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

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



November 3, 2026: 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 create a distinctly different Christmas experience.

This winter, NH Collection Hotels & Resorts, part of Minor Hotels, turns the spotlight on five European destinations offering a fresh take on the traditional Christmas-market escape.

Heidelberg, Germany: Christmas Beneath the Castle

For travelers looking beyond Germany’s larger Christmas markets, Heidelberg offers a more intimate and atmospheric festive escape, combining the charm of its historic Old Town’s

cobbled streets with the striking backdrop of Heidelberg Castle. Running from November 23 to December 22, 2026, the Christmas market takes place 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 festivities extend beyond the market's closing date, with Winter Woodland remaining open until January 1 and the ice rink into January.

NH Collection Heidelberg provides an elegant base for a winter weekend, blending historic charm with 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 lesser-known, but because their traditions simply cannot be replicated elsewhere. Dating back to 1434, Dresden's Striezelmarkt 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 striking features are the monumental Erzgebirge step pyramid and walk-in Schwibbogen candle arch, both reflecting the region's rich Christmas traditions.

NH Collection Dresden Altmarkt offers a front-row seat to this centuries-old tradition, with its location directly on the square placing guests at the heart of the festivities. Here, visitors can experience one of Europe's most celebrated Christmas markets, where centuries of craftsmanship, local flavors and festive heritage come together.

Olomouc, Czech Republic: A Christmas Market With a Punch

For travelers looking beyond Prague's famous Christmas markets, Olomouc offers an unexpected alternative. Held in the atmospheric squares of Horní náměstí and Dolní náměstí, its festive market unfolds against the backdrop of the UNESCO-listed Holy Trinity Column. The city's real Christmas calling card, however, is its celebrated punch culture, with a wide variety of flavors 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 Olomouc's historic center, NH Collection Olomouc Congress provides an inviting base for a winter city break. Guests can spend their days exploring the Christmas markets, historic squares and architectural landmarks before returning to the hotel to unwind.

Antwerp, Belgium: Festive Flanders Beyond Brussels

For travelers looking beyond Brussels and Bruges for a Belgian Christmas escape, Antwerp offers a stylish alternative, blending historic charm with contemporary energy. From December 4, 2026, to January 3, 2027, the city's winter market takes place across several historic squares and streets, 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 explore the city's illuminated streets and discover its architectural charm along the way.

NH Collection Antwerp Centre, located in Antwerp's Diamond Quarter opposite Central Station, offers a convenient starting point for exploring the city, while its leafy inner courtyard provides a peaceful retreat from the bustling streets.

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 December 20, 2026, Westergas, Amsterdam's cultural park and former gasworks complex, is set to host the Funky Xmas Market, a festive edition of the city's Sunday Market featuring independent designers, artists, food and live music. With an emphasis on independent design, art, fashion and original gifts, the market offers a contemporary alternative to the traditional Christmas-market experience.

NH Collection Amsterdam Barbizon Palace offers a stylish place to stay during the festive season, blending historic architecture with modern comforts. Its central location makes it easy for guests to explore Amsterdam's Christmas attractions, from creative markets to the city's vibrant shopping and cultural scene.

About NH Collection Hotels & Resorts

NH Collection Hotels & Resorts is a premium hospitality brand with more than 100 properties across Europe and the Americas, and an expanding global presence in Asia, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and beyond. Designed for globally minded travelers, NH Collection offers stays that evoke extraordinary emotions, seamlessly blending comfort, innovation, intuitive service, elegant atmospheres, and surprising flavors — all integrated with local identity.

NH Collection Hotels & Resorts is part of Minor Hotels and recognizes its guests through the unified loyalty program Minor DISCOVERY, which is itself part of GHA DISCOVERY.

Visit nh-collection.com for more information and connect with NH Collection on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

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Minor Hotels is a global leader in the hospitality industry with more than 640 hotels, resorts and branded residences in operation and committed development across 67 countries. The group crafts innovative and insightful experiences through its hotel brands including Anantara, Elewana Collection, The Wolseley Hotels, Tivoli, Minor Reserve Collection, NH Collection, nhow, Avani, Colbert Collection, NH, Oaks, and iStay, as well as a diverse portfolio of restaurants and bars, travel experiences, and spa and wellness brands. With over four decades of expertise, Minor Hotels builds stronger brands, fosters lasting partnerships, and drives business success by always focusing on what matters most to our guests, team members and partners.

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