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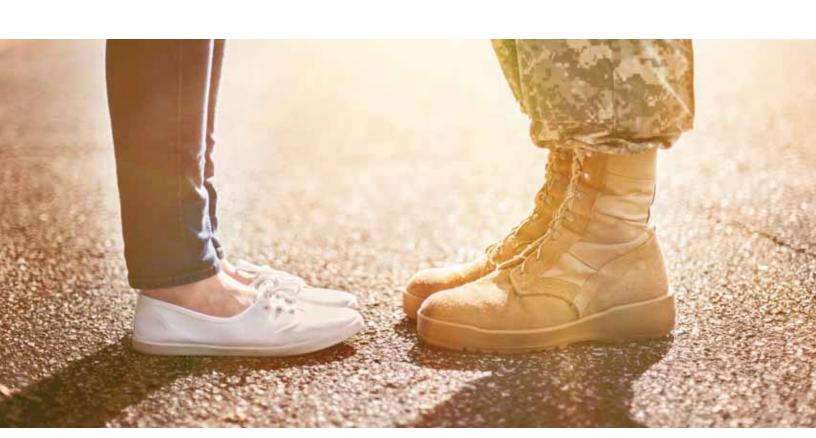
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GERMAN LIVING





Due to the pandemic, our favorite holiday pastime is uncertain this year.



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Embracing GERMANY

The Magical Christmas Markets

By Stacy Roman

Every holiday season, we normally would all be looking forward to the highly anticipated markets. However, due to the pandemic, our favorite holiday pastime is uncertain this year. Nevertheless, for anyone new to Germany, I encourage you to take a look at what makes these markets so magical.

WHAT ARE CHRISTMAS MARKETS?

Christmas Markets are commonly known as "Christkindlmarkt" or "Weihnachtsmarkt," and are just as they sound — market stalls selling seasonal wares and gifts. There's also plenty of delicious food and beverages to partake in as well. Set up in small, alpine huts neatly lined in rows, the markets gravitate toward the city center or a popular tourist attraction. While there are some disputes about when the first "Christkindlmarkt" began, the general consensus points to the Dresden Striezelmarkt in 1434, which is still put on every year.

Usually popping up right before or after Thanksgiving, Christmas Markets are a one-of-a-kind experience. Some may charge a small admission fee, while others are free of charge. If you visit markets in different cities, you may be slightly disappointed to find many of the stalls selling the same trinkets and decorations. However, most markets have some sort of unique flair. For instance, Wiesbaden's Twinkling Star Market features huge flowers lining the street which light up at night and Stuttgart's town hall is converted into a giant advent calendar.

EAT AND DRINK ALL THE THINGS

Food at Weihnachtsmärkte can be described as upscale, awesome fair food. Sizzling brats, freshly baked pretzels and roast candied almonds meet your nose as you walk through. Be sure to save your appetite for the soft, gingery goodness of Lebkuchen — especially if you visit Nuremberg, where it originated. But the most popular delicacy isn't a food, it's a drink. Glühwein is a staple at Christmas markets. Made with red or white wine, this delicious imbibement is mixed with mulling spices and usually served piping hot. Not big on drinking? Indulge in hot chocolate or the non-alcoholic (yet cloyingly sweet) version of glühwein, "kinderpunsch." You can either hang on to your mug as a keepsake or return it for the small "pfand."

WHERE TO GO

The traditional big markets are usually found in Dresden, Nuremberg, Aachen, Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt and Berlin. Another fan favorite is the fairytale village of Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber. One market I personally loved was Pots-dammerplatz in Berlin. Not only were there rows upon rows of stalls, but there was also a huge sledding hill right smack in the middle of the city. Another personal favorite the Heinzels Wintermärchen in Cologne. This market is dedicated to all thing gnomes. With animatronic scenes atop the huts and gnomes peering out from different corners, it whimsically encompasses the season.

Christmas markets come in all different shapes and sizes. Hopefully this time next year, we can embrace this fun and magical time of year in Germany. Frohe Weihnachten! \blacksquare



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GERMANY'S HIGHLIGHT

A Bavarian Winter Wonderland

By Amanda Palumbo

"If you're
looking for a new,
less traversed winter
excursion, head east to
Bayerischer Wald,
the Bavarian
Forest."

