

9th Annual Carefree Christmas Festival - And it's Free!

Written by Amanda Rumore

Each December, Arizona's high Sonoran Desert comes alive with sugarplums, elves and Santa at the Carefree Christmas Festival (#CCF2016.) The annual event, an iconic celebration, offers merriment, entertainment, and free holiday fun for the entire family, including beloved pets.



The 9th Annual Carefree Christmas Festival will take place December 9 - December 11, in downtown Carefree, Arizona. The entirely free event runs from 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, and 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. on Sunday. For information and an event schedule visit carefreechristmasfestival.com, or call 480-488-2051.

The scenic destination is the charming Carefree Desert Gardens and Sanderson Lincoln Pavilion, 100 Easy St., in downtown Carefree. The four-acre botanical garden converted to a winter wonderland provides a stunning backdrop for a real-life Christmas village with winding paths showcasing thousands of illuminated exotic plants and cacti.

Live music, choral and dance performances, real snow and snow slide, pictures with Santa, an electric light parade and fireworks, horse-drawn carriage rides, North Pole train rides, a huge gift and food market, a Nativity scene, pet parade and pet pictures with Santa and more are all part of this free weekend long event.



New this year, snow sculptures will be on display from world-renowned artist and master carver Ray Villafane.

Santa's Grotto is open to visitors for pictures with Mr. Claus, and children are invited to leave their Christmas lists in Santa's mailbox. Even Mrs. Claus makes an appearance for story time hour.

Renowned for its expansive Kid's Zone, families flock from all over to play in 40 tons of real snow created especially for the Carefree Christmas Festival. Children and adults are invited to ride the snow slide and use the multiple sleds for all who wish to fly down the icy chute. The Kid's Zone, with bounce houses and other activities is open throughout the weekend.



Last minute shoppers will appreciate the Holiday Gift Market presented by Magic Bird Festivals. The lighted holiday village offers daytime and late night shopping with nearly 100 artist booths and vendors. Featuring artisan designs, handcrafted jewelry, stocking stuffer gifts, boutique apparel, and gourmet confections, there is something for everyone on your list.

Sunday is pet day. The popular pet parade begins at 9 a.m., and pet pictures with Santa are available throughout the morning. A pet adoption event will take place to benefit the Foothills Animal Rescue (FAR). All are encouraged to dress their pets in their holiday best.

Carefree Desert Gardens is located at 100 Easy St., Carefree, Arizona. for more **Information**, visit carefreechristmasfestival.com.