

“You don’t really think about what holidays are like without family until you are a continent away. At first, it is upsetting, but you start to adapt and take comfort in the realization that you are surrounded by a community that is going through the same emotions. That is the basis of new traditions that fill overseas communities.”  
 – Frances Salas



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 GENEVIEVE NORTHUP

## Readers' Favorite Autumn & Winter Traditions

While in Europe, you have the opportunity to experience new cultures and adopt new traditions. To inspire you this fall and winter, we asked military community members in Germany how they celebrate the season.

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 When my husband and I came to Europe, we found that creating our own traditions not only brought us closer, but also helped us become part of a new community despite the language barrier.

Our first Halloween in Germany was hard because unless someone was hosting a party, it was not celebrated. We headed out for dinner to drown our sorrows in Chinese wontons and fried rice when we saw a few short ghosts and skeletons walking. We felt terrible for not having candy to give them, so I dipped into my emergency stash.

From that moment, we vowed to do better, and have topped our Halloween every year since. We start planning the decorations months in advance and the community looks forward to it. In the States, unless you spend large amounts of money, many decorations look the same. But in Germany, the smallest efforts are different and fun. – Frances Salas

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 In autumn, we take advantage of the apple picking and wine fests all over the Rhine region. One of the most unique activities we do is the fall Rhine River cruise, stopping by local wineries to taste their wines and sample local dishes.

In the winter, our family hits as many of the *Weihnachtsmarkt*, or Christmas markets, as we can. Some of our favorites include Wiesbaden; Rudesheim; Heidelberg; Colmar, France; Cologne (with several markets centered around downtown); Munich; Rothenburg; Oberammer-

gau; Murnau; and Innsbruck, Austria. We happen to love the Italian bratwursts at the market in Wiesbaden and the kebobs at the market in Colmar. In Cologne, we stop by the chocolate museum, stop by and chat with Santa, then stop by the children’s market to write a letter to Santa while eating *Poffertjes* (little Dutch pancakes). Finally, one of our favorite things to do (weather permitting) is to ride the horse-drawn sleigh in Farchant, Germany near Garmisch. – Shelby Van Voris

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 Starting the first day of November, we take turns sharing something we’re grateful for at the dinner table. We write each one down on a paper leaf and hang it on our Thanksgiving tree, which is really nothing more than a few branches I arrange in a vase. When Thanksgiving rolls around, we love taking off the leaves and reading

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each one again. It's especially fun to hear what our little ones come up with! We also make homemade *Glühwein* – red wine simmered with orange slices, cinnamon sticks, cloves and sugar.

– Courtney Woodruff

We venture to Garmisch for a week of skiing and snowboarding before the holiday. Most of the week is spent zipping along the trails of the Zugspitze, sipping hot chocolate at some of the quaint restaurants, and admiring the gorgeous views during our adventures. We frequent area guesthouses for evening meals but never leave without eating at our favorite restaurant, Gasthof Fraundorfer, which features Bavarian food, accompanied by dancers and accordion music. Although most of the week is spent on the slopes, during our "off" day, we visit local Christmas markets. Our time in Garmisch enables us to connect with each other, take part in some of Germany's traditions and enjoy the outdoors.

– Allie Smeeth

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own each year, before the first week of Advent. Although we are not religious (the Advent wreath is traditionally a Christian custom that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent), we celebrate this time with our family and friends, and have come to see this wreath as a symbol of family, friendship and health leading up to Christmas and the New Year.

We have several families participate each year in the making of the *Adventskranzen*. We all buy supplies at the local craft stores, or go foraging in the woods for pinecones, branches and berries to accent the wreath. We meet on a chilly November evening at a friend's house, eat *Erbssuppe*, drink *Glühwein*, watch the kids play and make our wreaths. This is one of my favorite parts of Christmas, and I'm looking forward to sharing it with our friends and family back home!

– Tara Jensen Crim

Thanksgiving is usually a time we would travel to our parents' house and have a large family get-together. Since we live so far from family here in Europe, we adopted a new tradition: we travel with our close military friends for the entire week of Thanksgiving and enjoy

some traditional cuisine of the country we are visiting.

– Teresa Rotramel

We started making *Feuerzangenbowle* cocktails every weekend during the holidays. Watching the rum drip over the sugar and wine at the festivals and catch fire is so much fun! I now make it at home.

– Autumn Ochsner

On Christmas Day, our kids open their stockings from Santa as soon as we're all awake and Mom and Dad have coffee. Following the stockings, I serve my family our traditional Christmas breakfast casserole we only have on Christmas Day. Eggs, cheese, sausage and bread are baked to delicious perfection, and served with homemade cinnamon rolls, fruit salad and orange juice. My family has been making this breakfast casserole for at least 40 years, and I hope to pass that tradition to my children when they have families. After breakfast, we open the presents under the tree, relax and enjoy our new toys, then head to town to see a family movie. I look forward to these family-fun traditions every year!

– Betsy Eves

I picked up the German (and some other European countries') tradition of watching the British comedy "Dinner for One" on Silvester, New Year's Eve.

– Linda Seelig