

# PLANNING AHEAD: *Christmas Markets*

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*Traditional christmas market in the historic centre of Frankfurt, Germany*

I KNOW, I KNOW - YOU'VE ONLY JUST PUT AWAY THAT LAST STRAGGLING CHRISTMAS DECORATION AND YOU'RE STILL TRYING TO LOSE THE 5LBS YOU PUT ON OVER THE BREAK. BUT BEAR WITH ME- WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FELT THE REAL MAGIC OF THE HOLIDAYS? THAT COLD-NOSED, PINK-CHEEKED EXCITEMENT YOU FELT AS A CHILD, KNOWING THAT A HOT DRINK AND SWEET PASTRY WOULD SOON WARM YOU UP? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HEARD THE TINKLING OF CHRISTMAS BELLS AND HUMMED ALONG WITH CAROLERS AS YOU SIPPED A CUP OF STEAMING HOT MULLED WINE?

If you're like many of us, those are distant memories - replaced by a few harried, slushy trips to the local mall for yet another gift card before racing home to half-heartedly slap up a few decorations. But, it doesn't have to be that way. There is a way to get that magic back -- and it's time to start planning now.

All over Europe, the charming traditions of Christmas are alive and thriving. From Copenhagen to Berlin to Barcelona and many points in between, Christmas markets abound. These delightful outdoor markets are full of stalls offering everything from mulled wine (glühwein) to hand-blown glass decorations, traditional wooden toys and roasted chestnuts. What better place to rekindle that nostalgia?



*Traditional Christmas market in Barcelona*

Germany is one of the best-known destinations for Christmas – they have thousands of different markets through the country, all with their own charms. Nuremberg is the best-known, but Stuttgart is the biggest. Frankfurt has arguably the most beautiful setting, Dresden is the oldest – but Berlin alone has over 60 markets to choose from.

Not to be outdone, Austria also has a long-standing Christkindlmarkt tradition, whether you go to Vienna’s well-known Schönbrunn market, or Salzburg – where the market stalls are all gathered around the Hohensalzburg Fortress and the Cathedral. There are a vast number to choose from – in the cities or in any number of other smaller towns nearby.

Switzerland is another country where you’ll find a wonderful variety of seasonal markets: Lucerne has a delightfully quaint market – this traditional town is a stunning setting for the festivities, and cosmopolitan Zurich gets in on the action with a large indoor market, for those of us who are perpetually cold.

Even Spain has their own version of Christmas market in Barcelona – the Fira de Santa Llucia – where over 300 stalls offer nativity scene figures, unique handmade gifts, plants and traditional Christmas treats. Be sure to ask about the puzzling Caganer figurines!

Wherever you choose to go, wandering through the stalls, sipping a cup of something hot, stomping your feet to keep them warm, pausing to choose a hand-knitted scarf or to chat with a stand-owner about a toy you remember from your childhood – these are the experiences that will rekindle the delight you once felt at the Christmas season.

But it’s important to think ahead – there are lots of options for river cruises and tours dedicated to Christmas markets, but take note: they sell out surprisingly early. Some of the more popular cruise itineraries will be snapped up in the next few months by people already dreading salt-covered cars, Christmas Musak and the black Friday sales we’re used to in North America!

*Ensemble Experts Suggest*

**AVALON  
Christmas Tine  
on the Danube**

Prague to Vienna  
9 days



**UNIWORLD  
Classic Christmas Markets**

Nuremberg to Frankfurt  
8 days



Ask your Ensemble Agent  
for details



*Traditional wooden toys on sale*



*Cologne's sparkling market*



*One of Berlin's many markets*