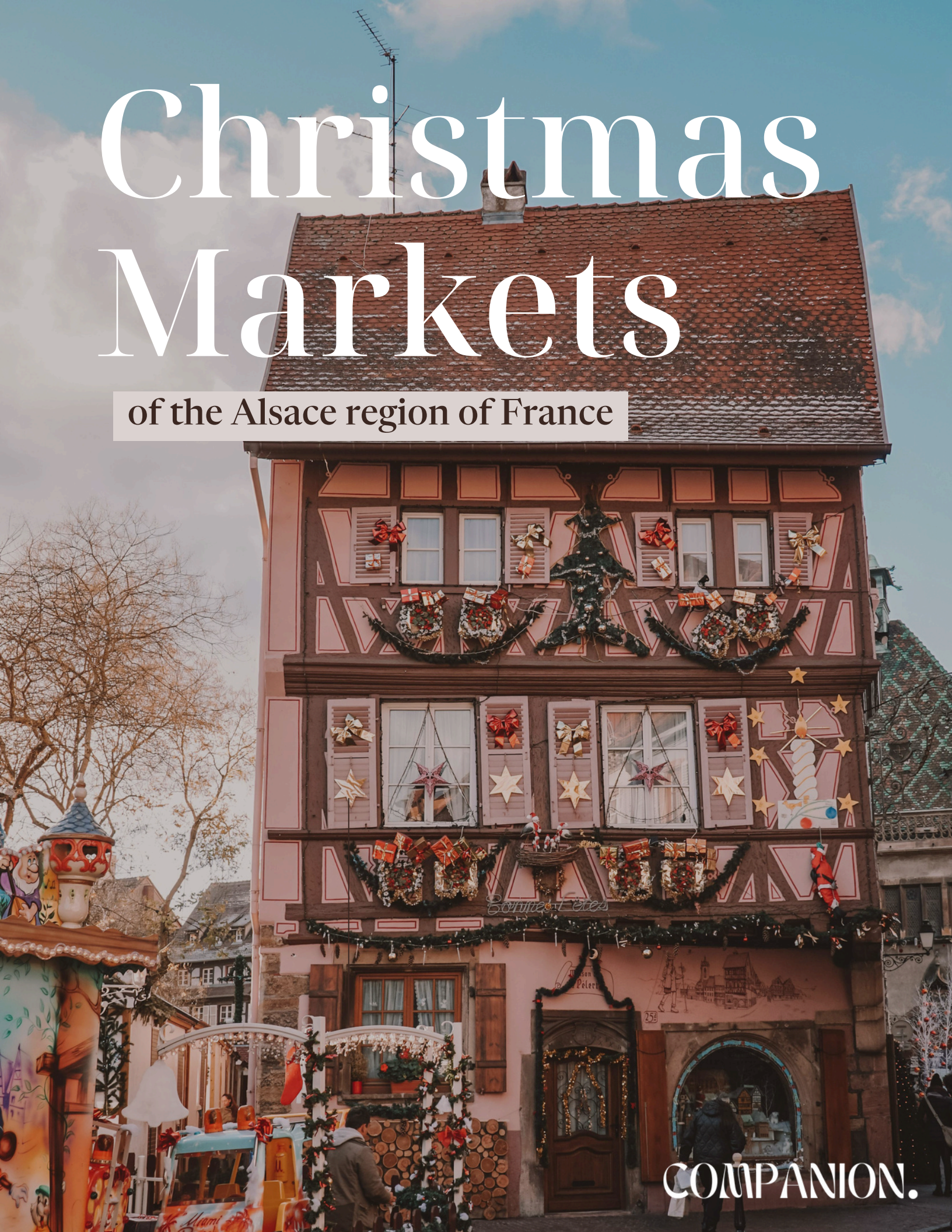


Christmas Markets

of the Alsace region of France



COMPANION.

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Trip Overview

Christmastime in the Alsace region of France is a magical experience. Towns overflow with storybook charm, scents of butter and mulled wine fill the air, and a cheery atmosphere hangs over the crowd.

It's truly a can't-miss life experience.

However, it's also a whirlwind of crowds and sensory overload, so a little planning goes a long way.

This guide will prepare you for what to expect including when to go, where to stay, what to eat, and how to structure your time so that you can focus on making memories - not last minute adjustments.



WHERE TO BASE

Colmar, France

HOW LONG TO STAY

4 days

PHYSICALITY OF LOCATION

Walking
Flat landscape

GO FOR THE

**Cozy holiday
ambience and
unique holiday
gifts**

DON'T MISS

**A glass of hot
wine under the
Christmas trees**

PREPARE FOR

**Crowds of
people**

When to Visit

Planning when to visit the Christmas markets is just as important as planning the trip itself. Not all of the markets are open at the same time, and most close right before Christmas.

Three of the markets included in this guide - Ribeauvillé, Kaysersberg, and Münster - are only open on select dates. I've included the most efficient way to see all of these markets, but you could definitely switch things up if you want to minimize the number of markets visited on a Saturday.

All of the markets have slightly different opening and closing times. The smaller ones close by 6:30 p.m. during the week and 7:00 p.m. on Saturday. Colmar markets stay open later - until 8:00 p.m. every day.

