


# Sparkle & Shine: Festive Fun in the Waterloo Region

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I don't think my grandkids would ever say that a weekend with Nana is boring after our wonderfully festive stay in the Waterloo Region! We strolled through the Christkindl market, had our brains tested at the fascinating Brain exhibit, swam, bowled and mini-golfed at the Crowne Plaza, chatted with Santa on the Santa train and counted Christmas trees at Castle Kilbride. Festive, heck yes, and definitely fun!

## Shop

Christkindl Market is a traditional outdoor market adjacent to city hall and the skating rink with a European feel to it. Stalls selling hats, sweaters, finger puppets and lots of hot drinks and food added a festive feel to downtown Kitchener. I bought flax seed neck warmers for gifts for friends, and hand knitted finger puppets.



Christkindl market – Photo Melody Wren



Photo Melody Wren

## Eat

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After getting thoroughly chilled shopping outside, we warmed up with enormous mugs of hot chocolate at [B@THEMUSEUM](#), an on-trend café bar with bistro style menu. Wooden tables and chalkboards add to the rustic vibe. The menu has something for everyone in the family and kids will love the big mac flatbread.





B@THEMUSEUM – Photo Melody Wren

## Explore

Next door at [THE MUSEUM](#), we were spellbound by the brain exhibit. A rather apt location for a brain exhibit given the nearby University boasts the largest math and computer science program in the world. Displays of the inner workings of a head included masks painted by the Brain Injury Association explaining their injuries and the effects on them. Sensory activities were mesmerizing including a walk across the floor with tiny fish scattering underneath as your feet moved. A concave mirror totally flipped me out and over. An animation station allows any age to set up animals and people, add sound, and record their own animated video. A giant pinwheel, water play and an enormous walk-on piano will keep the whole family engaged for hours.



THE MUSEUM – Photo Melody Wren



Brain exhibit- masks by Brain injury survivors – Photo Melody Wren

We checked into the recently renovated Crowne Plaza, with its fun lime and turquoise lobby furniture, king-sized beds and lime coloured bathrooms. An iPod charging station on the night table and a “wind down-rest up” package of face wipes and lavender spray ensure a restful sleep.

## Play

Once the grandchildren arrived, we swam in the huge pool, then enjoyed the bowling alley and mini golf on the lower floor. Never having bowled before, grand-daughter bowling alongside Grandad was an instant convert announcing that she “loved bowling”. Mini putt golf was challenging and another first for both the five and two-year-old.





Bowling with Grandad at the Crowne Plaza – Photo Melody Wren

After a full hot breakfast buffet at the hotel, we made our way to ride the Santa train on the Waterloo Central Railway. The vintage train filled with the excitement of a visit from Santa. We sang Christmas carols led by the conductors and Santa's elves and gobbled up a delicious boxed lunch we carried on board from E.V.O. Kitchen in nearby Cambridge. Santa gave each child a beautiful silver bell on a burgundy hanger that they then rang along with the carols. Colouring books and crayons were handed out, and at only one hour long, it was filled with Christmas activities to keep both grand-daughters, 5 and 4 1/2 entertained the entire time.



## Local History

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After a brief drive from St. Jacobs, we visited [Castle Kilbride](#), a Victorian home, built in 1877 and festively decorated until early January each year. The five-year-old kept busy counting the many decorated Christmas trees throughout the home, losing track after 22. The dining room was set for a Christmas dinner, with many foods we have included in our spreads today but a few oddities that were amusing. Place cards for each member of the family were set out as well as a tiered dessert stand that grand-daughter was captivated by. The Victorian miniature Dickens village on display in the attic was a huge hit and we were all charmed by the one hundred miniature houses, churches, people, lights and trees. On the lowest level was an interactive collection of Victorian toys that one of the daughters would have played with including a Skittles and tops game that we played with other children.



Castle Kilbride Christmas Dinner – Photo Melody Wren





Castle Kilbride Cookies and milk for Santa – Photo Melody Wren

The whole weekend was enjoyable for every layer of the family, hitting all the elements of a weekend escape nearby. Our five-year-old grand-daughter announced that she wanted to live at Castle Kilbride and never leave.

For more information, check out the Explore Waterloo Region website: <https://www.explorewaterlooregion.com>

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## About The Author

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Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snowshoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.