



## **Germany Travel Planning Podcast**

Ep 9 – Trip report: Cologne Christmas Markets We Loved

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Welcome to episode 9 of the Germany Travel Planning Podcast. In this festive trip report, Aaron and I take you inside three Cologne Christmas markets that truly wowed us, so you can decide if these markets deserve a spot on your itinerary. Plus, we share practical tips for making your Christmas market visit magical and stress-free.

If you're dreaming of traveling to Germany, you're in the right place. Hey, I'm Cate co-founder with my husband Aaron of [MyGermanyVacation.com](https://MyGermanyVacation.com) and host of this podcast. Our goal is to help you plan and enjoy a meaningful and unforgettable trip to Germany and surrounding countries. So let's dive in.

Just a few months ago, we spent five weeks crisscrossing Germany, visiting over 50 Christmas markets.

I have been enjoying German Christmas markets for decades, but we decided to go back and visit so many markets last winter so that we could do in-depth travel research. We're now creating a new Christmas market guide and interactive map for our DIY Germany travel planner.

And we always want to provide our clients with the best experiences and the most up-to-date information. We are now even more knowledgeable about the best markets in and around Germany. And there are so many markets that we love in Germany. But today we thought we would do a trip report just for Cologne for those of you who are thinking about adding this city to your Christmas market tour.



So Aaron's joining me today to talk about three Cologne Christmas markets we loved. Hi everyone. So let's start with the basics. Yeah.

So we were in Cologne for I think about three days. And I remember one of those days you were doing Zoom travel consults and I was out finding a laundromat to do some laundry. So we really had probably two full days and one evening, which was I think enough time to explore the Christmas markets and see a couple of the major sites. Yeah, I thought that was actually a good amount of time. We've been to Cologne several times before that. So we've seen the main sites.

But I think two full days, you can see the cathedral and walk along the river and see the old town, maybe go to the chocolate museum and see some of the best Christmas markets.

We took the train to and from Cologne. And I remember on that trip, we actually tried Flix train for the first time and it was pretty okay. I think I liked the Deutsche Bahn a little bit better. It felt like the train was more comfortable. But Flix train was fine and it was a little bit cheaper than the Deutsche Bahn. And we stayed in the city center. And remember Aaron, you spent a lot of time trying to find us a place to stay. Yeah, because we started looking maybe six to eight weeks before we arrived. So it was Christmas time as well.

And because it's Christmas season, I would recommend doing it further ahead, further out. But it wasn't bad. We did find a place that was a convenient downtown location. It wasn't, you know, a wonderful hotel, but it was fine. There was nothing wrong with it at all.

But there are lots of other hotels we'd recommend that are on our planning map for example, but it worked out fine. Yeah, it was totally okay. I think it took us maybe ten minutes to walk there from the train station which was fine and then maybe seven to ten minutes to walk into the Old Town. I think we only took public transportation



maybe one time because it was late at night and our feet were killing us and that was it. We walked pretty much everywhere.

And it was okay and the hotel was basic, kind of old school. But we had a large room. We had a refrigerator in our room and it was quiet. Yeah, so it was okay. Cologne's a big city, but you can walk to all the Christmas markets within I don't know, probably within 10-20 minutes of each other. Yeah. And when we were in Cologne two summers ago, we stayed at a hotel that was kind of neat. It was like a kind of modern small boutique hotel that had self check-in and the location was fantastic. It was right on the Alter Markt, which is where one of the really popular Christmas markets is.

And we were talking about whether we would have wanted to stay there when visiting the Christmas markets. And there's some pros and cons. There are lots of hotels that are right in the Old Town. And they're fantastic hotels, great locations because you step out your door and there are the Christmas markets.

The hotel that we stayed in when we visited a couple summers ago, we could have seen the Christmas market from our window and stood out on our balcony which would be really, I think would' actually be really neat. You could get great pictures. You'd really feel that Christmas market vibe. But the potential downside is that it could be loud because the Christmas markets go until 10 or 11 at night. And the place we ended up staying at, which was, about 10 minutes walk away from the Christmas markets. It was a lot quieter. So that's something to think about when you're planning your trip, whether you want to be right in the middle of all the Christmas markets, it'll be more expensive and it could be a little bit louder or whether you want something that's a little bit outside of that area, but is quieter and potentially a little bit less expensive.



