



Great Escapes // Munich and Other Winter Wonderlands

With the Bavarian Alps as a fairy-tale backdrop, Munich brings the best of the snowy season to its bustling streets and storied traditions. By Shawn Gilliam

In Munich Marienplatz draws crowds to the city's historic core no matter the month, thanks to the chiming clocktower of the neo-Gothic **Neues Rathaus** (New Town Hall), which plays concerts with 43 bells, quaint dancing figures and all. But the holiday season adds yet another layer of charm to the exquisite square: Under the magnificently lit, 98-foot-tall Christmas tree, you'll find more than 100 stalls making up the city's **Christkindlmarkt**, or Christmas Market. Munich's first official Yuletide fair dates to 1642, and over the years the range of goods hasn't changed much. Hand-carved figures from Alpine towns, quaint paper decorations and Advent treats such as *magenbrot* cake and *pfeffernüsse* biscuits attract shoppers now just as then. The same goes for the steaming cups of *glühwein* (spiced wine) that ward off the chill at night.

Carols sung from the Neues Rathaus balcony every evening at 5:30 add to the festive spirit, as does a tram with *glühwein* and gingerbread. Little ones love the Christmas Market post office with its special stamp and the



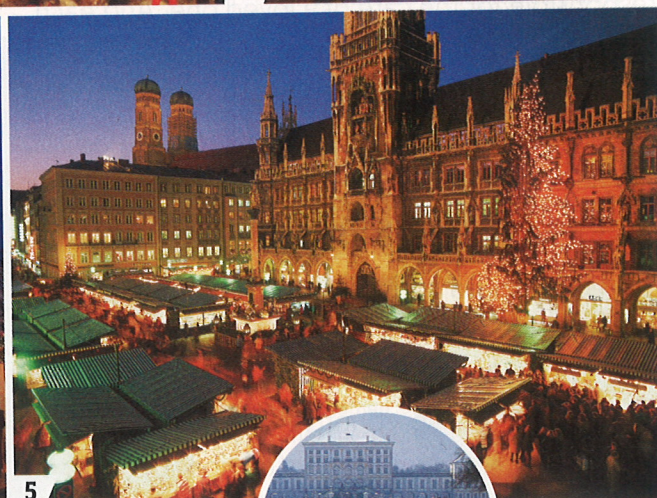
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- 1 Munich's historic center
- 2 A vendor at the Christmas Market
- 3 St. Nicholas and angels at the Christmas Market
- 4 Munich's Manger Market
- 5 Marienplatz at night
- 6 Along the Isar River near Marienplatz

If it's cold enough, try ice skating on canals and ponds on the grounds of Schloss Nymphenburg, a magnificent Italianate palace dating from 1675 five miles west of the city center.



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- 7 Fünf Höfe arcade shops
- 8 Old Town pedestrian shopping area
- 9 Anna Hotel
- 10 The Tollwood Festival

Theresienwiese

Marienplatz

Munich

Viktualienmarkt

children's handicrafts program called Himmelswerkstatt (Heavenly Workshop).

Make sure to check out the **Rindermarkt**, or Manger Market, a stone's throw from the main market action. Here you can peruse all the necessary pieces to create a crèche, including details such as manger lanterns and gifts of the Magi. For something extra special to take home, seek pieces from Alpine artists from such areas as the Erzgebirge, Oberammergau and South Tyrol. To see the national collection of hand-carved nativity scenes, many dating to the 18th century, visit the

Bayerisches Nationalmuseum.

The **Tollwood Festival**, housed in huge tents on Theresienwiese, adds live musical theater to the market mix. This year, guest plays from Austria, Canada, Russia, and the United Kingdom create a repertoire ranging from opera to cabaret to circus. The fun

culminates with a New Year's Eve party.

Shopping beyond market stalls is concentrated in the pedestrian area of Altstadt, or Old Town, namely **Neuhauser Strasse** and **Kaufingerstrasse**, where you'll find Germany's top department stores and fashion chains. For a change of architectural pace, head to the glimmering modern shopping arcade **Fünf Höfe** (Five Courtyards), designed by world-renowned architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron—whose works also include the 2005

addition to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the National Stadium in Beijing. More than 60 upscale boutiques, including Emporio Armani and Max Mara, sit amid hanging gardens in the center's textured metallic structure.

Christmas Eve finds churches in Munich packed. Consider a memorable midnight service close to Marienplatz at **Peterskirche** (St. Peter's Church). The oldest church in town, it dates to the 11th century with an 18th-century renovation in the Rococo



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Prince Charles and Bill Clinton are among the recent guests at Munich's Mandarin Oriental Hotel.



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Stollen, a powdered sugar-coated fruitcake dating back to the 15th century, is a holiday delicacy in Munich. (And much tastier than most American fruitcakes!)

The fourth Winter Olympics, held in 1936, brought world attention to the Alpine villages of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, an hour south of Munich.



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Where to Stay

Close to Old Town action, the beautifully renovated **Mandarin Oriental** (doubles from \$480) occupies a neo-Renaissance villa with dramatic views of the city. The designer **Anna Hotel** (doubles from \$307) features Donghia furnishings. The pricier tower rooms come with 270-degree views.

Where to Eat

For traditional Bavarian fare and a break from the cold, you can't beat the cavernous but cozy **Ratskeller**, just steps from Marienplatz on the lower level of the Neues Rathaus. Close by, the wood-paneled dining rooms bustle late into the night (3 a.m.) at **Schumann's Bar am Hofgarten**.

style. During the day, its eight-clock, seven-bell tower offers one of the best views of the city.

Winter sees Munich's opera season in full swing. Among the **Bayerisch Staatsoper** (Bavarian State Opera) performances this winter are *Salome* by Munich-born composer Richard Strauss. Some operas, including Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, are particularly well-suited for children. Performances take place at the **Nationaltheater**, an exquisite neoclassical building modeled after a Greek temple.

One of winter's most intriguing festivities, the traditional **Tanz der Marktfräuen**, takes place on Shrove Tuesday—February 16 in 2010. The spectacle centers on women who work at **Viktualienmarkt** (Food Market), who don colorful costumes and spin around in dance.

If snow sports better suit you, take your pick of Alpine slopes, many within two hours from town. The villages **Oberstdorf** and **Garmisch-Partenkirchen** are home to two of the world's top Ski Jumping World Cup events in late December and early January.