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HISTORY IN THE
Heart of Bulgaria

EDITOR'S PICKS

10 CHRISTMAS MARKETS
ACROSS THE WORLD

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December Events

By Tamala Malerk

EDITOR'S PICKS

For things to do between Christmas markets, we've got eight events occurring across Germany this winter. From ballet to car shows, comedy nights, toy cons and more, there is something on this list for everyone.



Grand Classic Ballet presents "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker"
Nov. 26, 2023-Jan. 15, 2024

Across Berlin, celebrate craft beer with Catch these two classic ballet performances no matter where you live in Germany. Performances include Munich, Berlin, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Hamburg, Oberhausen and more. For more locations and dates go to mc-ballet.de/kalender.



Bonn Santa Claus Run 2023
Dec. 10, Bonn

Run off those Christmas cookie calories and have some fun at the same time. You can choose between fun runs of 1 km and longer routes up to 10 km, so there is a distance for everyone. Registration ends Dec. 3.



©ILIZA.COM

Iliza Shlesinger Live
Dec. 12, Cologne

Calling all elder millennials: Grab your party goblins and make your way to this comedy show from the winner of "Last Comic Standing." More German and European dates are available at iliza.com/pages/tour-dates.



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Essen Motor Show
Dec. 1-12, Essen

For automobile lovers everywhere, enjoy classic cars, motorsports and discussions on tuning and lifestyle at "Europe's leading trade fair for sporty vehicles." Celebrate the end of the 2023 Formula One season and get geared up for the 2024 season.



Moving Shadows
Dec. 27, Nuremberg

See Europe's "award-winning shadow theatre show." You will be captivated by the blend of light, music and the precision of eight people behind a screen. Additional dates, including Stuttgart and Kaiserslautern, can be found at mobile-theater.de/termine.html.



Retro Games Con + Classic Toys Con
Dec. 2, Dresden

Relive your childhood and soak up all the nostalgia at this convention. Bring euros to buy all the things you couldn't when you were a kid. Make sure to check out this month's Con Together at stripeseurope.com for more cons across Germany.



Ski Jumping World Cup 2023
**Dec. 31, 2023-Jan. 1, 2024,
Garmisch-Partenkirchen**

Cheer on skiers as they compete in the qualifying jumps. These two days are a part of the major "Four Hills Tournament" across Germany and Austria. For more jump dates, go to skigebiete-test.de.



©JEROME SILVERE AKA 21STREETZ

Candlelight: 100 Years of Warner Bros.
Dec. 8, Dortmund

Relax in the candlelight and enjoy the orchestral music from movies and television programs such as "The Wizard of Oz," "The Lord of the Rings," "Scooby Doo," "Friends," "Casablanca" and more. Additional dates and locations can be found at candlelightexperience.com.

Christmas Markets

If you are looking for a great list of Christmas markets, travel features, stocking stuffers and more check out Stripes' "European Christmas Markets" magazine, available online and in print at your local Commissary, Exchange and Express. ■




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PHOTO of the month

Most people head to Seitan Limania Beach on the island of Crete to photograph the turquoise blue water and contrasting white-walled cliffs that hem in this beautiful beachy cove. But our contributing photographer found this goat more photogenic. We thought it would bring you some joy at this bleak time of year to know that somewhere in Greece a goat may be perched on a cliff keeping tabs on whether the beachgoers are naughty or nice.

Photo by Melissa Rall

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The Museums of Frankfurt

By Tamala Malerk

If you've done any international traveling via the skies, chances are you've been to Frankfurt and its main airport. Instead of immediately rushing home after your next flight, spend the day exploring the Museumsufer (Museum Shore), a collection of 39 cultural institutions along the Main River. While we don't have the time or space to cover them all, here are a few that should definitely make your "to-do" list.





For the kids

The Junges Museum Frankfurt is an interactive and hands-on museum that all the kids will enjoy. They host workshops all about jewelry making, historical playrooms, experiments, printing, comic-making and more. They have guided tours and exhibitions. Learn about your role in the “Environment, Climate & YOU” exhibit. If you need to wind down, there are picnic areas on several levels for relaxing breaks.

