

THE VELVET RUNWAY

WHERE DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT

The Best European Christmas Markets



THE BEST CHRISTMAS MARKETS



THE BEST EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS MARKETS

As soon as Summer is over and the leaves start to fall and the evenings start to draw in, my thoughts immediately turn to Christmas.

Christmas in Europe is a time for magical fairy lights, mulled wine, delicious pastries, midnight masses in gothic churches, Christmas wishlists, candle-lit evenings spent with family and friends, and of course – Christmas Markets.

Julia x

thevelvetrunway.com



If you haven't yet experienced a European Christmas market, you really should add one to your bucket-list.

Most markets start on the Friday before Advent (4 weeks before Christmas) and run through to December 24th, although some keep on until Epiphany (January 6th).



The Best European Christmas Markets

Typically, a Christmas Market consists of a series of beautiful wooden chalets that are centred around one or more of the town's main squares.

You will find a selection of handmade Christmas items, woollen sweaters, Christmas decorations, candles and jewellery, as well as an enticing array of food (typical to the region) and steaming hot mulled wine.

The general atmosphere appeals to all your senses with the beautiful twinkling lights, the seductive smell and enticing taste of the delicious cooking, the sound

of Christmas music and the feel of the different handmade gifts.

There are so many markets to choose from across Europe, (in France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the United Kingdom.....), you are sure to find one that fits your requirements.

Here are my top 10 European Christmas Markets, but wherever you go, I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

BEST EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS MARKETS GUIDE



"Christmas is about all the other senses. I can smell Christmas, I can taste Christmas, and I can see and hear it."

Jostein Gaarder



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BEST EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS MARKETS GUIDE

What to do

*Our top ten picks for this year's
Christmas Markets, including Budapest,
Vienna, Baden-Baden, Evian-les-Bains,
Prague, London and more.*



Vienna Christmas Market, Austria



Why Go

Of all the Christmas Markets, I have to say that Vienna is my favorite! There can be no better place to get into the Christmas spirit than at the Christmas Markets in Vienna.

From mid-November to Christmas, Vienna's prettiest squares transform into enchanting Christmas Markets, and the beautiful lights against a backdrop of spectacular architecture, together with the tempting aroma of Christmas baking and mulled wine make for a truly magical experience.

This Christmas tradition dates back to the Middle Ages when in 1298 Albrecht I granted Vienna's citizens the privilege of holding a December Market or "Krippenmarkt".





Nowadays, over 20 official Advent Markets sell a vast array of seasonal gifts and mouth-watering treats from mid-November to Christmas.

One of the most well-known of the Christmas Markets is the traditional “Vienna Magic of Advent”, which turns the City Hall Square into a shining fairytale land, with enticing sweets, warm drinks and an array of tree decorations and Christmas crafts. There is also a Christmas craft workshop for kids inside the City Hall, an ice-skating rink and a carousel.





Not far from here is the Christmas Village on Maria-Theresien-Platz, located between the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Art, with over 70 stands offering traditional handicrafts and original gift ideas .

Another 'not to be missed' Christmas Market is in front of Schönbrunn Palace, where the imperial backdrop, combined with the tempting aroma of Christmas baking and mulled wine makes for a truly magical atmosphere.

Many of the Christmas markets translate seamlessly into a New Year Village after Christmas, and did I mention that Vienna is also a magical place to spend New Year's Eve?

*EXACT DATES DEPEND ON
THE MARKET, BUT THERE
ARE MARKETS SCHEDULED
FROM NOV 16TH TO DEC
23RD*



The Grand Ferdinand Hotel, Vienna



The Grand Ferdinand is the only Austrian-run hotel on the Ringstraße. The hotel's motto is "A hotel that celebrates tradition by moving forward, not by looking back".

The hotel, which opened in Autumn 2015, is owned by the Weitzer family. In 2003, Florian Weitzer took over the reigns of the family business and a 100 year legacy.

He had wanted to add a glamorous hotel to Vienna's scene for a long time, and he draws on the Ringstraße's heyday to revive Viennese elegance at the Grand Ferdinand, combining the elegance of the past with the best modern amenities.



The hotel has 186 rooms in 5 categories, with the jewel in the crown being the 100 m² Grande Suite, with views which extend all the way to the giant Ferris wheel in Vienna's Prater park. The Grande Suite costs from 1000 EUR upwards per night, but Florian Weitzer wanted to make the Grand Ferdinand experience accessible to those with a smaller budget, too, and bunk beds are available in an elegant eight-bed room for a reasonable EUR 30 a night (they can be booked through Airbnb).

