

# CHRISTMAS MARKETS TOURISM IN GERMANY: A SUCCESS STORY WITH DARK SIDES



It is the end of November which marks the beginning of the Christmas season and the opening of Christmas markets all over Europe. Christmas trees and other attractions attract millions to the inner cities. The number of visitors is increasing, which has created a veritable Christmas market tourism.

The demand has developed in a very dynamic matter and has skyrocketed. Today trip organizers offer numerous trips to many Christmas markets. For example, in Germany, the most popular destinations are Erfurt, Harz, Dortmund or Munster. Day trips are very popular, while the clientele is mixed. **During the week seniors enjoy this type of trips, while younger people travel during weekends.**

Large travel companies in Germany are also counting on the Christmas market tourism. For city trips, this is an important business in the months from the end of November to December. In addition to the classic Christmas shopping, Christmas markets in the run-up to Christmas are one of the main reasons for tourism.

Christmas markets are also a popular destination across the borders. This tradition is now attracting not only Germans, but also guests from neighboring countries and even the world. According to the German Tourism Association, in the past year, 85 million people visited more than 1500 German Christmas markets.

## **Booming Christmas market tourism**

The cities are experiencing booming Christmas market tourism. In recent decades there has been an increase in foreign guests and overnight stays in December. Of the three million visitors, 15% recently travelled from abroad and 20% from over 50 kilometers away. On average, a guest leaves 170 euros in Frankfurt, directly on the market, he spends twelve euros. The boom, however, has its downsides. The parking garages are full, the public transport is loaded, there is a higher demand for bus parking lots.

“The Kassler Märchenweihnachtsmarkt has been a magnet for visitors for years and attracts around two million visitors,” says a city spokesman. In a 2016 visitor survey, 26% of interviewees said they came from outside the region. “The proportion of foreign visitors varies from year to year but has risen overall in the last ten years.” The vast majority of foreigners are day visitors. However, the market is also an important attraction even for overnight stays. Together, overnight guests and day visitors ensure a tourist turnover of 18 million euros.

## **Many foreigners in Fulda**

Smaller, but very popular with tourists, is the Christmas market in Fulda. In 2017, a total of half a million visitors came in four weeks. The proportion of foreign visitors is about 50%. The proportions

are significantly increasing, because the market is being developed.

**While cities like Fulda do not see negative effects of the boom, there is also the example of Michelstadt, a small city with 17,000 inhabitants.** The city used to welcome 130 tourist buses per day and the city reacted. Five to six years ago, the market was reduced from 200 to 100 stalls. Since then, the situation has become calmer and more contemplative, the goods offered are of high quality.

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