



# DESTINATION GUIDE EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS MARKETS

*Unwrap the charm of a festive journey along the rivers of Europe*



# *Welcome to* EUROPE'S CHRISTMAS MARKETS

*Discover the magic of the festive season along Europe's rivers*



As winter settles over Europe, the continent's cities and riverside towns transform into sparkling wonderlands of timeless traditions, cozy indulgence and the magic of Christmas itself. From the fairytale facades of Strasbourg to the glittering market squares of Cologne and Vienna, Europe's Christmas markets offer more than just festive shopping. They are immersive cultural experiences, where centuries-old customs meet the scent of roasted chestnuts, the sparkle of hand-blown ornaments and the warmth of mulled wine shared beneath twinkling lights.

There is no more enchanting way to explore these markets than by a river voyage. Gently gliding along storied waterways like the Rhine, Danube, Main, Moselle and Elbe, you'll be delivered directly into the heart of medieval

towns and baroque cities aglow with lights and festive charm.

Each market has its own character. Some are set against Gothic cathedrals, others tucked into medieval courtyards or sprawl along riverside promenades. You'll find artisan stalls brimming with handmade gifts and regional delicacies while the sounds of brass bands and choirs echo through cobbled streets. From nativity scenes and candlelit processions to local specialties like Quarkbällchen and Glühwein, Europe's Christmas markets are a feast for the senses.

Whether you choose to enjoy the festive season and return home in time for Christmas, or you choose to spend the Christmas period on board with us, you can look forward to a magical experience like no other.



COLOGNE, GERMANY

# *What our guests love about* **EUROPE'S CHRISTMAS MARKETS**

*There's no better way to learn about a destination than from someone who has experienced it firsthand. Hear from past Viking guests about their European Christmas markets voyage.*

*"You get the enjoyment of fabulous Christmas markets everywhere and the efficiency, friendliness and charm of the Viking crew. Win-win!"*

- Sharee C.

"Budapest has such history and beautiful architecture. The bridges across the Danube are spectacular. Loved Szechenyi Thermal bath and the Christmas markets."

- Peter F



"Our first cruise, [Christmas along the Elbe] Berlin to Prague we totally enjoyed. It had a friendly atmosphere. We've booked another cruise and so the journey begins..."

- John M



*"The Danube Christmas markets river voyage exceeded my every expectation. It was the only thing I have on my 'bucket list' – thank you!"*

- Mary B

*“Vienna was our favourite city. Architecture, music, pomp and ceremony, dear little coffee houses, gorgeous sweets and pastries, amazing Christmas markets, new friends and a romantic holiday. Absolute perfection.”*

-Christine C



VIENNA, AUSTRIA

# *The history of* CHRISTMAS MARKETS

*World-famous, Europe's Christmas markets are loved by locals and tourists alike, spreading cheer throughout the festive season for centuries.*



DRESDEN, GERMANY

Of Europe's many festive traditions, perhaps none is more loved than the annual Christmas markets. Replete with cozy stalls selling all manner of handmade crafts by local artisans, delicious regional treats and authentic holiday accoutrement, each charming market boasts its own heritage and character. With a history dating back centuries, this treasured custom has more than stood the test of time.

Though forerunners of today's Christmas markets began in Europe during the Middle

Ages, the world's oldest genuine Christmas market is Dresden's own Striezelmarkt, which was first held for one day only on December 23, 1434. This initial iteration of the Striezelmarkt was a meat market, held so that the people of Dresden would have a selection of fresh meat from which to choose for the upcoming yuletide festivities. This endeavour proved so successful that it became an annual tradition and the offerings supplemented the following year with various other goods. Beginning in the early 1500s, the duration of

the market was expanded from a single day to encompass the Monday before Christmas through December 24. While the location of the Striezelmarkt has changed many times over the centuries, today it is held in the same place as the original 1434 meat market: Dresden's Altmarkt square, the city's oldest.

While Christmas markets had begun to spring up in the years following the introduction of the Striezelmarkt, the 16th century is when they truly began to proliferate across the continent. In addition to celebrating the festive season and providing a vehicle through which local vendors could sell their wares, they offered busy townspeople a way to procure everything they needed for Christmas in one convenient location. Today, Europe's Christmas markets are enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Perhaps take a moment to marvel at their long history as you explore the land in which many of our most cherished Christmas traditions began.



BASEL, SWITZERLAND



DRESDEN, GERMANY

# *Top 10 European* **CHRISTMAS MARKETS**

*From riverside squares to the foot of medieval town halls, we've handpicked Europe's most enchanting Christmas markets, each one a destination in its own right.*



## **COLOGNE, GERMANY**

Every year, the city centre of Cologne is touched by the magic of the festivities in the run-up to Christmas with everything you'd expect of a classic German spread: the glühwein, the crafts, the twinkling lights. This is the most visited Christmas market in Germany with four million visitors annually and features about 150 stands modelled after quaint Budens. These red-roofed huts offer all manner of handicrafts, gifts, food and drink.



## **VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

One of the most iconic Christmas markets in the world is the Christkindlmarkt Rathausplatz in the shadows of Vienna's town hall. The market welcomes more than three million visitors each year who meander through the 150 market stalls offering traditional foods, Christmas ornaments and handicrafts. Choirs and musicians, a grand Christmas tree and a 3,000-square-metre ice rink add the final touches to this incredible sight.

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### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY**

The Budapest Christmas Fair and Winter Festival located in Vörösmarty Square is the oldest and most popular market in the Hungarian capital. Quaint cottages and over 100 wooden stalls transform the area into a magical wonderland, complete with the delicious scent of mulled wine, cinnamon, roasted chestnuts and honey biscuits, alongside traditional Hungarian dishes such as pork knuckle and chimney cake.