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There is not a bad season to visit Bavaria

but Bavaria in winter? Well, that's a sight words will do no justice. While Zugspitze and Garmisch-Partenkirchen seem to get all the winter wonderland headlines, and rightfully so, the area is a frozen fairytale come to life. But, if you're looking for a new, less traversed winter excursion, head east to Bayerischer Wald, the Bavarian Forest.

Germany's first park

Bavarian Forest National Park is a 94-square mile mix of forest, mountains and wildlife. It bleeds into the Czech Republic, where the forest is called Šumava, or the Bohemian National Forest. It holds a special place in German hearts, as it was the country's first national park and amasses more than 700,000 visitors each year.

The forest is filled with towering spruce and fir trees, providing the perfect scent of evergreen. Those gorgeous trees lead right up to the peak of each mountain. The park is full of rare wildlife, such as the Eurasian Lynx, a wildcat that nearly went extinct due to excessive poaching. It's also home to 1,800 different species of beetles, which by no means is a tourist draw, but I bet you found that interesting.

Not your average hike

Unfortunately, due to gravity, hikers are normally anchored to the ground, weaving through tall trees on trails where you often can't even see the sky above you. That is not the case in the Bavarian Forest. You can hike along the treetops! The Treetop Walk is a 1,300 meter (.8 mile) trail that takes you between 25 and 80 feet off the ground. You can walk through the tops of the beech, spruce and fir trees. There are stations throughout the trail including rope bridges, balance beams and even trapezes.

The trail leads up to the "Baumei" or "tree egg." This winding egg-like structure takes you to the height of the trail, giving you a 365-degree view of the forest. No matter when you go, you will get a breathtaking view. In winter, you'll get to see a still and snowy paradise as wet snow clings to the branches of the evergreen trees. Just over the tips of the trees you'll see the rolling hills and meadows snuggled in front of snow-capped mountain tops. The best thing about this trail is it is very family friendly, so the younger kids will get to experience this incredible view.

"With each step,
the snow makes this
cathartic crunching sound,
as the warm sun falls
over you and reflects off
the microscopic angles
of each individual,
unique snowflake."



Snow sports abound

For a much more intense hiking experience, and if you really want to work those quads and glutes, snowshoeing is very popular in the Bavarian Forest. Everyone should snowshoe at least once in their life. With each step, the snow makes this cathartic crunching sound, as the warm sun falls over you and reflects off the microscopic angles of each individual, unique snowflake.

Ski bums can really get a lot of bang for their buck in the Bavarian Forest. One hour ski passes are just 11 euros and 24 euros for the entire day. There are discounts for children, families and seniors and gear can be rented or purchased on-site. They even offer something I've been dying to do: night skiing. Imagine soaring down a mountainside with the moon in your view and the snow in front of you glistening in the moonlight.

Where to crash

There are places to stay for every style and budget through the park itself and the neighboring villages. From quaint bed and breakfasts that provide the full Bavarian experience to four-star resorts with every amenity imaginable, there is no shortage of places to stay. There are even private cabins and apartments you can rent for a quiet weekend away.

2020 has been nothing short of ridiculous, mentally taxing and, at times, even heartbreaking. As Elsa said herself, it's time to "let it go." What better way to do that, than spending time in a silent and secluded winter wonderland forest where you can easily kick back, relax and socially distance your troubles away. ■





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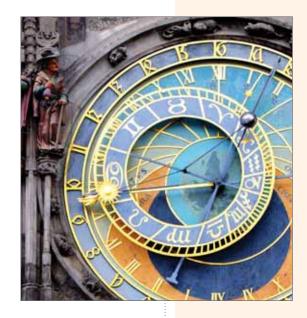
PRAGUE



The delightfully scenic city of Prague is the capital of Czech Republic and the largest city in the country. It is split by the VItava River and is brimming with Baroque churches, Renaissance architecture, medieval streets and tasty treats that will make you yearn to return over and over again. History buffs, foodies, castle fanatics and grand church aficionados can all find something that draws them to this incredible location.

By Jessica Zen

TRAVEL INSPIRATION



ABOVE: Admire the astronomical clock at the Old Town Square first installed in 1410.