Right. And I would say definitely book it many months in advance. The prices are a little bit higher during Christmas season, so you might have to find a place that's a little further out. Yeah, definitely.

We also have a Cologne hotel guide on our website. So I will link that up in the show notes and you can start there. Use that as a jumping off point if you're looking for a hotel in Cologne any time of the year.

Let's now talk about the Christmas markets that we really loved. Our goal while we were in Cologne last winter was to go to as many markets as we possibly could so that we could see what they had to offer. And we did visit almost all of them. There were a few that weren't open because they were really tiny or they were only open on the weekends. But there were three Christmas markets that we really enjoyed and would highly recommend because each one had something a little bit unique about them. And we're going to talk about them in a minute.

But first, there are some really big traditional Christmas markets right by the cathedral. Yeah, really impressive. You see these in lots of photos of Cologne. They're right basically in the shadow of the cathedral, quite large, a lot of booths, sort of traditional Christmas market. And we did enjoy that too. You can take some great pictures there.

Yeah, definitely visit that big traditional market by the cathedral. And then we're going to now tell you about three markets that we really, really liked. The first one is called the Angels Market. Be sure to check out the show notes so you can see some photos of this market. You'll see the name in English and German. And then we'll also link to the official website for more information about the market.

Yeah, I remember just walking up to this market and being really impressed. It's located in a park with some big old mature trees and you see it from a distance and there's lights in the trees. I think it was purple or blue and there's stars in the trees like



floating in the trees and it's just an amazing thing to sort of come upon. Yeah, I agree. I remember when we walked up, it was night when we visited this market. And we both just sort of stopped and said, whoa, this is so pretty. It was just a, it's a little different from some other markets.

This market seemed a little bit more modern in some ways and the stalls were very similar. They were all white and I think they had dark roofs. And so you have like this uniform theme with the white and the black and each stall had different decorations that kind of illustrated what they were selling or what their stall was about.

Yeah. I remember the whole thing being just so neat and pretty and tidy and uniform again. It was such a cool market, really different from the other ones we've seen. Yeah. And it was so pretty as we were walking through it, you've got these stalls that are just really interesting to look at in and of themselves. Then you have whatever they're selling, and then you look up and there are all these trees and there were lights hanging on white lights and white stars and it really was just dreamy. I had so much fun just walking through it and just enjoying it.

Yeah, it was a really special market. It's not a small market either. We spent quite a bit of time there just walking by and enjoying each little booth because although structurally they were kind of uniform, they each had their own character. They each have their own decorations. And of course, the things that they're selling there was unique to each booth too. So it was a really cool market.

There was this really nice relaxed vibe about the market. People were slowly meandering through the market and just taking it all in. I felt like we really slowed down and enjoyed it. There are some markets that just feel a little bit more frenzied, I think, but this one was just very relaxed. I remember there was a merry-go-round for kids. Yep, yep. And I also remember there were two angels circulating through the market. Yes. Remember that? Yeah, yeah. There were a couple of women who were dressed up in angel costumes and they would kind of roam through the markets and



everybody was so excited to see them and they would take pictures and videos of them and with them so that was kind of fun to see as well. We actually ate a couple of things at this market. One was a sweet treat that I remembered enjoying when I was a teenager living in Germany and it was like a wafer cookie with a marshmallow cream on top and it's all covered in chocolate.

And I found this booth that was selling individual ones and all different flavors. So I bought one and we enjoyed that. You can see a picture of it if you go to our show notes. And then we also tried something called Printen, which I think is something local to the area. And it's gingerbread, kind of like Liebkuchen, but it's a little bit different. I overheard the person who was selling it explaining it to somebody else because I hadn't heard of it. And we just tried a little bite of it and it was really good.

So this market is open roughly November 17th through December 23rd and it's open from about 11 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m. depending on the day. So definitely check the website if you want the official starting and ending dates and times for the current season.

Another market that we really liked was called the Nicholas Village. And again, go to the show notes to see photos of this market, the name in English and German, and then the link to the official website.