Grounded in history,
spirit and cultivated
elegance.



With its 186 rooms and three restaurants, the hotel combines the beauty and relish of times past with the finest amenities around now.

The harmonious overall composition is graced with extravagant details – from the courtyard oasis and rooftop pool to the Lobmeyr chandeliers.

Guests of Grand Ferdinand Vienna benefit from a fitness centre, a 24-hour reception, and a gift shop.

There are also three restaurants; Meissl & Schade, serving traditional Viennese cuisine, the Gulasch & Söhne, featuring snacks and small dishes, and the Grand Étage, which is reserved for hotel guests and club members.

Photocredit: (C) Florian Weitzer Hotels & Restaurants



Brussels Christmas Market, Belgium

Why Go

The Brussels Christmas Market, known as 'Winter Wonders', is the most popular of the Belgium Christmas Markets, with approximately 2.5 million visitors from all over the world.

"Winter Wonders" is the unmissable end-of-year event in Brussels with its magical lights, fun activities, interesting gift ideas, delicious food and warming drinks.



The majority of the Christmas Market is centred around the Grand Place, where you will find the majestic tree, a magnificent sound and light show, a life-sized manger and a host of Christmas market stalls to tempt your tastebuds and your purse.

You will also find market stalls around the Bourse, the Place de la Monnaie (where you will also find the skating rink), the Place Sainte-Catherine and the 'Marché aux Poissons', selling an array of treasures to appeal to all tastes and all ages.

Once you've exhausted the shopping and eating possibilities (or possibly before) you can take advantage of the various fairground attractions (Ferris wheel, merry-go-rounds,...), and the light and festive parades and concerts.

*BRUSSELS CHRISTMAS
MARKET DATES:
NOVEMBER 29, 2024 –
JANUARY 5 2025*



Baden-Baden Christmas Market, Germany

Why Go

Baden-Baden, Europe's hidden gem, draws in year after year guests from all over the world to visit its enchanting Christmas Market. Here, already the pre-Christmas season is very special.

Situated at the entrance of Baden-Baden's splendid parks and gardens "Lichtentaler Allee", this Christmas Market, ("*Christkindelsmarkt*"), gives visitors the feeling they have been transported into a romantic winter fairytale. So, what makes it so special?



Image Credits : c)Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH

First, let's set the scene: Baden-Baden is located on the northern cusp of the Black Forest, and beautifully surrounded by mountains and dense forests of pine and needle trees. Often enough, the eye catches the glance of an old castle on a hill in the distance. A setting like this is very dreamy, especially during winter and covered in snow.

Nestled in the mountains of the Black Forest, the traditional Christmas Market in Baden-Baden with its numerous atmospheric attractions, will whisk you away to a winter fairytale of a special kind.

The scent of mulled wine and gingerbread accompanies you as you stroll past pre-Christmas decorated huts at the beginning of the famous Lichtentaler Allee park and gardens. Let yourself savour the culinary delights of the "Christkindelsmarkt" – there are so many treats to discover here.

Indulge in an extraordinary experience for all senses: almost 100 festively decorated huts and stalls sell unique handicrafts, anything from wooden toys to traditional German Christmas tree decorations and precious gift items, such as decorative candles and delicate cashmere scarves.



Image Credit : c)Baden-Baden Kur & Tourismus GmbH

Buy a bag of chestnuts from the sweet wooden locomotive and nibble away; send a wish list to the “Christkind” and put it in the heavenly letterbox; take photos with the magnificent Christmas tree and the illuminated “Kurhaus”; visit the nativity scene exhibition in the gallery of the “Trinkhalle” (the pump room); and marvel at the wide range of products in the shops in the Kurhaus colonnades.

The Baden-Baden Christmas Market is truly an extraordinary experience: countless live performances are staged open air by international singers, choirs, musical bands as well as performances from theatres and schools. This feast for the ears and for the eyes will entertain the audience with a festive mix of seasonal songs and carols alike and caters to any age groups.

A highlight especially for the little ones every year is the arrival of Saint Nikolaus on 6 December who will hand out gifts to all children.

But the family fun does not stop here. One seasonal delight chases the next: Another unique attraction of the Christmas Market in Baden-Baden is the illuminated alley of colossal church windows painted by the pupils of the city. The popular “Fairytale Lane” where famous German fairytales are shown on huge posters is an impressive attraction for the whole family.