For music lovers

The Museum of Modern Electronic Music is a non-traditional museum that tantalizes the eyes and ears of its patrons. Learn all about the fashion, culture, media and more surrounding electronic music. Take a DJ workshop or attend a public forum. Check out their current exhibit, “MILESTONES: Favorite Club Tracks 1985-2020.”

For dinosaur fans

The Senckenberg Naturmuseum contains over 10,000 exhibits and the “largest number of dinosaur species in Germany” for visitors to learn about the world around them. See the extinct dodo bird, venture under the sea, learn about the evolution of man and more. If you get hungry during your visit, there is a bistro onsite providing cakes, salads, snacks and beverages.



©SERGI ODVPHOTO/123RF.COM

For art lovers

The Museum für Moderne Kunst and SCHIRN Kunsthalle Frankfurt offer customers the opportunity to view contemporary and modern art. However, the Caricature Museum of Frankfurt offers patrons something a little off of the beaten path, an entire museum dedicated to comic art: comics, cartoons, caricatures and picture stories. Every year, at the end of August, you can also check out the comedy festival. During the festival, “the most exquisite satirical stage art is presented at the Weckmarkt outside in front of the museum.”

For history buffs

As “one of the largest city museums in Europe,” the Historisches Museum Frankfurt offers plenty to learn about and see. Several permanent exhibitions take you through Frankfurt’s history as well as its role with democracy and as a global and trade city. This large institution also houses the aforementioned Junges Museum and the Porcelain Museum.



For media consumers

The Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum (DFF) has models and interactive exhibits onsite for film enthusiasts. Look through the Camera Obscura and see Darth Vader’s helmet. At the Museum für Kommunikation Frankfurt, learn all about media in the permanent exhibition, “Media History | Retold!” Bring the kids along and they can enjoy the children’s workshop on the second floor.

If you want to check out all 39 museums, there is an option for you. The MuseumsuferCard grants you access to them all for 12 months, access to Night of the Museums in the spring and the MuseumSurferFest in August, as well as the magazine “art kaleidoscope” delivered to you once every three months. Single cards are 89 euro and family cards (two adults and two kids) are 150 euro. ■

HISTORY IN THE *Heart of Bulgaria*

By Kat Nickola



NEBET TEPE



ROMAN AMPHITHEATER



HINDLIYAN HOUSE

PLOVDIV

When we pulled into the Plovdiv train station, my sister and I were doubting our travel choices. It had been a restless overnight train ride from Istanbul with two little kids. Our berth on the Bosphor Express was comfortable enough but a series of border stops kept us awake in the wee hours. Riding into town past litter-filled vacant lots, Cyrillic graffiti and row upon row of brutalist housing blocks wasn't the welcome we were after.

Then it all changed. A quick taxi ride whisked us up the hill into the Old Town of Plovdiv, and suddenly we felt like we were back in time. The tiny stone-lined streets wound between colorfully painted homes and former mansions built in the Bulgarian National Revival style that developed here. Six of these buildings, with their dark wood framing, rows of windows and overhanging

second floors, can be visited. We enjoyed the bright blue Hindliyan House which housed floor-to-ceiling murals and period furniture that highlighted the wealth of the burgeoning Bulgarian merchant class.

The Bulgarian National Revival occurred in the 1700s, when the Ottoman government was in decline and Bulgarian culture and nationalism could develop. Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire for nearly 600 years, and previously part of the Byzantine Empire. But Bulgaria's origins are much older. The Bulgars, for whom the area is name, were a semi-nomadic people who united in 632 as Old Great Bulgaria. The nation developed north of the Black Sea, but quickly expanded southwest creating an empire that lasted until 1018.

There are much older layers to this town, though. Before the Bulgars moved in, the area was part of the ancient Roman Empire and Plovdiv was known as Philippopolis. The Roman stadium was built in the second century by Emperor Hadrian. It was a ten-minute, downhill walk along the cobble streets of the bustling, cafe-lined shopping district. In another five minutes, we walked to the ancient Theatre of Philippopolis, a large Roman amphitheater that still hosts performances.

Back up on the hill in the old town, we visited the oldest layer of history at Nebet Tepe. Atop the hill is an archaeology park at a prehistoric settlement dating from 4000 B.C. that eventually became the city of Plovdiv. Thracian tribes fortified the settlement with dry-stone walls and towers. I marveled at the construction while my daughter pet a local cat and we enjoyed the hilltop view and city-park ambiance.

