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Beyond the Christmas Classics: A Different Side of Europe’s Festive Season

From punch-fuelled festivities in Olomouc and castle-side skating in Heidelberg to independent design discoveries in Amsterdam, NH Collection Hotels & Resorts spotlights five distinctive European cities offering a fresh take on the traditional Christmas-market escape.



Strasbourg, Vienna and Cologne may dominate Europe’s Christmas-market wish lists, but some of the season’s most memorable experiences are found away from the festive heavyweights, in cities where local traditions, culture and contemporary life give Christmas characters all their own. This winter, NH Collection Hotels & Resorts, part of Minor Hotels, turns the spotlight on five distinctive European destinations offering a fresh take on the traditional Christmas-market escape.

Heidelberg, Germany: Christmas beneath the castle

Rather than Germany's larger Christmas-market destinations, Heidelberg offers a more intimate and atmospheric festive escape, pairing the charm of its cobbled historic Old Town with the striking backdrop of Heidelberg Castle. Running from 23 November to 22 December 2026, the Christmas market spreads across six locations in the Old Town, including the Winter Woodland at Kornmarkt and an ice rink at Karlsplatz, where visitors can skate beneath the castle. The festive season continues beyond the market, with Winter Woodland open until 1 January and the ice rink into January.

NH Collection Heidelberg provides an elegant base for a winter weekend, combining historic character and contemporary comfort within easy reach of the Old Town.

Dresden, Germany: where Christmas-market tradition runs deep

Some Christmas markets stand out not because they are undiscovered, but because their traditions simply cannot be replicated elsewhere. Dresden's Striezelmarkt, dating back to 1434, brings centuries of festive heritage to the Altmarkt each winter, with more than 200 traders showcasing Saxon traditions, from Ore Mountains craftsmanship to the city's famous Christstollen. Among its most distinctive sights are the monumental Erzgebirge step pyramid and walk-in Schwibbogen candle arch, adding to a setting deeply rooted in German Christmas culture.

NH Collection Dresden Altmarkt makes experiencing this tradition particularly easy, with its location directly on the square placing guests at the heart of the festive atmosphere. Dresden is about experiencing one of Europe's great festive traditions at its source, with centuries of craftsmanship, local flavours and Christmas heritage on the doorstep.

Olomouc, Czech Republic: A Christmas market with a punch

For travellers who think they already know Christmas in the Czech Republic, Olomouc offers an unexpected alternative to Prague. Set across the atmospheric squares of Horní náměstí and Dolní náměstí, its festive market unfolds against the backdrop of the UNESCO-listed Holy Trinity Column. But the city's real Christmas calling card is its remarkable punch culture, with a tempting variety of recipes making the warming winter drink as much a part of the experience as the lights, stalls and historic surroundings.

Combining contemporary comfort with easy access to the historic heart of Olomouc, *NH Collection Olomouc Congress* is ideally placed for a winter city break, allowing guests to spend the day exploring the Christmas markets, historic squares and architectural treasures before retreating to the comfort of the hotel.





Antwerp, Belgium: festive Flanders beyond Brussels

For travellers who instinctively look to Brussels or Bruges for a Belgian Christmas escape, Antwerp's distinctive urban character and historic surrounds offer a stylish and less expected alternative. From 4 December 2026 to 3 January 2027, the city's winter market unfolds across a series of historic locations, including Grote Markt, Groenplaats, Handschoenmarkt, Suikerrui and Hendrik Conscienceplein. Rather than being confined to a single square, the festivities create a route through Antwerp's historic heart, inviting visitors to wander between illuminated streets and squares while discovering the city along the way.

NH Collection Antwerp Centre, ideally located in the city's Diamond Quarter opposite Central Station, provides a contemporary base for exploring Antwerp, with a leafy inner courtyard offering a peaceful retreat from the city outside.







Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Christmas with a creative twist

Amsterdam proves that a Christmas market doesn't need wooden chalets and centuries-old traditions to capture the festive spirit. On 20 December 2026, cultural park Westergas is set to host the Funky Xmas Market, the festive edition of the city's Sunday Market, bringing together designers, artists and creatives alongside food and live music. Held at Westergas, Amsterdam's former gasworks complex, the market offers a distinctly contemporary take on Christmas, with independent design, art, fashion and original gifts taking centre stage.

NH Collection Amsterdam Barbizon Palace provides an elegant base for a festive city break, combining the character of historic Amsterdam with contemporary comfort. From here, travellers can discover the city's refreshing alternative to the traditional Christmas-market formula, where independent design, creativity and urban culture bring a distinctly modern twist to the festive season.













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