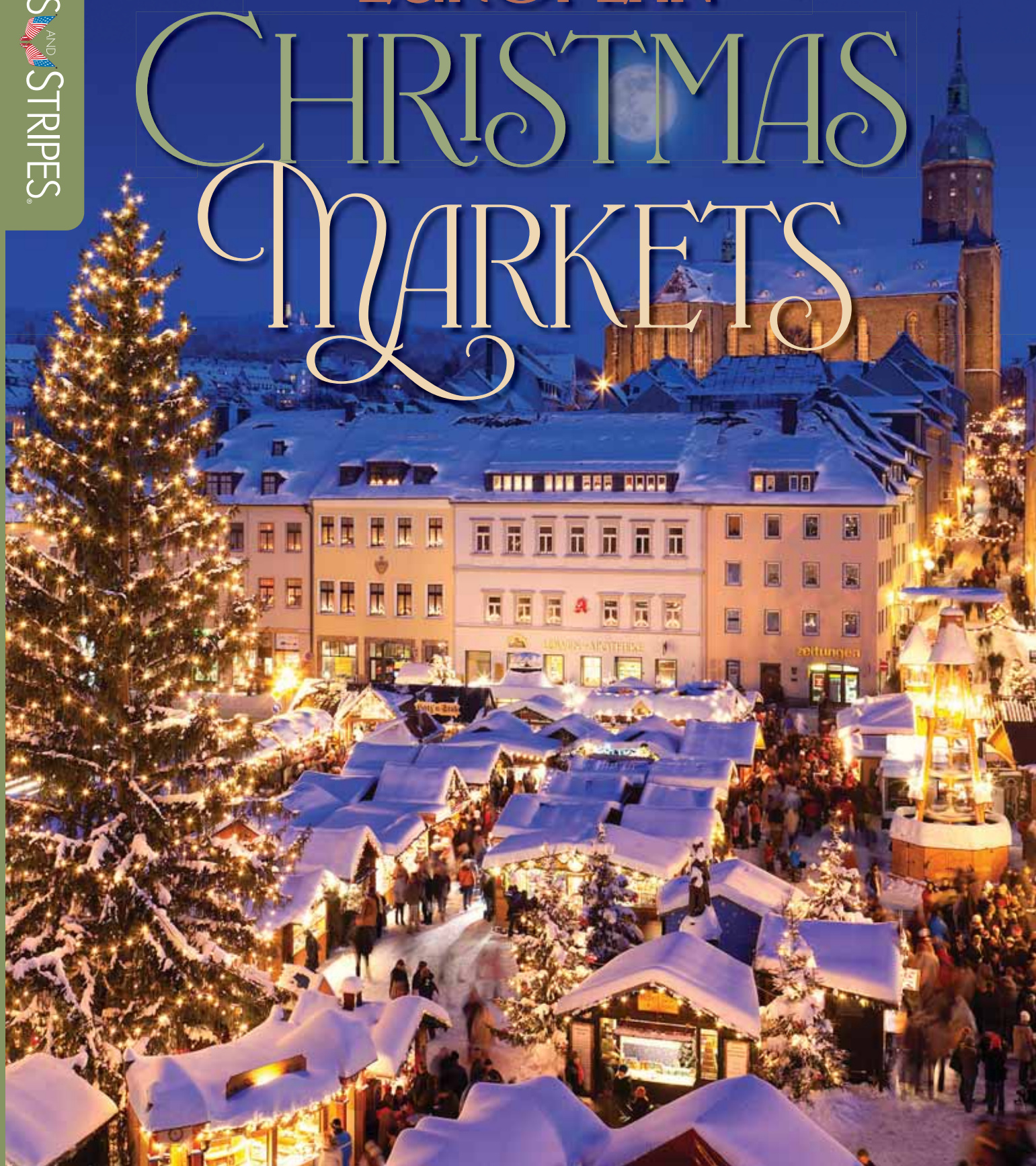


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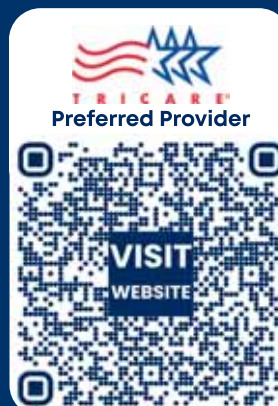
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WINTER IS HERE!



The wind is fierce, the darkness is intense and it seems like everything is a shade of gray or brown. This is the time of year that I like to cozy up with some cider and delve into a good show. But I don't just hibernate until spring. Every winter, I find myself in need of a bit more socializing and merrymaking in order to feel whole. Cue our local Christmas market. It is the perfect place to pop over in the evening or after work to just have a drink or snack, people watch and feel the vibe of community.

The longer I live in Europe, the more normal it seems that every tiny hamlet, bustling medieval town and big urban center has some kind of Christmas gathering place to ensure that no one is left truly alone in the darkest months.

In this edition of our "European Christmas Markets" magazine, we've included special places and holiday events worth traveling to. Experience Christmas markets in some of the most interesting places Europe has to offer, like castles and Roman ruins, walled cities and deep forests.

Our holiday wish for you this year is to find peace and contentment with the changing seasons and enjoyment in your explorations of Europe.

Kat Nickola

Writer-Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe



Regensburg:

By Gary Brown

Christmas Markets in Germany's
Best-Preserved Medieval City

Regensburg offers everything that its larger neighbors in Bavaria do, but at a lower cost and with fewer crowds. Avoid the chaos of larger cities at one of southern Germany's best off-the-beaten-path destinations for Christmas cheer.

Nearby Munich and Nuremberg are full of crowds that swamp the markets on weekends and hotel prices to match demand. Having visited all of these markets myself, I find few things more frustrating than waiting thirty minutes to get a glühwein refill or bratwurst on a Saturday night!

Thankfully, Regensburg is the perfect alternative. It has all the Christmas cheer of its larger neighbors in a more relaxed and local atmosphere. The UNESCO-recognized old city transforms into a winter wonderland starting in late November. Festive lights adorn shops and hang across the narrow pedestrian-only cobblestone streets. The original medieval architecture adds a historic flair to the city as a whole; Regensburg was one of the few German cities to be spared destruction during World War II. The Regensburger Dom (cathedral) is a Gothic masterpiece that truly lends a fairy tale-esque aura to the city, especially when lit up by spotlights at night!

Around the compact old city, Regensburg offers four major Christmas markets for every taste. You can easily visit them all in a casual day of walking:

Regensburger Christkindlmarkt

Located right in the heart of the old city in Neupfarrplatz, this is Regensburg's oldest and most lively Christmas market. While I find it not exceptionally unique, it has all of the offerings you expect from a Bavarian Christmas market: mulled wine, woodcut ornaments and confectioners selling gingerbread and roasted almonds. There are dozens of vendors here, so there are plenty of options to find a gift for friends and family back home. The main stage has live entertainment every Saturday, most Fridays and select weekdays.

NOV. 24 – DEC. 23, 2025

Sunday to Wednesday: 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Thursday to Saturday: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

continued on page 8



45. Trierer Weihnachts Markt



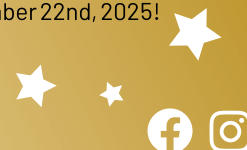
Fotos:
Werner Hardt / Thomas Vatheuer /
Trierer Weihnachtsmarkt

November 21 to December 22, 2025

Closed on Sunday, November 23

Unique romantic atmosphere in the heart of the city

Now in its 45th year, the Trier Christmas Market will again be one of the loveliest in all of Germany. Set on the medieval Main Market and in front of the imposing backdrop of Trier Cathedral, the attractively decorated booths offer a fitting framework for this wonderful event. Delicious regional specialties, festive arts and crafts attracts will invite visitors to stroll in the cozy atmosphere of Trier's Old City. Guests from Germany and abroad enjoy the genuine "vintner hot mulled wine" from the Moselle and the "hot mulled Viez" (apple wine) from apple trees in the Eifel hills. The one and only "Mulled Wine Queen" in Germany resides solely in Trier, as an ambassador for the popular hot drink. It's worth a visit this year to Main Market and the Cathedral up to December 22nd, 2025!



Mon. to Thurs.: 11:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Fri. and Sat.: 11:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.
Sun: 11:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

trierer-weihnachtsmarkt.de

Romantischer Weihnachtsmarkt Thurn und Taxis

I have mixed feelings about Christmas Markets that have an entrance fee (why am I paying good euros for the privilege of shopping and spending more money?), but the “T&T” market goes about it the right way. The entry fee is fairly low (roughly 10 euros), and once inside you are whisked away to a charming scene out of a Hallmark movie.

Thurn und Taxis has around three dozen vendors spread inside and outside of a beautiful Renaissance palace. The location is picturesque, and the stalls here offer a variety of boutique culinary delights alongside traditional fair food. Plus, there is a small petting zoo for the young (or young at heart), live music and a handful of amusement rides for children.

NOV. 21 – DEC. 23, 2025

Monday to Thursday:
3 – 10 p.m.

