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Bring Home a Sleigh Full of Memories

Experience the Christmas markets of Europe this year with Grand European Tours

Lake Oswego, Ore., June 12, 2007 – Gingerbread cookies and Christmas trees. Candy canes and warm spiced wine. They're the essential ingredients of Christmastime and just some of the holiday goodies to enjoy while shopping at a traditional open-air Christmas market in Europe. Held in snow-dusted, medieval villages or bustling public squares, these bazaars are filled with twinkling lights and the sound of music in the air. It's such an incredible experience that travel writer Patricia Schultz even chose to feature one of these markets, the Christkinklmarkt in Germany, in her top selling book *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.

The Christkinklmarkt is in good company with thousands of holiday markets that open their stalls each November and December throughout Europe. Luckily, Grand European Tours, specialists in escorted tours to Europe, has honed down the list to their top picks – culled during their 28 years of experience – and is offering the very best of the Christmas markets on three tours this year.

"Experiencing an event like the traditional holiday markets of Europe is a wonderful way to gain an understanding of a different culture, while also sharing a joyous time together with the local people," says Hans Sohlstrom, president of Grand European Tours.

Grand European Tours designs their trips so travelers have a chance to learn about the history and tradition of the seasonal festivities and get a behind-the-scenes look at the culture.

Tours are designed to include special events, such as a holiday concert given by locals or a horse-drawn sleigh ride through the Black Forest. And shoppers can get an insider's view as they buy gifts for loved-ones with a visit to a local schnapps distillery or a stop at the hometown of Swarovski crystal for instance.

Sohlstrom says, "There's a lot to explore, but our tour directors are true travel experts who knows these markets and can help you discover the very best they have to offer."

Beyond the handcrafted goods and traditional products, one of the best presents travelers enjoy are the lower prices of the winter season. You can also avoid the large crowds of summer and enjoy a quieter time in your favorite country.

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"We see many of our experienced travelers come back to Europe just to see these cities and villages in all their holiday glory," Sohlstrom explains. "It's a more intimate experience and a new view you can't experience any other time of year."

Grand European Tours is unwrapping the following three tours for the 2007 season. And since they take care of all the travel details, including your bookings, the hardest part is picking which tour to take.

Christmas Market Tours for 2007:

Alpine Christmas Markets – 9 days

A tour with a sampling of holiday treats. Visit Europe's largest Christmas market in Strasbourg, enjoy a Christmas show given by local residents and relax aboard a horse-drawn sleigh ride. Stops at Swarovski crystal in Innsbruck and Lake Titisee – famous home of handmade cuckoo clocks – provide even more holiday shopping opportunities. The tour includes stays in Munich, Innsbruck, the Black Forest and Rhineland.

Prices start at \$1,989 per person, including airfare and 12 meals, with departures available November 30 and December 3, 7 and 10.

German Christmas Markets – 10 days

This holiday tour to Germany offers plenty of opportunities to shop for loved ones at home, with visits to five famous Christmas markets, including the Leipzig market, that dates back to 1767. This market is known for its unique range of musical, cultural and culinary delights, and is also the inspirational location for Goeth's "Feast." Then put up your feet as you drive through the Bavarian Alps to see soaring mountains, quaint villages and fairy tale castles. Sightseeing tours of Berlin, Dresden and Munich will give you a chance to see how the locals celebrate the holidays.

Prices start at \$2,349 per person, including airfare and 12 meals. Departures are available December 1, 8 and 15.

Danube Christmas Markets Cruise – 11 days

When you can't travel by Santa's sleigh, the next best thing is Grand European Tour's Christmas cruise along the Danube that covers four countries. From the large Christmas markets of Vienna to the more intimate markets of Bratislava, Passau and Salzburg, each combines timeless traditions with pageantry. The tour also includes a floral decoration workshop and gingerbread making demonstration, an organ recital at the Baroque Gottweig Abbey, and an evening Mozart concert in Vienna.

Prices start at \$2,324 per person, including airfare and 20 meals. Departures are available November 23 and 30 and December 7, 14 and 21.

Prices are all-inclusive and include fuel surcharges, so the price you see is the price you pay for your trip. And the prices are guaranteed not to change after you pay your deposit with Grand European Tours' Unconditional Guarantee. Additional savings may be available with promotions like the Early Booking Discount, so ask when booking your trip.

For more information on the Christmas markets tours or to request a free catalog containing a complete listing of all tours, departure dates and prices, call 1-888-522-3950 or visit www.getours.com. The Web site also features current discounts and promotions.

Grand European Tours

For over 28 years, Grand European Tours has provided travelers with an easy and enriching way to travel through their escorted tours. With over 40 itineraries to Europe and beyond, every trip includes a team of travel experts to guide your journey and help you discover the gems of each destination. Grand European Tours even offers an unconditional price guarantee that keeps tour prices low, even if exchange rates and fuel costs change. For more information, visit www.getours.com or call 1-888-522-3950.