

How Austrians Celebrate Christmas

The time from late November to the end of the year has a very special meaning in Austria. Visit Austria's Christmas markets, try some Glühwein and enjoy the spirit of Christmas...

The Advent period in Austria is also known as “the most peaceful time of the year.” Deeply-rooted folk traditions come alive in colourful, romantic ways. Advent begins on a Sunday four weeks before Christmas Eve. This is the day when in living rooms all over the country advent wreaths, woven from evergreen twigs and decorated with ribbons and four candles, are placed. On each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, one more candle on the wreath is lit at dinnertime and many families read Christmas stories or sing carols together.

Christmas Markets

The first Sunday of Advent does not only ring in the festive season in homes but also the “Christkindlmärkte” (Christmas markets) open their doors. From cities to small villages, you can find Christmas markets everywhere you go. The scent of roasted chestnuts & mulled wine and stands with handcrafted goods & local treats will spread across the country. These markets allow visitors to connect with locals and to experience Christmas spirits so different to Australia.

The Christmas markets in Vienna truly are an age-old tradition. The forerunners of the present-day events date back to the Middle Ages when in 1298 Albrecht I granted Vienna's citizens the privilege of holding a December Market or “Krippenmarkt”. Since then, the character and prevalence of these markets has changed considerably. Nowadays, over 20 official Advent Markets sell a vast array of seasonal gifts and treats. The Vienna Christmas World in front of the City Hall is an unforgettable highlight for those eager to get into the spirit of the season. The unique backdrop gives this market a charm of its own. But the markets in front of Schönbrunn Palace and Belvedere Palace enchant with their imperial backdrop. Christmas Market on Spittelberg enchants visitors with romantic lights and numerous handicraft stalls in the idyllic alleyways.

Salzburg's Christmas Market, mentioned as far back as the 15th century, is located at the foot of the Hohensalzburg fortress and around the venerable Cathedral of Salzburg. An extensive programme of events such as choral singing in front of the cathedral, “Turmblasen” (wind instruments) on Residenz Square and nativity exhibits in the Residenz courtyard await visitors. Advent Magic in the courtyard of Hellbrunn Palace, with its oversized Advent calendar in the windows of the palace, romantic booths and an exciting entertainment programme is a popular Christmas market for locals.

The Christmas markets in Innsbruck are counted amongst some of the most beautiful and romantic in the entire Alpine region. Every Advent, in the historic part of Innsbruck, in front of the Golden Roof and surrounded by beautifully preserved medieval facades the Old Town Christmas Market comes to life. Imagine the lights of a Christmas tree rivalling the glistening tiles of the Golden Roof and the aroma of freshly made “Kiachln” (piping hot doughnuts laced with Sauerkraut). At the Panorama Christmas Market on Hungerburg, at the top of the funicular railway) visitors can not only enjoy breathtaking views of the city but will also find plenty of culinary delights and a wide range of local crafts.

Silent Night

Wherever you are on Christmas Eve you will hear “Silent Night, Holy Night!”. Not many people know that the famous Christmas carol was written and composed in Austria, in a small village just outside of Salzburg. Over 200 years ago on Christmas Eve 1818, in the village of Oberndorf, Joseph Mohr and Franz Xaver Gruber combined melody and lyrics for the first time to create a carol that would be sung by the entire world. Today “Silent Night” has been translated into more than 300 languages and is a symbol of solidarity, peace and hope. In 2011 “Silent Night” was listed as as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Christmas Eve

Austrians celebrate Christmas on 24 December. A traditional tree, decorated with gold and silver ornaments, stars made out of straw, sweets and candy wrapped in tinfoil, gilded nuts, decorated gingerbread cookies, is lit for the first time when it gets dark. Austrian Christmas tradition has it that it is the Christ Child himself (or rather, an eponymous cherubic figure known as the “Christkind”) who brings the children their Christmas presents. Most bars and restaurants are closed on Christmas Eve. However, most hotels put on a special Christmas banquet for guests.

Event Highlights during Advent

Winterfest Salzburg

28.11

Every year from end of November until early January Salzburg's Volksgarten is home to the biggest festival for contemporary circus in German-speaking countries. In a city of tents performing artists from all over the world amaze visitors and locals alike.

More information: <https://www.winterfest.at/?lang=en>

Light Show Max 500

27.11.-19.01.

The Imperial Palace in Innsbruck rings in the 2019 Maximilian Anniversary Year with the spectacular "Light Show Max 500" that takes viewers on a magical journey back to the 16th century.

More information: <https://www.tyrol.com/things-to-do/events/all-events/e-light-show-max-500>

Katschberg Advent Trail

27.11. – 22.12.2019

The Katschberg Advent Trail is for everyone who wants to experience Christmas far away from the hustle and bustle of the cities. The romantic winter hike leads past beautifully renovated barns set up with Christmas themed stations.

<https://www.katschberg.at/en/advent-trail.html>

Light Festival

29.11.-06.01.

At the Festival of Light the Swarovski Crystal Worlds, just outside of Innsbruck, will be telling the most sparkling winter fairy tale in the Alps. A 13-meter-tall Christmas tree, winter fairy-tale figurines from the designer Tord Boontje and interactive light installations create a unique exchange of light and crystal await visitors.

More information:

https://kristallwelten.swarovski.com/Content.Node/wattens/events/2019/11/Festival_of_Light_Swarovski_2019.en.html

Ice Magic Linz

23.11.-23.02

Ice artists from all over the world turn the Volksgarten in Linz into an ice world with a variety of sculptures and impressive ice art. This year's theme: Frozen II

More information: <https://icemagic.at/>

Salzburg Advent Singing

29.11 – 15.12

Advent in Salzburg simply wouldn't be the same without Advent Singing. For 70 years, folk music, small vocal ensembles and Alpine melodies carrying a message of peace have enchanted audiences and sparked the Christmas spirit in everyone.

More information: <https://www.salzburgeradventsingen.at/en/>

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