



EUROPE'S BEST CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Experience three of Eastern Europe's most elegant cities, Budapest, Vienna and Prague during the winter holiday season where you will be immersed in the joy, tradition, dancing lights, and heartwarming charm of the captivating Christmas markets.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Europe, Hungary, Austria, Czech
Republic



10 days from AU\$18,770 pp



Private

Journey Overview

Experience three of Eastern Europe's most elegant cities, Budapest, Vienna and Prague during the winter holiday season where you will be immersed in the joy, tradition, dancing lights, and heartwarming charm of the captivating Christmas markets. On this unforgettable journey, discover the two distinct sides of Budapest, get a glimpse into Viennese imperial life and immerse yourself in Prague's medieval charms. In each city, join locals at delightful open-air markets where artisans offer their treasures accompanied by the delightful tunes of festive melodies, and the air is filled with cinnamon and mulled wine in the merry countdown to Christmas.

Journey Highlights

- Enjoy the festive splendour of Christmas markets in each city, featuring a dazzling display of twinkling lights, carols and a magnificent Christmas tree
- Explore the street stalls for unique ornaments, traditional Alpine wares and beautiful handmade gifts
- In Vienna get into the Christmas spirit by joining locals of all ages on the ice rink
- Sample delicious regional treats from strudel and roasted chestnuts to *gluhwein*
- Visit both sides of Budapest for a well-rounded view of Hungary's historic capital
- Explore the resplendent winter and summer residences of Austria's Habsburg royals
- Be enchanted by Prague's fairytale castles and stunning snow-topped cathedrals
- Soak up the joyous atmosphere in the shadow of gorgeous palaces and pretty snow-capped cathedrals



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Budapest

Arrive in Budapest, a city of two very different halves – Buda and Pest – bisected by the mighty Danube River. Merged only in 1873, Buda retains a distinctly regal air having served as the Hungarian capital for extended periods in the kingdom's history, while Pest is decidedly more vibrant, offering some of the city's best shopping, drinking and dining.

Check in to your hotel assisted by your A&K Guardian Angel.

Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace

Day 2: Budapest

Take in the sights of lively Pest today on a private tour, starting at the opulent Opera House, considered to be one of the finest of its kind in architectural style, decoration and quality of acoustics.

Admire the ornate onion domes that top the Moorish Revival-style Dohany Street Synagogue, home to a museum, cemetery and memorial dedicated to victims of the Holocaust.

See the vast Heroes' Square with its impressive Millennial Monument and St. Stephen's Basilica, the city's largest church. If time allows, you may choose to conclude the morning with a visit to the bustling market hall, offering a plethora of regional delicacies and crafts.

After lunch, wander the largest and most famous of Budapest's Christmas fairs, located in Vörösmarty Square. This festive market is known for its distinctly Hungarian atmosphere, offering a wide array of traditional food, crafts, and performances. Sample traditional Hungarian fare and sip on a warming mulled wine while perusing lovingly decorated stalls and soaking up the lively holiday ambience.

Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace | Meals: B

Day 3: Budapest

Unravel the city's royal past on the opposite bank of the Danube River in Buda, beginning with the sprawling palace that occupies the southern tip of the evocative Castle Hill district. Wander through the cobbled streets, witness to numerous Hungarian royal coronations over the centuries, whilst inside the grand Gothic-style Matthias Church, discover magnificent frescoes and stained glass windows by some of Hungary's greatest artists.

Later, drink in breathtaking panoramic views over Budapest from the terrace of the whimsical Fisherman's Bastion and from the top of Gellért Hill.

In the evening, there's the option (additional cost) of a private wine tasting at the historic Faust Wine Cellar, nestled within the labyrinth of medieval tunnels carved under Castle Hill. This enchanting stone cellar promises an evening of savouring some of Hungary's finest wines, a testament to the region's rich wine-making heritage.

Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace | Meals: B

Day 4: Budapest - Vienna

After a leisurely morning, you'll be escorted to the railway station for your comfortable train journey into Austria and the former capital of the Hapsburg dynasty, Vienna. Enjoy the exclusive Concierge Rail service, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable ride.

Upon reaching Vienna, you'll be greeted by your Guardian Angel, who will assist you with your luggage and escort you to your private vehicle for onward transfer.

This afternoon, embark on a tour of Vienna's enchanting Christmas Markets alongside your Guardian Angel, starting with the iconic *Christkindlmarkt*, which has occupied the square in front of City Hall for over 700 years. Here, you'll have the opportunity to get into the Christmas spirit by joining locals of all ages on the ice rink or tucking into fresh baked seasonal treats such as gingerbread, roasted chestnuts and ' *Weihnachtspunsch* ' (Christmas punch).

