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SEASONAL DECORATING
IS A COMPETITIVE SPORT
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THEIR FAVORITE THINGS

CATER TO THE INTERESTS
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HAYLEY SHELDON TAKES
A DIY APPROACH TO
DECKING THE HALLS

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

SINGER-SONGWRITER
JEWEL KILCHER EMBRACES
HER ALASKAN ROOTS FOR
FESTIVE FAMILY TOUR

WINTER WONDERLANDS

PUT A SPIN ON TRADITION
BY CELEBRATING THE
HOLIDAYS AT INTERNATIONAL
DESTINATIONS

THE
HOLIDAY
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WINTER *Wonderlands*

PUT A SPIN ON TRADITION BY CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS AT DIVERSE INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS

BY LYNN ALLESON

WHILE THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, EXPERIENCING SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS IN FARAWAY PLACES CAN CREATE MAGICAL MEMORIES. IT'S EYE-OPENING – AND A NICE CHANGE FROM ROUTINE – TO SEE HOW OTHER CULTURES EMBRACE THE WINTER HOLIDAYS AND HONOR TRADITION. SO, WHETHER YOU WANT TO ENJOY A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE HOLY LAND OR TAKE IN THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND AROMAS OF SPECIAL CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES, YOU JUST MIGHT EMBRACE SOME NEW TRADITIONS AT THESE INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS.



Photo courtesy MiniFinland.com



Santa photo courtesy
 VisitFinland.com/Katrine Syvari

Santa Claus
 Village **Alavut**
 Santa Claus' office



MEET SANTA CLAUS IN FINLAND

For a truly unique holiday, head north – far north! While legend has it that Santa resides on the North Pole, Rovaniemi, capital of the Lapland region of Finland, claims to be the jolly man's official hometown. Supposedly, his original home lies in the mysterious Korvatunturi site, or "Ear Fell," in Lapland, but the exact location is known only by a chosen few. Whatever you believe, Rovaniemi, located on the Arctic Circle, is a modern and unique town worth a visit.

Although Dec. 25 comes but once a year, you can experience Christmas every day in Rovaniemi, Finland. Meet Santa Claus at his office on the Arctic Circle, where children bake gingerbread cookies with Mrs. Claus and enroll in the Elf School.

Although Dec. 25 comes but once a year, you can experience Christmas every day in Rovaniemi. Meet Santa Claus at his office on the Arctic Circle, where children bake gingerbread cookies with Mrs. Claus, enroll in the Elf School and take calligraphy classes to compose their Christmas lists. For industrious visitors, seasonal jobs as elf workers in Santa's post office are available. Other area attractions include the Ranua Zoo, home to baby polar bears, wolverines and moose, and the Arktikum, a science center where the mystery of the Northern Lights is revealed.

Stay at the Arctic TreeHouse Hotel, which offers 32 suites on stilts and five Arctic Glass House cabins. New accommodations are available at Santa's Igloos Arctic Circle, complete with glass roofs, in the heart of Santa Claus Village, and there's also the Hostel Café Koti, located in a converted bank building. As more and more visitors flock to the Arctic Circle, new flight connections are becoming available through London, Berlin and Zurich.

Quebec City's German Christmas Market **Opposite page, from top:** Colmar market; riverboat lobby; Rudesheim market; luminarias in Taos



Photos by Andrea Holden

ENJOY EUROPEAN CHARM IN QUEBEC

Dating back to 1608, Quebec City sits on the Saint Lawrence River in Canada's mostly French-speaking Quebec province. Celebrating the holidays in Quebec City, which was voted North America's Best Winter Wonderland by the readers of *USA Today* in 2016, provides the best of both worlds: It has the charm and ambience of a European-style venue with the convenience of remaining in North America.

The German Christmas Market has been a popular feature for more than a decade, offering authentic

cuisine like sausage dishes and roasted chestnuts. For a more Quebec-flavored meal, try Restaurant Toast!, one of the most romantic restaurants in the city, located in the Hotel Le

Celebrating the holidays in Quebec City provides the best of both worlds: It has the charm and ambience of a European-style venue with the convenience of remaining in North America.

Priori in the heart of the Old Port.

The older part of the city, Old Quebec, is surrounded by a wall and turns into a Christmas village straight out of a Charles Dickens story. The more religiously inclined can wander

through nativity scenes from around the world. Nearby, the magnificent Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac hotel provides breathtaking views of the city and the river. Its lobby is festively decorated for the holidays, and it has several restaurants to cater to any taste. For a traditional holiday meal, visit the Buffet de l'Antiquaire, a neighborhood diner that offers *cipaille*, a layered meat pie that is a must at every French-Canadian Christmas dinner.

The nearby Aquarium Lumiere hosts the annual Festi Lumiere, where you can stroll through 500,000 lights, enjoy live music, go snow tubing and more. If you have time, stay for New Year's Eve to ride the Ferris wheel and lounge on heated outdoor patios.



CRUISE TO CHRISTMAS MARKETS IN GERMANY

Each year, Christmas markets spring up around Germany to bring some holiday joy to winter-weary residents. The tradition dates back to the 17th century, when traders would come into the cities and lay out their wares along the streets. Today, Christmas markets still offer a festive meeting place for locals but feature cozy stands

he says. "And, of course, for our Christmas market cruises, our ships are specially decorated for the holidays."

One of the cruises, Christmas Markets Along the Rhine, travels between Cologne, Germany, and Basel, Switzerland. Highlights along the way are Christmas markets in Aachen, Rudesheim, Heidelberg and Baden-Baden, among other towns.

