

FOOD + HOME/HOLIDAYS

# Holiday Traditions at Alderbrook

With so many memory-making moments, families come back year after year

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER (/AUTHOR/GEMMA-ALEXANDER) |

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PHOTO: Photo courtesy of Alderbrook

**Editor's note:** This article was sponsored by [Alderbrook Resort & Spa](https://www.alderbrookresort.com/) (<https://www.alderbrookresort.com/>).

When [Alderbrook Resort & Spa](https://www.alderbrookresort.com/) (<https://www.alderbrookresort.com/>) was established in one of North America's scenic fjords – the inaccurately named Hood Canal – it was only accessible by boat. While road access is one of many changes to the family and pet-friendly vacation spot that have taken place since 1913, “We really love our Pacific Northwest traditions. When you’ve been around more than a hundred years, you pick up a few!” declares Abigail Holmes, marketing manager at Alderbrook Resort & Spa.

Alderbrook itself is a tradition for many PNW families. Holmes has seen couples who held their wedding at the resort come back to celebrate their anniversaries there. Over the years, many honeymooners continue to visit the resort every year as their families grow. It's also frequently the site of family reunions.

“You bring the kids out here and they swim for the first time in the pool, or try their first oyster, find hidden treasures up on the trails, or find all of the hidden nautical flags throughout the property – there's just so many aspects of life that we support with all the families that come out,” says Holmes.

But without a doubt, one of the resort's favorite traditions centers on the winter holidays. What started years ago as a simple tree-lighting ceremony has evolved into a month-long celebration that kicks off Thanksgiving weekend with the Holidays on Hood Canal event that trades the commercial chaos of Black Friday for an interactive waterfront production full of holiday cheer.

## **Holidays on Hood Canal**

At Alderbrook, the holiday decorations go up even before Thanksgiving.

“It's controversial, decorating for the holidays before Thanksgiving. But why wait when it's something that you love to do?” asks Holmes. Alderbrook creates a classic, traditional holiday atmosphere in the lodge that gives way to more whimsical decorations as guests move down to the water.

Thanksgiving at Alderbrook is a stress-free tradition that exchanges hours in the kitchen for a Thanksgiving banquet buffet. Chef Sara Harvey gives all the traditional Thanksgiving dishes an elevated PNW flair. Even families who spend the actual holiday at home can drive (or sail – Alderbrook's winter moorage services include power, Wi-Fi and restaurant access) down to Hood Canal to arrive in time for the biggest event of the season – Santa's arrival at the Holidays on Hood Canal extravaganza.



*Photo courtesy of Alderbrook Resort*

Santa has been visiting Alderbrook during the holidays for at least 15 years. Being the traditional sort, Santa and Mrs. Claus still prefer to arrive at Alderbrook the old-fashioned way: by boat. But reindeer landing on the 54-foot Lady Alderbrook yacht are liable to damage some navigation equipment. When that happens, one of Santa's elves leads guests and visitors from the lodge down to the dock where they help guide the boat in with Christmas carols. There may or may not be a green guy running around causing mayhem. But Captain Elf always manages to bring the boat to the dock just in time for sunset when all the holiday lights go on and fireworks go off.

"It's such a fun, family-oriented blast for everybody," says Holmes, and it's free for everyone who wants to attend.

## **Cocoa cruises**

Starting the day after Santa's arrival and continuing every Saturday and Sunday until Christmas, Santa joins the Cocoa Cruise after making a late morning appearance at the lodge. Parents can take pictures of their kids with Santa in the lobby, where kids fill the time until the Cocoa Cruise departs with activities such as decorating gingerbread and ornaments.





*Cocoa Cruise, photo courtesy of Alderbrook Resort*

The Lady Alderbrook hosts the Cocoa Cruises in the afternoon. True to the name, the cruises are filled with hot cocoa and hot cider as well as sweet treats, while Santa poses for more pictures and reads stories against the backdrop of Hood Canal and the Olympic mountains. Kids can color and do crafts until the boat stops at the Union City Market for some holiday shopping before returning to the resort.

All of Alderbrook's holiday activities are open to members of the community as well as guests, and lobby activities are all free. The Cocoa Cruises are ticketed though (\$50 adults/\$40 seniors/\$25 kids) and they sell out fast. Advance registration is highly recommended.

## **Memory-making moments**

Many more events and special moments are sprinkled throughout the season. Every day, a new design in the pastry-themed advent calendar (think gingerbread orcas frolicking in the fjord) is revealed in the lobby and on [Alderbrook's Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/alderbrookresort/\)](https://www.instagram.com/alderbrookresort/) stories.

"Kids can play in the pool and then afterwards get hot cocoa in the lobby by the fire or go back to the cottage or your room and just hang out and watch movies," says Holmes. "It's amazing weather for cocoa and blankets and stories by the fire. We have fires all over the place and S'mores kits – it's such a cozy seasonal vibe."

Families who don't mind the PNW's aggressive mist can go out on the water, play on the beach, or enjoy geocaching on the trails through the resort's woods. Alderbrook stocks games like bocce ball, croquet and cornhole for the lawn in front of the cottages.

Each of those cottages has its own Christmas tree, and in the main lodge, there's a lobby full of board games and a heated saltwater pool to keep kids occupied. Parents will enjoy the hot tub and sauna and may also take advantage of the spa's wellness programs and the Drinkery bar's weekday specials such as Tapped Out Tuesdays and Winesday.

And if you would prefer to continue the rest and relaxation instead of going home to cook a big Christmas dinner, consider staying through the holiday. Chef Harvey has got you covered with a special banquet buffet menu on Christmas Day. Holidays at Alderbrook could easily become your family's favorite tradition.

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