

THE BIG FAB FIVE MARKETS

By Genevieve Northup

Germany's famed cities have perfected festive Christmas markets over time, sometimes hundreds of years. Though each has the basics — bustling booths, gifts and *Glühwein* — you'll be awestruck by the unique décor, entertainment, cuisine and traditions that distinguish these must-see markets.

DRESDEN

Christmas markets in Dresden can be traced back to 1434, and the holiday cheer continues today. The historic Striezelmarkt is named after the *Hefestriezel* or Christstollen, bread filled with dried fruit and dusted with sugar, which is served by many concessionaires. Each year, bakers prepare a 4-ton Christstollen. Taste this record-breaking bread and browse exceptional wooden decorations from the Erzgebirge region. Then climb the Christmas pyramid to photograph the landscape and scope out the stalls for your next stop. Open Nov. 27-Dec. 24.

Read about Dresden's other interesting markets at www.dresden.de.

COLOGNE

Plan your trip to Cologne's beautiful markets at www.cologne.de/events/christmas-markets, and save time to see these gems.

An immense Christmas tree and the Kölner Dom, one of the world's tallest and most impressive cathedrals, dominate the scenery of the Cathedral Market. More than 150 kiosks offer delicious regional dishes and lovingly handmade gifts from all over Europe. Open Nov. 24-Dec. 23.

Laugh at the Rhine Pirates' tall tales, dine on fresh fish, and stop by the old ship for *Glühwein* at

the Harbour Market. If you're a chocoholic or need gifts for one, visit the nearby Cologne Chocolate Museum. Open Nov. 21-Dec. 23, except Nov. 23.

The splendid Angel Market is worth braving the crowds. White lights, stars and angels create a white Christmas ambiance, even if it hasn't snowed. Find superior gifts at the market and throughout the Neumarkt shopping district. Open Nov. 24-Dec. 23.

Children will be ecstatic to explore whimsical booths and chat with Santa at the cheery market in the Altstadt. Open Nov. 24-Dec. 23.

MUNICH

The heart of Bavaria hosts several Christmas markets. Make sure to visit these and find out more at www.muenchen.de.

The Christkindmarkt on Marienplatz is Munich's main market, with countless food stalls, local crafts and daily Santa sightings. Live music resounds from the Neues Rathaus each evening, and the Heavenly Workshop provides interactive activities for children. Market is open Nov. 27-Dec. 24; Heavenly Workshops start at 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., Nov. 29-Dec. 14.

Relive the merriment of the Middle Ages at the Medieval Christmas Fair on Wittelsbacher Platz. Drink flaming cocktails from goblets served by bartenders in period costumes and peruse medieval-themed gifts. Open Nov. 27-Dec. 23.

At the trendy Tollwood Winter Festival, modern tents burst at the seams with gifts from around the globe, multicultural cuisine and organic treats. Open Nov. 25 to Dec. 23 with a New Year's Eve bash on Dec. 31.

BERLIN

The capital has more than 50 markets to celebrate the season, but these are a few to consider.

The city's oldest castle, the Jagdschloss Grunewald, sets the stage for the Fairy Tale Market. Characters from beloved fables stroll through the castle grounds, transporting you to a world of make-believe. Open Dec. 6-7.

Entertain energetic kiddos at the market in front of Berlin's Rotes Rathaus. Children can skate out their excitement on the ice rink, enjoy panoramic views from the Ferris wheel, and make furry friends at the petting zoo. Open Nov. 24-Dec. 28, except Dec. 24.

Prepare to spend, spend, spend at Berlin's largest market, located in Spandau. This market features 250 stands, live entertainment, and family days on Wednesdays. Open Nov. 26-Dec. 23.

Your family will enjoy the diverse live performances at the Gendarmenmarkt. Mark your calendar to count down to 2015 at the fabulous New Year's Eve event. Open Nov. 24-Dec. 31.

Visit www.visitberlin.de/en/keyword/christmas-markets or www.weihnachteninberlin.de to read about other markets.

NUREMBERG

Nuremberg's old-world charm provides a memorable setting for the fantastic Christkindlesmarkt. Each year, the celebration begins with an appearance by the symbolic Christkind, a local youth in a golden angel costume who is said to bring gifts to children. Throughout the holidays, nearly 200 vendors line the square in front of the iconic Church of Our Lady. Savor the city's namesake *Nürnberger Rostbratwürste* and renowned gingerbread (*Lebkuchen*). Take little ones to Hans-Sachs-Platz to spin round and round on the carousel, invent imaginative stories at the puppet theater, and hone their culinary skills at the baking booth.

Go to www.christkindlesmarkt.de/en for more information. Open Nov. 28-Dec. 24. ■

Your holidays won't be complete without a visit to one of these fabulous markets, so make plans now. *Fröhliche Weihnachten!*