### **STRASBOURG, FRANCE**

The capital of Christmas in France, Strasbourg's Christkindelsmärik is the oldest in France, dating back to 1570. More than 300 wooden chalets in the city's Old Town square brim with colourful wares, fine food and mulled wine, bringing festive cheer in abundance. Thousands of shimmering lights and decorations make it one of the most famous Christmas markets in Europe.



### **NUREMBERG, GERMANY**

Step into a winter wonderland at the medieval Christkindlmarkt. Dating back to 1628 this market is one of Germany's most iconic. Explore the dazzling display of wooden stalls, twinkling lights and a feast of long-standing culinary traditions, including Lebkuchen and bratwurst. Experience the world's largest Feuerzangenbowle, a flaming mulled wine punch that warms your soul. Carollers and musicians fill the air with holiday melodies and a traditional carousel makes this market a local family favourite.



### **LEIPZIG, GERMANY**

Leipzig's Christmas Market, dating back to 1458, is one of Germany's oldest and largest. With over 300 stalls, overflowing with handcrafted treasures and delicacies, from woven baskets to delectable Quarkbällchen. Warm up with Leipziger Lerche as you wander through this fairy-tale village adorned with garland arches. Leipzig's proud legacy as the home of composers like Bach and Mendelssohn is echoed in every square, where local choirs and classical ensembles add to the atmosphere.



### **PARIS, FRANCE**

La Magie de Noël located in Tuileries Garden alongside the Louvre is by far the largest and most popular of Paris' many Christmas markets. Originally located along the Champs Élysées the market moved to Tuileries in 2018. The enormous Ferris Wheel is silhouetted against the Parisian skyline while the white chalets of the Artisan Village feature handmade gifts, crafts and other specialty French products. The aroma of hot roasted chestnuts, crepes and vin chaud (hot mulled wine) fills the air while the Champagne igloo provides a uniquely French experience.



### **TRIER, GERMANY**

Immerse yourself in a truly one-of-a-kind Trier Christmas Market, where Roman ruins meet yuletide magic. Set in Germany's oldest city, the market features stalls selling handmade toys, glass ornaments, and seasonal treats. Delight in the array of regional delicacies, such as Flammkuchen, a flatbread pizza topped with creme fraiche, perfect for a cosy winter snack. Traditional brass bands, baroque facades and the scent of fir branches offer a feast for the senses.



**BASEL, SWITZERLAND**



### **BASEL, SWITZERLAND**

Explore a softer, more whimsical side of Basel, with a Christmas market set beneath centuries-old churches and sparkling fairy lights. Savour unique Swiss delicacies like Basler Lächerli, a chewy gingerbread spiced with cloves and candied peel, crafted to a secret local recipe that is guarded all year. The Basler Wunschbuch, or Basel Wish Book has become a beloved Christmas tradition. Set in the courtyard of the Town Hall, this large, leather-bound volume invites visitors to pen their Christmas wishes and read heartfelt messages from around the world. Styled like a medieval codex, it captures the spirit of the season in ink and sentiment.



### **BAMBERG, GERMANY**

A UNESCO World Heritage city, Bamberg exudes medieval charm year-round, but during Advent, it transforms into a festive masterpiece. At the Bamberg Christmas Market you'll find Franconian specialties like bratwurst and lebkuchen, alongside hand-blown ornaments and artisan gifts. But what truly sets Bamberg apart is its Krippenweg, or Nativity Path. A centuries-old tradition, the Nativity Path is a celebrated part of Bamberg's heritage. This city-wide trail features over 40 nativity scenes displayed in churches, museums, and shop windows—from traditional wooden cribs to modern interpretations.

# *Highlights on a Christmas* **MARKETS VOYAGE**

*A handpicked collection of seasonal experiences that define the charm and wonder of your journey.*

## **FREIBURG ORGAN CONCERT**

Enjoy an organ recital of festive classics in this enchanting, medieval German village. Admire the Gothic cathedral and visit the Christmas market in Freiburg's charming main square, brilliantly lit for the season.

## **MEDIEVAL NUREMBERG**

Wander through Christkindlmarkt — one of the oldest Christmas markets in the world — in the heart of this historic city and savour the warm, nutty flavours of lebkuchen, a traditional German spiced cookie.



**FREIBURG, GERMANY**



**SALZBURG, AUSTRIA**

## **THE SOUND OF MUSIC**

Immerse yourself in the storybook charm of the alpine town of Salzburg. The birthplace of classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the filming location of classic movie *The Sound of Music*. Stroll through one of the world's oldest Advent markets set against the baroque backdrop of Cathedral and Residenz squares, alive with festive colour and tradition.

## **FRANCE'S ALSACE REGION**

Stroll the quaint streets of Colmar & Riquewihr. These two small towns in the Alsace region of France are known for their quaint cobblestoned streets, half-timbered houses and beautiful canals. Savour authentic Alsatian cuisine before exploring their delightful Christmas market stalls or sampling a glass of local Riesling.



### THE WORLD'S OLDEST CHRISTMAS MARKET

Dresden's historic Striezelmarkt is recognised as the world's oldest Christmas market, dating back to 1434. Towering above the market is the world's largest Erzgebirge step pyramid, standing over 14 metres tall, and a 25-metre Nordmann fir adorned with 16,000 lights and a glowing Herrnhut star.

### CHRISTMAS MARKET AT ST. STEPHEN'S BASILICA, BUDAPEST

Set beneath Budapest's grand cathedral, this festive market comes alive beside an ice rink gliding with graceful skaters. Towering above the wooden stalls and nativity displays stands an 18-metre Christmas tree, visible from nearly every corner of the square. Indulge in a delicious Hungarian chimney cake or savour a hearty bowl of paprika-infused goulash.