Friday: 3 – 11 p.m.

Saturday: 12 – 11 p.m.

Sunday: 12 – 10 p.m.

Romantischer Weihnachtsmarkt Thurn und Taxis

©ROMANTISCHER WEIHNACHTSMARKT THURN UND TAXIS

Sankt Katherinenspital Adventsmarkt

This market lies outside the old city proper but is worth walking to for the scenery alone. It is located across the Danube River on Regensburg’s ‘Stadtamhof’ island and offers an impressive panoramic view of the cathedral, Stone Bridge and old city. If you are concerned being in an open garden beside the river means you’re exposed to bad weather, worry not—this market has several bonfire pits to keep you warm. And if that does not work, they also have nightly party music to help dance the cold away.

NOV. 24 – DEC. 23, 2025

Monday – Friday:
4 – 10 p.m.

Saturday:
11 a.m. – 10 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Sankt Katherinenspital Adventsmarkt

©STEFAN EFFENHAUSER

BONUS | Der Zauberhafte Gräfliche Christkindlmarkt

Outside the city center, one kilometer from the old city, this small market is oriented towards youthful visitors. Many vendors here sell traditional children’s toys, but gifts for all ages are available. If you have a car or don’t mind the walk, this is a more relaxed alternative to the four larger Christmas Markets.

NOV. 20 – DEC. 21, 2025

Thursday and Friday:
4 – 10 p.m.

Saturday: 2 – 10 p.m.

Sunday: 2 – 9 p.m.

Lucrezia Markt

Looking for a unique gift for someone special? The Lucrezia Market in Haidplatz may be smaller, but it has the most eclectic vendors of all the markets in Regensburg. It was started in 1982 by a local association of artists and craftsmen, so no commercial brands are allowed! Shoppers will be delighted by the one-of-a-kind jewelry, handicrafts and much more. It hosts musicians, comedians, dancers and other live entertainers daily. ■

NOV. 28 – DEC. 23, 2025

Sunday to Thursday:
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Friday and Saturday:
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We are looking forward to welcoming you in Garmisch-Partenkirchen this winter!

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Bischenberg's gluten-free Christmas market



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Der Weihnachtsmann



Cast-iron roasted potatoes

Bischenberg's 100% Gluten-Free CHRISTMAS MARKET

Story and Photos by Katie Wells

Christmas markets are one of my favorite things about living in Germany. I love the glowy lights, the sweet and savory smells of hearty food and just the whole vibe. However, as someone with a gluten sensitivity, it can be tricky and stressful to find something that I can safely eat. But what if I told you there is a touch of small town Christmas magic in the Black Forest especially for any gluten-sensitive, celiac or vegan friends out there?

When a Christmas market popped up in my billionth search for "Gluten-free foods at Christmas markets" I shook my spouse's arm excitedly to tell him all about the 100 percent gluten-free (GF) market in Bischenberg, just a two-hour drive from Kaiserslautern and one-and-a-half for folks in Stuttgart. A huge smile spread across his face, knowing how much not having to worry about what I could eat meant to me and we planned our day trip for the day after Thanksgiving.

The **Bischenberg gluten-free Christmas market** is small but expands every year. This year will be its ninth iteration. Almost all the vendors have food intolerances and other day jobs. They are a "Christmas market family" with the initiative to bring joy to others with allergies. Along with gluten-free, there are many nut-free, lactose-free, vegan or all of the above options.

We parked in a large parking lot just below the Spa Park of **Sasbachwalden** and strolled up a gentle slope and into the cozy, softly lit park. There were plenty of long-standing wooden huts offering every Christmas market delicacy in a GF version I could desire. We walked past crafts and teas, GF burgers, *flammkuchen* and I beelined for a crêpe with Nutella®. Next, we surveyed the whole market—I wanted to choose wisely a few things to devour. We looped by GF schnapps, cakes, *Maultaschen* (similar to ravioli), pasta, salmon rolls and more! We shared a Black Forest waffle smothered with tart cherries and fresh off the iron. It was crispy, airy, fluffy and reminded me of the recipe my grandma Anne made when I was a kid and could still eat gluten.

We paused at a table and sipped on some *Weißer Glühwein* to warm up. I admired the market around me and the care and effort the surrounding GF community put into it. Then the *Weihnachtsmann* appeared. I wondered if Santa might be gluten-free too, or if he simply couldn't pass up a cookie opportunity.

Gaining our second wind, we shared some cast-iron roasted potatoes with a homemade sour cream. Then, we meandered to a pavilion where GF Nuremberg *Lebkuchen* (gingerbread), plain, coated with vanilla icing and chocolate-dipped, were waiting. These were soft, chewy, and, later at home, perfect slightly warmed. From a bakery truck we picked out a couple of cinnamon rolls to take home. At that point, the sun started to lower and our toes were numb. I wanted to try one more thing that I hadn't been able to try in the three years we've been living in Germany. I nabbed two salty, crispy GF pretzels. We hopped in the car, bellies full, and I unwrapped one for the ride home. ■

Bischenberg Glutenfrier Weihnachtsmarkt

Spa Park of Sasbachwalden | Nov. 28–30 & Dec. 6–7, 2025

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YOUR GUIDE TO Köln CHRISTMAS MARKETS

By Kat Nickola

EACH MARKET IN KÖLN (COLOGNE), GERMANY, HAS A UNIQUE VIBE, INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER AND SPECIAL GLÜHWEIN MUGS.

Reminder: Christmas markets across Germany will be closed on Remembrance Sunday, Nov. 24.

Stadtgarten Market

NOV. 14 - DEC. 23, 2025

You never know what you will get at this market in the *Stadtgarten* (city garden), since the 80 vendors change weekly. The focus here is on down-to-earth socializing and finding unique handmade gifts. Glühwein at this market has a high alcohol content, so sip slowly and enjoy the low-key atmosphere under the trees.

Mug: Simple, clear-glass mugs

Pit Stop: During the day, head under the *Köln West* train station to the former city moat, now the *Innerer Grüngürtel* (inner green belt), for fresh air and a view of the *Colonus Tower*. You can return to Old Town and the cathedral quickly from this train station along the #5 subway line.

Heavenue

NOV. 11 - DEC. 23, 2025

Köln's LGBTQ+ Christmas market has moved to *Friesenplatz*. Bigger than ever, it promises a rotating Christmas tree, pretty pastel stalls, a water-jet fountain and an extra-large walk-in Glühwein palace. In the evening, expect a party atmosphere with an extensive stage show lineup.

Mug: A tall, slender rainbow-colored glass mug

Pit Stop: Check out the eclectic neighborhood. Pop into a vintage bookshop, cozy up in a quaint pub or take on some of Köln's best clubs along *Hohenzollernring*.



St. Nicholas Village

NOV. 18 - DEC. 23, 2025

With adorable half-timbered structures and a house for Saint Nick, *Nikolausdorf* cozies up in *Rudolfplatz* at the base of the *Hahnenort*, a medieval stone city gate and castle. Don't miss a photo op with the giant market mugs, the many food vendors or St. Nick as he wanders around.

Mug: A boot-shaped mug in red or blue

Pit Stop: Walk through Köln's hip, artsy *Belgian Quarter* for creative street art, trendy boutiques and the city's most famous drinks stand, *Le Kiosk* in Brussels Square.

PUBLIC TRANSIT (VRS)

24-hour tickets are available from subway and train station machines or via the VRS App. The 1B option covers all public transit within the city center and connects to all the markets. They can be purchased to cover up to five people. www.vrs.de

CHRISTMAS MARKET EXPRESS

A hop-on-hop-off tram services four of the eight markets in a loop with frequent stops at the Cathedral Market, Heinzels Market (Alter Markt section), Harbor Market and Market of Angels.

Cathedral Market

NOV. 17 – DEC. 23, 2025

With a massive lit fir tree on the south side of the world-famous *Kölner Dom* (Cologne Cathedral), the *Weihnachtsmarkt am Dom* (Christmas market at the cathedral) has all the glitz you expect from a city market. Vendors are selected for their sophisticated handcrafted items.

Mug: Colorful hand-drawn image of the cathedral and market

Pit Stop: Don't miss seeing inside the cathedral or attending a religious service. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is the highlight of any trip to Köln.

Heinzels Market

NOV. 24, 2025 – JAN. 4, 2026

Themed around the *Heinzelmännchen* (little house elves) of Köln's literary heritage and often called the "Gnome Market" by English-speakers, this is the city's biggest venue. It playfully sprawls across two squares: *Alter Markt* and *Heumarkt*. The space is full of funny, cute elves and has a great ice-skating rink.

Mug: Up to 18 differently named elves on rounded red mugs

Pit Stop: Two blocks away, the huge *Galeria Kaufhoff* department store is known for its festive Christmas window displays.

Market of Angels

NOV. 17 – DEC. 23, 2025

This magical market oozes with a refined sparkle. It is set in the *Neumarkt* square, surrounded by trees dripping with white twinkle lights and massive stars. The matching fanciful vendor huts sell all manner of tasty treats, original art and decorations.

