

Fancy a White Christmas? Unwrap festive joy at Europe's iconic markets

Shikha Shah

Streets lit with fairy lights, steaming mugs of spiced beverages, choirs echoing through historic squares, and markets overflowing with craftwork — don't these seem like scenes straight from a fairy tale? During Christmas, these are everyday scenes across Europe, where cities transform into open-air celebrations of winter charm. For Indian travellers wanting to experience a White Christmas, European Christmas markets offer the perfect blend of culture, cuisine, and celebratory warmth.



Prague: WENCESLAS SQUARE MARKET

The Gothic skyline, Baroque palaces, and cobblestone lanes create a storybook backdrop for its world-famous markets. At the Old Town Square, a towering Xmas tree — sourced from the Czech mountains — stands amid wooden stalls selling hand-blown glass ornaments, marionettes, scented candles, and traditional Czech crafts. A short walk away, the Wenceslas Square market offers more modern delights, while the Prague Castle market brings festive magic to one of Europe's largest ancient castle complexes. Don't miss trdelník, the warm cinnamon-sugar chimney cake!

WHY INDIANS WILL LOVE IT: Easy to walk around, food options for vegetarians



Dresden: STRIEZELMARKT MARKET

Germany takes its Christmas markets very seriously, and Dresden's Striezelmarkt, first held in 1434, is one of the oldest and most atmospheric. Expect traditional wooden toys, delicate lacework, candle pyramids, and the iconic Stollen Festival, celebrating the city's famous Christmas fruitcake. The giant Stollen parade alone is worth making the trip.

WHY INDIANS WILL LOVE IT: Authentic German holiday traditions, excellent shopping, and easy connections from Prague and Berlin



Budapest: VÖRÖSMARTY SQUARE CHRISTMAS FAIR

Budapest's Christmas markets combine rustic Hungarian charm with dramatic nightscapes along the Danube. Vörösmarty Square Christmas Fair, one of Europe's most famous markets, features artisanal pottery, homemade honey, and live folk performances. Considered to be one of the most beautiful Advent markets, St Stephen's Basilica Market includes 3D-mapped light shows projected onto the Basilica itself.

WHY INDIANS WILL LOVE IT: Affordable prices, great local food (think chimney cakes and goulash soup), and therapeutic thermal baths perfect for cold evenings

PRO TIP

Most European markets accept card payments, but it'd be smart to keep some local currency handy for small purchases



Vienna: CHRISTKINDLMARKT AT RATHAUSPLATZ

A few hours by train from Prague, Vienna hosts some of Europe's most sophisticated Christmas markets. The city's refined charm shines brightest during Advent. With its neo-Gothic city hall as backdrop, Vienna's flagship Christkindlmarkt at Rathausplatz features over 100 stalls, ice skating trails, and a "Tree of Hearts" — a fave among the romantics. For those who love art and architecture, the market, set in front of the illuminated Baroque palace, feels like stepping into a painting.

WHY INDIANS WILL LOVE IT: Music concerts, world-class museums, and cafes serving comforting hot chocolate in elegant Viennese style

 While Western Europe remains a favourite, Eastern and Central Europe are gaining popularity, with their Christmas markets. The Czech Republic and Hungary are experiencing a surge in interest with their festive offerings

— SD Nandakumar, president & country head of a leading travel company

FACTS & FIGURES

- ❖ Winter wonderland bookings are up by 7-8% YoY, led by travellers actively choosing snow, Christmas markets, and cold-weather charm over the usual tropical holidays
- ❖ Vienna, Lucerne, Prague, Helsinki and Copenhagen have emerged as the top five "Christmas-looks-like-a-movie" destinations, with Vienna alone seeing a 5-7% jump in interest
- ❖ Northern Lights add-ons from Finland are up 30%, driven by Gen Z and millennial travellers seeking bucket-list winter experiences
- ❖ Overall, Christmas-New Year European itineraries have risen by 30%, making this one of the biggest early-winter shifts being witnessed

— Inputs by Pickyourtrail



Bruges: GROTE MARKT CHRISTMAS MARKET

A postcard-perfect city, Bruges turns into a winter wonderland with ice rinks, chocolate shops, and picturesque canals. Grote Markt Christmas Market is lined with Flemish houses that glow under soft winter lights, while vendors sell Belgian chocolates, waffles, mulled wine, and handcrafted gifts.

WHY INDIANS WILL LOVE IT: Romance, chocolate, and dreamy cobblestone streets — plus the ease of pairing it with Amsterdam or Paris