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The best WINTER MARKETS

*(and some you might not
have thought about)*



Prima's travel expert, Jane Anderson, takes us on a tour of her favourite festive markets – with some unexpected destinations along the way →



Festive travel

The illuminated Deutscher Dom behind the beautiful Christmas Market on the Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin



UK & IRELAND



Go coastal in Cornwall

Come winter, Cornwall's creative, artisanal streak overflows in its festive markets. Accommodation is often less than half price, too. The Padstow Christmas Fayre (padstowchristmasfayre.co.uk) runs from 4 to 7 December, with appearances from chefs Rick Stein and Paul Ainsworth. Stay at the Camel Estuary at 2 Quay Cottages in Rock (latitude50.co.uk/explore-our-properties/north-cornwall/rock/2-quay-cottages) a ferry ride away.

The Coastal Christmas Market at Carbis Bay (carbisbayhotel.co.uk/offers-and-breaks/coastal-christmas-market) is worth a look, on 6 to 7 and 13 to 14 December, with over 40 stalls daily. The market raises funds for Cornwall Air Ambulance and holds a fantastic daily raffle and a woodland-themed Santa's grotto.

Truro also runs a Christmas Market (visitruro.org.uk) from 21 November to 24 December, and the Eden Project hosts the Cornwall Christmas Fair (cornwallchristmasfair.com) on 19 and 20 November, including dazzling light displays.

BEST GIFTS: A signed copy of *Rick Stein's Christmas*, locally made Atlantic Blankets, Persian Love Cake from female-owned deli Sabzi in Padstow.



Enter a Welsh wonderland

Wales will get you in the festive mood. Cardiff Christmas Market (cardiffchristmasmarket.com), from 13 November to 23 December, features stalls with goods from a rotating roster of local artisans – so there's always something fresh to browse. Cardiff's Winter Wonderland (cardiffwinterwonderland.com) has ice skating, a ski lodge and festive rides. Set against the castle backdrop, Caerphilly Winter Fair (visitaerphilly.com/en/caerphilly-winter-fair-2025) on 29 November features a lantern parade, street theatre and fireworks. The next day, Ruthin Artisan Markets Christmas Extravaganza (artisanmarkets.wales) is full of community spirit. If you love an old-fashioned Noel, head to the Beaumaris Victorian Christmas (bvweekend.co.uk) in Anglesey from 30 November to 1 December, with costumed vendors and nostalgic gifts – there's even an elf school.

BEST GIFTS: Ceramics from makers such as Rachel Codd – we love her red Welsh dragons.



Enjoy ethical gifting in Ireland

Treat yourself to a trip to Ireland for the sheer warmth of a festive Irish welcome – plus there are plenty of wonderful Christmas markets to explore. Dublin Castle Christmas Market (dublin.ie/whats-on/listings/christmas-at-the-castle) runs from 28 November to 18 December, with traditional alpine stalls, many featuring decorative art. Smithfield Christmas Market (dublinwinterlights.ie) opens on 24 November, accompanied by an ice rink, ice museum and big wheel. For something more eco, the Botanic Gardens sustainable Christmas Craft Market (botanicgardens.ie) on the second weekend in December combines ethical gifting with botanics. Galway (christmasmarketgalway.com), Cork (christmasmarkets.io/ireland/cork-christmas-market), Sligo (sligo.ie) and Waterford (winterinterval.ie) all host Christmas markets, too.

BEST GIFTS: Spiced Irish coffee in Dublin and handcrafted baskets at the Botanic Gardens. When you're out and about in Dublin, pop into Stable of Ireland (stableofireland.com) for Irish linens and cottons – if you love gifting a good scarf, this is a goldmine.



Take a spin in Scotland

The Scottish capital pulls out all the stops when it comes to the festive season – with multiple events from 15 November to 4 January for Edinburgh's Christmas (edwinterfest.com/edinburgh-christmas). The East Princes Street Gardens Christmas Market has spectacular views of the castle and around 70 stalls featuring local and international producers. Take a spin on the LNER Big Wheel, Scotland's largest Ferris wheel. Then catch the Christmas fair at Blair Castle in Perthshire (exclusively

highlands.co.uk/events/blair-christmas-fair) on 21 to 23 November, where you'll find wood and metal work, textiles, art, locally designed jewellery, children's clothes and beautiful knitwear, along with vegan soaps and skincare, and a host of bee products. It's also worth visiting Cawdor Castle Christmas Market (cawdorcastle.com/whats-on/christmas-market) on 13 to 14 December, for a weekend of pretty market stalls, festive food, live music and Scottish merriment.