SVARÁK STALL, PRAGUE

### THE SPIRIT OF BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS

Step into the glittering world of fin de siècle Paris with an unforgettable evening at the Paradis Latin. Located in the heart of the Latin Quarter, this iconic cabaret was originally opened in 1803 and remains a vibrant symbol of Parisian joie de vivre. Take your seat for a dazzling revue that blends acrobatics, music, and elaborate costumes in a celebration of theatrical flair.

### TRADITIONAL BEER BREWING

The rolling hills of the Bavarian countryside provide an ideal setting to learn about brewing beer. Sample the state's famous beverage while enjoying live music at a true German Christmas party. Join in the dancing, raise a stein and sing along to a Christmas song as you celebrate the spirited traditions of festive Bavaria.

### BOHEMIAN CHRISTMAS

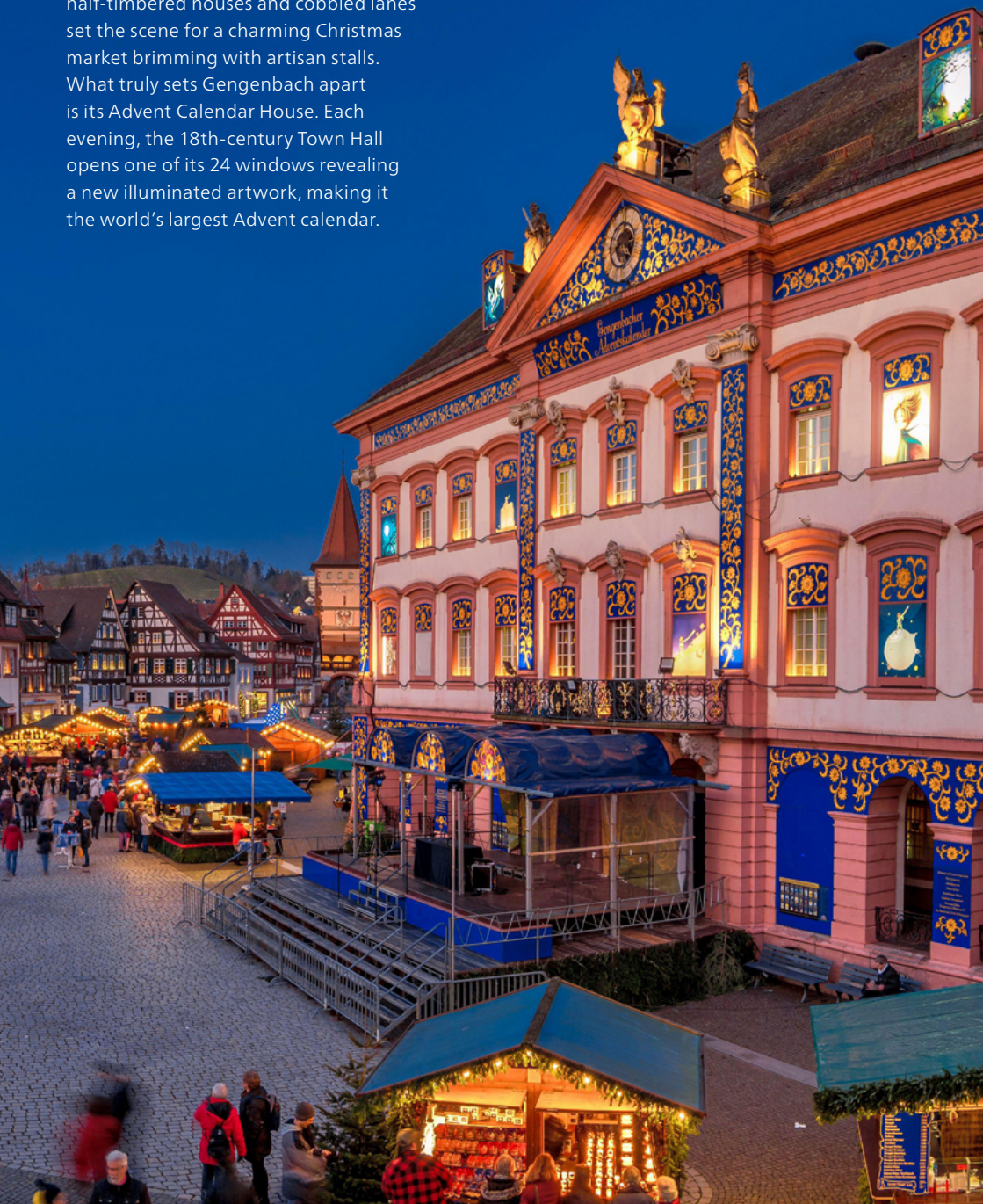
Explore Prague's Old Town, a captivating blend of architectural styles and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Listen as carolers fill the air with festive song, browse Bohemian tree ornaments while enjoying a warm cup of svařák, the Czech take on mulled wine.



BAVARIAN BEER

## GENGENBACH – A JEWEL OF THE BLACK FOREST

Wander the medieval old town where half-timbered houses and cobbled lanes set the scene for a charming Christmas market brimming with artisan stalls. What truly sets Gengenbach apart is its Advent Calendar House. Each evening, the 18th-century Town Hall opens one of its 24 windows revealing a new illuminated artwork, making it the world's largest Advent calendar.



# *Rothenburg ob der tauber* WHERE CHRISTMAS HAPPENS ALL YEAR ROUND

*Follow the “Romantic Road” to one of Germany’s last remaining walled medieval towns — Rothenburg ob der Tauber, lovingly preserved, and where Christmas is celebrated all year round.*



Centuries ago, Rothenburg was ruled by the Holy Roman Empire. It was a busy merchant city until the Thirty Years’ War and the plague threw it into poverty. This 17th-century stagnation froze Rothenburg in time, to be rediscovered by German Romantics in 1802. An optional excursion to this charming town, you will see the picturesque Plönlein square and the Kriminalmuseum, stroll the castle garden and observe its system of weirs across the river. Walk along the Herrengasse, an inviting lane of old patrician houses. And see the 1466 High Altar of St. Jakob’s Church and the Gothic–Renaissance Town Hall.

