it’s a fun activity for everyone regardless of age or experience. After you’ve worked up a hearty appetite, the nearby Mountain Lodge is a great place to have lunch, drink hot chocolate, and warm up by the fire.

Another option is to go ice skating on the lawn by the Casino Restaurant. Open as of Nov. 20, there’s a festive atmosphere with music blaring and a gorgeous winter landscape. On a break you can roast S’mores over the fire pit, enjoy a warm pretzel, and wash it all down with some hot cocoa. Lessons are available for newbies.

In the evening there are guided snowmobile tours on the slopes, sure to bring a rosy glow to your kids’ cheeks. Kids ages 6 and up can even drive their own Polaris 120 in 15-minute sessions. Your family can

also hop on a holiday hayride to take in the nightly light show, the Historic Tower’s gorgeous silhouette, and the many holiday displays.

After a host of outdoor activities, head to the Great Hall and warm up from 3-4 p.m. with tea and light sandwiches. Consider making a quick detour into the Presidents’ Lounge before it opens for the evening. It could provide a hands-on history lesson for the kiddos. This elegant bar area displays portraits of the 22 presidents who once visited the resort. Down below is Players Pub, an ultra laid-back sports bar with pool tables and open to kids until 10 p.m.

Nearby Martha’s Market is a hub for coffee, snacks, and sandwiches throughout the day. In addition, there are several computers available. In the Tower Corridor you’ll also find the adorable Hobby Horse filled with toys. Down the hall, the Allegheny Outfitters Shop can arrange your recreational activities in conjunction with the concierge.

Sam Snead’s Tavern, a local favorite, is handily located across the street from the resort. With plenty of noise in this casual and friendly pub,

kids can exercise their vocal chords as much as they want. With any luck, you may even get to meet Sam Snead Jr. himself, like we did.

Tweens will get enthusiastic (really!) about the vibes at VIBZ Family Game Center, open on weekends. There is an array of arcade games as well as the latest Wii consoles to keep kids on the move even while indoors. In addition, there is an arcade room with video games and a change machine located on the floor below the main dining room.

The Bowling Center with its own pool table is another surefire hit. In addition, complimentary kid-friendly movies are shown nightly in the theater free of charge. Last but not least, be sure to save some time for a rejuvenating swim in the warm indoor pool. Its water comes from the same mineral springs once enjoyed by Thomas Jefferson. You can’t find that at the real North Pole! **RPM**

*Libby Carty McNamee, a local freelance writer and mother, has enjoyed every minute spent at the Homestead. For more information and rates, visit [www.thehomestead.com](http://www.thehomestead.com).*