



Germany Travel Planning Podcast

Ep 28 – Don't Make These Christmas Market Mistakes!

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If you want to experience the magic of Christmas markets, Germany is hands down the best place to go. But there are some things you need to know ahead of time so you don't make some very common mistakes. These are things many travelers don't realize until it's too late.

Welcome to the Germany Travel Planning Podcast, the show that helps you plan a super fun trip to Germany and surrounding countries. My name is Cate and I'm your Germany destination expert. I'm here to help you plan the trip of a lifetime including how to make the most of the magical holiday season and the awesome German Christmas markets.

Today I'm sharing seven common Christmas market mistakes and how to avoid them so you can enjoy everything German Christmas markets have to offer. Let's dive in.

Mistake number one is assuming all Christmas markets run through Christmas. One of the biggest surprises for first time visitors is that most Christmas markets close before Christmas day or even Christmas Eve and sometimes even the day before. If you show up in Germany on December 24th expecting peak Christmas market magic, you're going to be disappointed because they will be closed or they will be in the process of closing.

Most markets start in late November and wrap up by December 23rd or possibly the 24th. Some do end sooner, some are only open on the weekends, and some are



actually only open for specific dates during the season. So it's very important to check each market's opening dates. A few do stay open through New Year's, but they are the exception.

There's a couple in Berlin and there's one in Cologne and I think there's a few others in Germany. But like I said, they're definitely the exception, not the rule. So if visiting Christmas markets is your priority, definitely plan to arrive before December 23rd. And I highly recommend looking up the exact dates for the markets you want to visit.

If you have our DIY Germany Travel Planner, we make this super easy for you. Just go to step one and open our new German Christmas market planning guide. Then go to our custom created and curated map to see our top Christmas market recommendations, information, tips, photos, and links to each market. That way you can easily determine which markets you most want to visit, and then you can check to see when each market opens and closes.

Mistake number two is only visiting the big famous markets. Now I'm not saying you shouldn't visit the big famous markets. But what I do recommend is not only visiting the big famous markets. And by big famous markets, I'm talking about like the ones in Nuremberg Old Town or Munich Old Town. There are thousands of Christmas markets in Germany and some are big and famous and very crowded, but many of them are actually smaller local markets, just neighborhood markets, or they have a specific theme or they're in a specific setting.

And that makes them a little bit more unique and interesting. I've been to hundreds of markets over the years, all over Germany. And Aaron and I actually spent four weeks last year crisscrossing Germany just so we could do Christmas market research for our new Christmas market planning guide and map. And we're actually doing the same thing this year. Because our goal is to make it really easy for you to plan the best Christmas market possible.



And so we go back to as many markets as we possibly can. And we really look at what makes this market unique and how does it stand out from other ones? And what are the really, really good themed markets or the local markets or the, you know, what are like the really special markets?

Now, while I can find something to enjoy in any market, I mean, seriously, drop me off at any Christmas market in Germany and I will find something to love about it. I do, however, really, really, really like the small markets. And I love just the local neighborhood markets. And the themed markets can be really fun too. And I really like these for a couple of reasons.

One is that they just have like this charm, you know local charm or, you know, and the themed ones can be really fun. They're usually less crowded. And, you know, it just kind of reminds me of what it was like to go to the markets back in the day before they became super popular because the Christmas markets have become so, so popular.

So because these markets have become really popular, the big ones like Nürnberg Old Town, the one in Munich Old Town, actually there's a whole bunch of them in Munich. I'm thinking of the one that's like right in Marienplatz. They're often very crowded and especially in the evenings, on weekends as it gets closer to Christmas.

And actually, you know, the first time I went to the Nürnberg Christmas Market was actually back in the 90s. And it was super crowded even back then. I went on a Saturday, which was not a good decision, but I went on a Saturday afternoon and it was so packed. I mean, we were walking through like one lane and it was shoulder to shoulder, just barely taking little tiny steps. I'm not that tall, so I actually couldn't see anything. I couldn't get to any of the stalls. We couldn't buy any food.

