

10 Can't-Miss Christmas Market River Cruises

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Embrace time-honored traditions and explore medieval villages on a trip to remember.

Across Europe, from mid-November through Christmas Eve, cities large and small are transformed from everyday life into enchanting, fairy tale-like villages. Locals and tourists pour into hundreds of Christmas markets, lured by enticing aromas, holiday music, handmade gifts and beautiful decorations. Instead of driving across Europe, fending for hotel rooms and restaurant tables, relax on a weeklong [river cruise](#). You'll visit several countries and at least a dozen festive Christmas markets and only have to unpack once. If you're ready to explore 10 vibrant [port cities](#) along the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers, use this guide to memorable Christmas market river cruise itineraries to start planning your holiday.

Where: Strasbourg, France, on the Rhine River

Cruise Line: CroisiEurope

Strasbourg hosts one of the largest and oldest Christmas markets in Europe. Located on the Rhine in the heart of Alsace region, Strasbourg features more than 300 Christmas market stalls. To get to Strasbourg, river cruise passengers take a 15- to 20-minute motor coach ride from the port of Kehl, Germany, and cross the Bridge of Europe into France. From the public bus depot, crisscross the streets and head to the heart of Strasbourg's Christmas markets at the towering, gothic Strasbourg Cathedral. Leave at least a couple of hours to wander through Le Petite France, a not-to-be-missed area with plenty of charm, culture and history.

Where: Cologne, Germany, on the Rhine River

Cruise Lines: AmaWaterways, Avalon, CroisiEurope, Scenic, Uniworld and Viking

Cologne is a popular port city on a Rhine river cruise. It's an easy walk from the dock to Cologne's bustling Christmas markets. The main market, Weihnachtsmarkt am Roncalliplatz, is located on the square in front of the twin-spired Cologne Cathedral. Crafts, knitted woolens and wooden toys can be found at this 160-stall market. If time allows, visit the Christmas market right outside the Lindt Chocolate Museum. Each year, 30-plus vendors set up a medieval-themed market with musicians, artisans and traditional crafts, along with food stalls selling fried potato pancakes served with a mound of applesauce. If glühwein isn't your thing, try Cologne's exclusive Kölsch, a beer produced and sold only in Cologne.

Where: Mannheim, Germany, on the Rhine River

Cruise Lines: AmaWaterways, Avalon, CroisiEurope, Scenic, Uniworld and Viking

Mannheim, in southwest Germany, lays claim to the busiest Christmas market in the region. Mannheim's famous landmark, the rotund Wasserturm (water tower) is the focal point for some 200 wooden stalls. This area, known as Friedrichsplatz, is one of Europe's most beautiful art nouveau areas. Stalls line the wide pedestrian mall and extend all around the Wasserturm. In addition to finding yet another colorfully decorated glühwein mug, there's a huge selection of knitted winter hats, scarves and leather gloves. You can even find fine ceramic table settings and decorative embroidered table runners.