

GERMAN CHRISTMAS FANTASY

Day 1 (Sunday): Frankfurt – Heidelberg – Triber/Black Forest (D)

Depart from Frankfurt in the morning and drive to Heidelberg for a walking tour of the oldest German university town, located at the river Neckar and dominated by the impressive castle, UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our next stop is one of the most prestigious and famous Spa resorts worldwide, Baden-Baden. Enjoy a visit of the charming Christmas market before we enter the Black Forest, a region known not only for its delicious cake and the wooden cuckoo clocks but also for its spectacular landscapes. In the evening, our welcome dinner will be served at the hotel. Overnight at Best Western Schwarzwald Residenz or similar.

Day 2 (Monday): Triberg/Black Forest – Lake Constance – Hohenschwangau - Füssen (B)

In the early morning, we are heading to the region Allgaeu passing wonderful Lake Constance. During the journey we will do several breaks, one of them at a real architectural treasure: the Basilica of Birnau with lake view. You will already see the fantastic Bavarian Alps before we arrive at Hohenschwangau. On the rugged hill above, the breathtaking fairytale castle of King Ludwig II, Neuschwanstein! After the guided tour we check-in at our hotel in nearby Fuessen. Overnight at Luitpoldpark-Hotel o.s.

Day 3 (Tuesday): Füssen – Oberammergau – Ettal – Munich (B)

After the breakfast we will take you to Oberammergau. The village is internationally famous for its Passion Play – generally performed every ten years – and for its numerous buildings with tromp l'oeil (Lueftmalerei) painted façades. On the further way to our today's destination, the Bavarian capital, Munich, we will make short stops at the glorious rococo church in Wies and at the Benedictine abbey of Ettal. In Munich we will show you all the main sights of the splendid city and finally we discover the romantic Christmas market. Free time to explore the numerous stalls with handcrafted Christmas gifts or local specialities. Taste the hot spiced wine called Gluehwein. Overnight at Hotel Rivoli o.s.

Day 4 (Wednesday): Munich – Salzburg – Munich (B)

Today enjoy our full day excursion to the native city of the world famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Salzburg in Austria. While walking through the Old Town you will see its highlights such as Mozart's birthplace, Getreidegasse and the cathedral. You will have enough time to spend on your own, just strolling around, visiting the lovely Christmas market and, of course, you should not miss the opportunity to taste the famous sweets made in Salzburg, Mozartkugeln. In the late afternoon we return to Munich. Overnight at Hotel Rivoli o.s.

Day 5 (Thursday): Munich – Rothenburg ob der Tauber – Nuremberg (B)

After our breakfast and the check-out we head to Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany's well-preserved 'Jewel of the Middle Ages'. During a city walk, including a visit of St. Jacob's Church with the Holy Blood Altar by Tilman Riemenschneider, you will experience the special flair of this unique town. Enjoy the Christmas market or even step inside the incredible Christmas Store before we continue to Franconia's biggest city, Nuremberg. You might have heard about the local sausages called 'Nuernberger' or the Christmas speciality of Lebkuchen, gingerbread. Overnight at Leonardo Hotel o.s.

Day 6 (Friday): Nuremberg (B/ D)

Today we will see the 'Christkindlesmarkt' – probably the most famous Christmas market of the world – and all the main sights of the historic city like the former home of the artist Albrecht Durer. At the end of our tour, join a visit of the medieval Kaiserburg Castle before the rest of the day is free for shopping or other activities. In the evening we will meet again for a nice Christmas dinner at one of the typical restaurants. Overnight at Leonardo Hotel o.s.

Day 7 (Saturday): Nuremberg – Würzburg – Frankfurt (B)

This morning we leave for Wuerzburg, on the banks of the river Main. Enjoy a guided tour of the magnificent Residence, a masterpiece of baroque architecture and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Together, let us celebrate a small good-bye at the last Christmas market of our tour before we return to Germany's financial capital, Frankfurt. Arrival in the afternoon.

Day 8 (Sunday/Wednesday):**Frankfurt – Eisenach – Weimar – Leipzig (D)**

Depart from Frankfurt in the morning and drive eastward to Eisenach, dominated by the Wartburg Castle. Visit one of the most important buildings of German history and see the room where Martin Luther in only eleven weeks translated the New Testament. Three hundred years before, St. Elizabeth of Thuringia spent almost all her life at the Wartburg. Afterwards, we continue to a cultural treasure, Weimar, where numerous famous persons like Goethe, Schiller, Liszt and Richard Strauss lived and worked. Afterwards we head to our today's destination, Leipzig, check-in at our hotel and visit one of Germany's largest Christmas markets. The main attraction is located on the historical market square in front of the ancient town hall, a 25yard Christmas tree with thousands of lights. Stroll along the stalls with handcrafted Christmas gifts from the region. We invite you to an informal but very typical German snack with Bratwurst and the hot spiced wine called Gluehwein. Overnight at Ramada City Centre or similar.

Day 9 (Monday/Thursday):Leipzig – Meissen – Dresden (B)

After the breakfast we continue towards Meissen where we will visit one of Germany's oldest porcelain manufactories. Founded in the 18th century and being continuously in operation since then, the delicate and always handcrafted products are found in royal courts and celebrities homes all around the world. See the exhibition hall and the demonstration workshops where all steps of the painting and glazing process are explained to you. Afterwards, we go on to Dresden, the capital of the Free State of Saxony. On a city tour you will get to know one of the loveliest cities of central Europe. Due to its general mild climate, the baroque architecture and the renowned museums, Dresden is also called 'Florence of the Elbe'. See the main sights such as the Semper Opera House, the baroque Zwinger and, overall, the restored Frauenkirche. Nowadays, it is hard to believe that after the bombing in 1945 the city centre was completely destroyed. After our tour we check-in at our hotel. In the evening we will visit the Christmas market called 'Striezelmarkt' – named after the local cake 'Striezel'. Highlights are the big Christmas pyramid and the numerous stalls where you can taste the Striezel. Overnight at Park Inn o.s.

Day 10 (Tuesday/Friday): Dresden – Annaberg – Schneeberg – Plauen (B/ D)

Today we are heading mostly along country roads, via Seiffen, a centre of the wooden toy industry, to two ancient miner-villages, Schneeberg and Annaberg. These towns are typical for the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) and actually home of the German tradition of woodcarving and Christmas pyramids. In former times, light – represented by candles – was an important symbol of life and safety for the miners, working in the dark tunnels. The woodcarvers combined their deep religious beliefs and used candles to illuminate the pyramids, decorated with saints and symbols of the holy night. The Christmas market in Annaberg is dating back to 1510. Schneeberg hosts St. Wolfgang's Church with an altar from 1539, carved by Lucas Cranach the Elder. In the afternoon we continue towards Plauen, famous for its handcrafted lace. Plauen was founded in 1122 and since the 16th century has been an important place for cotton manufacturing. Our farewell dinner will be served at our hotel. Overnight at Hotel Alexandra o.s.

Day 11 (Wednesday/Saturday): Plauen – Bamberg – Frankfurt (B)

This morning we are travelling through the Franconian forest to the imperial city of Bamberg. Founded in the 9th century, it has a nicely preserved Old Town which was declared UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will see the cathedral and the former Benedictine abbey of Michaelsberg before, unfortunately, it is time for the last impressions of German Christmas markets. You will have sufficient time to do some last-minute shopping before we start our journey through the rolling hills of Franconia back to Frankfurt, our final destination which we will reach in the late afternoon.