

To Market, to Market: CHRISTMAS EDITION

**In Europe, the holidays usher
in a fairy-tale experience.**

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What do you get when you mix a dash of handmade crafts, a pinch of historic architecture, a smidgen of chilly air, a drop of mulled wine and a whole heap of holiday joy? That's a recipe for Europe's famed Christmas markets. Ready, set, stroll your way through these three cities, where you're sure to get in the snowy-season spirit.



Copenhagen



DENMARK

THE EXPERIENCE: Celebrate in Scandinavian style in Copenhagen, where legendary amusement park Tivoli Gardens—the world's second oldest—puts on quite a show. Amid a backdrop of Christmas trees dotting the landscape, browse 50 stalls selling décor, traditional winter clothing and warm drinks, or take a spin on the park's many magical rides. Special guests include Father Christmas and a cohort of live reindeer. At nighttime, with thousands of fairy lights aglow, walking through the gardens is truly enchanting.

UNIQUE FIND: Get a nisse ornament, inspired by the pixie-like folkloric creatures who are rumored to live in barns and attics, helping take care of things for those who are nice to them. Danish children leave out a bowl of rice pudding on Christmas Eve for the nisse.

MUST-TASTES: The sphere-shaped æbleskiver are Danish pancakes served with jam and a liberal sprinkling of powdered sugar. Pair the treats with the divine-smelling gløgg, a hot mulled wine spiced with raisins, almonds, cinnamon sticks and cloves that have been steeped in aquavit or another alcohol.

tivoli.dk

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

With 15 Michelin-starred restaurants, Copenhagen packs a lot of fine dining into a relatively small city. Plan ahead to get a table at Noma—named Best Restaurant in the World four of the past five years by Restaurant magazine—which is famous for its reinterpretations of Nordic cuisine.





Dresden

GERMANY

THE EXPERIENCE: At Striezelmarkt, the oldest Christmas market in Germany, tradition reigns. Nearly everything has roots that date back centuries, from the crafts to the foods to the Pflaumentoffel that you'll see everywhere—a jolly chimney sweep figure crafted from dried prunes. Another longstanding institution is the Christmas pyramid, which you'd be hard-pressed to miss. While the tiered carousel decorations are usually less than 2 feet tall, this one soars 45 feet in the air.

UNIQUE FINDS: Wooden figures from the Ore Mountains (Erzgebirge in German) come in many forms, from a flying buttress that displays candles to iconic nutcrackers to a smoking man, a typical Erzgebirge Christmas figure who's designed to hold an incense candle. The Lusatian pottery is also worth seeking out.

MUST-TASTES: Stollen (originally known as striezel) is the trademark food at Striezelmarkt—and its namesake. The bread-like fruitcake is made with rum-soaked raisins and dried fruit, then coated in powdered sugar. The real deal is baked only by registered members of the Dresden bakers' guild, who follow a historic recipe. During the Stollen Festival, a several-ton version is paraded through the streets, then sliced into individual servings with a 5-foot-long knife.

dresden.de

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

Known as the most beautiful dairy shop in the world, circa-1880 Pfund Molkerei is deserving of the title. The neo-Renaissance tile paintings and intricate ceiling will mesmerize you, but don't get too distracted to grab a bar of famous milk soap and a bite of cheese before you go.



Strasbourg

FRANCE

THE EXPERIENCE: When you close your eyes and think of a holiday market, something like Christkindelsmärik in Strasbourg—the self-proclaimed Christmas capital—is what you're likely to envision. The sound of carolers, the smell of buttery pastries and the sight of twinkling lights bring tidings of comfort and joy to those attending the event, which dates back to 1570. Highlights include the Great Christmas Tree in Place Kléber; the skating rink at the foot of the towering, Gothic-styled Strasbourg Cathedral; and, of course, hundreds of quaint wooden stalls lined with gifts and ornaments. It's not all about consumerism, though. Around the tree, locals leave gifts for those who need them, and the Sharing Village includes dozens of charities collecting donations.

UNIQUE FIND: A stuffed white stork is a fun souvenir—in Alsace, they're a symbol of good luck, particularly if a pair chooses to nest on your rooftop.

MUST-TASTES: Try the flammekueche, also known as tarte flambée, which is like a pizza with very thin crust. It's topped with crème fraîche, sliced onions and bits of bacon. On the sweet side, bredele cookies come in almost endless flavor and shape variations.

noel.strasbourg.eu

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

At the Musée Alsacien, get a glimpse into the history of this fascinating region, long caught in a tug of war between France and Germany. Spread throughout multiple houses, the museum covers day-to-day life from the past through displays on clothing, food, religion, tools and more.