

# 8 of the best... Christmas market cruises

Stock up on souvenirs and gifts, sip glühwein and soak up some festive spirit, says **Jane Archer**



## BEST FOR VARIETY

Nuremberg's Christmas market is one of the largest in Germany, with more than 100 chalets full of festive treats in the main square alone, so kudos to Viking for scheduling a night in the city on its 11-day new-for-2026 Christmas on the Rhine & Main cruise from Nuremberg to Basel in Switzerland. It means passengers can visit after dark, when the festive atmosphere really comes alive. There are plenty more markets to visit on the cruise, including Bamberg, Würzburg, Marktheidenfeld, Frankfurt, Strasbourg and Colmar. For those who want a change from the glühwein, there's an Alsatian wine tasting plus tours of the Black Forest, a schnapps distillery and the Swiss town of Interlaken.

**Book it:** From £3,995 including flights, selected drinks with lunch and dinner, tips and Wi-Fi.  
[viking.com](http://viking.com)

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Renata Sedmalova, east22, Sun\_Sn\_ne



## BEST FOR BEER LOVERS

There are many reasons to love Bratislava, but the (free) beer and bites tour with head brewers Tomáš and Mário at one of the Slovak capital's top microbreweries adds another. The Be My Guest excursion is one of the highlights of a new eight-day Danube Christmas Markets cruise from Trafalgar, which makes its river cruise debut next spring. The cruises sail on *Trafalgar Reverie* between the Hungarian capital, Budapest, and Passau, Germany, promising a cornucopia of Christmas markets with calls into the Austrian cities of Vienna and Linz (from where an optional excursion to Salzburg pairs a tour of *The Sound of Music* sights with lunch at the Christmas market), plus a full day in Passau at the start or end.

**Book it:** From £2,669 including flights, selected tours, drinks with lunch and dinner, tips and Wi-Fi.  
[trafalgar.com](http://trafalgar.com)



## BEST FOR BEATLES FANS

With two days in Hamburg, Germany, on Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' six-night sailing on board *Balmoral*, a visit to the Reeperbahn entertainment district – where the Fab Four got their first big break – is the perfect Christmas gift. Once that's ticked off, it's time to get in the Christmas spirit with a glühwein at one of the many markets that spring up in the city. There's a day at sea at the start of the cruise, a round-trip from Southampton departing December 16, and another en route to Honfleur, a charming French town where artist Claude Monet loved to paint. It is especially festive in December when the historic harbour lights up with a Christmas market selling everything from jewellery to mulled cider.

**Book it:** From £599 including tips and selected drinks with lunch and dinner.  
[fredolsencruises.com](http://fredolsencruises.com)



## FESTIVE CRUISES

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## BEST FOR FLIGHT-FREE FESTIVITIES

One of the best things about A-Rosa Cruises' five-night Enchanting Christmas Markets voyage is that it sails round-trip from Cologne, Germany, which is just a few hours by train from the UK, so it's perfect for those who prefer not to fly. Five departures, all on *A-Rosa Silva*, are available from the end of November to the middle of December and include calls into the quaint winemaking town of Rüdesheim, where festive stalls fill the narrow streets; and Kehl (Strasbourg), where there are numerous markets, canal boat rides and a 700-year-old astronomical clock. On the final morning in Mainz, passengers have time to visit the Gutenberg Museum, dedicated to the inventor of the printing press, and the Christmas market, before an afternoon sailing through the Rhine Gorge en route to journey's end in Cologne.