I think we actually only spent like 10 minutes at the market and then we just left because it was not fun. And for years, I had a really bad impression of that market.



And so I didn't go back until just a couple of years ago because we wanted to, you know, we were doing Christmas market research and we thought, well, let's go back and check it out. Because I had not a great experience the first time, we made sure to go to the market when it first opened. So we were there at like 11 in the morning.

And it was great. I mean, there's hardly anyone there for the first hour. And so I finally got to go through and actually see the market. So that's something to really take into consideration that the big markets, you know, there are some good things to them. You know, the upside is that they're easy to find. They're right in the city center. They've got all the typical Christmas market things. And if you've never been to the Christmas markets before, they're going to seem beautiful and magical and you will enjoy them.

But the downside is that they can get really crowded and they can just kind of start to feel the same as you go to a lot of them. You can kind of feel like, okay, this feels kind of touristy. And sometimes, you know, they can have a lot of like mass produced items. So if you've already been to some Christmas markets before, or if you don't like crowds, or if you're just looking for something different, I highly recommend looking for those smaller markets, the neighborhood markets or the themed markets.

Ideally, I highly recommend planning your trip so that you're visiting a variety of markets because having contrasting types of markets really makes for a more memorable experience. Because if you're visiting a lot of them in a short period of time, they really can all start to run together and you kind of feel like, we're just visiting the same thing, right? And we don't want to lose the magic of the Christmas markets.

So because there's something like 3,000 markets in Germany, it can be hard to find those hidden gem markets, the local ones, the themed ones, ones that are neighborhood, and you just kind of get that great feel of the market. And if you go to



a big city like Munich or Berlin, there are so many markets just in that city, and they're spread out all across the city. That's why on our Christmas market planning map,

We've narrowed it down to about 90 of the best markets that you'll want to actually travel to. I mean, there's markets in every single town. So no matter where you are in Germany, you'll come across a market. But there are some markets that are really worth traveling to or some areas that really are worth traveling to. But oftentimes, like I said, people just go to the big famous market that's right in the center of the town and they miss out on all the best markets that are a little bit further out.

So that's why on our planning map, we've narrowed it down to about 90 of the best markets and in all the different places around Germany that people generally want to go. And that way it's a lot easier for you to take a look at what we have on our map. You can see where they're located. You can see where the big popular markets are, and then also the smaller markets. And you can take a look at our photos and our information and our tips. And that will help you find the big markets and then the smaller ones and the themed ones that you most want to visit. So you get that really nice contrast and variety.

Mistake number three is not being ready for the weather. Christmas markets are outdoors and there's often minimal cover and very few places to sit. So you're going to be doing a lot of walking and a lot of standing at the markets. Now it is not nearly as cold in Germany as it used to be. But I do recommend being prepared for all kinds of weather. So that means being prepared for anything from warm sunny days to rain, to snow, to slush, to freezing temperatures after the sun has set.

The best thing to do is to pack layers so that you can easily adjust to the temperature. And this is especially important if you're gonna be out during the day and then you're also staying after dark because it does get colder at night.



Layers are also a really good idea if you plan to spend time both outdoors and indoors, because it can get very warm when you go inside to a store or a museum or a palace or a restaurant. And I have made that mistake before where I dress for the outdoors and then I go inside and I, for some reason, can't take off something that I'm wearing and that I'm just roasting because it can be really really hot and kind of you know sometimes kind of steamy inside but there's you there's a lot of people.

I do like to bring a hat mittens and a scarf and you know during the day I may or may not wear the hat I usually wear the scarf every day and the mittens sometimes I'll wear them but I do like to bring them because you know sometimes during the day it will get cold and then if I am staying after dark that's when I definitely put them on because it does often get colder at night.