Mug: White, usually with a hand-drawn classy-clown angel

Pit Stop: Snap a photo of the massive ice cream cone above the mall, then pick your shopping palette: outdoorsy paradise at *Globetrotter* or a high-end stroll along *Mittelstrasse*.

Harbor Market

NOV. 14 – DEC. 23, 2025

This small waterfront market leans heavily into maritime heritage. Drinks from ports around the world are served on a 15-meter-long ship, seafood is prevalent, and pirate shanties are sung. Try a *Feuerzangenbowle* (burning rum-soaked sugar drips into your glühwein). Then, ride the giant Ferris wheel for views across the city.

Mug: Nautical-themed images on small blue mugs

Pit Stop: The Chocolate Museum is right beside this market and worth a visit to learn about cocoa, or just to get a treat from the shop.

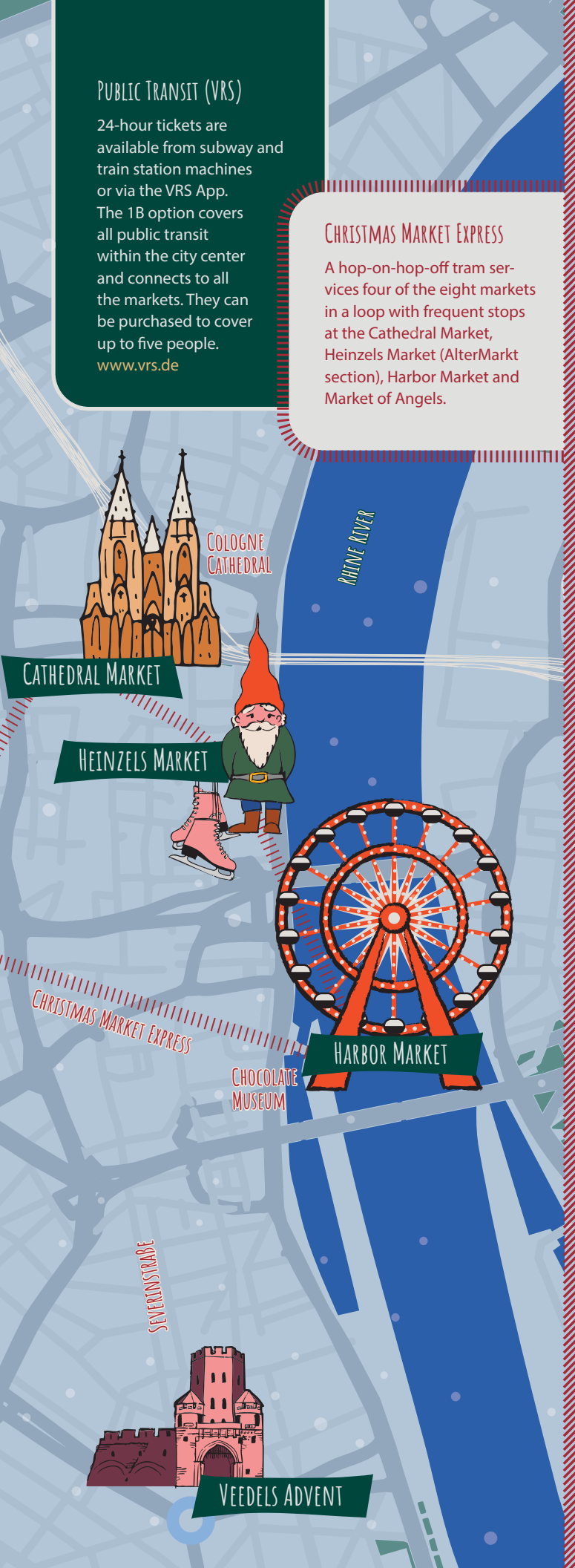
Veedels Advent

NOV. 20 – DEC 23, 2025

Vringstveedel (High German for Severin's District) is considered the most authentic neighborhood in Köln. In *Chlodwigplatz*, wander beneath the impressive Severins Tower and have a local kölsch beer in the "kölscheste (Cologne-est)" Christmas market in the city.

Mug: A traditional red mug with the neighborhood buildings

Pit Stop: On the walk down or back on *Severinstrasse*, take time to pop into some of the 120 local businesses along this straight-as-an-arrow Roman road. ■



Give Christmas Markets a Sniff

By Archie (as dictated to Zade Vadnais) •



If you're a dog who gets excited by twinkly lights, tasty smells and lots of friendly humans, Christmas markets in Germany are basically heaven.

.....

From the moment my paws hit the cobblestone, it's a full-on sensory adventure. The air buzzes with holiday cheer, and even better, it smells amazing!

Everywhere I turn, something new is wafting past my snout: sizzling bratwurst, roasted chestnuts, warm sugar from candied almonds.

And the humans? They're all carrying steaming mugs of something called Glühwein, which smells like cinnamon, cloves and something sweet like amaretto. Not for dogs, apparently, but it makes everyone very smiley.

There's plenty to see and hear, too. The buildings are decorated with twinkling lights and seasonal greenery, and there's usually a band or choir playing holiday music somewhere in the square. It really sets the mood, even for someone who hears in a different range.

But it's not just lights and music. The market stalls are packed with

handmade gifts, ornaments, toys and treats. I love sniffing around the wooden booths while my dad shops for presents. Sometimes the vendors give me a little wave or sneak me a bite of something. One even had a basket of dog biscuits behind the counter. Absolute legend.

Speaking of humans, nearly all of them want to say hello to me. Maybe it's my festive sweater. My dad always dresses me up for a Christmas market because he knows we'll be spending a few hours outdoors in the chilly weather.

Now, if your humans forget your outerwear, the Germans might give them a talking to. They take dog welfare very seriously, and honestly, I respect that. Nothing ruins a market stroll faster than chilly paws.

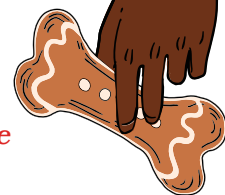
It's busy, sure. There are crowds, music, clinking mugs and jingling bells. But for a small dog who likes a big atmosphere, it's perfect. Just remember to stick close to your human and maybe don't try to chase the horses pulling the carriage rides. Dad says we don't need to talk about that.

.....

Just remember to stick close to your human and maybe don't try to chase the horses pulling the carriage rides.

.....

So, if you're a dog and you've never been to a *Weihnachtsmarkt*, grab your coziest jacket and tell your human it's time. There's holiday magic, lots of head pats and a good chance someone drops a sausage. ■



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By Eliana C.

Eliana is student writer from Dr. Wiedemer's and Ms. Ireland's class at Spangdahlem Middle School (SY 24-25).

"That really is a black gate," my brother William said. "I wonder what it looks like up close," I replied.

The black gate, or Porta Nigra, was breathtaking and almost fairy-tale-like with the German houses around it. The gate was really old, made by the Romans a long time ago. The place looked like a slice of a different time past, but, sadly, our car moved on and we drove to the Trier Christmas market.

The Christmas market looked like a place from a Disney movie. Snow had just started to fall, and there were also glittering, shimmering string lights. Then, I noticed the scent of all kinds of food like bacon, chocolate, cinnamon, fruit and sugar in the air. The Disney aesthetic was even in the wooden stalls themselves. The structures were all the same,

designed like small, quaint, cute cottages. As we walked around the stalls and headed to the main square of the market, I couldn't help but wonder if we could go to the black gate, not just see it from a distance, but go under and truly admire it.

I was startled out of my thoughts by my mom saying, "What do you want to eat? There is a row of food stalls that way." She pointed to some of the cottage-like stalls.

"I don't know, let's go look at the food. Wait. Where did William and Khriissy go?" I exclaimed, worried we lost them.

My mother looked around and said, "Right over there, by the carousel. Good timing! You noticed before they went out of sight."

"Come on, let's get them and then eat."

We got my siblings and went to the food stalls. "Can I get the Nutella® crêpe and some Kinderpunsch?" I asked my mom.

"Okay, but you're getting Schnitzel." I groaned. I had never had it, but I typically don't like pork.

"Trust me, you will like it," my mom said.

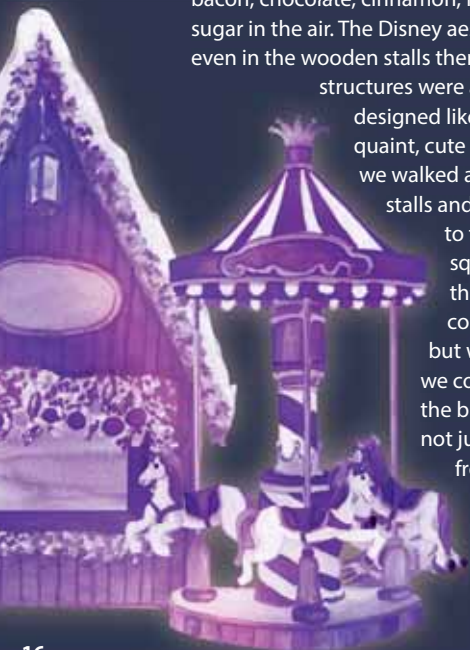
We got our food, and I decided to try the Schnitzel first because I didn't think I'd really like it. When I took a bite, it let out a satisfying crunch. The meat was juicy and it didn't have the texture of the kind of pork that I hate. The Kinderpunsch smelled like fruit and cinnamon; it tasted like berries with a faint cinnamon undertone. I moved on to the crêpe and was not disappointed. It was warm and chocolatey in contrast to the cool nighttime air.

