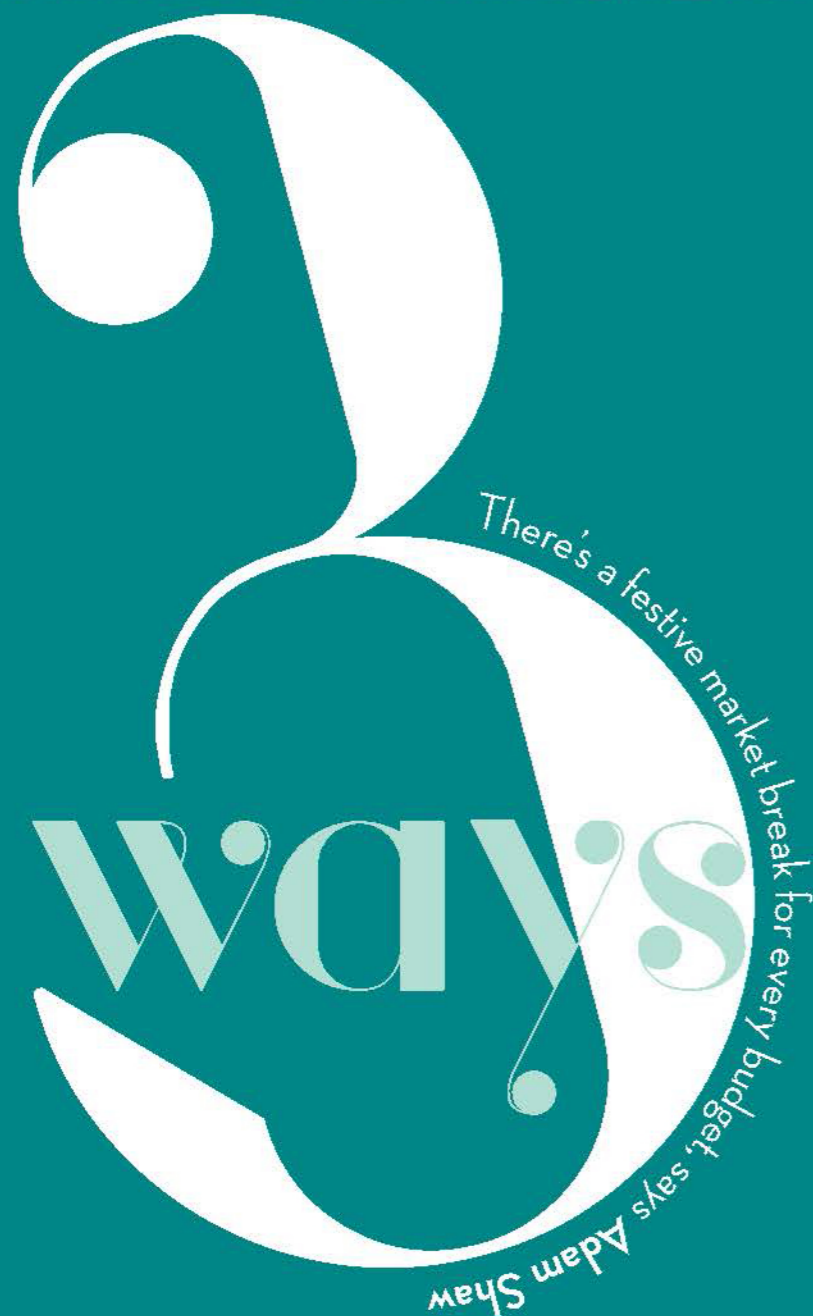


CHRISTMAS MARKETS



It's the most wonderful time of the year! And nothing says Christmas like taking a trip round a European Christmas market, wrapped up in a big coat, with a steamy cup of mulled wine in hand – especially if it's laced with hot rum.

This year's Christmas markets across the continent are likely to be even more joyful. While Omicron may have put a dampener on last year's Christmas season, this year Europe's seasonal markets are set to be back in full, festive swing – for the first time in three years.

And from budget-conscious coach breaks to lavish, all-stops-pulled-out trips in luxury accommodation, there's a magical festive market break to make every client's Christmas wishes come true. Here we pick out the best trips for every budget, with plenty of selling tips from the experts.



