

# Making

# Holiday Memories

**In** 2009, my husband and I were excited to experience Europe's winter festivities, but we were also unhappy about spending the holidays away from home for the first time. To combat homesickness, we took a

**Find Some Holiday Cheer**  
Being away from home for the holidays isn't easy, but remember that your spouse, children, friends and co-workers are probably experiencing many of the same feelings. Also understand that the lack of sunlight and short days of winter can negatively impact your mood. Read our "Beating the Winter Blues" article to learn more.

To get into the spirit, accept that the holidays will be different from what you are accustomed to and look at the bright side: you'll miss out on family drama, avoid relatives who drive you crazy, and have the chance to celebrate in your own way.

**Fulfill Your Wish List**  
The festively decorated cities, reverent services in Gothic cathedrals, quaint Christmas markets, renowned ski destinations and epic New Year's Eve celebrations have landed Christmas in Europe on many people's wish lists. Encourage your friends and family to make the transatlantic trip — Christmas Eve in Prague or Hogmanay (New Year's) in Edinburgh may be on their bucket lists, so you won't have to do much convincing.

Whether out-of-towners come to visit or not, the holidays are an excellent time for a much-needed vacation. Winter is considered the off-season for tourists, so you'll find great deals on airfare and lodging at most European destinations. Smaller crowds and shorter lines mean that you can squeeze in more sights and take your time. Enjoy the spectacular view from the top of the Eiffel Tower sans the two-hour wait, stroll Venice's tiny streets without becoming claustrophobic, and find a table at London's exclusive restaurants. Contemplate the destinations you are yearning to visit and fulfill your dream this season.

**Give the Gift of Goodwill**  
Compassion and generosity are synonymous with the holiday season, so help an organization you admire or aid those in need. Write holiday cards for soldiers downrange ([www.redcross.org/support/get-involved/holiday-mail-for-heroes](http://www.redcross.org/support/get-involved/holiday-mail-for-heroes)), visit wounded troops or welcome families just arriving to Europe at a USO center (<http://usovolunteer.org>), adopt a lower-enlisted family with Soldiers' Angels (<http://soldiersangels.org>), cheer up the elderly at a host-nation retirement home, or run a 10K for a good cause. There is no greater reward than giving back — you'll always remember that feeling of fulfillment and the beaming faces of those whose lives you've touched. To learn more about volunteering in your area, visit your local family readiness center.

**Take Time for Togetherness**  
Fill in your social calendar this season to catch up with old friends and make new ones. Attend your unit's holiday party and social gatherings hosted by your installation's community center, morale program or chapel. Book a tour with Outdoor Recreation, the USO or your installation's travel agency to see exciting places and meet new people. Prepare a smorgasbord for friends who make you laugh. If your culinary skills are limited to microwave dinners, organize a potluck and invite your



ROME, ITALY

short trip to Rome, a destination at the top of our must-see list. Though opening gifts thousands of miles from loved ones was bittersweet, we fondly remember that Christmas. Don't let the distance dampen your spirits — embrace your time in Europe and make new memories to cherish for years to come.



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friends who could pass as Food Network chefs, or hire a caterer instead.

You can't fly home, but you can still have family time. Use a video chat service to join your relatives as they open gifts, sing Christmas carols or light the tree. And share your European adventures by sending holiday cards brimming with photos.

### *Preserve Precious Traditions*

You'll feel closer to home by keeping long-standing traditions. Cook beloved family recipes and let the aromas and flavors bring back fond memories as you make new ones. Stay up late to watch the big game and call your dad at half-time. Snuggle on the couch to watch favorite holiday movies. Hang the stockings lovingly knitted by your grandmother and bake cookies for Santa, but save some for yourself! If you have children, preserve the traditions most important to them. The little things are often what make the greatest memories.

### *Trade Something Old for Something New*

Clinging to family customs is comforting, but integrating new activities can make way for new traditions. Host a tacky Christmas party, prepare new holiday dishes (the best part is taste-testing!), ski the Swiss Alps, sojourn in a castle hotel, relax at a beach resort, or forego the hassle of a traditional

Christmas tree for a crafty alternative, courtesy of Pinterest. And let go of the family traditions you're not a big fan of during your time away.

While in Europe, you have the opportunity to explore new cultures and experience their foods, music and customs to commemorate the season. German Christmas markets are an age-old tradition that

has spread throughout Europe. Bundle up and sip *Glühwein* to keep warm while shopping for gifts, chatting with locals, and sampling bratwursts, crepes and warm, roasted chestnuts. Do as the Brits and make a Christmas pudding, but make sure each family member stirs the batter while making a wish. Or adopt the Italian tradition of having your little ones write letters to convey their love for you, which you'll open on Christmas Eve.

You may find that the changes you make are so wonderful that they remain even after you return home. But don't be discouraged if you're not ready to adopt the new traditions you try; there's always next year to find something that's just right for your family. Know that whatever you choose, celebrating in a new way will be memorable. You'll discover that the enchantment of the holiday season is all around you, no matter where you are. ■

**Don't let the distance dampen your spirits. Embrace your time in Europe and make new holiday memories.**

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