

How Germans celebrate Christmas - traditions and “Weihnachtsmärkte”



The beginning of Christmas Season

One knows that Christmas is around the corner when Lebkuchen and Spekulatius cookies (gingerbread cookies) are available on the supermarket shelves (sometimes already from September). Four Sundays before the holy night the Advent Season starts and so do the Christmas markets. Christmas lights are lit and Christmas songs can be heard on the radio.



What Christmas traditions exist in Germany?

According to a survey, most people said Christmas involves candles, a Christmas tree, baking Christmas biscuits and buying presents. About 29.8 million Christmas trees stood in German living rooms - preferably real ones, because plastic imitations are frowned upon.



How could a typical Christmas in Germany look like:

Germany celebrates Christmas from Dec. 24 - Dec. 26, with the 25th and 26th being public holidays. No stores are open on these days. When Christmas Eve falls on a working day, the shops are only open on the 24th of December until about noon. For many people the 24th of December is hence divided into a hectic morning of preparations and a festive evening. Some activities are decorating the Christmas tree, wrapping presents and preparing the Christmas meals.

In the early evening the members of the family gather. Some cultivate traditions, such as singing and playing instruments together. The evening meal is followed by the distribution of presents: this is when everyone is allowed to unwrap the parcels lying under the Christmas tree. In Germany the “Christkind” brings the presents on Christmas Eve - not Santa Claus. It is the figure of a woman with blond curly hair. Children write wish lists for presents during the entire year to the “Christkind.”



Germans love potato salad for Christmas

While every family tradition for foods is different, a popular dish for Christmas evening is potato salad with sausages. On Christmas Day and the day after, which are both public holidays, people enjoy a lavish feast on a festively decorated table. The traditional Christmas meal is roast goose with potato dumplings and red cabbage.



“Adventskranz” - The wreath

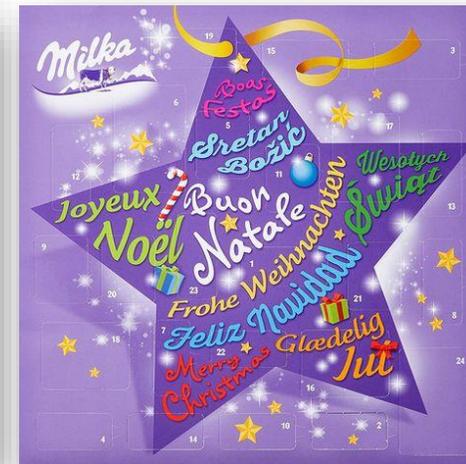
Many families set up an Advent wreath (Adventskranz) on the first Advent Sunday (the fourth before Christmas) to start off the Advent season. The picture shows an Advent wreath with its four candles, one for each week of Advent. Traditional families gather around the wreath on each Advent Sunday to light the next candle and sing Christmas carols. This was even more important in the past, when the Christmas tree was usually reserved for a special unveiling only on Christmas Eve. Until then, the Advent wreath provided the evergreen look and aroma in the house. Many families decorate the wreath themselves.



“Adventskalender” - The Advent Calendar

The Advent or Christmas calendar began as a plain card with paper backing. On the front were 24 windows that when opened revealed various Christmas symbols and scenes. These windows or small doors were to be opened, one each day, over the 24 days leading up to Heiligabend or Christmas Eve. The largest window was and still is reserved for December 24th and usually offers a view of the Nativity.

Today the most popular version of this calendar is the candy-filled variety. Instead of mere pictures, the windows open to reveal pieces of chocolate shaped to resemble stars, ornaments, and other Christmas symbols.



German Christmas markets - Weihnachtsmärkte

From Nuremberg and Hamburg to Dresden and Cologne, the run-up to Christmas sees town squares all over Germany filled with festively decorated huts selling handcrafted goods and delicious food. Most Christmas markets open on 1st Advent and remain open until shortly before Christmas. The cozy wooden huts, decorated with fairy lights and greens, sell everything you can think of. Foods and hot beverages are on top of the list - hot cacao, "Punsch," "Glühwein" (mulled wine), foods like crêpe, waffles, pizza, hot soup, "Flammkuchen" (tarte flambée), candies and much more.

The vendors sell handcrafted goods like knitted products, candles, pictures, woodcarvings, glass blown products, books, jewelry... Some Christmas Markets are specialized in one sort of products, e.g. arts.

Among the most popular and scenic Christmas markets in Germany are the Christkindl Market in Nuremberg and Munich, Striezelmarkt in Dresden, Christmas Market in Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Aachen and Cologne.



German Christmas Markets - Weihnachtsmärkte

Cologne has seven major Christmas markets:

- ❖ The Cathedral Christmas market
- ❖ Christmas market “Alter Markt”
- ❖ Heavenuue Cologne - The Gay Christmas market
- ❖ Harbor Christmas market
- ❖ Neumarkt Christmas market
- ❖ Rudolfplatz Christmas market
- ❖ Stadtgarten Christmas market

In addition to that, every Veedel (quarter) has its own small Christmas market for at least one weekend.

Not only the Christmas markets in Germany’s bigger cities are worth a visit. Especially small medieval villages with their timbered houses and narrow alleys offer unique, creative products and a very festive atmosphere!







Merry Christmas!



Christmas is a very special time in Germany, not only in Cologne. Visiting the Christmas markets is perfect for getting in a festive mood!

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