

Christmas in Austria: 7 Unusual Advent Experiences

Austria's big-name city Christmas markets from Vienna to Innsbruck are worth a visit, no doubt. But the country also has plenty of lesser-known alternatives with a charm all their own. From markets on a ship (or along the lake shore) to festive celebrations at a mountain summit and an entire holiday village transformed into a Christmas wonderland, here are seven Christmas experiences to surprise even seasoned Austria visitors – or delight first-time travellers looking for something a little different.

1. Experience Advent in Wels, the European City of Christmas

An [international jury](#) has delivered its verdict: [Wels in Upper Austria](#) is the European City of Christmas 2026. It is the first German-speaking city ever to receive the title. Wels has its own [Christmas World](#) with 120 market stalls and more than 350 festively decorated shops and restaurants in the city centre. There's also a 2.2-km illuminated trail featuring 31 installations with more than 850,000 LED lights and a new arts and crafts market at Minoritenplatz.

Info: 13 November – 24 December 2026, daily 11 AM – 9 PM

Tip: Combine your visit with a trip to Christkindl, a pilgrimage destination near [Steyr](#), where Christmas mail receives its very own special [Christkindl postmark](#).

2. The Floating Advent Market in the Wachau Valley

Right on the Danube, in front of Dürnstein's Baroque old town, lies [Austria's only floating Advent market](#): a festively illuminated ship featuring arts, crafts and gift ideas on board, complemented by stalls around the abbey and along the banks of the Danube. Following its debut in 2025, restored paddle steamer MS Wachau, operated by the First Danube Steamship Company, will serve as the Advent ship in 2026. Visitors can look forward to around 100 illuminated Christmas trees and even more exhibitors.

Info: 20-22 and 27-20 November, 4-8 and 11-13 December 2026, 11 AM – 8 PM

Tip: Visitors staying for a day or longer can check out the [Dürnstein Castle ruins](#) or book a tour and tasting at the [more than 400-year-old wine cellar at Hotel Schloss Dürnstein](#) before or after their Christmas market stroll.

3. The world's largest nativity scene on Lake Neusiedl

From 20 November 2026, the Mörbisch Lake Stage on Lake Neusiedl will be transformed into a dazzling sea of lights. The centrepiece of the [Mörbisch Winter Wonder](#) is the world's largest nativity scene, measuring 90 metres wide and 18 metres high. The Christmas nativity scene is brought to life with a projection show, transforming it into a sea of light, colour and music.

Info: 20-22 and 26-29 November, 6-8, 10-13, 17-20 and 26-30 December 2026 (tickets and prices [here](#))

Tip: There's also a nearby Advent village featuring regional crafts and activities for children.

4. A mountain refuge opens its doors for a nativity scene trail

This November, the first-ever Kripperl-Roas (nativity scene trail) will take place on the Ischlberg mountain, above [Bad Aussee in the Ausseerland region](#) in the Salzkammergut. A circular walking trail will lead visitors to several stations showcasing intricately crafted nativity scenes. There's also an exhibition, music and entertainment for all ages, as well as food and drinks.

Info: 21-22 November 2026, from 10 AM

Tip: Bad Aussee itself invites visitors to enjoy the [Ausseer Christkindlmarkt](#) in the spa gardens, while neighbouring communities around Lake Grundlsee welcome them with their own Advent markets.

5. Advent at 1,700 metres in Austria's South

The Christmas market on the Petzen in Carinthia is located at 1,700 metres, making it Austria's highest Advent market. Visitors reach it by gondola, travelling over snow-covered forests to enjoy panoramic views of the Karawanken mountain range. At the top, around 15 traders offer Carinthian specialities and handcrafted items made from felt, leather, wood and tin. Visitors can also warm up with mulled wine and punch beside open fire pits. There's a kids' programme near St. Anna's Chapel and a visitor centre of the Karawanken UNESCO Global Geopark, offering insights into the mountain's geological world.

Info: 5, 6, 12, 13 and 19 December 2026

Tip: If you arrive during the day, you can combine your visit to the market with a ski run in the Petzen ski resort.

6. An entire holiday village transforms into a Christmas Wonderland

For the first time, illuminated figures and Christmas trees will light up the area around the traditional farmhouses of [Schönleitz Holiday Village](#) on Lake Faakersee, turning it into [Carinthia's first Christmas village](#). Visitors can look forward to a petting zoo, the village's own animal farm, hot drinks, savour regional specialities and an all-weather ice rink. There's also a spa and an activity programme, think torchlit walks and snowshoe hikes. Skis, snowshoes, sledges and hiking poles are available to rent, and the village also runs its own ski school. A complimentary ski bus takes guests to the Gerlitzen Alpe and the Dreiländereck ski areas.

Info: 19 November 2026 – 10 January 2027, light installations daily from 5 to 9 PM.

Tip: Guests staying over Christmas will find their very own little Christmas tree in their holiday apartment, ready to be decorated.

7. Christmas market hopping on Lake Wörthersee

Holidaymakers wishing to visit the [Christmas markets around Lake Wörthersee](#) won't have to choose just one. The [Wörthersee boat fleet](#) connects Velden, Pörtschach and Maria Wörth every Saturday and Sunday. An all-day ticket (€23 when bought online) allows them to hop on and off as often as they like. A must-visit en route is the Stiller Kunstadvent (Silent Art Advent) at Pörtschach: Local artists exhibit their work along the lakeside promenade, accompanied by sound installations, concerts and regional winter specialities.

Info: 21 November – 20 December 2026, as well as on 7 and 8 December.

Tip: Keep an eye out for other festive activities in the area including a Krampus run, alpaca experiences, and church tours in Maria Wörth.