The right footwear is also important because if you wear the wrong footwear, it can ruin your trip. You're going to be walking and standing on cobblestones all day and it could rain or it could snow. There could be slush. You never know. Aaron and I always bring a pair of waterproof walking shoes. Like lately we've been wearing Nikes, on Clouds and Aaron just recently got a pair of Hoka's. I haven't tried them yet, but he just got a new pair of Hoka's. So we're going to, he's going to try those out.

So we like to get the waterproof kind. And I also like to bring a pair of waterproof boots just to change things up a bit. Sometimes you just want to wear normal shoes and not wear Nikes. So I like to bring two pairs of shoes. And Aaron usually just brings one pair of shoes. Now you don't necessarily need to go out and buy new shoes. But look to see what you have that's warm, waterproof, comfortable, and something that's going to be supportive as you're standing and walking.

And oftentimes I find the standing is actually harder on my feet than the walking. So check out the show notes for links to our packing lists. You can see the things that we recommend packing. And honestly, there's a lot of travel gear out there that you really don't need. And we often just talk about the same things to pack over and over



and over because we've tried a lot of different things. And like I said, there's just a lot of stuff that's being promoted and being sold that you don't need. So take a look at our list and you can see the things that we genuinely use ourselves and have used for years and that we recommend so that you can see if it'll work for your trip.

Mistake number four is trying to visit all of the markets in just one trip. I know, I know, I know, it's so tempting to try to fit in as many markets as possible. But Germany is a lot bigger than most people realize. Some towns are better connected than others.

Winter travel can slow things down and cramming in more markets does not make for a better trip. Trust me on that one. So there's two things here that are important. The first one is choosing markets that you're most interested in. Because like at the same time, the markets are very similar. You're going to see a lot of overlap at the markets. You're gonna see some similar stalls and food and decorations.

But on the other hand, there are some markets that are a little bit more unique and there is a way that you can add variety to your trip. The worst thing that you could do is not research this ahead of time and to just go to a bazillion cities and just try to cram in as many markets as you can and just do the ones that are in the old town. Because after a couple of days, everything will blur together.

You'll walk to another Christmas market in a new city and you're going to be like, this looks exactly like the market I just went to. You probably will only see the stalls with the cheap mass produced knickknacks and you know, things like that that really aren't that interesting. And you won't really get the feel of the Christmas markets because the Christmas markets are not just about the food. It's not just about the things you can buy. It's not just about the Christmas market mugs.

It's not just about collecting all of the Christmas market mugs. And it's not just about seeing a whole lot of them. It's a feeling. It really is a feeling. When I think of the Christmas markets, I get a feeling. And that feeling comes from not having visited a



whole lot of them. It comes from the time that I've spent enjoying the markets and really experiencing the markets.

So that's the second thing. I mentioned there are two things. That's the second thing. You want to experience the markets. You don't want to just consume them. So like I said, do research ahead of time so that you can narrow down the places you want to go to in Germany that have the markets you want to see. And then once you've narrowed that down, you can really zoom in on, which of the markets do we want to see in this area? And how can we have contrast? How can we have variety?

And two other tips, one is to visit the markets during the day and at night. Sometimes this is not possible. You may only be able to visit a market during the day or you may only be able to visit one at night. But if you can, I highly recommend go during the day, go do some other stuff and then come back and visit that market at night. During the day, especially if you go right when it opens, that's a really good time to be able to see the things at the stalls. It's usually not as crowded. It's really great if you want to shop. But go back in the evening because that's when the vibe totally changes. The lights come on. People are just hanging out. When I lived in Germany, that's where we'd meet up. We would go have Glühwein or we would just go there to hang out and stand around and connect with friends and just enjoy the season.

So the vibe really changes in the evening and you really want to experience that. Now there's some markets like I went out to the Ludwigsburg market, which is north of Stuttgart and I had heard that one was really great. So a few years ago I was in Stuttgart and I went out to Ludwigsburg and you know, I walked around during the day and I was like, okay, it's fine. It's kind of pretty, you know, all right. And I almost left, but I decided to stay until dusk.