RIGHT: Take a stroll and view the 30 statues mounted to the balustrade of Charles Bridge.





"No European city is complete without a castle perched high on the hill overlooking its territory. Prague is no exception."

Sites to see



No European city is complete without a castle perched high on the hill overlooking its territory. Prague is no exception. Prague Castle was once the seat of Czech rulers, but today is the residence of the president. The surrounding grounds are free to visit, but you have to pay to enter the St. Vitus Cathedral, Basilica of St. George and Golden Lane. It's worth the small fee as this massive structure is the largest coherent castle complex in the world.

Not far from Prague Castle is Charles Bridge. A quick 15-minute walk will take you to the edge of the Vltava River. The colorful buildings in the background plus the 14th-century bridge make for the perfect picture which captures the essence of Prague. Stroll across the bridge, stopping for photos along the way.

As with most European cities, the Old Town Square is not to be missed. Dine in an al fresco restaurant, admire the surrounding architecture and listen to the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages as they convey visitors through the cobblestone streets. In the square you'll find the astronomical clock on the Old Town Hall. This is one of Prague's proudest accomplishments. The clock was built in the 15th century and is considered one of the best preserved medieval mechanical clocks in the world!

From Old Town, the Jewish Quarter is just a five-minute walk. This area dates back to the 13th century when both Czech Jews and those from other countries had to vacate their homes. Despite having many of their buildings destroyed, there is still a fantastically preserved complex of Jewish monuments today. Surprisingly, this little neighborhood survived Nazi occupation because Hitler wanted it to be a "Museum of an Extinct Race." Artifacts were collected from other occupied countries and now make up the Jewish Museum in Prague. You can also visit six synagogues here.

What to eat

The Czech Republic is full of fantastic foods, and Prague is the perfect place to sample as many as possible.

- Be sure to add beef tartare to your list of foods to try, a raw minced beef dish often served with an egg on top. You can eat it with bread and garlic and it pairs perfectly with a Pilsner beer.
- ② If you prefer your meat cooked, try "svíčková" with dumplings. This is marinated sirloin beef and bread dumplings covered in a delectable root vegetable cream sauce. It is served with cranberry sauce and unsweetened whipped cream and makes for the perfect dinner.
- (3) If you're looking for something a little lighter, opt for the fried cheese. This incredible dish is exactly what it sounds like: fried and breaded Edam cheese. The ooey gooey goodness hits the spot every single time. Do not pass up an opportunity to try this!
- ① Of course you must sample some of the local sweets. One particularly delightful dessert is "kolache". It is a small, round yeast dough ball filled with sweets like strawberries or cherries. It pairs perfectly with the coffee you are sipping at the cafe!
- 6) While you're strolling the cobblestone streets you'll likely notice many places selling "trdelník," or chimney cakes. These are rolled yeast doughs wrapped around a stick and roasted over an open flame. The dough is then brushed with butter and rolled in cinnamon and sugar. Get them filled with Nutella and ice cream for an extra sweet treat!











TOP ROW: Beef tartare, fried cheese, chimney cakes

BOTTOM ROW: Marinated beef & dumplings, "kolache" pastry



Where to stay

The buses, metro lines and trams make it easy to stay just about anywhere in the city, but a few places stand out as the best.

Malá Strana is known as a fairytale neighborhood. It is in the hills near Prague Castle and close to Charles Bridge. Though it can be quite busy during the day, it is peaceful at night.

If you want to be right in the center of the action, Old Town is the place for you and the obvious choice for first time visitors. New Town, though not actually new, surrounds Old Town and has lots of cafes, bars, restaurants and shopping opportunities.

If you have a creative side and crave crafty spaces, Holešovice is for you. This is a former industrial area that is now home to warehouses and factories for artists and creatives. It is located across the water from the historic city center.



No matter where you stay or what you do...