Yeah, so the Nicholas village is really cool and what sort of sets it apart makes it unique is that it's set on an Old Town plaza to Old Town square that's right up against an old city gate. So two big towers and a gate in between it is the backdrop to this really pretty market. It's not too big, but it's just striking to have all these booths and all this Christmas, all this ornamentation right up against this giant lit up old city that was so pretty to see in the background. And I remember the stands at that one were kind of in a half timber style. So it definitely had like an older look to it, to the Angels Market that we were at that was so modern. So I really liked the contrast and these two are pretty close to each other. We were able to walk from one to the other. Yeah,



they're not too far from each other. It was only like a five, maybe five minute walk. Yeah. And this one also had free activities for kids. So there was a house that was called the St. Nicholas house and they had offered free activities throughout the day and into the evening.

I remember that they had a singing moose in one part of the market and there were also these huge lit up stars right at the entrance of the old gate. Yeah, huge, like twice as tall as I am probably. Yeah, yeah there were like three stars and lit up. I mean they were just perfect for getting selfies and taking pictures of the stars with the market in the background and the gate and it was a very popular selfie spot.

And I don't think we had Glühwein at that market, but remember what caught our eye there? Yeah, you could actually buy a thermos of Glühwein there, which I haven't seen anywhere else. So usually you just buy Glühwein by the mug, but there you could buy this thermos and you would pay for five servings, but you would actually get six servings of Glühwein. So people would buy the thermos and then they would take it over to the table with everyone they were hanging out with. And then they would just serve each other the Glühwein which is really nice because Glühwein is great when it's hot. It's not so great when it's cold. So I like the idea that you can keep it warm as you're enjoying it. Yeah, that was neat. I don't think we saw anything quite like that elsewhere. No, I don't think so. This market starts around November 18th and closes December 23rd. And it's open from about 11 a.m. to 9 or 10 p.m. depending on the day.

The third market that we really enjoyed is one that is right in the old town. It is super popular. And this one is Heinkel's Winter Fairytale. Yeah, and this one is super impressive, right? I think a Cologne Christmas markets and this is the one I think of. Just so impressed, so awed by this market.

The first part of this market we went to was a Heumarkt or hay market. And this place is just huge. It really occupies a whole city Plaza or city square. And it's really



remarkable. All the craftsmanship and how ornate this market is really such incredible attention to detail. I mean, there's a huge ice rink running the length of it, which was pretty impressive, but there's so much more. I remember this one game they have set up. It's kind of like across between bowling and bowling and curling, think. Do you remember? Yeah, yeah, yeah. We saw this game all over at lots of different Christmas markets. It's called Eistockschießen. it looks really, really fun. I want to play it sometime.

So I really liked this market because of all the dark wood, all the buildings and stalls, the entrance gates were so ornate and well done. And just, there was so much to see and do in this market. There were even some restaurants and places where you can get food that were like two stories. So you can climb up the stairs to a little viewing platform and they go up higher and get something to eat or drink. They had this great place, indoor place. was kind of like a hut where you could get all sorts of drinks. There were polar bears, statues on the roofs. were gnomes everywhere. Like there'd be a post, know, post is there to hold up a string of lights. But on the top, there would be a little gnome perched on it. So the more you looked around, the more details you saw and appreciated in this market. Yeah, this one was, I think this one had kind of like an old world feel and it almost felt a little bit like what you would imagine up in Norway like a hundred years ago and I loved the dark wood that you mentioned. I love the dark wood stalls with the dark roofs and the greenery and yeah it was just this one was really really fun. This one is very very popular though. Yeah and I remember there were at least two places where you could get hot fresh chestnuts too. One of my favorites. yeah yeah.

Yeah, they had a variety of food all of the Christmas market favorites So you will definitely find something that you want to eat and drink there

So that was the Heumarkt part of the market. And if you walk just a couple of minutes towards the Old Town, towards the cathedral, you'll find the second part of this market, which is in the Alter Markt Square or Plaza.