So is the “Ice Arena”, an open-air ice skating rink, only a few steps away from the Christmas Market.

*BADEN BADEN CHRISTMAS
MARKET DATES: FROM 21ST
NOVEMBER 2024 TO 6TH
JANUARY 2025*



Budapest Christmas Market, Hungary

Why Go?

Once called the “Queen of the Danube,” Budapest, the capital of Hungary, has long been the focal point of the nation and a lively cultural centre, and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.

Budapest city straddles the Danube (Hungarian: Duna) River and consists of two parts, Buda and Pest, which are situated on opposite sides of the river and connected by a series of bridges.



The most well-known and recognised Christmas Market in Budapest is Vörösmarty Square, which twinkles with Christmas lights on the trees and buildings. Under the lights, wooden market stalls host traditional Hungarian food with arts and crafts for people to purchase.

There are other markets for you to visit as well with a similar vibe. You can enjoy more festiveness at Erzsebet Square Christmas Market, only a few steps away from Vörösmarty Square.

You also have the Buda Christmas Market on the Buda side, which you will have to cross the bridge for. Again, there is a very similar vibe to the Vörösmarty Square.

Don't forget to head over to the Kossuth Lajos Square, which is the most notable landmark in Budapest as it holds the Hungarian Parliament Building. I managed to see it whilst it was snowing. And there's something magical when it's illuminated during the night.



For a taste of traditional Hungarian cuisine, you cannot find a better place than the Christmas Markets, and one of the most popular treats is the "chimney cake". Walking around Budapest in winter, you can smell the unmistakable aroma of the cake baking over the coals, and it is not worth resisting the temptation, as sooner or later you are sure to give in!



*BUDAPEST CHRISTMAS MARKET DATES:
FROM 17TH NOVEMBER TO 31ST
DECEMBER 2024*



K + K

Hotel Opera Budapest



Located on a quiet side street next to the State Opera House, [K+K Hotel Opera](#) is a competitively priced hotel in one of Budapest's most exclusive districts.

Just a short stroll from the city's most famous sights and embassies and a one minute walk from the nearest underground station, the K+K Hotel Opera is the perfect hotel for business and pleasure.

The multi-lingual team provide the personal service of a family-run business. The reception is open 24 hours a day and the concierge desk is always ready to offer advice on finding tickets for the opera or booking a table at the best restaurants.

Each one of the 200 stylish guest rooms is larger than average for Budapest and includes premium bedding, full climate control, a mini bar, private bathroom, and super-fast Wi-Fi to keep you connected.



Welcoming Atmosphere in an Unbeatable Central Location



Image Credit: adventbazilika.hu

The careful selection of high-quality fabrics and finest textiles enhance the unique ambiance of the rooms and guest beds with top quality mattresses and down duvets ensure a most restful sleep.

Wake up to a delicious buffet breakfast. Choose from full English and Continental options, local delicacies and a selection of fresh fruit.

Throughout the day, you can grab light bites, regional dishes or international favourites for lunch and dinner, or head to the bar for a relaxing drink or nightcap.

As a guest, you will have free access to the wellness centre, where you can loosen up in the sauna, unwind with a massage, or exercise in the gym.

The hotel is within walking distance of the Danube River and next door to the Hungarian State Opera House.

Ideally situated for romantic breaks, couples can walk the banks of the river, taking in the amazing views over the city before bringing the curtain down on a wonderful day at the opera.

If you're in Budapest for work, then K+K Hotel Opera is also a top business hotel with state-of-the-art meeting facilities.



Strasbourg Christmas Market, France



Why Go?

The Strasbourg Christmas Market is one of the oldest in Europe (it dates back to 1570), and takes place in the heart of the Grand Île, a UNESCO world heritage site.

The Christmas Market has successfully managed to preserve the spirit of the festive season, and you will be entranced by the city's warm atmosphere and the crafts, Christmas decorations and gifts on display at the 300 wooden chalets set up in the city's historic centre.

You will find traditional wooden toys and blown glass candles, and the delicious aromas and mouth-watering bredele (traditional small cookies) will tempt your taste buds, and of course, you will be able to partake of the traditional mulled wine.





Don't miss Place Broglie, the square that hosted the very first *Christkindelsmärik* in 1871, and the home of Strasbourg's Hotel de Ville.