Krakow

Save

KRAKOW, POLAND EASYJET HOLIDAYS

Krakow looks like a fairytale all year round, so it's no surprise that the city's Christmas market is among the prettiest in Europe.

Visitors can stroll around the stalls in the 13th-century main square, nibbling on *kielbasa* sausage and gingerbread before washing it down with a cup of mulled wine.

Krakow is famous for its amber, and there will be plenty of opportunity to make this part of your Christmas shopping – either for yourself or a loved one. The city also hosts an annual nativity competition – look out for colourful displays in shops and public places.

Book it: EasyJet holidays offers two nights at Avena by Artery Hotels, with flights from Luton, from £136. holidaystrade.easyjet.com

BATH, ENGLAND JUST GO! HOLIDAYS

While continental Europe might be considered the birthplace of Christmas markets, the UK also has its fair share of big-hitting pop-up winter wonderlands.

Birmingham, Edinburgh and Manchester are obvious choices, but the historic city of Bath makes a great setting for a festive market too. Dozens of traders set up shop in chalet-style stalls across the city, with the stunning Bath Abbey providing an impressive backdrop.

Beyond the market, visitors can sightsee at the Roman baths that gave the city its name, or head farther afield to places such as Bristol, Stonehenge or Cheddar Gorge.

Book it: Just Go! Holidays offers a two-day coach break to Bath and Oxford from £99. justgoholidays.com

LILLE, FRANCE RAILBOOKERS

Just a short hop across the Channel, foodie hotspot Lille has long been a popular destination with UK travellers.

Its Christmas market is just a 10-minute walk from the main station and, as one of France's smaller markets, it is fairly easy to navigate.

Traders from around 90 stalls offer clients festive souvenirs and warming food and drink, there are pony rides for the kids and, on Friday nights, live concerts too.

A massive Christmas tree dominates the market and makes for a great picture, while those who want a bird's-eye view of the city can have a spin on the Ferris wheel.

Book it: Railbookers offers a two-night stay in Lille from £299, including Eurostar tickets. railbookers.co.uk

ASK THE
operator



Claire Dutton,
trade sales manager,
Just Go! Holidays

"When it comes to Christmas markets there's a huge breadth of options to promote. UK cities such as Bath, York and Edinburgh host their own markets for those who don't want to travel abroad or perhaps have less time. In Europe, Germany is the home of traditional Christmas markets.

But there are many other destinations that should also be considered such as Vienna, Bruges and Arras. Whether in the UK or abroad, Christmas market trips are all about soaking up the festive atmosphere. The beauty of a coach break is that travel into the heart of the city is organised for customers, so all they need to focus on is where to get their first *glühwein*. These breaks are often an impulse purchase so agents should get them on their social channels and into their windows."



Bath

PICTURE: Polish Tourism Organisation



Ashley Dellow,
head of retail sales,
Leger Shearings Group

“Christmas market breaks are very popular with mother-daughter combinations, couples and friend groups of all ages, allowing agents to tap into a variety of demographics. One up-selling tip is to suggest turning a Christmas markets short break into a longer holiday, combining the Christmas markets with other attractions. Another selling tip is to suggest an all-inclusive Christmas markets holiday; the agent receives commission on the full price and the customer gets a great deal.”



RIGA, LATVIA
NEWMARKET HOLIDAYS

In Latvia, Christmas markets are seen as a place for the local community to come together to celebrate – and Riga, with its tight-knit maze of stalls, is a good place to start.

Festive markets here promise something unique. Visitors can expect to sample local traditional delicacies, such as grey peas and bacon, and in terms of shopping, the markets are a chance for traders to sell specialist items, including handmade wooden goods, furs and knitted socks.

Be sure to take in the many colourful Christmas trees around the capital city – it is said the tradition of decorating trees began in Latvia over 500 years ago.

Book it: A three-night trip to Riga can be booked through Newmarket Holidays from £374, including accommodation in the Old Town. newmarketholidays.co.uk

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC
ABERCROMBIE & KENT

One of Europe’s premier Christmas market cities, Prague comes alive during the winter months.

The two main markets are just a five-minute walk from each other – in the Old Town Square and Wenceslas Square – with others taking place in Republic Square, Kampa Island, Havel’s Market and by the castle.

