



*Unless we make Christmas an occasion to share our blessings, all the snow in Alaska won't make it "white".*

BING CROSBY

## Christmas Market Magic in Germany

*Rob and Wendy Lindsay share the charm of Christkindlesmarkts with us. "These traditional Christmas markets are scattered across Germany during Advent," report these avid Ontario travellers. "To us, they embody the magic of a traditional Christmas."*

The fragrance of oven-fresh gingerbread, roasting chestnuts and the pungent aroma of glühwein assail the senses in these Christkindlesmarkts. One soon discovers snacking and outdoor Christmas shopping make a great combination.

Frankfurt has one of the largest Christmas markets with over 240 shops, most in the old city. A village of little wooden shops with festive red and white striped roofs winds its way through the streets. Most of these shops are not heated so the shop keepers, like the happy throngs of shoppers, have to dress for the winter weather. But weather is the only cool part of a German Christmas market - a joyous, convivial atmosphere is everywhere. We found shopkeepers cheerful and patient and other shoppers delighted to translate at the slightest provocation. Comradery was in the air.

Intricate wood carvings are a favourite - cuckoo clocks, a myriad of toys and tiny detailed tree ornaments as delicate a

gossamer. Traditional wooden nutcrackers in bright red and blue military uniforms were everywhere. But it was the modern nut-crackers decked out like doctors, skiers, hikers, teachers, gardeners and even Lord of the Rings characters that got a laugh and sales were brisk.

Tradition is an important part of Christmas markets. Most of the wooden ornaments continue to be made in the region of their origin where long ago miners spent their winter evenings crafting ornaments for friends and family. When the iron mines closed the miners turned their hobby into a livelihood. Their work has become collector items - especially the limited editions from the Erzgebirge and Thuringia regions of Germany. Apparently mining life was reflected in the original designs of the wooden pyramids and the arched nativity scenes. Our favourites were the little smoker men, that hold a cone of incense inside, the fragrant smoke drifting out of holes in a mouth or pipe. Attention to detail is evident in every intricate piece and shoppers happily pay a little more for good German-made crafts - no imports here.

We recommend the Christkindlesmarkts in historic Heidelberg and the medieval walled towns of Dinkelsbühl and Rothenburg. You can find more information on the German National Tourist Office site at [www.cometogermany.com](http://www.cometogermany.com).

