

THE ALSACE REGION OF FRANCE OFFERS MARKETS IN NUMEROUS PICTURESQUE LOCATIONS WITH THE ADDED BONUS OF VISITING BASEL IN NEIGHBOURING SWITZERLAND AND SALZBURG IN GERMANY

Christmas markets of the Alsace Region

Their magical and fairytale charm



Colmar

The relatively short car journey on our first morning had taken us along dirt tracks through arable flat fields. On either side turnips were heaped under white tarpaulins. The avenues of trees were laden with

picturesque bright white hoare frost which eventually gave way to the fast 'A' roads.

As we entered Colmar there was a moment when things turned topsy turvy as the statue of liberty



appeared! The New York version being a gift from the people of France and made here in Colmar. Hence the replica. Throughout the Christmas markets of Europe one constant remains the same - the mulled wine. Delicious, aromatic and here in Colmar a large glass was a reasonable price and an added attraction You can get refills from any stalls offering the same enticing warming 'nectar'

And with an unusual Arctic blast bringing temperatures down to minus 5 - even more enticing

To escape the cold we also visited many of the shops which flanked the market stalls and we soon had plenty of bags to carry. Apart from the mulled wine I must say that I find the Christmas markets across Europe evoke their own unique vibe. Colmar is no exception as it is influenced by its proximity to so many borders.

The architecture and buildings are Germanic and fairy tale and cocoon the market stalls. Handicrafts reflect the folk art of Germany, Bavaria, Switzerland and the Nordic countries with their hearts, reindeers and Trolls. The language is French with plenty of freshly baked croissants and there are plenty of chocolates and cheeses including the regions

ALSACE BABA
CHOCOLATE TREATS
ARCHITECTURE
CHRISTMAS MARKET STALL

own Munster cheese. Add to that the delights of the local delicacies which are very moorish and include their own version of rum baba which we had for dessert on our first night.

Strasbourg

Today we visited Strasbourg. Famous for its teddy bear decorations on its half timbered buildings The prettiest of streets here were fully decked with glittering light strands, greenery on doorways and teddy bears, polar bears, penguins, nut-crackers, and glittering stars above the shops.

We began our trip with an hour and a half boat ride on the river. It was covered and heated but the rain did not make for the best viewing or the best photography. The commentary however on the history of the city was very interesting and highlighted its association with both France and Germany

Here the Christmas markets were enticing but the snow was compacted beneath our feet and icy. Flurries of soft snow and low light meant that the illuminations and lights on the stalls twinkled brightly and made an impact even though it was day time. I took refuge for some of the time in a cafe and stayed warm with hot chocolate and a large bag of roasted chestnuts while others took a closer look at the stalls. The large carousel at its





STRASBOURG DECORATIONS

THE COSY SETTING FOR LUNCH

HUMAN STATUE

THE CATHEDRAL IN THE MIST

STREET DECORATIONS

centre was very magical and enticing and added an extra charm with its music, bright lights and choice of horses and carriages.

The main market was by the cathedral and we found a great atmospheric old tavern for lunch. It had great stain glass windows, colourful folksy throws over the seats and low ceilings with old beams. Thick heavy red curtains around the entrance meant that we were warm and toastie even when the door was open. The food was delicious



2 VIEWS OF RIBEAUVILLE

Ribeauville

It had snowed heavily over night and the temperature remained well below zero. As always the track through the fields to the main road was barely visible

Our intension today had been to visit the picturesque villages around Cormar and their Christmas markets but our departure from the main highway to Ribeauville, which was our first stop, made us think twice. The village was very picturesque and the streets had been cleared but we did not venture from the car except to pay a visit to a winery. Instead we soaked up the atmosphere as we drove around and viewed the snow laden manicured vines as they stood starkly against the white snow. Ribeauville has a medieval market on just one weekend but if it coincides with your visit to the region it is well worth a visit.

Our intention had been to visit Koenigsbourg castle but it was shrouded in mist, and the road was still icy, so we set oursatnav destination as Basel

Basel

The Swiss capital was less snowy, but temperatures were still well below zero as all of the region was caught in the same icy blast from the north. There were two main Christmas markets. Both more generic than those we had previously visited. One was by the cathedral which had an astronomical clock and a great patterned roof. We took a look inside and admired its stain glass. I was particularly drawn to the stall selling cookie moulds

The second market had a Christmas pyramid called a



CHRISTMAS MARKETS AT THE CATHEDRAL

FONDU HOT DOGS



Weihnachts pyramide with a log cabin at its base Here we revelled in the warmth and sampled more mulled wine which was delicious and served in dark blue souvenir mugs. Here you could get fondue hot dogs and a wide selection of gifts to satisfy everyone

INTERIOR OF CATHEDRAL
MAKING COOKIE CUTTERS
CATHEDRAL CHRISTMAS MARKET
WEIHNACHTS PYRAMIDE
STALL HOLDER DRESSED TO IMPRESS

Eguisheim

By late afternoon we took the main highway again and as darkness began to fall we reached Eguisheim. This was one village we did not want to miss and it did not disappoint. It was magical and full of gifts and local produce. The twinkling lights enhanced the charm of its timbered buildings and it is easily understandable why it has been awarded the title of the prettiest village in France.

Amongst our purchases were wine, sausage and the regions bakery specialities. These included kugelhopf, a sweet brioche-type cake, often made with dried fruits and almonds, and baked in a special round fluted pan and topped with powdered sugar on top and often eaten with sweet sauces and cream.



SIDE STREET MARKET MAIN SQUARE HIGH STREET

TEDDY DECORATIONS TYPICAL ARCHITECTURE
MARKET STALL KUGELHOPF