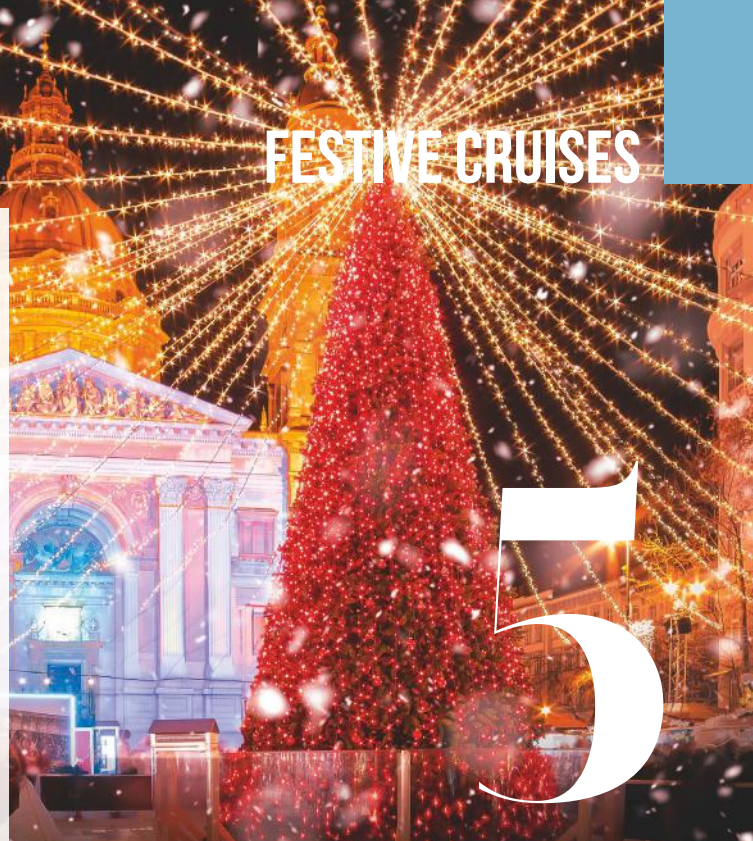
**Book it:** From £850 including drinks and Wi-Fi.  
[arosa-cruises.co.uk](http://arosa-cruises.co.uk)



## BEST FOR SOLO SAILORS

There's good news for any solo travellers who'd love the festive feeling of a river cruise but resent paying a hefty supplement. New this year, Riviera Travel has added a five-night The Danube's Imperial Cities and Yuletide Markets mini-break, sailing round-trip from Budapest, to its portfolio of supplement-free cruises for solo travellers. There's time at the start and end to see Budapest, along with a call into Bratislava, where it's a quick hop and skip over the road from the ship's mooring to the main square and festive market. In Vienna, don't miss the stalls in front of City Hall and Schönbrunn Palace, but be back on board for dinner, because Riviera has lined up an evening classical recital to round off the day in Austria's city of music.

**Book it:** From £1,699 including flights, transfers, Wi-Fi, drinks with lunch and unlimited drinks after 6pm. [rivieratravel.co.uk](http://rivieratravel.co.uk)



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## BEST FOR THE BUDGET

If time and money are tight, Ambassador Cruise Line's three-night jaunt from Tilbury to Antwerp in Belgium is just the ticket. The cruise on *Ambition* stays overnight in the city so passengers have plenty of time to visit its various Christmas markets by day and by night. The main one is in the historic Grote Markt in the city centre, which is an easy walk from the dock and has stalls selling festive food, drinks and gifts. There's more of the same in nearby Groenplaats, where the market also has a large ice rink. If passengers fancy making it more of a festive splash, they can upgrade (from an extra £175 per person) to have drinks and tips included.

**Book it:** From £479 departing December 15. [ambassadorcruiseline.com](http://ambassadorcruiseline.com)





# FESTIVE CRUISES

## BEST FOR SWEET TREATS

Do you love lebkuchen? It's a German biscuit similar to gingerbread and there'll be plenty to try on an included tour to the Black Forest on Travelmarvel's eight-night Rhine and Moselle Christmas Markets cruise from Basel to Amsterdam, departing December 8, 2026. There's also a day to explore Strasbourg's festive markets, a trip to the quirky Siegfried's Mechanical Museum in Rudesheim to see more than 400 self-playing musical instruments and an afternoon of castle-spotting through the Rhine Gorge. Then the cruise diverts along the Moselle River to Cochem, a pretty town famous for its castle, half-timbered houses and, of course, its Christmas market. There are more festive stalls to explore in Cologne and an included canal cruise in Amsterdam on the penultimate day, before heading home. **Book it:** From £2,295 including flights, transfers, drinks with lunch and dinner, tips and Wi-Fi. [travelmarvel.com](https://travelmarvel.com)



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## BEST FOR GOING UNDERGROUND

The Netherlands is famous for cheese, clogs and tulips, but a Christmas market in a cave? That's probably a new one for most people. It's at Valkenburg, a stone's throw from the historic city of Maastricht, and visited on Uniworld River Cruises' 2026 eight-day Belgian Holiday Markets sailings, which start and end on the Brussels-Scheldt Maritime Canal. Festive market lovers will be spoilt for choice on calls into Ghent, Antwerp and Hasselt, and they can join the cruise manager for a stroll after dinner to admire the Christmas lights in Maastricht and Brussels. Given this cruise sails mostly in Belgium, Uniworld throws in a few chocolate and beer tours as well.

**Book it:** From £3,374 including flights, transfers, tours, drinks, tips and Wi-Fi. [uniworld.com](https://uniworld.com)



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