Perhaps one of Rothenburg’s most famous attractions is the Käthe Wohlfahrt Christmas shop. Founded by Wilhelm and Kathe Wohlfahrt in 1964, from a desire to gift friends traditional music boxes that they were unable to find outside of the Christmas period. The Rothenburg store – now their global headquarters – has been converted to a year-round Christmas village covering more than 1,400 square metres. It is home to a remarkable collection of traditional German decorations, perfectly fashioned handmade gifts, pyramids, nutcrackers, and ornaments of glass, wood and pewter, all made by creative

artists and expert craftsmen. Decorating trees and displaying ornaments has been a tradition going back thousands of years. Born from the notion that beautiful decorations and green branches were thought to banish the gloomy feel of winter in the dark season.

Upon entering, you are immediately spellbound by Christmas, captivated by the magical sights and sounds before you. Nearly five kilometres of tinsel and Christmas garland, with over 122,000 dazzling lights have been used to gracefully decorate the village. The heart of the village is modelled off a Franconian settlement with snow-covered houses, thousands of twinkling lights and a winding cobblestone street. A five-metre tall revolving Christmas tree, adorned with 12,500 twinkling lights and more than a thousand glass baubles will entrance and enliven the darkest of seasons. Before you leave, finish with a photo with the colourful Käthe Wohlfahrt Gift Express bus – parked right outside – and take home your very own original souvenir.



If you've not had enough of Christmas, take time to explore the German Christmas Museum, the first permanent exhibition in Germany on the history of German Christmas traditions. It showcases unusual and rare Christmas decorations from the 19th and the early 20th-centuries. You'll also discover the differences between St. Nicholas and Father Christmas and learn when the first advent calendars and wreaths appeared.

**Experience the joy of Christmas all year round with an optional excursion to Rothenburg ob der Tauber on our 15-day *Grand European Tour* voyage.**

# Something FOR EVERYONE

*There's so much more to a Christmas markets river voyage than twinkling lights and festive cheer. These journeys follow the same storied waterways as our year-round itineraries, offering rich access to Europe's art, architecture, culture and history, just with a magical seasonal twist.*



## Art

In Würzburg, step inside the opulent Bishops' Residenz to marvel at Tiepolo's breathtaking 595-square-metre fresco, a masterpiece of Baroque ceiling art. In Vienna, the Museum of Fine Arts invites you to linger among works by the Old Masters, while Göttweig Abbey's Imperial Staircase stuns with one of the world's largest ceiling frescoes. At Prague's Lobkowitz Palace, centuries of artistic patronage come to life through grand portraits, rare artifacts and handwritten musical scores. A river journey through Europe reveals how deeply the visual arts are woven into the cultural fabric of this region, even as the festive season adds its own radiant layer of sparkle and sophistication.

## Culture

Vienna enchants with classical concerts featuring the timeless works of Mozart and Strauss, while Budapest invites you to soak in centuries-old thermal baths alongside locals. In Paris, the spirit of the Belle Époque lives on in the cabaret halls, where music, dance and theatrical flair light up the night. In Prague, music lovers can trace Mozart's handwritten notes and Beethoven's symphonic manuscripts at the Lobkowitz Palace. These experiences go beyond sightseeing, they're invitations to participate in living traditions. From candlelit performances to historic rituals, every moment is steeped in the customs and creativity that define Europe's cultural soul.

## Culinary

A river journey through Europe is a delight for the taste buds at any time of year. In Gouda, try your hand at crafting the perfect stroopwafel, a sweet Dutch treat layered with toffee syrup. In Germany, savour sizzling sausages with tangy mustard and sauerkraut, or sip crisp Rieslings at Schloss Vollrads, one of the country's oldest wineries set amongst 198 acres of stunning scenery. Alsace tempts with its blend of French and German culinary traditions, offering everything from creamy cheeses to crispy flammkuchen - wood-fired flatbread topped with cream, onions, and cured pork. Budapest's



Grand Market Hall offers local delicacies from strudel to paprika-spiced meats. Become a Maître Chocolatier during a hands-on workshop at Lindt's headquarters in Switzerland, or indulge in a slice of Sacher Torte at Vienna's iconic Café Sacher.

## History

Step into the pages of Europe's past as you sail through cities steeped in centuries of history. Visit Marksburg Castle, the only Rhine stronghold never destroyed and imagine life behind its fortified walls. In Strasbourg, gaze up at the soaring Gothic cathedral that once held the title of the world's tallest building. Walk the halls of the Palace of Versailles, where French kings once ruled in opulence. Or explore Schönbrunn Palace, the Habsburgs' grand summer residence that dates to 1638. In Mainz, discover the birthplace of the printing revolution at the Gutenberg Museum. While Passau and Regensburg, offer an opportunity to wander through Old Towns that have stood for over 2,000 years. These destinations offer more than historical facts, they bring to life the stories, struggles and triumphs that have shaped Europe.

## Architecture

Europe's rivers are lined with architectural marvels that span millennia. In Heidelberg, explore a Renaissance-era castle perched above a town that inspired the German Romantic movement. Vienna's Ringstrasse dazzles with imperial elegance. Or marvel at the intricate stained glass of Reims Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where the Gallery of Kings and windows by Marc Chagall illuminate centuries of sacred artistry. In Cologne, the twin spires of its iconic cathedral pierce the winter sky, while in Budapest, the Parliament building, Chain Bridge, and Fisherman's Bastion create a skyline of architectural grandeur.



