



David McGuffin's
EXPLORING EUROPE

VIENNA CHRISTMAS MARKETS

DESTINATION GUIDE



INDEX

[Getting to Vienna](#) - pg 3

[When to visit](#) - pg 3

[Top Christmas Markets](#) - pg 3

[Festive Foods to Try](#) - pg 5

[Cultural Highlights of Vienna](#) - pg 6

[Winter Activities Beyond the Markets](#) - pg 7

[Practical Tips](#) - pg 8

Vienna, Austria's imperial capital, transforms into a winter wonderland during the Christmas season. Famous for its Baroque architecture, musical heritage, and cultural sophistication, Vienna twinkles as festive lights adorn its historic streets, and the scent of roasted chestnuts, grilled sausages, and mulled wine fills the air. Christmas Markets pop up all over Europe in December, but Vienna's markets seem to pop with style and bling. Whether you're a history buff, a foodie, or simply seeking holiday spirit, Vienna offers something for everyone. This guide will help you make the most of your visit to Vienna and its Christmas markets.



[Jump to index](#)

Getting to Vienna

Vienna is easily accessible by plane, train, or car. Vienna International Airport (VIE) is well-connected to cities worldwide and lies just 20 minutes from the city center by train. High-speed trains connect Vienna with major cities like Munich, Prague, and Budapest. Once in Vienna, the city's efficient public transportation system (U-Bahn, trams, and buses) ensures seamless travel.

When to Visit

The Christmas markets typically begin in late November and run until Christmas Eve. The best time to visit is early evening when the twinkling lights are most vibrant. For a quieter experience, visit on weekday afternoons to avoid weekend crowds.

Top Christmas Markets in Vienna

Vienna Christmas World at Rathausplatz

Location: In front of Vienna's City Hall

Highlights:

- The largest and most famous Christmas market in Vienna.
- Over 150 stalls offering handmade gifts, ornaments, and culinary delights.
- Ice skating paths winding through the park are perfect for families and couples.
- A beautiful tree-lined avenue illuminated by themed lighting.

Schönbrunn Palace Christmas Market

Location: Schönbrunn Palace Courtyard

Highlights:

- A festive setting on the palace grounds, with the Baroque backdrop of Schönbrunn Palace.\
- Emphasis on traditional crafts and handmade items.
- Live musical performances add to the ambiance.
- A chance to combine your visit with a tour of the palace or its gardens.

Spittelberg Christmas Market

Location: Spittelberg Quarter, near Neubau-gasse

Highlights:

- Nestled in narrow, cobblestone streets, offering a cozy vibe.
- Focus on arts and crafts, with local artisans displaying their work.
- Gourmet food stalls with offerings, from organic mulled wine to raclette.

Belvedere Palace Christmas Market

Location: In front of Upper Belvedere Palace

Highlights:

- A view of the palace's illuminated façade and its reflecting pond.
- Fewer crowds compared to the larger markets, offering a quieter experience.

- Elegant stalls with a focus on high-quality goods.

Altwiener Christkindlmarkt (Old Viennese Christmas Market)

Location: Freyung Square

Highlights:

- It is one of Vienna's oldest markets, steeped in tradition.
- A nostalgic atmosphere with traditional decorations and music.
- Local specialties include hot apple strudel and maroni (roasted chestnuts).

Maria-Theresien-Platz Christmas Village

Location: Between the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Natural History Museum

Highlights:

- A market combining history, culture, and festive spirit.
- Ideally situated for museum visits before or after shopping.
- An array of unique gifts and culinary treats.

Festive Foods to Try

Every visit to Vienna's Christmas markets must involve something to eat and drink. Here are some must-try treats:

Glühwein (Mulled Wine): A warm, spiced wine in red or white varieties.

Punsch: A fruitier alternative to Glühwein, often mixed with rum or amaretto.

Kaiserschmarrn: Fluffy shredded pancakes served with plum sauce.

Lebkuchen: Traditional Austrian gingerbread, often beautifully decorated.

Bratwurst: Juicy sausages grilled to perfection and served in crusty rolls.

Kartoffelpuffer: Crispy potato pancakes, typically served with applesauce.

Roasted Chestnuts: A classic winter snack sold by street vendors.

Vanillekipferl: Crescent-shaped vanilla cookies, a festive favorite.

Cultural Highlights of Vienna

While the Christmas markets are the star attraction, Vienna offers many cultural experiences to enrich your trip.

Explore the Imperial Palaces

Schönbrunn Palace: A UNESCO World Heritage Site and former summer residence of the Habsburgs.

Hofburg Palace: The imperial winter residence, home to the Sisi Museum and the Spanish Riding School.

[Jump to index](#)

Attend a Concert

Vienna is synonymous with classical music. During the holiday season, numerous venues host festive concerts. Don't miss performances at:

Musikverein: Renowned for its Golden Hall and New Year's Concert.

Vienna State Opera: A world-famous opera house with a stunning interior.

Visit St. Stephen's Cathedral

This Gothic masterpiece in the heart of Vienna is an iconic landmark. Climb the south tower for panoramic city views or attend a holiday mass for a spiritual experience.

Museums and Art Galleries

Kunsthistorisches Museum: Houses a world-class collection of European art.

Albertina Museum: Known for its impressive graphic arts collection and modern art exhibitions.

Winter Activities Beyond the Markets

Ice Skating: Besides the rink at Rathausplatz, head to the Vienna Ice Dream (Wiener Eis-traum), a sprawling skating area near City Hall.

Vienna Ring Tram Tour: Take a nostalgic electric tram ride along the Ringstraße and enjoy

the illuminated parks and buildings for the holidays.

Therme Wien: Escape the cold at Vienna's largest thermal spa, perfect for relaxation.

Practical Tips

- **Dress Warmly:** Vienna can get chilly in winter, with temperatures often dropping below freezing. Layer up and wear comfortable, waterproof boots.
- **Carry Cash:** Many smaller market stalls only accept cash.
- **Reusable Mugs:** When you buy Glühwein, you'll receive it in a souvenir mug for a small deposit. Keep it or return it to get your deposit back.
- **Arrive Early:** Beat the crowds by visiting markets early in the day or shortly after opening.
- **Plan Ahead:** Many cultural attractions require advance booking during the festive season.



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[Jump to index](#)