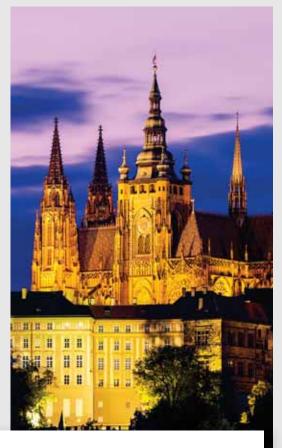
in Prague, you'll want to come back time and time again. From the incredible scenery to the inexpensive food options, there is no shortage of ways to spend your days. Explore the castle, learn about the local history and indulge in a chimney cake or two. Prague is the perfect place for your next vacation.













10 Reasons to Love Prague By Mary Del Rosario By Mary Del Rosario

- The timeless architecture throughout the city will leave you speechless.
- There are many craft beers to sample at the several breweries here. BeerGeek Bar was my favorite.
- $\begin{tabular}{ll} \hline 3. & The Astronomical Clock located in \\ \hline \end{tabular}$ the beautiful Old Town Square is a sight to behold.
- 4. Walking along historic Charles Bridge will be your favorite pastime.
- Trdelník, rolled dough on a stick coated with sugar, will have your mouth drooling.

- 6. For fans of The Beatles, a visit to the John Lennon Wall is a must-do.
- The KGB Museum and the Jewish Quarter provides a perfect glimpse into Prague's storied past.
- 8. Prague Castle is what fairytales are made out of. You can witness the changing of the guard at noon.
- $\begin{tabular}{ll} \end{tabular} \begin{tabular}{ll} \end{tabular} \beg$ stone alleyways are part of the city's charm.
- 10. The nightlife is like no other.

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Slovakia

ON YOUR RADAR

By Jessica Zen

Forget the overcrowded streets of bustling cities and get ready for an adventure that takes you into the lesser traveled country of Slovakia. There's certainly no shortage of activities here, from hiking in the glorious mountains to exploring romantic castles. Pack up the family and get ready for the experience of a lifetime! Whether you keep your vacation strictly outdoors or venture into some amazing villages, you're sure to find something to tickle everyone's fancy.

The mainly mountainous country in central Europe boasts some seriously incredible outdoor opportunities. For example, the National Park of High Tatras is nothing short of breathtaking. This park is one of the oldest protected areas in Slovakia. It is home to the tallest mountain in the country, Gerlachovský štít, towering at 8,710 feet. You can also find over 100 glistening alpine lakes here. Note that hiking is limited to June 15 - Nov. 1, unless accompanied by a guide.

If you would prefer to see the immense beauty below the mountains, there's an opportunity for that as well. The Dubnik Opal Mines are something truly amazing to behold. Opalescence, or the perfect play of colors, is on full display in these unique mines. They were operating in full swing from 1845-1880 and were run by a Viennese jeweler. Today, many people know the beauty of jewelry made with opals. Visit where these precious stones were once harvested from the earth and marvel at the incredible history!

For some adult-only fun, Modra vineyards are the place to be. Here you can

get a taste of some of Slovakia's finest wines. Head to the town of Modra, just outside of Bratislava, in the Small Carpathian Mountains where you will learn about the local wine culture and taste a variety of wine. The town has under 10,000 occupants and is the perfect place to wander around and look at various historical churches. Of course, you'll need to tour a local wine cellar and relax in a peaceful garden while here as well.

If incredible architecture is more your speed, Slovakia is up to the challenge. Bojnice Castle is one of the oldest and most important monuments in the country. This castle towers over the town as a reminder of medieval times. It was built in the

Romanesque style, but also has touches of both Gothic and Renaissance elements, creating a fairytale ambiance. Tour the Count's Flat, Middle Castle, Palffy family tomb, French Park and the travertine cave during your visit.

Another architectural triumph in the country is St. Elizabeth's Cathedral in Košice. This stunning Gothic style cathedral is the largest church in Slovakia, covers 13,000 square feet and can house 5,000 worshippers. The altar features a double-spiral





staircase, which can only be found in five churches throughout Europe. There are also beautiful frescoes and sculptures inside, as well as a tower that should certainly be climbed!

When you're carefully concocting the perfect travel bucket list for Europe, be sure to keep Slovakia on your radar! The outdoor scenery here will draw you in and the architectural feats will only add to the charm of the surroundings. Whether you hike for days in the national parks or relax in a city setting, there is no wrong way to enjoy the fabulous country of Slovakia!

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