Afterwards, lose yourself amongst the eclectic craft stalls of the Spittelberg market, unique in its location, being set not in a public square but along a series of narrow cobblestone streets and courtyards.

Your evening is free to experience Austria's handsome capital.

Hotel Imperial, a Luxury Collection Hotel | Meals: B

Day 5: Vienna

Embark on a guided exploration of Vienna's imperial treasures, beginning at the splendid Hofburg Palace complex, the winter home of the Habsburg family who ruled the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. Inside the vault-like Imperial Treasury, marvel at the priceless collection of status symbols including crowns, sceptres and jewels collected over a thousand years.

At the iconic St. Stephen's Cathedral, make time to inspect the numerous altars, side chapels and sarcophagi before climbing the soaring south tower for a phenomenal view over the city as well as the building's elaborately tiled roofs.

The remainder of the day is yours to explore at your own pace.

Hotel Imperial, a Luxury Collection Hotel | Meals: B

Day 6: Vienna

Transfer by private vehicle to the exquisite Schönbrunn Palace for a taste of what summertime life was like for the Habsburg royals. Some of the Baroque splendours you'll uncover include the sumptuous personal apartments of Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth, as well as the lavishly gilded Hall of Mirrors, where a young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart once performed for Maria Theresa when he was only 6 years old.

Outside, on the perfectly manicured, fountain-dotted grounds, immerse yourself in the timeless atmosphere of Schönbrunn's own Advent market. Rows of softly lit stalls selling quality handmade wares make this the perfect place to pick up handmade Christmas ornaments or tuck into central European Christmas delicacies such as *kaiserschmarren*, said to be a favourite of Emperor Franz Joseph.

Hotel Imperial, a Luxury Collection Hotel | Meals: B

Day 7: Vienna - Prague

This morning you'll be escorted to the railway station for your train journey to Prague today! Enjoy the exclusive Concierge Rail service, ensuring a comfortable and hassle-free travel experience. Upon arrival, you'll be greeted by your Guardian Angel, who will assist you with your luggage and escort you to your private vehicle for onward transfer.

The remainder of the day is yours to spend at leisure. Alternatively, there's the opportunity to dive into Prague's outstanding food scene with a knowledgeable guide (additional cost). Start your gastronomic adventure with an open-faced sandwich known as a *chlebíček* before trying an assortment of Czech favourites such as beef goulash and potato dumplings. Wash everything down with full-bodied Moravian wine or a crisp lager, followed by coffee and dessert, all set against the backdrop of Prague's medieval architecture.

Mandarin Oriental Prague | Meals: B

Day 8: Prague

Devote an entire day to the charms of Prague, with highlights including the National Gallery's fabulous art collection at Sternberg Palace which includes works by Reubens, Rembrandt and El Greco. Fans of the Art Nouveau movement will love the Mucha Museum inside Kaunický Palace.

After lunch (payable locally), enter Prague's sprawling Castle District, seat of power from the Bohemian era all the way to present day. Climb the bell tower of the richly decorated St. Vitus Cathedral for heavenly views, before strolling picturesque Golden Lane, lined with tiny colourful houses dating back to the 16th century that were later inhabited by goldsmiths.

If time permits, head to the Loreto Chapel, a venerated Marian pilgrimage site and home to a large collection of ceremonial treasures including a diamond-encrusted monstrance. Conclude your explorations at the Strahov Monastery, whose incredible library is sure to impress.

Mandarin Oriental Prague | Meals: B

Day 9: Prague

Stroll the narrow cobbled streets of in Prague's UNESCO-listed Old Town with an expert guide and see the Baroque statues that decorate the balustrade of the medieval Charles Bridge up close.

At the open-air Christmas market outside the elegant neo-Gothic St. Ludmila Church, there's a final chance to feast on festive indulgences including roasted chestnuts, mead, punch and peruse stalls for local crafts and wooden toys.

Mandarin Oriental Prague | Meals: B

Day 10: Depart Prague

After breakfast, transfer to the airport to meet your onward flight.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace, Budapest



A glittering jewel on the banks of the Danube, Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace is one of Europe's finest art nouveau buildings. Original features have been lovingly restored, re-inventing this architectural wonder as a vintage hotel with a modern twist - with sweeping staircases, stained glass, mosaics and soaring vaulted ceilings combining effortlessly with ultra-modern touches.

