

# APP.com

## Christmas markets

It's a scene played out all over Europe as the holidays approach: The air is cold, the sky is bright and snow crunches underfoot as crowds make their way through rows of little wooden structures that look like storybook houses with sloping roofs and rustic trim, each one offering some treasure that's beautiful, fun or delicious.

Chatter, laughter and music waft through the air, mixing with the smells of gingerbread, grilled meats and cookies as shoppers browse among the carved toys, small musical instruments, ornaments, handcrafted clothing, homemade soap, candles and hand-blown glass.

Millions of people — both locals and visitors — attend annual Christmas markets in cities all over Europe each year. They're not only tourist attractions, but they're also big business for local economies. But will the European financial crisis be the Grinch that steals the holiday spirit from the continent's Christmas markets?

Slovak economist Vladimir Vano, in Bratislava, says probably not. The Volksbank Slovakia chief financial analyst says, if anything, it may enhance the experience because "the main draw of these markets isn't just the buying and selling of wares."

He says they're really an old version of our modern online social networks — a place to connect. In times of trouble, he adds,

people want that connection to be more personal. If you add in the nostalgic spirit of the holidays, you have what he calls "behavior economics," and that could keep the Christmas markets strong this year.

### The markets:

Of the nearly 600,000 visitors who attend the Budapest Christmas market at Vorosmarty Square each year, 30 percent to 40 percent are foreigners, according to Jozsef Molnar, managing director of the Budapest Tourism office in Hungary.

Vorosmarty is a lovely location that offers a giant Christmas tree, nativity scenes and a unique Advent calendar that opens up in the windows of the historic Gerbeaud confectionary. The merchandise is quite good. Sellers are judged by experts representing craftsmen and folk artists, and only those of high skill are allowed to set up shop. But quality doesn't come cheap. You could pay hundreds of dollars for a nativity set, \$40 to \$60 for a woman'

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# APP.com

s hand-styled woven hat or less for small trinkets.

Another outstanding market is Vienna's huge Christkindlmarkt, which usually ranks as one of Europe's best. It's well-organized, beautiful, set in Rathausplatz, the plaza in front of the Rathaus (city hall) and the quality of goods is first-rate. You'll find excellent hand-blown glass, cute carved toys and musical instruments, ceramics and lovely clothing items.

Space is set aside inside the Rathaus for special children's activities like cookie-making and crafts, including handmade Christmas ornaments. Outside, sellers offer warm handmade clothing, toys and Christmas decorations. Shoppers sip hot punch made from fruit, rum, wine and spices as they browse.

Salzburg, Austria, offers a different look for its market. The city, located at the foot of the Alps, is Mozart's hometown and his image appears all over — including on Mozart chocolates. "The Sound of Music" was filmed here and there are movie-themed tours available.

The main Christmas markets in Bratislava, Slovakia, are located in beautiful public squares around the city. You'll find handmade pottery and wooden decorations often in the design of fish. That's because carp is a traditional dish during Slovak Christmastime.

In Paris at Christmastime, it seems like the whole city twinkles with 300 illuminated

sites, including lit-up bridges and the Eiffel Tower. Markets are scattered all over the various districts, but one of the prettiest is found along the Champs Elysees, where decorations, handcrafts, food, clothing and mulled wine can be found in dozens of wooden chalets.

Germany is famous for its many markets, including those in Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Dresden and Nuremberg. But markets in small towns like pretty Passau also have charm.

Passau is where I had my first cup of gluehwein, a traditional hot spiced wine drink that's perfect for warming up cold hands and bellies. In many places, it's served with an extra shot of rum.

The Passau market isn't as large as some others but it isn't as crowded, either. It's in a beautiful historic setting near St. Stephen's Cathedral, known for its enormous pipe organ and holiday concerts.

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**ADT AUTHORIZED  
DEALER**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# APP.com

In Britain, like other places, each market has its own personality. There's a "Dickens Christmas at Rochester Castle" in Kent that's small but nice. The castle lit up at night makes a pretty backdrop. Other markets use a Victorian theme and some specialize in German or other European goods; some have street performers in costume.

## A few tips:

In terms of trip-planning to see Europe's holiday markets, timing varies by individual location but most open in late or mid-November, a month or more ahead of Christmas.

Some tour operators offer organized trips to markets in several different places; they include transportation, hotels and some meals. You also can find European river cruises offering excursions to Christmas markets.

If you're traveling independently, remember that hotels near markets may fill up quickly at holiday time.

Don't expect bargains. These markets are about tradition, camaraderie, family and the holiday spirit, and well-crafted handmade goods don't come cheap.

Not all countries in Europe use the euro. Those using their own currencies may accept euros as payment, but you'll probably get change back in the local money. And don't count on using credit cards — market vendors are often cash-only.

Advertisement

**Protect Your Home  
with ADT!**

**Click Here  
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™