Marvel at the Great Christmas Tree in Kleber Square, which towers 30 m above the city centre and is the tallest decorated tree in Europe.

Grown in the Bois-de-Champ in the Vosges mountains, this huge, majestic tree with its multiple colored lights fills place Kléber with a cascade of light and color.

Make sure to visit the Christmas Market chalets in front of Strasbourg Cathedral.



Here is where you will find numerous chalets, the "Village du Partage", and an ice rink.

Join in a workshop for Christmas decorations, dream catchers, embroideries, Advent wreaths or Christmas cards and take home a hand-made souvenir to make your visit even more memorable.

*STRASBOURG CHRISTMAS
MARKET DATES: FROM 27
NOVEMBER TO 27
DECEMBER 2024*



Why Go

Prague's magical Christmas Markets with their beautifully designed wooden chalets take place on the 4 major squares – Old Town square, Republic square, Wenceslas square and Peace square.

The most impressive Christmas Market in Prague in terms of backdrop is the Christmas Market in Prague's Old Town Square, one of the major tourist spots in the city.

Prague Christmas Market, Czech Republic



You will find great gift ideas as there is a vast selection of Christmas decorations, toys, jewelry, winter clothing and accessories. It is also a great alternative to the usual Christmas shopping experience, and it's sure to get you in the festive spirit.

There is also a market at Prague Castle, which takes place at St George's Square and at the Stable yard, and features a great selection of high quality Christmas goods all in the most incredible location and atmosphere.

If you're looking for a market with a more medieval feel then Prague is the place to go!



*PRAGUE CHRISTMAS
MARKET DATES: FROM
20TH NOVEMBER 2024 TO
6TH JANUARY 2025*

Evian Christmas Market, France



Why go?

Every year, the small town of Evian is home to a Christmas fair with a difference!

There is nothing to buy but plenty of enchantment to inspire the imagination and feed your dreams.

The legend of the flottins tells the tale of fairy folk, including elves, sirens, pixies, hobgoblins, nymphs and pixies, who were washed up on the shores of the lake in Evian since the beginning of time, and how they saved Christmas, one chill November night many years ago.



As Santa Claus set out on a practice flight over Lake Geneva, a squabble between the reindeer forced the sleigh into an emergency landing on the water.

The flottins rushed to the rescue and swam out to rescue Santa Claus and his reindeer. That very night they built a magnificent cabin from driftwood for their marooned visitors and ever since, Santa Claus pays a visit to his Flottin friends and their driftwood village before setting out on his big journey!



For three weeks (since 2007), Evian is home to the “Fabulous Flottin Village”, where you will discover sculptures made from driftwood washed up from the lake and a host of storytellers, circus performers, actors and musicians with stories to tell and songs to sing.

This year the event runs from December 13th 2024 to January 4th 2025.



During this magical three weeks, there are storytelling sessions, concerts, games, rides on ‘flottin’ horses, merry-go-rounds, and a host of other activities.

Then, finally on January 4th 2025 the Flottins head home to the mountains until next year!



It's a magical experience for children and adults alike, and is an ecological alternative to the traditional Christmas markets.

*EVIAN CHRISTMAS MARKET
DATES: FROM 13TH
DECEMBER 2024 TO
JANUARY 4TH 2025*



Hotel les Cygnes, Evian-les Bains



With old-fashioned charm, a warm welcome and an excellent restaurant, the 3-star [Hotel Les Cygnes](#) has a prime waterfront location on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Built in 1926, the authentic and elegant building from the Roaring Twenties that houses the Hotel les Cygnes has an idyllic and enchanting setting, at the foot of the Alps.

Only 800m from the thermal baths, casino, shops and 50m from the marina, the hotel accommodation harmoniously combines comfort, romance and modernity.

There are 36 comfortable and refined rooms, which each have their own theme. All are equipped with a wifi connection, flat screen TV, and a safe.

The hotel also offers apartment accommodation.



The romantic charm of another era with modern convenience on the shores of Lake Geneva



From the 32m² Junior Suite with its lounge and view of the flower garden to the superior double rooms with magnificent lake views, to the connecting family room for a peaceful stay with your children or friends, everything is provided to receive you in the best possible conditions.

There is also a beautiful park and a terrace under the century-old trellis, a private beach with pontoons and boat moorings, a swimming pool, a spa, mini-golf and games for children, a vegetable garden, parking, private garages, two restaurants and a seminar room.

