

Krampus: Austria's Christmas Anti-Hero

If you've visited Austria in early December, you've probably met Nikolaus – the kind-hearted bishop who rewards children with sweets, nuts and small gifts on St Nicholas Day (6 December). But Nikolaus rarely travels alone. Lurking just behind him is Krampus, his horned and hairy counterpart, whose fearsome appearance, clanging chains and centuries-old folklore have made him one of the most captivating figures of the Alpine Christmas season. Krampus is St Nicholas' creepy Christmas companion, whose job it is to punish and scare any misbehaving townsfolk while the well conducted receive their treats.

During winter holidays in Austria, you can watch hundreds of these devilish figures during one of the country's festive traditions: the Krampusnacht ("Krampus night"). For a handful of set nights in winter, local residents don their terrifying costumes and hand-carved masks to parade for spectators, attempting to scare their socks off in the spirit of Christmas.

Krampus celebrations take place all over Austria. Here are five of our suggestions.

5 must-experience Krampus events

[Bad Gastein](#) in SalzburgerLand is famed for its fairytale feel, boutique spas and 200 km of pristine ski slopes. Here, the Krampus tradition is a really key event within the community. Come December, Gastein residents busy themselves by baking cookies, braiding baskets and weaving ropes in preparation for the [Krampus run](#). On 5 and 6 December, roughly 100 of the devilish figures go door to door, accompanied by St Nicholas, his basket carrier and an angel. While St Nicholas distributes biscuits and nuts to the well-behaved, Krampus frightens their naughtier counterparts and warns them to play nice the following year.

Also in SalzburgerLand, the [Rauris Valley](#) puts on a traditional Krampus spectacle called [Rauriser Toifi](#) ("devil of Rauris") from 5-7 December. The local Krampus versions wear carved masks hand-painted in red, white and black, have a red fabric tongue hanging out of their mouths, and walk through the valley in shaggy sheepskin coats, with a rod in their hand and bells and jingles tied around their bellies. The Rauriser Toifi have strict requirements regarding their appearance to ensure the custom remains authentic and original. A special feature of this parade is the "Einspeiber", dressed in a red coat, who accompanies St Nicholas and the Krampus, asking people to let them into their homes.

If Gastein and Rauris are among the most traditional, [Schladming](#) puts on one of the biggest spectacles every year. Held in late November, the event sees [up to 1,000 Krampus performers from around Austria and neighbouring countries](#) march from the Planai Stadium to the main square, wearing hand-carved wooden masks, thick sheepskin costumes and heavy cowbells, and accompanied by witches and other traditional figures, torchlight, drums

and traditional music. Approximately 7,000 spectators show up every year to watch the energetic parade. (Please note that this is a ticketed event!)

Want to catch Krampus during a winter city break? Head to the city of [Klagenfurt](#), Carinthia's capital boasting Renaissance courtyards and art nouveau theatres, for what is widely regarded [the largest Krampus run in Austria](#). 50,000 visitors come to see to 1,000 horned beasts run 1.5 km in their spine-chilling splendour every year in late November. For a smaller scale yet exceedingly impressive Krampus run in an incomparably picturesque location, locals will recommend the lakeside market town of [Velden am Wörthersee](#), which is just a half hour train ride away.

Across the provincial border, head to [Graz](#) for its [Krampus Run](#) on 8 November 2026. The city's centre is lined by beautiful buildings, with sweet cobbled alleys dipping in between shop fronts showcasing iridescent jewelry, handwoven fabrics and boutique cosmetics. But for one evening each winter, this charming thoroughfare becomes the gathering point for the city's Krampus. Crowds gather here at dusk in anticipation of the horned demons, who, upon arrival, torment the spectators with their jangling chains and gnarled masks. (Please note that this is a ticketed event!)