The markets are full of brightly decorated wooden huts, where traders sell festive ceramics, glassware, puppets and decorative lace.

When it comes to food, dumplings, ham and sausage are always a popular choice, but clients will also spot *trdelník*, a sugar and walnut-covered pastry. More adventurous travellers can also try the traditional Czech Christmas fish soup.

Book it: A three-night city break in Prague with Abercrombie & Kent starts at £640. abercrombiekent.co.uk

THE DOLOMITES, ITALY
SHEARINGS

Despite its strong Christian heritage, Italy might not be the first place you think of when it comes to selling Christmas market breaks.

But up in the mountainous north, clients will find many towns that have cultural influences from Austria and Switzerland. Places such as Merano, Bressanone and Bolzano all have quaint markets situated in picturesque squares, where visitors can sample mulled wine and gingerbread snacks.

The scenery is also a highlight. Where better to get into the festive spirit than in the middle of a beautiful mountain range surrounded by snow-covered peaks and breathtaking panoramas?

Book it: Shearings offers a seven-day trip to the Italian Dolomites from £609, including three evening meals and an optional excursion to the Grand Dolomite region. shearings.com

DRESDEN, GERMANY

TRAFALGAR

Rows of wooden huts, classical music in the background, lots and lots of *glühwein* – Germany is the iconic Christmas market destination, so much so that others across the world have tried their best to mimic its style.

But why settle for an imitation when you can immerse yourself in the real deal? There are authentic Christmas markets in almost every German village, but the best is arguably in Dresden – it’s the oldest in the country, and was responsible for making stollen famous.

Alternatives include Nuremberg, famous for its handmade decorations and gingerbread hearts, and Frankfurt, where the market is set inside the historic Paulsplatz square.

Book it: An eight-day German Christmas Markets tour with Trafalgar covers all the key markets, with lots of options for added excursions. Prices start at £1,675 per person.

trafalgar.com

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

INSIGHT VACATIONS

The Austrian capital turns into a sparkling city of light for several weeks between November and January, as the smell of hot wine and freshly baked pretzels fills the air.

Like its neighbour Germany, Austria is known for going all out at Christmas, and Vienna has plenty of stalls selling arts and crafts for decorating trees and homes.

If it all gets a bit too chilly, clients can warm up in one of the city’s famed coffee houses with piping hot drinks and decadent cakes.

Smaller markets are a feature in other Austrian cities, including Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt, where you can sample a similarly magical atmosphere.

Book it: Insight Vacations offers an eight-day Christmas Markets of Austria and Bavaria tour, with prices starting at £1,584 including accommodation and some meals.

insightvacations.com

BRUGES, BELGIUM

AUDLEY TRAVEL

With a reputation for producing great beer and chocolate, Belgians know how to have a good time – and it’s particularly evident during Christmas market season.

The main market in Bruges is built around a shimmering ice rink in the shadow of the 83-metre-tall belfry tower in Grote Markt, where clients can wander between stalls sampling cheese-filled croquettes, cups of hot chocolate and crisp waffles.

For a slightly larger offering, head to Brussels, where huts are complemented by traditional rides such as a Ferris wheel and carousel.

Another option to suggest to clients is to pop over the border into Luxembourg City – it turns into a winter wonderland with several concerts and workshops throughout December.

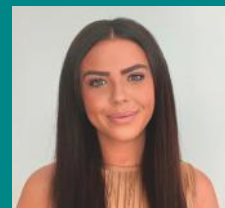
Book it: A 10-day Grand Tour of Belgium & Luxembourg starts at £5,380 with Audley Travel and covers several cities and historical sites.

audleytravel.com



Becky Francis, sales director
EMEA, TTC Tour Brands

“Christmas market season is such a special time to see some of Europe’s most beautiful cities. Not all Christmas markets are the same. We offer trips that take in Christmas markets in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and each has its own specialities. Some of the bigger markets are great for variety, others are better for an intimate atmosphere, for scenery, for gifts and toys, for ice skating, food or fairy lights. So do a bit of research to inform your clients what might suit them most.”



PICTURES: Shutterstock/1000 Words, ecal22, rustamank