# *The sweet history of* **GINGERBREAD**

*Sugar and spice and everything nice – in the enchanting realm of culinary delights, few treats evoke the warmth and nostalgia of the festive season quite like gingerbread in its many forms.*

*Just how did gingerbread weave its spicy magic into the fabric of Christmas traditions around the world?*

## **GINGERBREAD'S HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

Believed to originate in Southeast Asia, ginger's ancient use in Chinese and Indian diets dates back to 500 BC. In medieval Europe, ginger underwent a delightful transformation into beloved gingerbread, featured in both sweet and savoury dishes. Monks are credited with the earliest gingerbread recipes, in particular an Armenian monk, Saint Gregory of Nicopolis, who is claimed to have brought gingerbread to Europe in 992. Early gingerbread recipes often combined ginger with breadcrumbs, honey and other spices, sometimes known as honey cakes. These early gingerbreads were usually shaped into figures, symbols, or religious motifs. As gingerbread started to become associated with special occasions, feasts and religious celebrations like Christmas, its popularity spread across Europe, adapting to local flavours and traditions.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the 16th-century, gingerbread became a notable delicacy at the royal court. It is believed that the Queen appreciated the artistry of shaping gingerbread into humanoid forms, so she commissioned her bakers to create gingerbread figures in the likeness of important guests and dignitaries visiting her court. Adorned with colourful icing and gold leaf, these edible creations were highlights



at banquets. The trend spread among the aristocracy, and the tradition of shaping gingerbread evolved over the centuries, becoming associated with festive celebrations and Christmas. Today, bakers create festive shapes and designs, from stars and snowflakes to Santas and reindeer, turning gingerbread into a delightful edible canvas for spreading Christmas cheer.

## **THE RISE OF GINGERBREAD HOUSES: A SWEET TRADITION TAKES SHAPE**

Originating in 19th-century Germany, gingerbread houses, known as *lebkuchenhäusle*, are often linked to the 'Hansel and Gretel' fairy tale. However, the

tale as collected by the Grimm Brothers and published in their collection in 1812, lacked the iconic gingerbread house, featuring instead a dwelling made of bread with a cake roof and sugar windows. The introduction of gingerbread into the narrative came later, so it is uncertain whether gingerbread houses were a result of the popular fairy tale, or vice versa. Regardless, the tradition of families building gingerbread houses and decorating them with colourful icing and sweets as part of their Christmas festivities spread across Europe. Today, these edible creations remain iconic symbols of the festive season, enjoyed globally.

As we indulge in the comforting aroma and delectable taste of gingerbread during the festive season, we are not just savouring a sweet treat but immersing ourselves in a centuries-old tradition that has transcended borders and time. From ancient spice routes to Victorian feasts, fairy tales and modern family gatherings, gingerbread remains a cherished symbol of warmth, creativity, and the joyous spirit of Christmas. So, this festive season, let the spicy allure of gingerbread transport you to a world where the sweetest traditions come to life.



# *What to eat and* **WHAT TO BUY**

*From glühwein to sweet treats Jana Frawley explores what to eat and what to buy at Europe's Christmas markets.*



MUNICH, GERMANY

As much as I admire Mariah Carey's romantic Christmas list, it's a bit frugal for my tastes. I want a lot for Christmas. Not fancy baubles and expensive gifts, mind you, but Christmas clichés and Hallmark movies brought to life.

The snow-globe version I'm looking for obviously doesn't exist in the Australian summer, so it's off I go to the northern hemisphere to set sail on a Viking Christmas Delights cruise on the Danube.

The seven-night journey starts in Budapest, Hungary, with stops in the Slovakian capital, Bratislava, Vienna and the small Austrian towns of Krems and Linz, before finishing in

the German town of Passau. It turns out to really be the most wonderful time of the year.

On first inspection, Christmas markets – or Christkindlmarks – seem to be an attempt to break the world record for most fairy lights in a single location. They're also a centuries-old European tradition timed to mark the Christian advent calendar.

Most are outdoors, usually in a town's main square, and filled with vendors selling food, drinks, and gifts to local family and friends and visitors like me. Some, like the one in Bratislava with its pedestrian-only, cobblestone streets, have the charm of a country fête. In one pocket

of three interlinked markets, there are 50 or more Christmas trees, each with differently themed ornaments handmade by artists and crafters of all ages; in another, a near-life-size nativity.

The Passau market – my favourite, mostly because the food is so delicious – is smallish and features neat rows of quaint wooden stalls reminiscent of gingerbread houses, with glorious St Stephen’s Cathedral as the backdrop. In Vienna, where around 15 markets of all sizes are dotted around the city, I visit the biggest one in front of Rathaus City Hall. It’s a twinkling fun fair with a 28m spruce Christmas tree surrounded by nativity scenes, ice-skating, merry-go-rounds, and a giant maple covered in huge glowing red hearts.

If you’re looking to experience those very festive words – jolly and merry – every market delivers, but it’s the German and Austrian ones that offer the full Christmas package.

**TOUR NOTES:** My first fairy-light encounter is on Kadlin, the Viking river ship festooned from bow to aft for the festive season, and it remains a lodestar at every stop along the way. Aside from at Vienna and Passau, Kadlin docks in the centre of town, a gentle stroll to the main action. Each day includes a free tour, usually in the morning, mostly on foot, sometimes including a coach ride in the larger cities, plus optional excursions, at an extra cost, later in the day.

**BONUS TIP:** The music and biographies of the extraordinary Austrian composers Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Bruchner, multiple Strausses, and honorary Austrian Beethoven, who was born in Germany but lived in Vienna more than half his life, are woven throughout the tour. Some of my fellow passengers make the music real at an evening concert, an optional addition to the tour.

## WHEN DO CHRISTMAS MARKETS START IN EUROPE?

Christmas markets tend to start in mid-November, and some continue all the way into the first week of January.

## BEST FOODS TO EAT AT EUROPE’S CHRISTMAS MARKETS

The temperatures during my trip range from zero with a dusting of snow to seven degrees, and sunset is around 4pm, and the best way to stay warm is to try the local fare. In Budapest, this means hearty beef goulash, creamy chicken paprikash and lokša, a thin, crisp potato pancake. If you’re still hungry in Hungary, there’s pork knuckle, ribs and stuffed cabbage leaves.