And as the sun set, the lights started coming on and I was just in awe. It was such a beautiful market. I absolutely love it. It's now one of my favorites. But the thing is that I wouldn't have liked it if I'd only gone during the day. I really had to stay until the lights



came on. So when we went back last year, I took Aaron out to that market and we arrived during the day because we wanted to get photos and see it during the daylight. But then we stayed.

And as the sun went down and all these lights came on and then you got to see the buildings and it's between, you the market is between these two beautiful churches. And it was just so amazing. And just the whole vibe changed. So if you can definitely experience the markets during the day and then come back in the evening so you can really feel that vibe and slow down. I cannot stress enough. Visit fewer markets and slow down and take time to have something to eat, to stand around a table with some Glühwein, and just connect with the people that you're with.

Okay, so like I said, two top tips, visit during the day and at night, and slow down so you can really enjoy the markets. Don't just consume the markets.

Mistake number five is not booking hotels in advance. This is so important now because Christmas markets are super popular and it can be really difficult to find a hotel, especially if you want to stay in the old town near the markets and especially if you're going to the places that are super popular. So we recommend booking your hotels in advance. If you can't book in advance and you can't find a place to stay near the markets in the old town, look outside the old town. Last year when we went back to Nuremberg, we couldn't find anything that was decent and affordable anywhere near the Christmas market. Even the hotel that we really liked staying in, they were totally booked up. So we decided to stay in a suburb called Fürth, and it's just a little outside the old town. It actually wasn't very far. We were able to take a local train or local public transit to get out there. And the hotel was totally fine. The area was nothing super special because we just wanted to be close to public transit.

But the hotel was comfortable and it was absolutely no problem to get into Old Town. It was quick and easy. And actually we saved some money because the hotel was



very comfortable but it was a lot less than if we had stayed right in the Old Town. And as a bonus, we went out one morning and just explored a little bit of Fürth, which we hadn't been to, and they had a really great little Christmas market. It was one of those that was just super local, I don't think we ran into anybody who wasn't German at this market. And even better, they had like a little kid Christmas market, they had a little traditional market, and then they had a medieval market. So staying outside of the city center, especially if you're going to the really popular places, can actually help you find some of those really interesting local markets.

We wanted to make it easy for you to find a hotel for your Christmas market trip. So we actually added hotels to our Christmas market planning map. So that way you can see the markets that we recommend and you can see the hotels we recommend and you can decide which markets you wanna go to and which hotels will be in the right location for the markets that you want to go to.

Okay, mistake number six is skipping the food or not knowing what to try. One of the best parts of the Christmas market is the food. But with so many options and a lot of unfamiliar names, it's really easy to either miss something amazing or just stick to the same thing every day. Our Christmas market planning guide actually has a PDF download and it's a checklist of food that we recommend looking for and sampling.

So you can either download it and kind of use it as a scavenger hunt and see how many different things on that list you can find, or you can print it out, take it with you, and then you can check things off as you go through the markets so you can, you keep track of things that you've tried. And also take pictures of the things that you eat at the market because that way you can remember what you ate at each market. That will help you remember the markets too, because like I said, they can all blur together.

I often remember which market we were at based on what we ate. So like I said, there are so many different things you can eat at the markets and some things are



regional. But I wanted to give you a couple of our favorites just to kind of get you started. One thing I like to eat is called Kartoffelpuffer. These are those crispy potato pancakes and they're served either with garlic sauce or apple sauce. I really like the garlic sauce.

The next thing is Bratwurst. You can find this at pretty much any market. And I really love it with mustard on top, but you can also put ketchup on it. This is a budget friendly option and it's super delicious. And depending on where you are in Germany, different towns have their own type of Bratwurst. I also really, really like the sauteed mushrooms with garlic sauce. And that's also a really good vegetarian option. But I haven't seen them quite as often lately. I used to eat them all the time, like way back in the day, but every once in a while you'll find them and they make it in these huge skillets. But if you like mushrooms, look for the sauteed mushrooms with the garlic sauce.