BEST GIFTS: Tartan cushions by Baigali Designs and pickles from Zingy Tingy Beetroot at Blair Castle fair. ➔

The traditional symbol of Christmas time – the iconic nutcracker



Lots of festive fun to be had



EUROPE



Festive cheer in Helsinki

Scandinavia is classic market territory – and the Finnish capital of Helsinki ticks all the boxes for festive cheer and great gift shopping. At its heart is the iconic Christmas market on Senate Square. This Nordic spectacle kicks off on 28 November when Santa Claus arrives on a historic tram to switch on the lights. Here, 140 colourful wooden huts are treasure troves for thoughtful gifts that slip easily into your hand luggage. Moomin mugs, sleek glassware, woollen socks and mittens pack neatly yet carry the spirit of Finnish design. And Fazer chocolates, Vihreät kuulat gummies and Marianne mints offer a sweet taste of Finland. Across the city, you'll also discover smaller neighbourhood markets selling Finnish handicrafts, local delicacies and one-off finds.

Fly with Finnair (finnair.com) to Helsinki from £167 return, including a small personal bag such as a rucksack or handbag.

Stay at Scandic Park Helsinki, from £70 per night for two, scandichotels.com.

BEST GIFTS: Marimekko designs – pretty Puolikas Kukkaro purses and cheery Oiva mugs. Elma B products made from local honey – beeswax balm, candles and soaps. Lumiyama candles and BellaMiina textiles.



Magical times in Germany and Poland

Solo travellers can soak up the festive spirit of Berlin in Germany and Poznań in Poland on a magical Christmas market tour with Solos Holidays, which includes a trip up the Berlin TV Tower for panoramic views, the icy creations of Poznań's International Ice Sculpture Festival and a visit to the Croissant Museum. You'll find handcrafted silver jewellery and plenty of leather gifts at Berlin's Charlottenburg Palace and Gendarmenmarkt markets. At Poznań's market, buy handpainted ceramics and locally made honey, jams and vodka.

A four-night Christmas markets tour, departing on 11 December 2025, on a full-board basis, costs from £1,399pp. This includes return flights (with 23kg checked baggage), transfers, airport taxes, a double room for solo use, breakfast daily, two dinners and guided tours, soloholidays.com.

BEST GIFTS: Peppermint liqueur Berliner Luft, Sawade chocolates, St. Martin's Croissants from the Croissant Museum, Pierniki (Polish gingerbread). Note, many stalls are cash only.



Sun and shopping in Malta

For a blast of winter sun alongside your festive shopping, you can't go wrong with Malta. Bringing a Mediterranean twist to Christmas markets, Valletta's Fairyland – Santa's City runs from 9 December to 7 January, transforming Pjazza Tritoni into a magical winter wonderland, with Rudolph's Ferris wheel, ice skating and an artisan market. Gozo, Malta's sister island, also hosts its own Christmas market, with local crafts, seasonal food and a much more intimate atmosphere.

Flight time is just under four hours with departures from 19 UK airports, including Liverpool, Norwich and Southend – avoiding the need for an overnight stay in London or long taxi rides.

Holiday Gems offers a seven-night Christmas package, including flights and accommodation, from £190pp, staying in the four-star Qawra Palace Resort & Spa with breakfast, holidaygems.co.uk.

BEST GIFTS: Handmade jewellery, pottery and ceramics, and festive ornaments with unique Maltese designs can all fit in your hand luggage.



Your best overseas market by train: Lille

The journey time from London St Pancras International to Lille (lilletourism.com) is just one hour and 22 minutes by direct high-speed train – less time than it takes to get to Bristol. And there's no weight limit on your luggage, so you can bring back as many presents as you like! It's more than doable in a day, as Lille is compact and walkable with around 90 stalls on Place Rihour, plus a giant tree and Ferris wheel. Make sure you treat yourself to moules-frites and home-made waffles. Day returns cost around £78 when booked in advance (eurostar.com). On your return, take advantage of the fancy shops at St Pancras International (stpancras-highspeed.com), including Fortnum & Mason for luxury hampers, Diptyque for candles and Hamleys for toys galore.

BEST GIFTS: Mini snow globes and handpainted ornaments, artisan chocolates and soaps. If you love vintage, book an extra trip for September 2026 for the city's annual Lille Braderie Flea Market.