In one of the prettiest towns of the trip, Linz, I’m mesmerised by a woman making raclette, heating and scraping the molten cheese onto a chewy slice of rye, and delighted by the smell and sight of chestnuts roasting, not quite on an open fire, but close enough.



NUREMBERG, GERMANY



A next-level sausage sizzle is a highlight of each market. First up is a Hungarian kielbasa served in a roll with sauerkraut; midway there's the Austrian cheese-stuffed käsekrainer; and the last, in Passau, a German bratwurst and a squirt of mustard. It is, in the words of a Christmas cracker, the best of times, the wurst of times.

Sweetwise, there's always a queue for kürtÅskalács, the Hungarian chimney cake, at least 20 strudel flavours, and crêpes filled with Nutella, but it's the bauernkrapfen, a crisp German doughnut, that dances in my head like sugarplums. In Passau, as part of the included daily tour, I learn the secrets of gingerbread-making from an accredited baker and owner of Simon Coniserie. When the store was established in 1903, it doubled as a candle shop, the bees doing all the busy work making honey, but also wax for the candles.

All the markets have cheerful beer-garden vibes but with hot drinks instead of cold lagers. Cauldrons of gluhwein – aka mulled wine – flavoured with the traditional festive spices cinnamon, star anise, cloves, and cardamom, plus warm, fruity alcoholic punches made with spirits (and Christmas spirit!) are plentiful. I

order a different flavour every day and not going to lie – I don't like any of them, but the rosy-glow it brings the people sipping it around me prove I'm an outlier.

**TOUR NOTES:** Back on board Kadlin the menus and are just as tempting and the mood as convivial. On the first night, we assemble in the Aquavit lounge to trim the tree; another night we compete in Christmas trivia (I'm on the winning team).

The Advent Choir of Bratislava joins the ship one evening and the sextet of tenors and baritones sings carols. It's the second time that day we hear "Silent Night" – the first by a soloist with accompanying organist in the Church of the Merciful Brothers – and not the last. In Austria we're told the first performance of "Stille Nacht" was in Salzburg on December 24, 1818, and the rest is Christmas history.

**BONUS TIP:** Viking allows guests to bring their own alcohol on board and drink it in their rooms or public spaces so if you happen upon a great German riesling, skol to you.

## **BEST THINGS TO BUY AT EUROPE'S CHRISTMAS MARKETS**

I've come on the trip with an empty stomach, but many of the other passengers have come with an empty suitcase – amid all the eating and drinking, it's time to start shopping. In the Austrian and German markets, glass Christmas decorations grouped in colours shine and glisten. There are intricately carved wooden music boxes and elaborate candle arches with nativity scenes or treescapes.

Most stalls in Hungary and Slovakia are food-related so as well as eat-now options, there are gifts of macarons and chocolate, gingerbread and honey biscuits, cured meats, and preserves. The most portable to bring back to

Australia is paprika. It's the spice of the region and, like wine, can be cheap and cheerful or expensive and complex. The mainstay of all are winter warmers – woollen socks, scarves, mittens, beanies and gloves – plus a small selection of handmade arts and crafts.

**TOUR NOTES:** The upfront cost of the tour includes accommodation, three daily meals, plus house wine and beer with lunch and dinner, a daily tour, and gratuities.

You'll need money for everything else and here's the big tip: cash is king in many markets, so be sure you've got plenty of euros on hand.

**BONUS TIP:** If you choose to spend time on your own off the ship, I highly recommend Google Translate or a similar translation app. Our Hungarian guide tells us (almost proudly) that the local language is one of the hardest for English speakers to learn, so while charades and pointing may get you a little way, it's better to be safe.

### TAKE ME TO CHURCH

There are ABC travellers – “another bloody church” – and there are people like me who can't get enough stained-glass windows and



depictions of the Madonna and Child. If you too are drawn to religious history, art and architecture, there are holy places aplenty during this Viking cruise.

In Central Europe, St Stephen is the name in everyone's prayers – though I learn the one spelt with an E was the King of Hungary, the other, with an A, a martyr who was stoned to death (and, bizarrely, is the patron saint of stonemasons and bricklayers). St Stephen's Cathedral in Passau features the biggest cathedral organ in the world. The St Stephen's Basilica in Budapest sits adjacent to the city's second Christmas markets, and the soaring, Gothic St Stephen's in Vienna – the tallest in Austria and dating back to the 12th century. It's also next to a market, and is the centre of converging pedestrian malls, each with a unique and magical fairy light installation.

In Krems we make a half-day stop to see Göttweig Abbey, a World Heritage-listed Benedictine monastery overlooking the Wachau Valley. It's surrounded by 26 hectares of vineyards, which have been used continuously since 1083.

*This article was originally published in Escape.com.au on 4 June 2024. Jana Frawley travelled on our 8-day Danube Christmas Delights voyage.*

8 DAYS | 8 GUIDED TOURS | 4 COUNTRIES

# CHRISTMAS ON THE RHINE

*Amsterdam to Basel or vice versa*

TYPICAL SAILING SEASON  
NOVEMBER & DECEMBER



STRASBOURG, FRANCE



## 'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOYFUL

Immerse yourself in the spirit of Christmas as you journey through storybook villages. Sample tasty yuletide treats and regional delicacies as you browse colourful stalls for handcrafted ornaments and unique gifts. Admire the twinkling lights of Cologne and revel in the merry atmosphere of the Rhine Valley, as storefront displays, wine cellars and markets embrace the holiday season. This eight-day voyage is a joyful celebration of festive cheer.