After we all finished eating our food, we went to the stalls with goods like hats, ceramics, sweaters and more. A gleam caught my eye, and I saw a beautiful rose gold necklace, with a heart at the end. I wondered if I could buy it, so I looked at the price tag, and it was a whopping 50 euros! I sighed and moved on. As we went to the next stall, I saw a gorgeous deep, dark purple amethyst crystal. It was small and the price was only 15 euros, which is really good for crystals. So, I asked my mom, and she bought it from the nice old lady who was the shop owner.

Finished with shopping, we finally started heading to the black gate because I convinced my mom to let us go there. I was bubbling with excitement to see it up close. This is what I had been hoping to do the whole day.

"I'm tired, can we go home?" my brother said. I panicked as my brother usually got his way, but my mom interjected, "No, we are going to the gate." So, we walked on and finally got there.

I was so happy that we got to go there at nighttime. You might think the black color would blend in with the night, but the light around it made it even more magical, like something out of "The Lord of the Rings." The sides of the gate had immaculate sculptures of Roman officers and Roman architecture; its color, a deep black, was simply breathtaking. ■





Catch Krampus This Christmas

By Kat Nickola

Krampus has a reputation. Not only will he punish naughty children, but he may just haul them off in a sack to eat.

The Krampus tradition comes from the mountainous Alps; its homeland straddling Germany, Italy, Austria and Slovenia. This hairy goat-man character is possibly a relic of the many pre-Christian alpine spirits called *Perchten* that are said to drive away the evil of winter. His story was incorporated into Christian belief as a devil who is bound by the church to do the necessary dirty work of punishing those who deserve it. In the 1600s, he became Saint Nicholas' helper in the Alps. While Saint Nick brings gifts for good kids, Krampus takes care of the naughty ones.

In many places there is a traditional *Krampuslauf* (Krampus run). More like a parade than a race, these events feature hundreds of Krampus' wandering through town, playing pranks, swatting bystanders and bringing fire. It is both fun and fearsome.

If you visit a small Christmas market in the mountains of Tyrol, whether in Austria or Italy, on Dec. 5, or *Krampusnacht*, you are likely to run into a Krampus gathering of some kind. Villages will often have a few of the goat-men accompany Saint Nick on his rounds in the early evening.



Large Krampus Gatherings in 2025

BAD GOISERN, AUSTRIA. With over 800 Krampus, this is the big one! Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.

TOBLACH, ITALY. This is the oldest known gathering and invites 600 Krampus. Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.

SEEFELD, AUSTRIA. The largest gathering in north Tyrol. Dec. 6 at 7 p.m.

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA. Krampuslauf on Dec. 5 at 6:30 p.m. and a Perchten parade on Dec. 21 at 1 p.m.

MUNICH, GERMANY. Roughly 300 Krampus invade the Marienplatz. Dec. 14 at 3 p.m.

KASTELRUTH, ITALY. Only occurring every other year, the parade ends with a massive party. Dec. 13 at 5 p.m.

Resources for Smaller Krampus Events

- **SÜDTIROL, ITALY:** www.suedtirol.info
- **TYROL, AUSTRIA:** www.tyrol.com
- **SALZBURG REGION:** www.salzburg.info

Krampus on Screen

Would you rather catch Krampus from the cozy comfort of home? Here are some non-traditional Christmas movie and show options.



By Tamala Malerk

You can celebrate the **Feast of Saint Lucia** on December 13th. Saint Lucia is the patron saint of Syracuse and known as the female Father Christmas in the North. December 13th is the day of her martyrdom and is commemorated with a solemn procession and by eating *Cuccia*, a boiled wheat treat that can be sweet or savory.

The **Piazza dell'Università** is hosting a traditional-style Christmas market from Nov. 24–Dec. 29. The grandest Christmas venture in Catania is Christmas Town. For an entire month from Dec. 6, 2025–Jan. 6, 2026, the **Ciminiera di Catania** is transformed into a town of Christmas movies, magic, ice skating, play areas, parades, shows, markets and talking reindeer.

Not far from the magic of the big city of Catania are the activities in the mountainous areas and villages of Etna. There are several markets to explore in **Acireale, Viagrande, Caltagrione, Zafferana** and **Pedara**. Keep your eyes peeled at the markets for special lava stone jewelry. You can visit the famous Caltagrione Nativity Scenes from Dec. 1, 2025–Jan. 7, 2026 for the Christmas season. Also, head to **Bronte**, home of the pistachio, for a nutty treat.

Palermo is home to some of the more popular Christmas markets in Sicily. While you will find the market trinkets you've come to expect, you will also find regional treats to try. These include *Cassata*, a colorful cake with a ricotta base and *Buccellato*, a fig-filled pastry. While you discover different trinkets at the markets, make sure to catch a special Christmas-themed performance at the **Teatro Massimo**. In 2025, the markets will be held across different locations from Dec. 8, 2025–Jan. 6, 2026.

The Christmas markets of Ortigia will delight anyone looking for local, unique treasures. Ortigia is the oldest city in Syracuse, and history surrounds you as you shop for Italian leather goods and jewelry, Sicilian ceramics and citrus marmalades.

Tradition is a hallmark in Taormina. Witness the annual lighting of the Christmas bonfire in front of Duomo di Taormina. Against the flickers of flames, you will have fantastic views of Mt. Etna and the Ionian Sea. Make sure to catch a live nativity performance known as the **“Presepe Vivente”** and the **Carretti Siciliani**, a parade featuring colorful and intricate carriages. Throughout the season, several Christmas trees are lit and performances are constantly going on. The Christmas market usually occurs between early December and early January. ■





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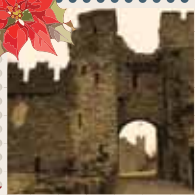
Europe's CASTLE Christmas MARKETS

By Kat Nickola

SWORDS CASTLE

IRELAND

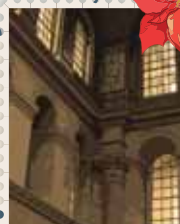
- * Market tents in medieval castle walls
- * Artisans and traders from the region
- * Local performances



BLENHEIM PALACE

ENGLAND

- * Themed décor in a Baroque palace
- * Great court with market stalls
- * Nighttime light trail



LOIRE VALLEY CHÂTEAUX

FRANCE

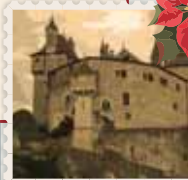
- * Renaissance Christmas in many châteaux
- * Market inside Château de Montgeoffroy
- * Underground market at Château de Brézé



CHÂTEAU DE MENTHON-SAINT-BERNARD

FRANCE

- * Owned by the same family for 1,000 years
- * Majestic alpine castle for Santa
- * Live reindeer and street performers



SAN MICHELE / OSSANA CASTLE

ITALY

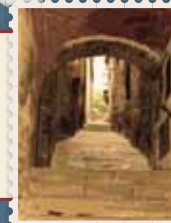
- * 6th-century castle with WWI tribute
- * Over 1,000 nativity scenes in the village
- * Follow the red rope to see it all



MONTEPULCIANO FORTRESS

ITALY

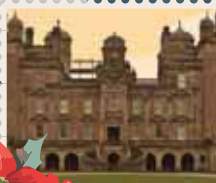
- * Fortified Medici-era hilltop village
- * Largest market in central Italy
- * Find Santa inside the castle



DRUMLANRIG CASTLE

SCOTLAND

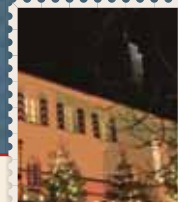
- * 600 years of Clan Douglas history
- * Clay shooting and axe throwing
- * Horse-drawn carriage rides



GUTENECK CASTLE

GERMANY

- * Enchanting vibe in a 12th-century castle
- * Medieval artisans and shows
- * Live animals



CASTLE GRAVENSTEEN

BELGIUM

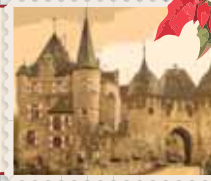
- * Christmas at a 12th-century castle
- * Dungeon vibe in the winter bar
- * Market stalls outside the castle



SATZVEY CASTLE

GERMANY

- * Medieval 14th-century castle
- * Walk-through nativity play
- * Local craft vendors



KATZENSTEIN CASTLE

GERMANY

- * Vendors in a 1,000-year-old castle
- * Cat-themed gifts and displays
- * Fire shows and stilt walkers





EGESKOV CASTLE

DENMARK

- * Classic cars and market stalls
- * Renaissance castle perched in a lake
- * Lots of local crafters