Liebkuchen is another Christmas market favorite and a Christmas market staple. And this is a soft gingerbread, usually it's just round and it's often glazed or covered in chocolate. And it's a softer gingerbread than what you'd find in the US. And it's so good. Gebrannte Mandeln are roasted almonds and they're in like a crunchy cinnamon sugar coating. Again, another Christmas market favorite, another staple, you'll find those everywhere. And you can actually find the same type of thing, but with different nuts. Like you can find the cinnamon sugar roasted pecans and cashews and all sorts of things. I like the almonds the best.

Nutella crepes, that's another one of my favorites. It's very simple, but I have one of those once a year. It's so, good. And you can find lots and lots of different kinds of crepes. I just really love the Nutella crepes.

Two drinks that we have when we go to Christmas markets. One is called Feuerzangenbowle. And look at the show notes for a photo of this. This is a drink that is served to you on fire.



So take a look at the photos and you'll see what I mean. And then of course, last but not least, Glühwein, the hot mulled wine. And lately we've been seeing lots of different kinds of Glühwein, like maybe made with local berries or other flavors. There is non-alcoholic Glühwein. It's basically like, you know, mulled cider or mulled juice or something. And you can get hot chocolate and lots of different kinds of drinks.

And if you like Glühwein, I highly recommend going to Munich and going out to the little Christmas market that is out in the suburbs. They have basically like a Glühwein festival and I think they have like 30 or 35 different kinds of Glühwein. It's a really small market and it's really mostly about going into the tents and enjoying some Glühwein. We really enjoyed it. We went out there, spent a couple of hours out there one evening and tried a couple different kinds of Glühwein.

It was really fun. Okay, I could go on and on and on and on about the food, but one tip when it comes to food, if you see something that you want to try, get it right then and try it. You are not guaranteed to see it again. You may or you may not. Some things are just local and I made this mistake last year. There was something, I can't remember what it was now, but there was something that I wanted to try but I didn't and I thought I'll get it at the next market. And then I thought, you know, that was probably a local specialty and I probably won't find it again. And I was right, I did not find it again. So it's a huge bummer if you really wanna try something and then you don't and you miss your chance to try it.

And finally, mistake number seven, only visiting Christmas markets on your trip. The Christmas markets are magical, they are awesome, but they are not the only reason to visit Germany in December.

And if you visit too many markets, it can get old. You kind of lose their magic. So to avoid Christmas market fatigue, definitely work in other sites like a castle, a museum, maybe go to a thermal bath or go on a winter hike or go on a tour, visit some cozy



cafes and restaurants. All of these things will add depth to your trip and they'll give you a break from the Christmas market crowds. And there you have it.

Seven Christmas market mistakes you definitely want to avoid so you can enjoy the magic of this beautiful season. And if you already have our DIY Germany Travel Planner, definitely check out our new German Christmas market planning guide and map so you can plan your own unforgettable Christmas market trip.

Before you go, two quick things. First, if you found our podcast helpful, please leave a five-star rating and even better, a review. That helps more travelers find our podcast and that means we can keep creating episodes to help you plan an unforgettable trip to Germany and surrounding countries.

And second, if you're just starting to plan your trip and you want to enjoy the best of Germany while also skipping those rookie mistakes most travelers unknowingly make, you'll love our best-selling DIY Germany Travel Planner. Think of it as your travel savvy best friend who's handing you everything you need to know to plan your perfect trip.

And if you'd like personalized support, upgrade to a one-on-one consult, itinerary review, or even a complete custom itinerary and travel plan. You'll find everything on mygermanyvacation.com. Thanks so much for listening to the Germany Travel Planning Podcast, and until next week, happy travel planning.