Guests can enjoy an extensive buffet breakfast, and the hotel offers lunch and dinner in both a gastronomic restaurant as well as more relaxed bistrot style dining.

The restaurant is in a lovely setting and a wide variety of food is offered, including a daily fixed menu (from Monday to Friday), and in the Winter 'Savoie' specialities, such as cheese fondue are also available.



Stuttgart Christmas Market, Germany

Why Go?

The Stuttgart Christmas Market takes place in the heart of the old town between the New Palace, Schiller Square, the Old Palace, and the marketplace, .

Dating back to the early 17th century, Stuttgart's market is one of Europe's finest with 290 kiosks of handmade treasures, delicious foods, including its own Springerle stall and the dark, sweet Hutzelnbrot, along with stunning light displays from the botanical garden down to the main square.



One of the best parts about visiting Stuttgart before Christmas, is that you not only get one of Germany's oldest and most established markets, but also two additional and distinctly different Christmas markets. The royal town of Ludwigsburg will start a day earlier and the elegant backdrop of the renaissance palace and gardens is a treat; while the medieval Christmas market at Esslingen will have your blood thrumming to the beat of the drums, the costumes, and fire jugglers. Scents of mulled wine, gingerbread and punch waft through the air accompanied by seasonal treats.

In Stuttgart, the painstakingly-decorated roofs of the stalls, from Santa Claus with his fluffy white beard to traditional Nativity figures or wonderful winter landscapes, never fail to delight. Another special feature is the Stuttgart Christmas Garden in the Wilhelma Zoological and Botanical Gardens which transform into a romantic fairy-tale wonderland with glittering light installations and audio-visual effects. The circular walk takes visitors past illuminated animal sculptures and laser animations in the redwood grove.



Each year visitors and a jury choose the best Christmas market stalls. Traditional Swabian specialties and delicacies, include a "Springerle" stall selling not only the carved wooden molds needed to produce this traditional cookie, but also the aniseed-flavored biscuits themselves. And "Hutzelbrot" –a sweet fruit loaf made of dark yeast dough - is an absolute 'must' when strolling round the Christmas market.

Children get their own special activities at the Children's Christmas market with hands-on activities, a genuine miniature steam engine, and the live animals in the Nativity scene.

*STUTTGART CHRISTMAS MARKET
DATES: FROM NOVEMBER 27TH
TO DECEMBER 23RD 2024*



Winter Wonderland, London, England

Why Go?

Why not add the Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park to your bucket list this year?

Located in the heart of London in Hyde Park, the Winter Wonderland runs from 21st November 2024 to 5th January 2025.

There is a wide variety of attractions, activities, entertainment, food and drinks, offering fun for all the family.



Attractions include the giant wheel, the magical ice kingdom, an ice bar, an ice slide and ice sculpting workshops.

There is also a Christmas Circus, SantaLand with a SantaLand train and a wide array of roller coaster rides, as well as Christmas Markets featuring 100 charming traditional wooden chalets, which will be sure to tempt you with unique gifts, traditional Christmas decorations and delicious food.

*WINTER WONDERLAND
DATES: FROM 21ST
NOVEMBER 2024 TO
5TH JANUARY 2025*



Why Go

Aachen is regularly listed as one of the top Christmas Markets in Europe and its ease of access for travellers from France, Belgium and the UK make it a must visit destination, as the 1,5 million visitors who come to the Aachen Christmas Market each year will testify.

Aachen Christmas Market is a particularly beautiful market to visit thanks to its backdrop of Aachen Cathedral, which is a UNESCO world heritage site

Aachen Christmas Market, Germany



Aachen is a really pretty destination, and for approximately four weeks before Christmas, the squares and lanes around the Cathedral and town hall are transformed into a beautiful Christmas village, with sparkling lights, traditional cooking and the scent of mulled wine (called Glühwein, which literally translates to 'glow-wine', because of how you feel after you've been drinking tiny mugs outside in the cold December air).

You will find a wide variety of Christmas cakes and biscuits, including gingerbread, "Spekulatius" and marzipan bread. Make sure to try the 'Aachener Printen' (a sort of spicy gingerbread).

*AACHEN CHRISTMAS
MARKET DATES:
FROM 22 NOVEMBER TO 23
DECEMBER 2024*

I hope you find this guide to the Best European Christmas Markets helpful.

Don't forget to subscribe to *The Velvet Runway* for more travel guides and tips.

Happy travelling!

Julia x



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