## Itinerary day by day

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**DAY 1** Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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**DAY 2** Scenic Sailing: Waal & Merwede  
Dordrecht, The Netherlands

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**DAY 3** Cologne, Germany

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**DAY 4** Koblenz, Germany  
Scenic Sailing: Middle Rhine  
Rudesheim, Germany

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**DAY 5** Mannheim, Germany  
Speyer, Germany

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**DAY 6** Strasbourg, France

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**DAY 7** Breisach, Germany

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**DAY 8** Basel, Switzerland

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# CHRISTMAS ON THE RHINE & MOSELLE

*Paris to Zürich or vice versa*

12 DAYS | 10 GUIDED TOURS | 4 COUNTRIES

TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER

Revel in yuletide cheer as you discover beloved European holiday traditions during this scenic 12-day cruisetour. Admire festive seasonal displays in Paris, the vibrantly lit facade of the cathedral in Reims and Alsatian bonhomie in Strasbourg. Browse stalls full of local delicacies and handicrafts at the charming Christmas markets of Trier, Koblenz and Mannheim, and enjoy a warm mug of *glühwein* while in the shadow of the Alps in Zürich.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Paris, France

**DAY 2** Paris, France

**DAY 3** Reims, France  
Trier, Germany

**DAY 4** Trier, Germany  
Bernkastel, Germany

**DAY 5** Cochem, Germany  
Winningen, Germany

**DAY 6** Koblenz, Germany  
Scenic Sailing: Middle Rhine, Germany

**DAY 7** Mainz, Germany

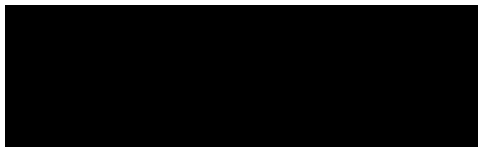
**DAY 8** Mannheim, Germany  
Speyer, Germany

**DAY 9** Strasbourg, France

**DAY 10** Basel, Switzerland  
Zürich, Switzerland

**DAY 11** Zürich, Switzerland

**DAY 12** Zürich, Switzerland



STRASBOURG, FRANCE

# CHRISTMAS ON THE MAIN & MOSELLE

*Paris to Prague or vice versa*

12 DAYS | 10 GUIDED TOURS | 4 COUNTRIES

TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER

Celebrate the holiday season as you immerse yourself in French, German and Czech traditions. Spend time in chic Paris and sample tasty yuletide dishes. Explore Christmas markets in quaint German towns and enjoy the scent of spiced gingerbread and *glühwein* as they fill the air amid colourful stalls. Visit castles and cathedrals that are adorned with festive displays. Revel in the merry atmosphere as you sail along Europe's iconic rivers.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Paris, France

**DAY 2** Paris, France

**DAY 3** Reims, France  
Trier, Germany

**DAY 4** Trier, Germany  
Bernkastel, Germany

**DAY 5** Cochem, Germany  
Winningen, Germany

**DAY 6** Mainz, Germany

**DAY 7** Heidelberg, Germany  
Scenic Sailing: Main River, Spessart

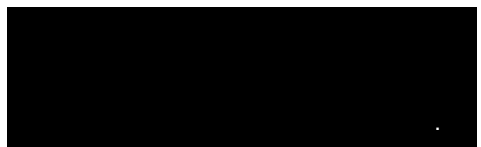
**DAY 8** Würzburg, Germany

**DAY 9** Bamberg, Germany

**DAY 10** Nuremberg, Germany  
Prague, Czech Republic

**DAY 11** Prague, Czech Republic

**DAY 12** Prague, Czech Republic



# CHRISTMAS ON THE DANUBE

*Budapest to Regensburg or vice versa*

**8 DAYS | 6 GUIDED TOURS | 3 COUNTRIES**

**TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER**

Discover grand cities, medieval towns and quaint villages along the “Blue Danube,” highlighting three countries: Hungary, Austria and Germany. Stroll among the stalls at Budapest’s Christmas market and immerse yourself in the cheerful atmosphere of Vienna as you shop for handmade decorations. Visit the fairy-tale village of Regensburg, one of Europe’s best-preserved cities, and delight in the city’s joyful festivities.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Budapest, Hungary

**DAY 2** Budapest, Hungary  
Scenic Sailing: Danube Bend

**DAY 3** Vienna, Austria

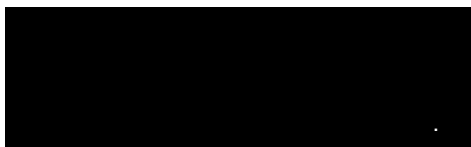
**DAY 4** Vienna, Austria

**DAY 5** Krems, Austria  
Scenic Sailing: Wachau Valley

**DAY 6** Passau, Germany

**DAY 7** Regensburg, Germany

**DAY 8** Regensburg, Germany



# DANUBE CHRISTMAS DELIGHTS

*Budapest to Passau or vice versa*

**8 DAYS | 6 GUIDED TOURS | 4 COUNTRIES**

**TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER**

Pass through Europe's most enchanting countries, stopping to explore cultural capitals and fairy-tale villages. Savour Austro-Hungarian cuisine, admire the Wachau Valley's beauty and explore Central European cities. Take part in European holiday traditions and experience the region's renowned Christmas markets. Breathe in the scents of traditional fare and admire the handiwork of local artisans—perfect for bringing home to your family and friends.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Budapest, Hungary

