



CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Laura French picks out Europe's top cities for clients who want a Christmas markets break



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STRASBOURG

For pure tradition, nothing quite beats 'Capital of Christmas' Strasbourg, whose market first appeared in 1570. Today around 300 wooden chalets around the city bring hand-crafted toys, Alsatian delicacies and more to Cathedral Square and Place Broglie. A Christmas tree towers over the square, but any corner you turn feels magical, with snowy scenes adorning almost every shop window and twinkling lights illuminating the cobbled streets.

Book it: Leger Holidays combines Strasbourg with the Black Forest, Colmar and Freiburg on a six-day Christmas markets tour, priced from £579 including daily breakfast, three dinners and coach travel. leger.co.uk

KOBLENZ

King of Christmas markets is Germany, but for a less-trodden alternative to the bigger cities suggest Koblenz, a once-Roman city set by the Rhine and Moselle. Colourful souvenirs, giant bratwurst rolls and steaming mugs of glühwein are all regulars here, with narrow cobbled lanes and fairytale castles forming a magical backdrop to festive fare without the crowds.

Book it: The River Cruise Line features Koblenz on a five-day German Christmas markets cruise, featuring Aled Jones, from £695 (full-board), including coach travel from the UK on December 10.

rivercruiseline.co.uk



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VALKENBURG

For something different suggest the Dutch town of Valkenburg, whose Christmas markets take place in caves beneath the streets. The Gemeetengrot cave has decorations, gifts and food stalls, while the less-crowded Velvet Cave is lined with intricate medieval carvings.

Book it: Shearings Holidays' five-day Aachen, Cologne and Valkenburg markets tour costs from £329, including B&B accommodation, three dinners and coach travel.

shearingsagent.com

BRUSSELS

If hearty Belgian waffles straight off the grill and silky hot chocolates overflowing with cream are your clients' thing, look no further than Brussels, which pulls out all the stops with an ice rink, Ferris wheel and huge illuminated tree hemming in a cluster of cosy stalls. There's also a light and music show at Grand-Place each night, plus visits from Santa, video projections on St Catherine's Church and a high-tech, 360-degree dome hosting films and concerts.

Book it: Osprey Holidays offers two nights at the Floris Arlequin Grand Place from £229, including return Eurostar, departing December 9. ospreyholidays.com



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COPENHAGEN

There's something special about this city's Christmas festivities, from the food stalls of colourful, cobbled Nyhavn to the handicraft-filled log cabins of Højbro Plads square. But the real crowning glory is Tivoli Gardens, an amusement park that becomes a winter wonderland with parades, performances, rides and the swirling aroma of mulled wine.

Book it: Jet2CityBreaks offers two nights' B&B at the Maritime Hotel from £359 per person, based on two sharing with flights from East Midlands airport on December 13.

jet2holidays.com



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