So this part of the market was just as interesting as the other one. I remember seeing the Ferris wheel, so colorful, lights everywhere. I remember the handicraft area. There was a booth with blacksmiths there, right? Yeah, And they were customizing things. I think they were maybe horseshoes? Yeah, they were making these horseshoes that you could have your name engraved on it or...a saying or something and that was pretty popular. Yeah and everywhere you went there were chandeliers, were lights, there were little gnomes perched everywhere, carvings on tree trunks, you name it. This was just a beautiful market. Yeah that one was really awesome. I remember there we ate a couple of things at that market. I had freshly made potato pancakes which were good and you had they're called Schupfnudeln I just find that German word so hard to pronounce....but they were dumplings, like potato dumplings, I think. They were really good. Yeah, I enjoyed those. Yeah. And it was mixed with sauerkraut and had sour cream on top and some greens. If you go to the show notes, you'll see pictures of this. I think you liked it a little bit better than me because I do not like sauerkraut at all, but I think you like this one. Yeah, I do. I'm a fan of sauerkraut. But there were so many different things to eat there. The booth that was right behind where we got the Schupfnudeln they had all these different kinds of meat on a stick. I remember that was also very popular I'll say lots of people going there, but if you're a vegetarian, don't worry actually the booth where we got the the dumplings They were vegetarian But there's a lot of a lot of food options for vegetarians vegan gluten-free I mean meat eaters all sorts of things. Yeah, and this is just a very picturesque photogenic sort of

Christmas market, really quintessential Christmas market. By the time we got our food, we were getting kind of tired and the sun was setting, the lights were coming on and I remember we went over to this fountain that they kind of closed down for the winter but it's right in the middle of this square and we sat there and we ate our food and we just enjoyed it just took in the whole atmosphere of the market and you know it was right in this square with these tall maybe three or four or five story buildings around us right in the old town. And it was just absolutely magical. Yeah, everything



lit up. The building's very colorful. I think it was right at dusk. It was just a perfect time and perfect location to sit and hang out. And I remember we just have this moment where we were just enjoying everything and we just were like, we can't believe that we get to do this as a job. We get to go to all these amazing places, do this travel research and then help you have the most amazing experience in Germany. And we feel so lucky that we get to do this

So the Heumarkt part of this market is open from about November 24th to about January 4th. So this one is actually open later past Christmas. A lot of Christmas markets close on the 20th, December 23rd or 24th. This one is open through January and it's open from about 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. depending on the day and the Alta Markt part of the market is open from about November 24th to December 23rd from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. but always be sure to check the official website to get the current dates and opening times for the year that you're going to be there.

Let's wrap up with a few Cologne Christmas market tips.

So we'd suggest going during the day and in the evening. If you go during the day, it's going to be a lot less crowded. It's great for shopping. It's just a different vibe. You can get different photos. And at night, it's really just magical. Comes to life with all the lights and the people, the food and the smells and the sights. It's just a really neat time also.

I absolutely agree. And the markets in Cologne get really, really busy and very crowded, especially on weekends. So another tip is to go early in the day if you want to go when it's not as crowded, go on a weekday. And if you really don't like crowds, don't go in the evenings and on the weekends. Also, we recommend having cash on hand. A lot of places take cards, but not all of them. So it's good to have some euros as well. And there is a little train called the Bimmelbahn.



and it does go around to different markets so you can check that out if you don't want to walk from market to choose fewer markets to go to, but really take the time to slow down and enjoy them. Don't feel like you have to rush to consume as many markets as you possibly can. Really the purpose of the markets is to go with friends and family to slow down and just revel in the season and really enjoy it and relax.

Yeah, there's a lot to take in and they're just beautiful places and the more you look, the more you notice. And one last thing, if you're thinking of, and one last thing, all of the markets we went to in Cologne were blocked off. They had security, they had a lot of security measures and so we felt very, very safe at all of the markets.

As you can tell, we really enjoyed the Cologne Christmas markets. I think they're definitely up there with some of our favorite markets in Germany.

If you're looking for more resources on Christmas markets, you can go to our website, [mygermanyvacation.com](http://mygermanyvacation.com). We do have some articles all about celebrating Christmas in Germany and traditions and food, and then also Christmas markets. And if you would like us to do more episodes like this on different Christmas markets in Germany, definitely let us know.

Well, we hope you found this episode helpful, and until next time, happy travel planning. Bye for now.

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that make planning your Germany trip easier and stress-free, including free travel guides, our step-by-step DIY Germany travel planner, and personalized services like custom itineraries, one-on-one trip planning consults, and itinerary reviews to ensure that you make the most of your time and enjoy the best of Germany. Until next week, happy travel planning!