What to buy? Favorites include beeswax candles; gluhwein mugs, in which a traditional mulled wine is served; and prune people, colorful figurines crafted from prunes, figs and

Each year, Christmas markets spring up around Germany to bring some holiday joy to winter-weary residents. The tradition dates back to the 17th century, when traders would come into the cities and lay out their wares along the streets.

selling local handicrafts and foods. Religious reformer Martin Luther influenced Christmas traditions by suggesting that children receive presents from the "Christ child," hence the common name for these markets, "Christkindlesmarkt," which is popular especially in southern Germany.

A river boat cruise is the ideal way to experience regional Christmas markets, says Tom Armstrong, corporate communications manager of Tauck Tours & Cruises.

"On a river cruise, you can visit a variety of towns and villages with the convenience of unpacking only once,"

walnuts that are fabled to bring money and happiness. Be sure to visit nativity scenes in each city and indulge in sweets like gingerbread cookies and stollen, a traditional German cake.

CELEBRATE WITH SPIRITS IN TAOS

Taos, New Mexico, is an art colony, a world-class ski resort and an ancient community with divergent cultures and spiritual traditions. The city comes alive during the winter months, especially in December, when residents organize a month-long series of events to showcase the area's beauty and history.

One of the most beloved festivals in Taos is the Lighting of Ledoux. To illuminate the darkness that comes with

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the winter solstice, residents light bonfires, lanterns and luminarias. These brown paper bags filled with candles are a special tradition that New Mexicans hold near and dear to their hearts. It's a gorgeous sight when thousands of them light the town as visitors enjoy



Photos courtesy Tauck

Photo by Walter Buczkow



dancers, violinists and parades. Many shops and museums, including the famous Harwood Museum of Art, stay open late for this event.

Another signature holiday event is the Christmas Eve celebration at Taos Pueblo, just north of Taos. This 1,000-year-old tradition has evolved over the years to combine Christian beliefs, Native American rituals and Southwestern traditions. Taos Pueblo is lit with bonfires as men in traditional Native American clothing carry a statue of the Virgin Mary through a loop around the plaza and men on rooftops fire rifles into the night sky in salute. Afterward, attendees sing English and Spanish songs, and all the chapel bells ring.

A great place to stay is the Historic Taos Inn, where the lobby Adobe Bar is referred to as the "living room of Taos" because locals often gather there to hear nightly live music.

HONOR HANUKKAH IN JERUSALEM

What better place to celebrate the Festival of Lights than the city where it all started? Hanukkah is one of the most exciting times of year to visit Jerusalem, Israel, when it comes alive with *hanukkiyahs* (menorahs) in the windows, family-friendly activities and plenty of fresh *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts) at the bakeries.

During *Hamshushalayim*, the city's annual winter festival, visitors can take in exhibitions, plays, dance performances and concerts around town every weekend in December. Enjoy nightly tours to view *hanukkiyahs* on display in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, and don't miss the nightly menorah lighting at the Kotel (Western Wall). Lead-

ing rabbis and dignitaries participate in this beloved public ceremony, which also features music, singing and dancing.

Bring the kids to The Israel Museum, where they'll enjoy free admission throughout the holiday and learn about Israeli culture and history, or visit the Bible Lands Museum, hosting daily performances by children's theater groups throughout

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Hanukkah. Another family-friendly destination is the Bloomfield Science Museum, which offers seasonal programs like this year's "Make Light," featuring activities, performances, exhibitions and hands-on workshops.

Those looking for luxury accommodations in the city will find them at the Waldorf Astoria Jerusalem. The 10-story venue combines meticulous restoration and ambitious con-

struction at a crossroads between the charms of the walled Old City and the modern bustle of Jerusalem. A more affordable choice is the Abraham Hostel, one of the most popular hostels in the city, which hosts holiday concerts each year.

SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS IN AUSTRIA

In Salzburg, Austria – where "The Sound of Music" was filmed and composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born – residents celebrate Advent (the season leading up to Christmas) with choral ensembles and Alpine melodies against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains, Baroque architecture and Christmas markets. The season officially begins with the traditional sing-a-long concert Salzburg Adventsingen at the Small Festival Hall, and other highly regarded Advent concerts take place at the 940-year-old fortress Festung Hohensalzburg.

The area is home to the famous carol "Silent Night," which was sung for the first time on Christmas Eve 1818 in nearby Oberndorf. On Christmas Eve, take a special tour to the tiny town, and join a Christmas celebration at the Silent Night Chapel. While visiting, you can also enjoy dinner and a Mozart concert at the St. Peter Stiftskulinarium.

The Hotel & Villa Auersperg offers an ideal location close to but outside the tourist strip and the heart of old Salzburg. It's also within walking distance of the river and affordable restaurants. If you want a luxurious stay, book the Hotel Sacher Salzburg, which mixes Old World charm with modern comfort.

Salzburg also offers a Christmas market dating back to the 15th century, located at the foot of Festung Hohensalzburg and around the Cathedral of Salzburg. Here, again, music plays an important part in the celebrations, with choral singing in front of the cathedral and an Advent brass concert on Residenz Square every Saturday. ○



Opposite page, from top: Hanukkah celebrations in Jerusalem; Waldorf Astoria Jerusalem; menorah in Jerusalem From top: Salzburg Christmas market; Hellbrunn Adventmarkt; Schiachperchten; Advent singing in St. Leonhard; Silent Night Chapel; Adventzauber

