

# METRO travel

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Leipzig in Germany is home to the world's largest free-standing Advent calendar at 857sq m

## Getting a little festive cheer

**CHRISTMAS MARKETS: SOAK UP THE ATMOSPHERE WHILE YOU SHOP AT THESE MAGICAL VENUES BY TAMARA HINSON**

### GOTHENBERG, SWEDEN

The Christmas markets in the Swedish city of Gothenburg are stylish affairs and there's not an Ikea in sight. While the city's Liseberg Christmas market may not be the world's largest, it's certainly the brightest, thanks largely to the five million lights that adorn the trees of the park in which it's located.

The market here is a traditional affair, with Sami (indigenous people from Lapland) serving up fare a million miles away from the gluhwein and weisswurst offered by their German counterparts. The market at the Kronhuset (Crown House) is also worth checking out.

'At Kronhuset, we found a Christmas craft market in full swing. The hall was packed with small stalls selling anything from pottery to decorations and several stalls raising money for charity,' reports Heather Coper, founder of heatheronhertravels.com. 'There was definitely a touch of the Women's Institute in the atmosphere.'

### SOUTH TYROL, ITALY

Some of Italy's most spectacular Christmas markets can be found in South Tyrol.

The Merano Christmas market, with its alpine backdrop, is one of the most beautiful. Every year, from November 29, the Passer

Promenade fills with stalls selling everything from local crafts to culinary specialities. There is also a varied musical programme, with regular performances from local theatre groups and choirs. Don't leave without enjoying some traditional Italian snacks within the comfort of the market's super-sized Christmas tree baubles.

The Bolzano Christmas market is equally appealing – the mixture of Mediterranean and central European influences means there's a huge range of crafts on offer, while the Dolomite mountains that surround the city make it one of the more beautiful places to go for some seasonal retail therapy.

### HOLLAND

One of the oldest – and most unusual – markets can be found in Valkenburg in southern Holland; more specifically, in the village's caves.

The market here is said to be the world's largest and oldest. Children will love the subterranean Santa's grotto and, in addition to a huge range of stalls, there's also an 18th-century underground church.

The Dordrecht Christmas market is ideal for those travelling from Harwich to the Hook of Holland – it's just a 45-minute drive from the port and the Stena



Seasonal charm: At Sweden's Liseberg Christmas market, indigenous Sami people from Lapland serve traditional fare

Line Dutchflyer rail and sail tickets make getting there easier than ever.

### CHICAGO

Christmas markets are no longer solely European affairs: Chicago's Christkindlmarkt is one of the world's largest and is inspired by the one in Nuremberg, which has been around since 1545. This market is opened by Nuremberg's very own Christkind, a fairy-like being responsible for delivering Christmas presents. This tradition is most common in German-speaking countries and, for the past 13 years, the Christkind – who serves as an official representative of the city of Nuremberg – has travelled from Germany to open the market. Many of the stallholders here are German – you'll find everything from Bavarian pewter to cuckoo clocks from the Black Forest.

### JAPAN

Japan has some of the most spectacular Christmas markets in the world. The market in Sapporo was created to celebrate the city's link with its twin city, Munich. It's also one of the brightest – 400,000 LEDs light the trees along the main street, which is where most of the stalls are.

The Christmas market in Osaka is Japan's largest and can be found in the shadow of the city's spectacular Umeda Sky Building. Highlights include vintage wooden merry-go-rounds shipped from Germany and the 15m-tall Christmas tree – thought to be the world's largest.

'You don't normally associate Japan with Christmas but this relative newcomer to the Christmas market scene is already a favourite for its mulled wine and original setting,' says Nicole McPherson, founder of travel blog womanseeksworld.com.



Have a ball: Enjoy snacks inside Merano's giant tree baubles

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