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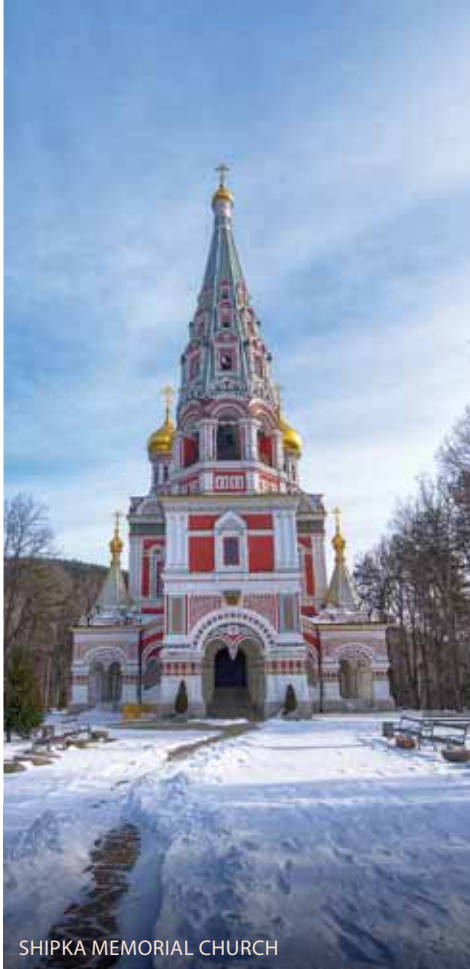
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BACHKOVO MONASTERY

we hiked up to Asen's Fortress, a medieval cliff-top ruin with a church precariously perched over the valley.



BACHKOVO MONASTERY (INTERIOR)

Buzludzha Monument rose up like a post-apocalyptic relic left by the communist government. Back down the other side, however, was the contrastingly serene Dryanovo Monastery. We were able to pop into this canyon-floor religious center just prior to closing time and got a wonderful tour of the icon-laden church and grounds by a lovely older monk.

It was a curving mountain road up over Shipka Pass. At the top, the abandoned saucer-shaped

Tired of driving, we finally rolled into the historic city of Veliko Tarnovo.

OVER SHIPKA PASS

We rented a car in Plovdiv and planned to take a day to drive up over the Balkan Mountains and visit sites along the way. With my sister at the wheel, our first stop was only 20 minutes out of town.

Bulgaria is known for its numerous active Orthodox Christian sites, and Bachkovo Monastery is the second largest. We visited three unique mural-covered churches, wandered along the arched columns and walkways and fed the sheep that live at the complex. Nearby,



BUZLUDZHA MONUMENT

“

The scenery and small mountain-town atmosphere define the Veliko Tarnovo area.

”

VELIKO TARNOVO

In 1185, a revolt by leading Bulgarian nobles threw off the crumbling Byzantine Empire to re-establish the Bulgarian Empire. Lasting over 200 years until Ottoman forces invaded, the Bulgarian monarchs based their government in Veliko Tarnovo.

The city is laid out on the cliffs of the wildly meandering Yantra River, which folds in and back on itself so much that the town appears to be a series of cliff-top islands. In the Middle Ages, this situation made the town, and the seat of power at Tsaravets Fortress nearly impenetrable.

We planned for a morning at Tsaravets Fortress but stayed all day. Thank goodness we had snacks. After crossing a high cobblestone bridge and passing under three gateways, we finally entered the massive complex where vendors offered extra experiences like horseback rides and guided tours. My daughter loved the opportunity to dress up as a Bulgarian empress and pose on the throne.

Tsaravets Fortress was a small city that housed government families, a military base and barracks, a palace for royals and a huge monastery. While most of it lies in ruins, the Ascension Cathedral at

the top of the hill was rebuilt in 1981 to mark the then-communist state's anniversary. Inside, we marveled at the unique, dark modernist murals of Bulgarian suffering.