SZCZECIN CASTLE

POLAND

- * Magnificent Pomeranian Dukes' castle
- * Courtyard market with regional products
- * Live reindeer to pet



SAXONY CASTLE LAND

GERMANY

- * Different castle market each weekend
- * 40 castles and palaces in the area
- * Dog market at Klaffenbach water castle



KŘIVOKLÁT CASTLE

CZECHIA

- * Historical Bohemian royal residence
- * Local artisans show off medieval skills
- * Explore the castle interior



AGGSTEN CASTLE

AUSTRIA

- * Torchlit medieval market in castle ruins
- * Crafts and skills from the Middle Ages
- * Fireworks every evening



FISHERMAN'S BASTION

HUNGARY

- * In the Buda Castle Quarter
- * Handmade gifts and local musicians
- * Saturday candle vigils



LJUBLJANA CASTLE

SLOVENIA

- * Small market in the hilltop castle
- * Other markets across the old town
- * Amazing views of the city



SIGHIȘOARA CITADEL

ROMANIA

- * Medieval Transylvanian walled fortress
- * UNESCO World Heritage Site
- * Vlad Dracula's birthplace



LIMATOLA CASTLE

ITALY

- * 12th-century Norman stronghold
- * Market throughout castle grounds
- * Luxury hotel in the castle

Map of Over 100 Castle Christmas Markets



Christmas in CANDELARA Italy

By Katie Wells

THE CANDLE FESTIVAL IN CANDELARA

Imagine all the bright overhead lights and streetlamps turned off. You are in a cozy town square, ambient music playing softly. Maybe the smell of warm cider or sweet butter cookies fills each inhale, and all around you is the soft amber glow of candlelight. Perhaps your attention is drawn solely to an illuminated stilt walker gliding through the streets. This is the *Candele a Candelara*, or **Candle Festival** in Candelara, Italy, and it is truly one of a kind.

Located near the temperate Adriatic coast, the village of Candelara in the Pesaro province is approximately one hour north of Ancona. Now in its 22nd year, *Candele a Candelara* is celebrated over a nine-day period. The tradition was built from the story of Candelara's coat of arms, which features three candles atop three hills. Legend has it that the three candles were lit to identify which site would be best for building the town. In the end, it was the least windy hill, where only one candle did not go out, that the town placed its roots.

Twice each day, first at 5:30 p.m. as the sun sinks below the horizon and again at 6:30 p.m., all electric lighting in the town center is turned off for 15 to 20 minutes. A hush falls over the crowd and the darkness is set ablaze by a procession of thousands of candles. There is something quite enamoring about the romance and enchantment of it all.



THE CHRISTMAS MARKET IN CANDELARA

In addition to the candlelight procession, *Candele a Candelara* features a Christmas market complete with elaborate nativity scenes, a snow-laden alley, street artists and delicious regional delicacies like *tortellini in brodo* (meat-filled pasta in a savory broth) or *Pangiallo Romano* (a traditional sweet bread).

Candelara pours a lot of care into its holiday program as the entire medieval village transforms into a place of Christmas magic. It is a village that has passionately passed down artistry and craftsmanship to keep tradition alive. Everywhere you look within the market, you will see unique decorations and special artisan-centered activities.

Stroll past each of the four corners of the village's medieval walls to admire the Advent themes: shepherds, angels, Bethlehem and the prophets, curated by the **Mengaroni Art Institute**. There will be live candle-making demonstrations where you can watch the candle makers use only beeswax. This method stays true to how they were crafted in the Middle Ages. The **Morelli Brothers**, local metalwork artists, will return this year and demonstrate for visitors how to create wrought iron sculptures of the Nativity scene.

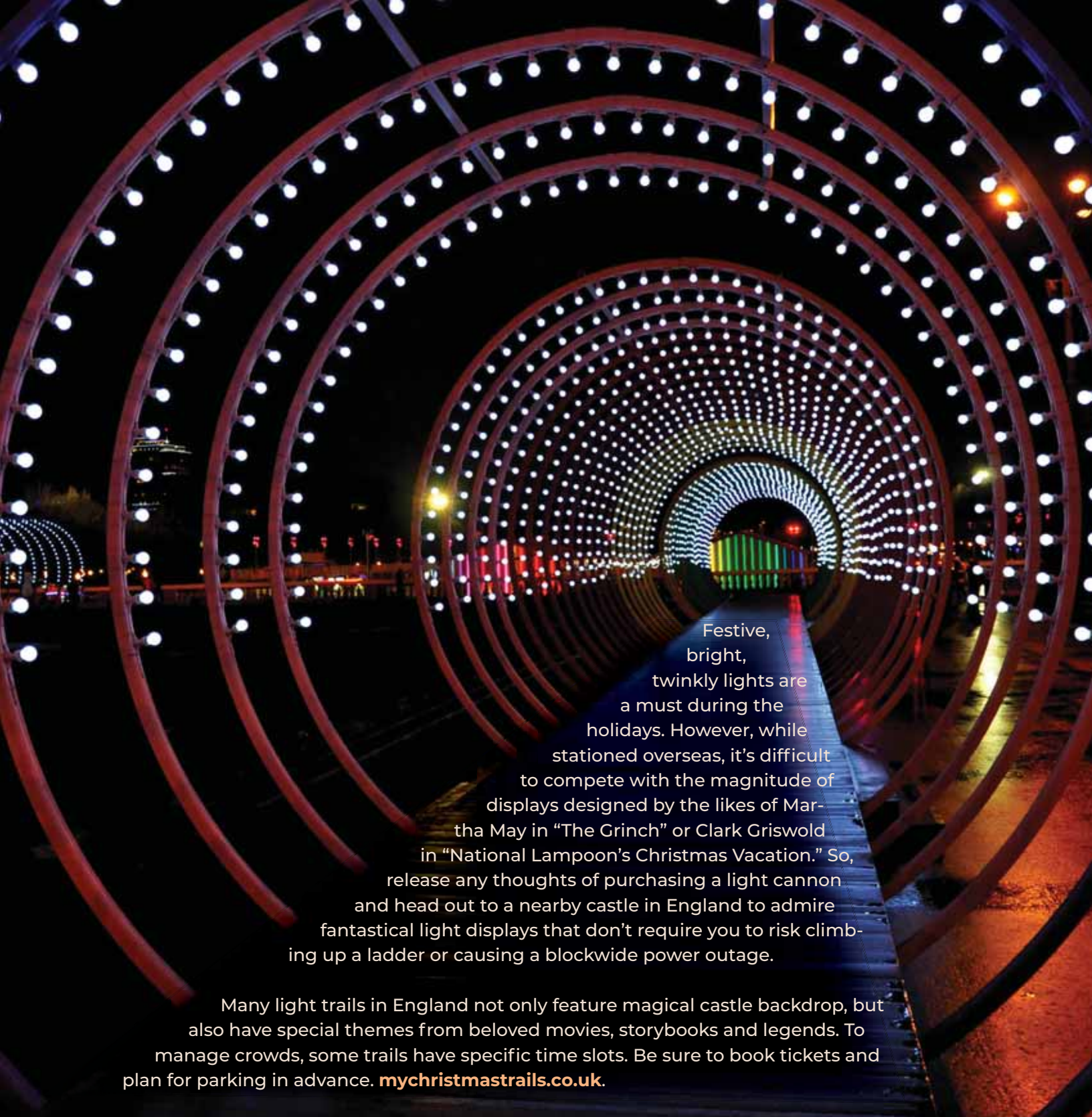
Children can participate in the **Elf Workshop** held at the **Captain's Hall** at the entrance of the castle where they will learn to make special figurines and Christmas ornaments from clay, wax, wood and paper. Plus, they can meet Santa, take a picture with him and tell him their Christmas wish while working on their crafts.

As part of the festival, to get around the market and to see more sites within Candelara, you can hop aboard the **Candle Train** for a guided tour to and from Bellavista from 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. A ticket includes a tour of the 18th-century **Villa Berloni**. You can also book a candle-lit lunch or dinner in the villa and enjoy a meal of regional specialties. The next stop on the Candle Train route is the **Pieve di Santo Stefano**, a beautiful late-Gothic-style Roman Catholic church. Inside, you can see a few variations of frescoes of "The Madonna and Child," fitting for the Christmas season.

The final Candle Train stop is at the **PAC Museum of Textile Art, Embroidery, Cutting and Sewing**, where guests can learn about the ancient tradition of making textiles and fabric on 20th-century looms. The train then drops passengers off back at the market, where you can continue to enjoy sampling treats, sipping warm drinks and shopping from the market stalls.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

In 2025, the festival and market will run over the weekends of Nov. 22-23 and 29-30, Dec. 6-7 and 13-14. While the candle procession is only in the evenings, visitors can enjoy the market and other festivities from 10 a.m.- 8 p.m. If you are travelling to the festival by car, it is recommended to park in Pesaro near one of Candelara's free shuttle stops. Entry to the festival and market, until 1 p.m. is €3, after 1 p.m., €6, and free for children under 10. For more information, visit candelabra.it. ■



Festive, bright, twinkly lights are a must during the holidays. However, while stationed overseas, it's difficult to compete with the magnitude of displays designed by the likes of Martha May in "The Grinch" or Clark Griswold in "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." So, release any thoughts of purchasing a light cannon and head out to a nearby castle in England to admire fantastical light displays that don't require you to risk climbing up a ladder or causing a blockwide power outage.