**DAY 2** Budapest, Hungary

**DAY 3** Bratislava, Slovakia

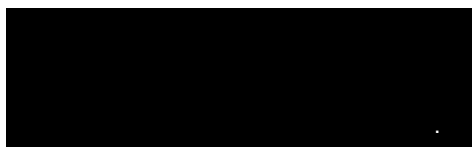
**DAY 4** Vienna, Austria

**DAY 5** Krems, Austria  
Scenic Sailing: Wachau Valley

**DAY 6** Linz, Austria

**DAY 7** Passau, Germany

**DAY 8** Passau, Germany



PASSAU, GERMANY



BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

# CHRISTMAS ALONG THE ELBE

*Berlin to Prague or vice versa*

10 DAYS | 7 GUIDED TOURS | 2 COUNTRIES

TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER

Take part in time-honoured European holiday traditions on this 10-day cruisetour. Stroll among colourful stalls and mingle with locals as you sample *glühwein*. Revel in Berlin's festive atmosphere and discover the treasured recipe for Dresden's famous Christstollen. Shop for handmade porcelain in Meissen and spend two days in Prague, delving into the city's Jewish history while its famed Christmas market exudes an abundance of good cheer.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Berlin, Germany

**DAY 2** Berlin, Germany

**DAY 3** Potsdam, Germany  
Wittenberg, Germany

**DAY 4** Wittenberg, Germany

**DAY 5** Meissen, Germany

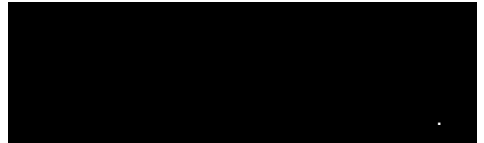
**DAY 6** Dresden, Germany

**DAY 7** Scenic Sailing: Saxon Switzerland  
Bad Schandau, Germany

**DAY 8** Prague, Czech Republic

**DAY 9** Prague, Czech Republic

**DAY 10** Prague, Czech Republic



# CHRISTMAS ON THE RHINE & MAIN

*Nuremberg to Basel or vice versa*

11 DAYS | 9 GUIDED TOURS | 3 COUNTRIES

TYPICAL SAILING SEASON - NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER

Set sail visiting festive Christmas markets along the Rhine and Main. Embrace the spirit of the season while browsing for artisanal crafts in Basel and Karlsruhe and discover Alsatian traditions in Strasbourg. Admire the old-world charms of Frankfurt's Römerberg Square, sample local delights in Würzburg and marvel at Nuremberg's Christkindlesmarkt, where centuries-old wonders like Zwetschgenmännle and aromatic mulled wine abound.

## Itinerary day by day

**DAY 1** Nuremberg, Germany

**DAY 2** Nuremberg, Germany

**DAY 3** Bamberg, Germany

**DAY 4** Würzburg, Germany

**DAY 5** Marktheidenfeld, Germany  
Scenic Sailing: Main River, Spessart

**DAY 6** Frankfurt, Germany

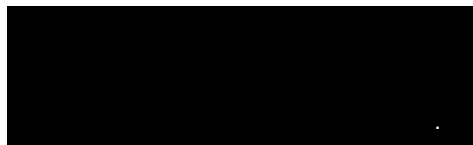
**DAY 7** Karlsruhe, Germany

**DAY 8** Strasbourg, France

**DAY 9** Breisach, Germany

**DAY 10** Basel, Switzerland

**DAY 11** Basel, Switzerland



# EXPLORE MORE

*See more of the world with our pre and post land extensions*

Make every moment count by adding an extension to your river journey. More days mean more time to immerse yourself in the rich culture, history, and beauty of your destinations. Whether you choose to extend your stay in your embarkation or disembarkation city, or venture to an entirely new locale, our thoughtfully designed extension programs are the perfect complement to your itinerary.



## **2 NIGHTS LUCERNE AT CHRISTMAS**

Immerse yourself in the holiday traditions of this Swiss town along the banks of Lake Lucerne, its Christmas markets set against the dramatic backdrop of the Alps. A guided stroll will take you to see the 14th-century Chapel Bridge and baroque churches of the medieval Old Town.



## **2 NIGHTS BASEL AT CHRISTMAS**

Celebrate the festive season as you revel in the spirit of Christmas in Basel. Shop for handicrafts at quaint markets, a cherished European tradition, and explore the winding cobblestone streets lined with medieval houses and decorated window displays.

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### **3 NIGHTS BELGIUM AT CHRISTMAS**

Revel in the spirit of the holidays as you explore the intriguing Belgian cities of Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp. View iconic landmarks and stroll historic UNESCO World Heritage Sites, then celebrate the season as you immerse yourself in the festive atmosphere of traditional Christmas markets.



### **2 NIGHTS BUDAPEST**

Explore Hungary's legendary capital city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Discover the Castle District, venture across the Danube along the Chain Bridge and indulge in some delightful local cuisine.



### 4 NIGHTS MUNICH & SALZBURG AT CHRISTMAS

Immerse yourself in the spirit of the season at the traditional Christmas markets of the Bavarian capital of Munich and the enchanting Austrian city of Salzburg. Discover Munich's iconic sights and the musical legacy of Salzburg, birthplace of Mozart and filming location for *The Sound of Music*.



### 3 NIGHTS INNSBRUCK & BAVARIA AT CHRISTMAS

Immerse yourself in the festive atmosphere of Innsbruck, a stunning alpine city and home to the opulent imperial palace of the Hapsburg dynasty. Explore the charming village of Mittenwald and celebrate the holiday traditions of Oberammergau, home of the famous decennial event, *The Passion Play*.



NUREMBERG, GERMANY



PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC



## 2 NIGHTS PRAGUE

Give yourself more time in the Czech Republic's vibrant capital, the "City of a Hundred Spires." Explore Prague's many landmarks, including Hradčany Castle, St. Vitus Cathedral, Charles Bridge and more. Perhaps sample some of the hearty local cuisine and and raise a glass of world-renowned Czech beer in one of the city's cosy taverns.



## 5 NIGHTS KRAKÓW & WARSAW AT CHRISTMAS

Celebrate the festive season as you revel in the spirit of Christmas in Kraków & Warsaw. Uncover Poland's rich culture, visit historic and important landmarks, and explore the winding streets of Old Town districts, lined with medieval houses and decorated window displays.