Outside, the kids enjoyed getting a bit lost in the nooks and crannies of the vast ruinous complex. There were stairs to climb, tunnels to search, and crenelated walls to walk along. Numerous places offered scenic views across the river to the Trapezitsa Fortress, where medieval noble families once lived.

The scenery and small mountain-town atmosphere define the Veliko Tarnovo area. We drove a few kilometers up a steep road to the tiny village of Arbanassi, which is maintained as a cultural heritage reserve. We wandered around the preserved, but still occupied, 17th-century stone homes and admired the chickens and horses eating clover in the village square. We respectfully entered a few of the small neighborhood churches whose windowless walls and arched ceilings were covered in old murals and icons that had aged and darkened from burning incense.

Later we ate at the Sevastokrator Hotel's restaurant. With views over the Veliko Tarnovo canyon below and a playground for the kids, it was a perfect afternoon in the heart of historic Bulgaria. ■



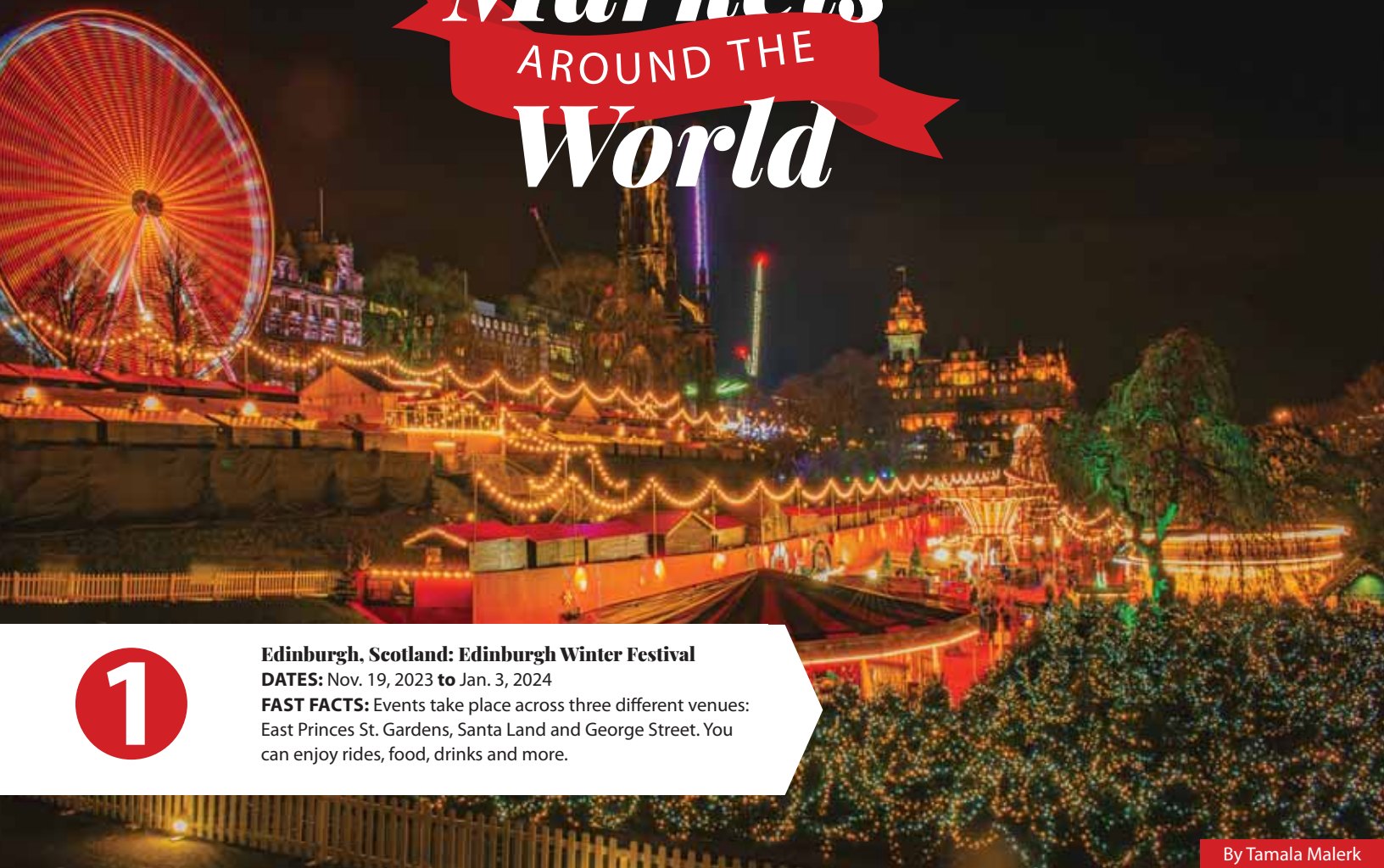
ASCENSION CATHEDRAL

10

Christmas Markets

AROUND THE

World



1

Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh Winter Festival

DATES: Nov. 19, 2023 to Jan. 3, 2024

FAST FACTS: Events take place across three different venues: East Princes St. Gardens, Santa Land and George Street. You can enjoy rides, food, drinks and more.

By Tamala Malerk



Two

Sibiu, Romania

DATES: Nov. 10, 2023 to Jan. 7, 2024 (tentatively)

FAST FACTS: Check out light shows, food, and a blend of German, Romanian and Hungarian cultures at the Piata Mare in old town Sibiu.

3

Hong Kong, China: WinterFest

DATES: Late Nov. 2023 to early Jan. 2024

FAST FACTS: Enjoy artwork, markets, games, meet Father Christmas and more.



