

Among many memorable Christmas traditions of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg are the holiday markets in the capital, Luxembourg City. The municipality of about 115,000 people hosts six markets in separate areas of the city, and each is unique. The markets begin the first Sunday of Advent and extend until about a week after Christmas. All of the Christmas markets feature small chalets or wooden huts where everything from Christmas decorations, jewelry, clothing and toys to food and beverages can be purchased. Sparkling Christmas lights, music and Christmas trees intensify the warm holiday feeling in all of the bazaars.

The Letzebuenger Chreschmaart, or Luxembourg Christmas Market in the Place d'Armes is the most traditional of the markets. Local cuisine is a feature, and hungry strollers can snack on gromperekichechler (potato pancakes with shallots and garlic), nutella crepes, bouneschlupp (green bean soup) and other goodies while listening to a variety of local musicians performing on the band stand. A 40-foot Christmas tree soars over stalls that sell local crafts, toys, soap and small trinkets.

A second market, the Wantermaart located in The Place de la Constitution, has as its most memorable landmark a three-story wooden pyramid decked with lights. Platforms behind open arches on each of the levels display colorful, three-dimensional holiday scenes and the entire structure is topped by a propeller of eight flat, revolving blades. Adding to the constant movement swirling around the Golden Lady monument in the center of the square are a ferris wheel, a giant trampoline and other carnival rides. Food is also a major drawing point: apple fritters, apple cider and hot chocolate are popular. However, probably the favorite is gluhwein, or hot mulled wine. This red wine, orange juice, sugar and spice concoction is the beverage of choice for holiday revelers in this market.

After the excitement of the previous two markets, visitors might be tempted to wander over to Place Guillaume II in front of City Hall. The main attraction is watching children and adults enjoying an open-air skating rink surrounded by sparkling blue and white lights. An open-air restaurant and a few food booths round out this market, called Knuedler on Ice by locals. A popular treat from one of the food stalls is tartiflette, a mixture of potatoes, cheese, onion, and lardon (strips of bacon or pork) cooked with large amounts of white wine. Washed down with more gluhwein, skaters and onlookers stay comfortable and oblivious to the chilly temperatures. Since the average temperature in Luxembourg City in December is 39 degrees F during the day, and 31 degrees F at night, the warmth is welcome.

In addition to these three major markets, three smaller venues round out the Christmas market scene in Luxembourg City. Niklosmaart, or the St. Nicholas Market, is known as the spot for "all things St. Nicholas." While it is smaller than some other markets, it's recognized for

its wide variety of Advent wreaths and other handmade Christmas decorations. It also has food stalls, music, and a 25-foot fir tree shining with multicolored lights and ornaments.

The Solidariteitsmaart or Charity Market is quite small, but it is a must-visit. The chalets here are reserved for charitable organizations that sell items to support their causes and hand out information about their missions. A carousel, and of course, food and drink stalls are also available.

Finally, if you haven't had enough to eat and drink, head for the Grund. An elevator will take you from the upper plateau of Luxembourg City down a steep cliff to Grund, a historic area on the banks of the Alzette River. Here, another cluster of chalets features gourmet foods such as foie gras and snails with munster cheese, and to accompany the delicacies, artisan beers, local wines, and of course, more gluhwein can be purchased.

Smaller towns and villages in the Grand Duchy also sponsor Christmas markets. Dudelange, for example, a town of 20,000 near the country's southern border with France, sponsors a 10-day market with a medieval theme. Fire shows, concerts, and animated displays are spotlighted. Echternach (population 5,600) in eastern Luxembourg holds a Christmas market that features donkey rides for children, and Esch-sur-Alzette (population 30,000) in southwestern Luxembourg presents a traditional Christmas market beginning in mid-November and extending into mid-December.

Due to the covid-19 epidemic, all of the Christmas markets listed have been cancelled for 2020, but there are plans to reschedule the celebrations for the 2021 holiday season.

The Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa will hold its annual meeting Saturday, November 14 at 9:30 a.m. at the Plymouth County Museum, 335 1st Ave., S.W. Use the south door off of 4th Street, S.W. Election of officers will take place and planning for Lux Fest, rescheduled for June 5-6, 2021, will continue. Everyone is welcome to attend.