Many light trails in England not only feature magical castle backdrop, but also have special themes from beloved movies, storybooks and legends. To manage crowds, some trails have specific time slots. Be sure to book tickets and plan for parking in advance. mychristmastrails.co.uk.

Holiday Light Trails AT CASTLES *in England*

By Katie Wells

continued on page 26



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&



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*Merry Christmas
& Happy New Year
from all of us to all of you*



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Christmas at Blenheim Palace

OXFORD | NOV. 14, 2025–JAN. 3, 2026

The illuminated light trail is “bigger and brighter than ever.” Each year, it is re-imagined with different magical settings and stories to tell. The sculptures and installations are created by local and international artists, and they aren’t simply strung lights. Here you might find waterfalls of light or fire gardens. Festive foods and drinks, such as toasted marshmallows and cocoa are available in the courtyard. Inside the palace, you will find this year’s theme, **The Palace of Oz**. Previous years have featured Cinderella, Neverland and The Nutcracker. Follow the Yellow Brick Road adorned with Christmas magic through the estate rooms and keep an eye out for your favorite characters as you journey to Oz and discover the Emerald City, where Dorothy awaits. For guests who want to have an entire castle Christmas-themed day, you can also book an Emerald City-themed tea in the Orangery. An outdoor Christmas market is located on the castle grounds. Tickets for The Illuminated Trail can be purchased at mychristmastrails.co.uk and start at £33 for adults and £23 for children aged 3-16.



Sudeley Castle & Gardens Spectacle of Light

WINCHCOMBE | NOV. 21–DEC. 30, 2025

Within the Cotswolds, an enchanting new trail takes visitors on a journey to meet mythical characters from Arthurian legend. You might encounter Sir Lancelot, Merlin or Queen Guinevere as this year’s theme for the Spectacle of Light is the **Court of King Arthur**; plus, it is the 10th anniversary. As you walk the magical castle’s grounds, try to find the hidden location of Excalibur. Perhaps it waits to be pulled from stone, or maybe it is emerging from the lake. Hot food like donuts and warm drinks will be available at stands and on the castle terrace. This light trail is open on select evenings: Nov. 21-23, Nov. 28-30, Dec. 5-7, 11-14, 16-23 and 27-30. Purchase your tickets at everymanthetheatre.org.uk/sudeley by November 20th for 10 percent off. Adult tickets are £28 each and children aged 3-16 are £18. Parking is free.



Christmas at Westonbirt

GLOUCESTERSHIRE | NOV. 28–DEC. 31, 2025

Christmas at Westonbirt National Arboretum combines the magic of Christmas with the whimsy of nature. Check out the new and spectacular installations: **Fireworks Trees**, **Laser Garden**, **Wicker Animals** and **Mycelium Network**. Father Christmas will be walking along the trail, so be ready with your Christmas wish for him. There will be plenty of food and drink stalls to help keep you warm. Fun rides like a Ferris wheel, Helter Skelter, a reindeer ride and swing chairs will be available. The light trail has limited capacity and set times. A **relaxed session** will be offered to those with additional needs at 4 p.m. on Nov. 29, Dec. 11, Dec. 17 and Dec. 26, 2025. A standard ticket for adults is £25 and £18 for children aged 3-16. It is recommended to purchase tickets and parking in advance at mychristmastrails.co.uk.



Christmas at Warwick Castle

WARWICKSHIRE | NOV. 22, 2025–JAN. 4, 2026

Christmas at Warwick Castle is a series of events, the brightest being their light trail which has over half a million lights spread across 64 acres of the historic grounds. Visitors can admire light sculptures, see projections in the sky and promenade through the gardens. Along with the light trail, there will be stories with Santa and Mrs. Claus, a brand-new ice rink, and a food and drink village with plenty of classic treats, festival food and warm beverages like mulled wine. For some of these activities, tickets are limited, so it is suggested you purchase them early. The light trail starts at £17 per person. There are combination tickets and various ticket options depending on what you wish to attend. For more information, visit warwick-castle.com.



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Christmas Lights at Leeds Castle

KENT | NOV. 21–DEC. 31, 2025

Built upon two islands in a stunning lake, Leeds Castle is a unique place for a Christmas light trail. As you walk up, you will see the glowing castle reflecting in the water. Here, you can enjoy light installations like a **Meadow of Light** and a **Neon Tree**, then continue through the mesmerizing **Ribbon Tunnel**. To warm up, visit food and beverage stalls along the trail where you can enjoy a hot chocolate or tasty festival treat. Keep an eye out for Father Christmas. The festive fairground will also have a variety of rides and other seasonal attractions for the whole family to enjoy. Adult ticket prices start at £26 and children aged 3-16 are £18.50. It is recommended to book parking in advance at mychristmastrails.co.uk.



Christmas at Kew

LONDON | NOV. 14, 2025–JAN. 4, 2026

While this three km light trail is in the Royal Botanic Gardens, **Kew Palace** can be seen illuminated and is just a 12-minute walk away. This is one of the largest light trails in England, and there will be larger-than-life illuminations created by artists from all over the world. There are three entry gates. **Victoria Gate** is the main entrance and is best for visitors traveling by bus or tube. **Elizabeth Gate** is best for guests coming by train. **Brentford Gate** is for those who have parking reservations. There will be street food to munch on as you wander, as well as on-site cafes and restaurants; you might even see Father Christmas wandering around. At the Botanical Brasserie, you can treat yourself to a three-course Christmas dinner. Adult tickets start at £27.50 and £18 for children aged 4-15. If you plan to travel by car, you must purchase parking when you buy your tickets at mychristmastrails.co.uk. ■



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Fancy a map?

SCAN THE QR TO SEE WHERE THESE HOLIDAY LIGHT TRAILS ARE IN RELATION TO U.S. MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN ENGLAND.



All Aboard!

The UK's Magical Christmas Trains

There is something magical and seasonal when you glance out of a train window and see the snowy landscape blur by. Throughout the U.K., you can star in your own whimsical holiday adventure on several winter-themed train rides.

By Tamala Malerk



The POLAR EXPRESS™ Train Ride

YORKSHIRE, DEVON, KENT
AND LONDON | SELECT DAYS
BETWEEN NOV. 8-DEC. 22

Put on your pajamas and dressing gowns and immerse yourself in the world of the film and book, "The Polar Express." There is themed food, plus drinks and music. Perchance, there will be special guests such as the Conductor or a Christmas ghost. Santa will certainly stop by and give children the First Gift of Christmas.



Learn more at
yorkshiredalesthepolar-expressride.com.

Santa Specials East Lancashire Railways

SELECT DAYS BETWEEN
NOV. 22-DEC. 24

Take an 80-minute steam train ride through the Irwell Valley and awe at the surprises that await you. Stroll through the winter wonderland at Bury Bolton Street Station, where you can chat with Mrs. Claus and the talking Christmas tree, then take part in a carol sing-along with the choir of polar bears before boarding the train where Santa will visit every child.



Learn more at eastlancs-railway.org.uk/events-activities/santa-trains.

The Christmas Train of Lights

DARTMOUTH | NOV. 28-DEC. 20

This 80-minute steam train is for those who love celebrating the season by seeing the glowing lights. The train and station are illuminated for your viewing (and Instagrammable) pleasure, and you'll enjoy a show riding through tunnels and forests. You can even book an experience where Santa will visit to bring you a gift on your return journey.



Learn more at dartmouth-railriver.co.uk/tickets/christmas-train-of-lights.

Santa's Special Train

EPPING OR ONGAR | SELECT
DAYS BETWEEN NOV. 29-DEC. 24

Travel on the vintage London bus service and enjoy the return train journey from North Wald Station, where Santa will give children a present. At the station, you will find festive food options and a live jazz band to really get you into the holiday spirit.



Learn more at
eorailway.co.uk/events/santa-specials.

The Great Central Santa Express

LOUGHBOROUGH | SELECT DAYS
BETWEEN NOV. 22-DEC. 24

View the gorgeous Leicestershire countryside as you ride this steam train with Santa and his friends. Kids receive a present from Santa while adults get a complimentary Irish cream liqueur and a warm mince pie. The train station goes all out for the holiday season with other themed trips such as Christmas murder mystery trains, festive lunch rides and jubilee four-course seasonal dinner rides.



Learn more at gcrailway.co.uk/visit/experiences/christmas.

Santa Special Steam Train Rides

CARMARTHEN | SATURDAYS
AND SUNDAYS IN DEC.

This 90-minute scenic ride is fun for the whole family. Children under 12 receive a present from Santa and everyone can grab a photo with the big man himself. On the ride, you can enjoy Christmas storybooks, activity booklets, mince pies for the adults and a snack for children.