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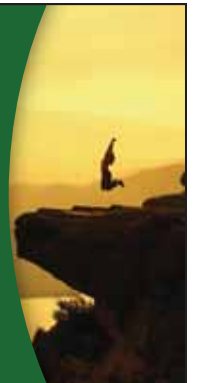
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4

Lisbon, Portugal

DATES: Nov. 2023 to Dec. 2023

FAST FACTS: Many markets take place in Lisbon. One of the most famous is Wonderland Lisbon which features an ice rink, Ferris wheel, train, trampoline and more.

FIVE

Washington, D.C.: Downtown Holiday Market

DATES: Nov. 17, 2023 to Dec. 23, 2023 | Closed Thanksgiving Day and Monday, Dec. 4

FAST FACTS: Features live music and over 70 exhibitors so you can shop for crafts, food and more.



Madrid, Spain: Plaza Mayor Christmas Market

DATES: Nov. 2023 to Dec. 31, 2023

FAST FACTS: Over 100 exhibitors await you at this 100-year-old market featuring DIY nativity scenes, gag gifts and Christmas decorations.



7



Gdańsk, Poland

DATES: Nov. 17 to Dec. 23, 2023

FAST FACTS: Enjoy Polish dishes such as kielbasa, pierogi and bigos while shopping.

Valkenburg, Netherlands: Christmas Town

DATES: Nov. 17, 2023 to Jan. 7, 2024

FAST FACTS: Visit Santa's Village, see the parade, underground Christmas markets, life-size sculptures, culinary walks and more.



Toronto, Canada: Distillery Winter Village

DATES: Nov. 16, 2023 to Dec. 31, 2023

FAST FACTS: Interactive treasure hunt, 65+ exhibitors, cafes and restaurants represented, live music and more. Tickets are required Friday-Sunday after 4 p.m. and 27-31 Dec. after 4 p.m.



Merano, Italy

DATES: Nov. 24, 2023 to Jan. 6, 2024 | Closed Christmas Day

FAST FACTS: Shop food and crafts and go ice skating while choirs sing and music plays. You are also a short trip from the Lagundo and Sterntaler Christmas markets. ■



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WHY IS THERE



SO MUCH

Mistletoe?