The Gresham Palace's 179 rooms, including 17 suites, reflect the grandeur and beauty of the art nouveau period and offer sensational views - taking in intimate interior courtyards, the sparkling Danube and Chain Bridge, the Royal Castle and the Buda Hills beyond. From the elegant Premier Rooms with marble bathrooms and immaculate styling to the gloriously decadent Royal Suite, reserved for VIPs, the hotel's rooms are flawlessly luxurious.

The Four Seasons offers an ideal base from which to explore a plethora of theatres, galleries and historic buildings - including the impressive Heroes' Square, where the Archangel Gabriel gazes down upon the Museum of Fine arts and the Kunsthalle from atop the towering Millennium Monument.

Why we like it

- The Gresham Palace offers spectacular view of the Danube, the Castle Palace and the

hills of Buda

- Many of the rooms and suites reflect the architectural heritage of Gresham Palace, with vaulted ceilings and private step-out balconies
- The Gresham Restaurant offers modern Hungarian and International cuisine in an elegant setting
- The spa, inspired by Budapest's rich spa heritage, offers an extensive range of massages and treatments
- The hotel has a rooftop, indoor pool with infinity edge

Hotel Imperial



Experience history, tradition, luxury and romance in the perfect harmony. The Imperial Hotel is a home to such iconic classical composers as Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Strauss as Vienna boasts more than 50 theatres and opera houses. The Vienna waltz originated here, and its centuries-old spirit still permeates the city's dancehalls. The expert concierge and butlers attend to all wishes and desires before they are expressed, such as having a hand-ironed newspaper delivered bedside with morning tea.

The Imperial Hotel offers 138 rooms and suites appointed with original paintings, antiques, stucco ceilings and fine fabrics will meet your highest expectations. The lavish décor and valuable art treasures blend harmoniously with the carefully co-ordinated interior. A team of dedicated staff members are available 24/7 to make your stay a once-in-a-lifetime experience in an imperial atmosphere. A private butler service is even available on request – Viennese charm included!

Catering to your individual wishes is top priority, whether at the *Café Imperial Wien*, the exclusive *Restaurant OPUS*, or in the elegant banquet rooms, magnificent halls or suites. The magnificent 1873-HalleNsalon with its attractive bar is the hotel's centrepiece.

The state-of-the-art fitness and health studio is magnificently located on the roof of the Hotel Imperial.

Why we like it:

- Hotel Imperial has a worldwide reputation and proudly welcomes members of royal families, politicians and other international opinion leaders.
- Opportunity to sleep in a former chamber of prince Philipp of Wuerttemberg to make you feel like a royal

- Tastefully furnished with precious, authentic antiques, walls cocooned in jewel-toned silk, and bathrooms made of marble, the rooms and suites blend the timeless elegance of 19th Century Vienna with state-of-the-art facilities and amenities

Mandarin Oriental, Prague



Perched on the bank of the Vltava River, Mandarin Oriental Prague is a beautiful historic hotel hidden in the heart of the Czech capital. Located on one of the city's prettiest streets, Malá Strana, it is within walking distance of many of the main attractions, including the Old Town Square and Prague Castle. Having been built on the site of a former 14th century monastery, the Mandarin Oriental's interiors have spared the original period features and complemented them with contemporary design pieces. 79 rooms are spread across the Baroque, Renaissance and Spa Wing with each enjoying its own individual design as well as added luxury features such as goose down bedding, heated towel rails and interactive entertainment systems. Of the 20 elegant suites, our favourite has to be the Ludwig Moser Crystal Suite, located in the Baroque wing, it features crystal accessories and decorations designed by Moser - the Czech Republic's premier crystal manufacturer - as well as tall ceilings, a spacious living room, stone-clad bathroom and one of the largest grand corner bedrooms in the hotel. Views from both rooms and suites can overlook the castle, monastery gardens or city.

In the sophisticated setting of Spices Restaurant and Bar, you can enjoy a taste of the east with dishes such as Malaysian Jackfruit curry, Shumai steamed dumplings and freshwater catfish glazed in ginger. Alternatively, the lounge and terrace is perfect for light lunches, classic cocktails and al fresco dining. Spread over two floors, The Spa at Mandarin Oriental Prague offers three treatment rooms, spa suite with vitality pool, relaxing tea lounge and fitness centre with two saunas.

Why we like it

- Luxury hotel built on the site of a former 14th century monastery
- Located in the quiet streets of Mala Strana, close to Prague Castle, the Old Town Square and Wenceslas Square
- Historic character and contemporary design
- Outdoor terrace for al fresco dining
- Home to the world's only spa located in former Renaissance chapel

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