Learn more at
gwili-railway.co.uk/train-rides/santa-special.

The Elf Express

STRATHSPEY | SELECT DAYS
BETWEEN DEC. 6-24

Children can doodle in their activity book as everyone enjoys the view of the Highlands. Elves wander throughout the carriages during the ride with antics and songs. Santa stops by every table with a souvenir for each child and a selfie with everyone. There are add-ons such as the observation carriage options with comfier seats and bigger windows or private compartments with holiday-themed drinks and treats.



Learn more at
strathspeyrailway.co.uk.

Santa Steam Trains

BO'NESS | SELECT DAYS
BETWEEN DEC. 6-24

Meet Santa aboard the train and enjoy this ride featuring singers and a magician. Children will receive a present from the Santa, and everyone can enjoy refreshments included in the price of your ticket.



Learn more at
bkrailway.co.uk/page/santasteamtrains.

The Santa Special Llangollen Railway

SELECT DAYS BETWEEN
NOV. 29-DEC. 24

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Christmastime in Poland

By Tamala Malerk and Kimberly Kephart

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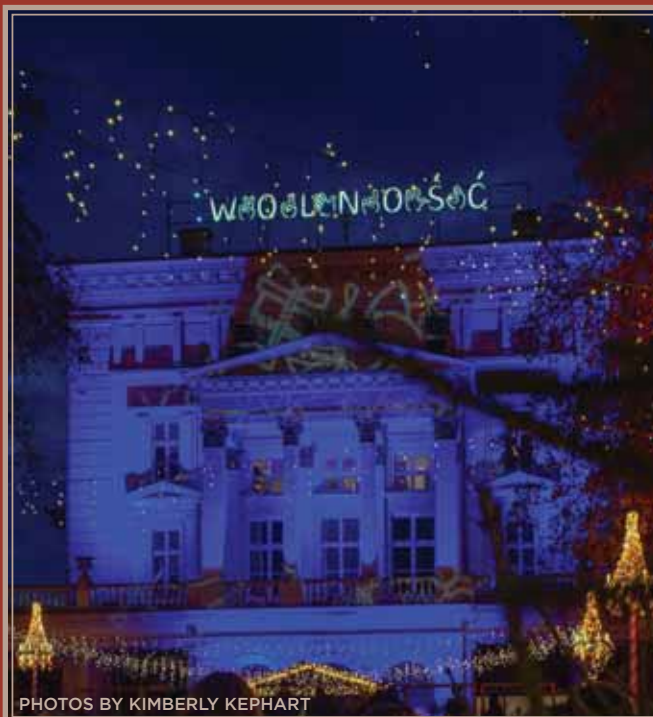
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POLAND'S FESTIVE SURPRISE: Poznań Christmas Market



PHOTOS BY KIMBERLY KEPHART

What if I told you there's a Christmas Market in Poland that could rival Germany's, without the elbow-to-elbow crowds or overpriced bratwurst? That market is **Poznań**.

My friend Aleksandra and I went on a Christmas Market road trip last year. We mapped out a three-day Christmas Market trip through Gdańsk, Torun and Bydgoszcz, but everything changed once we arrived in Poznań.

Poznań glowed; it buzzed and wrapped us in cinnamon-scented warmth (or maybe it was the mulled wine that made me feel this way) because before I knew it, I was declaring: "THIS IS THE BEST CHRISTMAS MARKET IN POLAND!"

WHY VISIT POZNAŃ?

Poznań delivers everything you want from a European Christmas market but without the chaos. It's festive yet unpretentious, cozy but not cramped, and filled with sparkle and soul that turns even the grinchiest traveler into a holiday cheermeister.

As someone who is a solo traveler, I couldn't help but notice how well this market balanced entertainment and fun for both adults and children. Parents could take their kids to enjoy the festive rides and games while everyone wandered between stalls with mulled wine in hand. You could even meet Santa!

TWO SQUARE, TWO VIBES

The magic unfolds in two central squares:

- **Stary Rynek (Old Market Square):**
A backdrop of Renaissance architecture, a towering Christmas tree, DJ and picture-perfect ice-skating rink.
- **Plac Wolności (Freedom Square):**
A livelier scene, with food stalls and a Ferris wheel offering gorgeous views and the International Ice Sculpture Festival. You'll want to check the dates for the festival to time your visit with this!

THE BEST MULLED WINE IS IN POZNAŃ (YES, REALLY)

Let's talk about mulled wine. Poland's version, known as *grzaniec*, was the best I've ever had. And I have had plenty: Germany, Italy, Austria and France. But here? The balance of spice and sweetness was perfect, and it was served in a tall, frosted mug I knew I would immediately be packing into my suitcase.

I noticed that unlike German Christmas markets, you must buy the mugs outright. This was not a problem for me. As an avid collector of mugs, I gladly handed over 16PLN (roughly \$5) for Poznań's edition.

DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT A ST. MARTIN'S CROISSANT

If there is one thing you absolutely must eat in Poznań, it's the Rogal Świętomarciński, or St. Martin's Croissant. This pastry is unlike any croissant I've ever tasted, rich, heavy, filled with white poppy seeds, nuts and dried fruit, then topped with a sugary glaze.

What my friend Aleksandra eventually told me was that the St. Martin's Croissant is so special, it

can only be sold by certified bakeries in the city. Biting into a St. Martin's Croissant felt like I was biting into a pillow of heavenly goodness. It was such a highlight!

Of course, you can order more than just sweet treats, you'll need to try pierogi, and grilled skewers. Shashlik or Shish kebab is a favorite; but fair warning, don't be like me and just point at the food. Everything is by weight. So, make sure you are specific with how many grams you want of certain foods. I honestly couldn't figure out why the vendor looked at me like I was crazy.

What I expected to be a pleasant stop turned into the highlight of my winter trip. From the intimate layout of the squares to the unforgettable flavors, Poznań felt authentic, approachable and joyfully festive. I know that you'll love this one whether you're going with family or solo. Poznań Christmas Market is the perfect place to immerse yourself in the Christmas cheer. In 2025, the market will occur from Nov. 19 to Dec. 23. ■



WHY IS THERE A CARP IN THE BATHTUB?

Wigilia, A Polish Christmas Tradition

Wigilia is a uniquely Polish Christmas tradition. It is centered around food, family, cleaning and stars. Wigilia itself is the dinner consumed on Christmas Eve; however, the customs and celebration surrounding the event go on for days.

Wigilia dates back to the 10th century. The preparation for Wigilia begins with deep cleaning the house. It is believed that no work should be undertaken once Wigilia commences and the two days that follow.

Wigilia officially begins when the first star appears in the sky on Christmas Eve and no one can eat until that first star is spotted. Children play an important role in finding the first star. Traditionally, a live carp fish was brought home and kept in the bathtub for days until it was time to cook it as the main dish for dinner; today, most people simply buy ready-to-cook carp filets.

Dinner begins with breaking **Oplatek**, a wafer that is broken by the eldest member of the family and shared. Then, it is time to eat the traditional 12 dishes of food for dinner. The dishes can represent the 12 apostles or the 12 months in the year. Recipes can vary by region but typically consist of fish, soups, potatoes, bread and fruit.

Wigilia isn't just about eating, though. It's about family, magic and community. There is often an empty chair for anyone who needs a place to go to not spend the holidays alone. People not only feast but also sing carols.

Children are also encouraged to behave so as not to scare away the Christmas Eve gift-giver. *Święty Mikołaj* (Santa) brings Polish children their gifts on Dec. 6th, and, depending on the region, one of five possible gift-givers is responsible for delivering the Christmas Eve gift: *Dziadek Mróz* (Grandfather Frost) in eastern Poland, *Gwiazdor* (the Starman) in western and northern Poland and in southern Poland you could receive presents from *Aniołek* (Little Angel), *Gwiazdka* (Little Star) or *Dzieciątko* (Baby Jesus). You might also find the children attempting to talk to their pets because it was believed that animals were given the ability to talk on Christmas Eve to welcome Jesus Christ.

After the meal, visiting and singing, Wigilia ends with **Pasterka**, Midnight Mass. This is a church service attended by Roman Catholics.

Whether you are stationed in Poland or visiting to attend one of their many fantastic Christmas markets, Wigilia is a great way to get into the Christmas season and celebrate a unique cultural tradition. ■



Fun Fact: In the last 30 years, watching the cinematic American Christmas classic, "Home Alone," has become a part of the Polish Christmas tradition. ■

5 Jarmark Bożonarodzeniowy

TO CHECK OUT IN POLAND

TORUŃ CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 21-DEC. 21, 2025

LOCATION: Rynek Staromiejski (Old Town Square)

LOCAL FAVORITE TREAT: Toruński Pierniczek, aka Toruń Gingerbread. The earliest mentions of this treat date back to the 1300s.

WHAT IS UNIQUE: This market is very child-friendly. Previous iterations have included a giant talking bear, merry-go-rounds and a huge sled for Santa that kids can sit in.