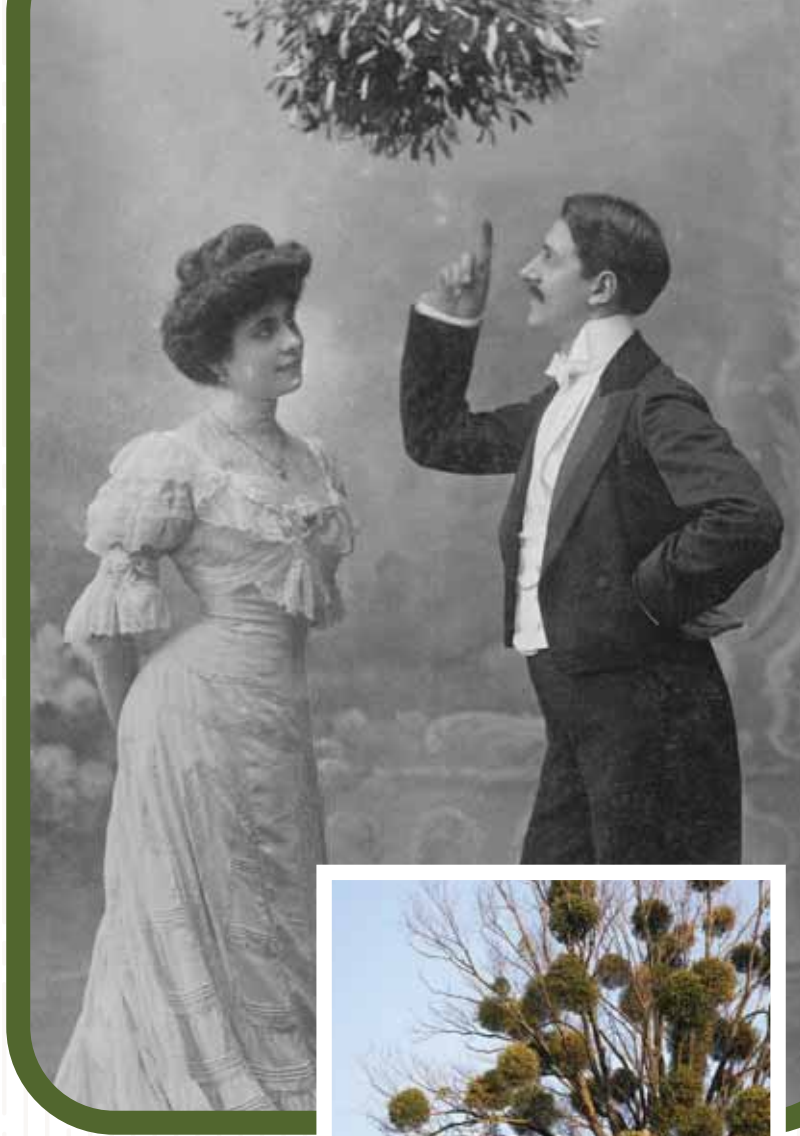
By Kat Nickola

We first moved to Germany in the dreary late winter a couple of years ago. Having come from the desert, we were excited to see what kind of new growth would pop up in the spring. However, I looked out the wintry car windows, “when what to my wondering eyes should appear?”

MISTLETOE!

To my surprise, there were huge spheres of this green plant surviving the cold weather in the bare trees.

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that grows in the tops of trees. It uses its host's water but photosynthesizes its own food. It is poisonous if eaten and is often treated as a nuisance in the States. So why does it seem so prevalent here in Europe?



Mistletoe in History

The Greeks and Romans used mistletoe medicinally, even though it is known to be poisonous today. More about this later, but it turns out that they may have been onto something.

The Celts considered it a sacred plant, likely because it is one of the few, along with holly and ivy, that can thrive during the cold winter months.

Mistletoe's poisonous aspect was also regarded as notable in the Norse traditions. In one story, Frigg cast a spell making all plants safe for her son Baldur, but mistletoe was overlooked, and it ended up being used to kill him.

Mistletoe Has Value

In Europe, mistletoe growth is not as controlled as in the States. It is considered a valuable part of a healthy ecosystem since it doesn't actually kill its host trees in areas where there is ample water. For that reason, you will

see it allowed to grow in trees that line drainage ditches and lakes, or trees that live on low ground.

In addition, the extract from mistletoe is used in a few European dietary supplements and homeopathic remedies. Most of these are prescribed to older adults for the treatment of ailments like arthritis and high blood pressure.

Mistletoe has also been studied at length in Europe for the treatment of cancer. While some types of cancer show no effects, colorectal and pancreatic cancers seem to respond well to medicine made from mistletoe and it is used fairly widely in Europe as a complementary treatment to chemotherapy.

I appreciate mistletoe more now and look forward to seeing it exposed on empty tree branches as the seasons change. I might even kiss a loved one under it. ■

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