KATOWICE CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 21, 2025-JAN. 6, 2025

LOCATION: Market Square

LOCAL FAVORITE TREAT: Silesian Treats featuring meat, cabbage and potatoes. "Silesian" refers to a culture, language and historical region (Silesia) that consisted of parts of Poland, Germany and Czechia.

WHAT IS UNIQUE: Check out the evening concerts and animations.

WROCŁAW CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 21, 2025-JAN. 7, 2026

LOCATION: Market Square, Salt Square, Świdnicka Street and Oławska Street

LOCAL FAVORITE TREAT: Oscypek, which comes from the Polish mountains, is a smokey cheese paired with cranberries.

WHAT IS UNIQUE: Explore the Fairytale Forest in the market and, just a short 10-minute drive (or 20-30 minute public transit ride) away is Zoo Wrocław, where you can experience the holiday-themed "Garden of Lights."

SZCZECIN CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 28-DEC. 21, 2025

LOCATION: Plac Lotników and Aleja Kwiatowa (City Center)

LOCAL FAVORITE TREAT: Paprykarz Szczeciński, aka Polish Paprikash, is a canned fish spread. Its ingredients include rice, ground fish, tomato paste, vegetables and spices. Spread it over bread.

WHAT IS UNIQUE: It's located by the sea. Perhaps a nighttime beach stroll after the market can be on your to-do list.

BIAŁYSTOK CHRISTMAS MARKET

NOV. 29-DEC. 23, 2025

LOCATION: Kosciuszko Square

LOCAL FAVORITE TREAT: Kvass. This historical fermented drink is overlooked for its more famous and alcoholic drink, beer. Kvass dates back to the Middle Ages in Eastern Europe, but no one can pinpoint its exact origin.

WHAT IS UNIQUE: You can learn about Podlasie culture as well as walk over to the Branicki Palace where you can marvel at a gorgeous light display. ■

THE YULE CAT OF ICELAND

By Katie Wells

Long ago a strange cat pounced into town, larger than the homes he prowled past. Black as the shadows of night, he would slink his way deep into villages searching for prey. Instead of mice, the fearsome Jólakötturinn snatched children from their beds and gobbled them up, particularly lazy children who hadn't been gifted new clothes on Christmas Eve. Some say he came from Dimmuborgir, a lava field in northern Iceland; some say he materialized out of wickedness.

Regardless...

Beware the yellow eyes of the evil Christmas cat peering into windows, ready to devour anyone without a new outfit before returning to the snowy countryside.

While the origins of the Yule Cat are unknown, the "Poem of Grýla," a tale of a sinister giantess-ogre-troll, suggests that Jólakötturinn was her cat. Which seems not too far-fetched as the "Christmas Witch" is known to command evil spirits and punish misbehaving children by boiling them alive. Her 13 sons, the Yule Lads, are notorious mischief-makers as well, known for their 13 nights of pranks leading up to Christmas.

In "Jólasveinavísur" by Jóhannes frá Kötlum, the lads swipe sausages, lick the batter off spoons, slam doors, steal candles and more. Thus, a Christmas tradition began in Iceland. Children leave out a shoe on the windowsill for the 13 days prior to Christmas and each night, one of the lads will leave a "prank" inside for the child to find in the morning; perhaps a treat or toy, or if the child has been naughty, a rotten potato.



Stories of this ominous Christmas family date back to the 13th century, when Norse mythology was first written down by Christian monks. Tales of monstrous cats in Icelandic folklore go even further back, all the way to the times of the Vikings. Vikings in Iceland valued cats for protecting stored food and controlling pests. Some Viking swords even feature cats as part of "gripping beasts" motifs.

The Yule Cat is especially loved at Christmas time in Iceland. It is often a motif in shops and decorations during the holidays and the story is still told regularly. Every year in **Laekjartorg Square** in Reykjavik, an illuminated sculpture of Jólakötturinn rises.

To learn more about Icelandic folklore and legends like the Yule Cat, Grýla and the Yule Lads, the **Skogar Folk Museum** is a neat place to visit and just one minute from the famous Skogar Waterfall. It is part of three separate museums tucked into the mossy hillside. Here, you can learn about and view historical items of Icelandic folklore and culture.

Even if you don't visit Iceland during the holidays, it is likely you'll find the Yule Cat's presence lurking in cafes and shops. ■



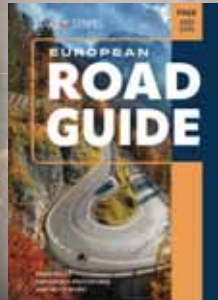
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Christmas Mug, Oh Christmas Mug, Where Can I Find Thee?

By Katie Wells

It's that time of year again,
Christmas market mug
collecting is back in full force.

Before you begin your hunt, here
are some tips for collecting.

- For the most unique mugs, **go during opening weekend** since markets can run out of limited designs quickly.
- **Go to more than one Glühwein stall**; many markets have a few variations of mugs, and you might find a special color or shape.
- **Look for the Christmas pyramid.** If the market has one, this is usually where you can find each variation of the current year's mug offerings.
- If you are a dog owner, **bring a few clean doggy bags to hold mugs** and protect your purse or coat pockets from sticky leftovers.
- **Follow our flowchart** to find out if you should keep a mug or pass.

Check out these festive
reader-submitted Christmas market mugs!



Bruges
Tela Lee Royston



Dresden
Jessica Lynn



Köln
Kate Swartz



Christmas Mug Tree
Debby June Gonzales



Nuremberg
Jamie Scott Roney



Innsbruck
Monica Clodwick

Jinglefind App

The **Jinglefind app** is a great resource when planning your Christmas market adventures. Many cities have more than one market, so if you open the map in the App, you can see if there are any others nearby. Useful details like hours, dates, addresses, restroom locations, websites and parking are available. Extras like whether a market has ice-skating or special food to try are also detailed. The app is crowdsourced, so you can add and edit the listings as well as upload photos. If you stumble upon an unlisted market, you could be the one to list it for someone else to find.

More details on
jinglefind.com



Should I Keep This Christmas Market Mug?



Do I have *space* for it?

yes

Will I use it?

no

Don't buy it.

yes

'Tis the season of joy, *keep it!*

no

Will I be *thinking* about it later?

yes

Keep it!

no

Leave it.

maybe

Am I *willing to part* with a mug I already have?

no

Will it make *my collection* complete?

yes

The *more the merrier!*

no

If you find yourself buying the mug anyway, you may be a **mug collector**. Please continue...

yes

Keep it! A trade is fair.



What Kind of Mug Collector Are You?

I have *more mugs* than everyday glassware.

no

Devoted Collector.

yes

I drink beverages from my market mugs *year-round*.

no

Perennial Collector.

yes

My heart *races* when I hear the words "Christmas Market Mug."

no

Fanatical Collector.

yes

Predatory Collector.





STAFF PICKS

PET EDITION

Compiled by Tamala Malerk

The ghosts of Christmas Markets Magazine's past include our staff's favorite market mugs, memories and presents. Who can forget Ayla's famous Barbie Jeep? This year, however, we wanted to hear from the furry friends of our staff and see them this holiday season.



NORAH & GINGER FIND CAT GRASS

"Ginger is 15 years old, and ever since he was a kitten, he's received a special treat—cat grass—on holidays and special occasions. When we moved to Germany last year, we

worried this tradition might end since we always bought it at our local PetSmart. But during our first visit to OBI, we spotted the exact same grass! He always meows with excitement the moment he sees us pulling it out the bag—just like in the photo. So grateful we can keep this little tradition alive for our 'grumpy old man.'"



BARRY WAITING TO OPEN PRESENTS



OTTO IN FRONT OF HIS STOCKING



ROCKY MEETS SANTA



SHELBY NODDING OFF BY THE TREE



ISAAC TAKES PRINCE THEO & SIR TITUS TO MEET SANTA

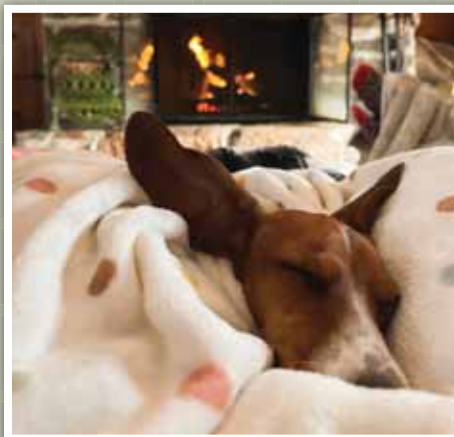
These ferrets were "all over the place" when they first met the big man in red. However, just a few treats on the noses and they were able to stay calm for a quick snapshot.



NUTMEG IN HIS CHRISTMAS SWEATER



FERN UNDER THE TREE



ARCHIE NAPPING BY THE FIRE



KRISTEN & CALVIN OPEN PRESENTS

"Calvin loved sitting under the Christmas tree and drinking the tree water. He would sit by the tree stand and stick his little paw in and then lick the water off. What could be better than sappy, pine water???" ■

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meliva.de/christmas