Check the official [Christmas in Alsace website](#) for the most up-to-date opening and closing times.

Some villages offer additional tours, shows, and activities throughout the month, which can also be found on the Christmas in Alsace website.



BEST TIME TO VISIT

Early December

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR TIME

Plan to arrive in Alsace on a Wednesday or Thursday if you want to hit the weekend-only markets.

Markets to visit *at a glance*

The Alsace region is full of charm. Situated right on the boarder of France, Switzerland, and Germany, the area is a melting pot of cultures. Each village is unique and offers its own take on a traditional Christmas market.



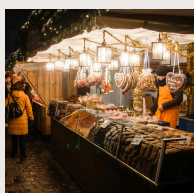
Colmar

When you picture classic, Alsatian Christmas markets, you're picturing Colmar.



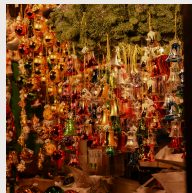
Kaysersberg

Surprisingly adorable, with a charming atmosphere and unique gifts. Wander to the back of town to find the river.



Riquewihr

Straight out of Beauty and the Beast, Riquewihr is dripping with charm. A small, easily navigable town.



Ribeauvillé

Ribeauvillé is full of friendly shopkeepers with unique goods. The biggest selection of handmade that I found!



Eguisheim

A tiny town just a few minutes away from Colmar. An easy starting place to begin your Christmas adventure.



Turckheim

A small village that packs a punch. This town is calmer and less busy than the others.



Münster

Six different markets shine under twinkling lights and picturesque decorations in Münster.



Strasbourg

The biggest markets in a bustling city. The number and diversity of markets makes it worth the crowds.

My Alsatian Itinerary

Explore the highlights of southeastern France over four days. Start in Paris and work your way down to the charming villages of the Alsace region.

PRE-TRIP

Arrive in Paris



For most people, it's going to make sense to book a flight into Paris and then train down to the Alsace region. There are flights into regional airports including Strasbourg (SXB), Basel (BSL), but if you're coming from the U.S. most of your options are going to be based out of CDG in Paris. Personally, I recommend staying in Paris for two-three days to discover the city at holiday time - it's magical!

DAY ONE (IDEALLY A THURSDAY)

Colmar - Eguisheim



Board a high speed train to Colmar to enter a Christmas wonderland. I recommend spending most of the day in Colmar itself, but if you find yourself with time to spare hop on over to Eguisheim. Just a quick ride away, Eguisheim will give you a break from the crowds and provide a fascinating peek into medieval France. Make sure you have dinner reservations lined up for your first night in town. See the "where to eat" section of this guide for suggestions.

DAY TWO (FRIDAY)

Turkheim - Münster



Turkheim and Munster offer a slightly calmer alternative to the other towns listed in this guide. But just because they're calmer, doesn't mean they should be missed! Turkheim and Munster are easily accessible via the Navettes de Noël (see the "Getting Around" section). Taste Munster soup in Munster (yep, the cheese!) and go on the nightly rounds with the Watchman in Turkheim

** The Munster Christmas market is only open on Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays beginning Nov. 29, 2024*

DAY THREE (SATURDAY)

Kaysersberg - Riquewhir - Ribeauvillé



These three villages are easily connected via the Navettes de Noël (see the "Getting Around" section). Each provides its own unique charm, and feels like a page out of a fairytale. The goods don't vary too much from town-to-town, but it's still worth stopping at each destination. Plan to spend around 1-2 hours in each village shopping, snacking, and enjoying the atmosphere. If you don't want to do all three on a Saturday, you could absolutely do Kaysersberg and Riquewihr on Thursday or Friday and then come back just to Ribeauvillé on Saturday or Sunday.

** The Ribeauvillé Christmas market is only open Dec. 7-8, 2024 and Dec. 14-15, 2024.*

** The Kaysersberg Christmas market is only open on Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays from Nov. 29-Dec. 2, 2024*

DAY FOUR (SUNDAY)

Strasbourg



Take a 30-minute train over to Strasbourg for a big-city Christmas. While very crowded during the weekend, Strasbourg has so much to offer with eight large, specialized markets and several smaller ones. In Strasbourg you'll find unique gifts, like the ceramic houses pictured left. You may even find a miniature version of homes you've seen around the region!

Can't-Miss Highlights

The Christmas markets are a feast for the senses. But between shopping and taking in the sights, be sure you don't miss these highlights!

- ✓ Shop the Christmas markets in the evening
- ✓ Drink a cup of hot wine by a Christmas tree
- ✓ Warm up with hot chocolate
- ✓ Peruse the markets for your favorite finds
- ✓ Join the Watchman for his night rounds in Turkheim
- ✓ Watch the children sing Christmas carols from the boats in Colmar
- ✓ Enjoy a glass of wine and nibbles at the Marché Gourmand Noël in Colmar
- ✓ Eat a bowl of Münster soup in Münster
- ✓ Try the gingerbread in Strasbourg
- ✓ Settle in by a cozy fireplace
- ✓ Eat a warm Bavarian pretzel



Where to Stay

I recommend basing yourself in Colmar for several reasons. First, the city has the best Christmas markets of the region, but they really shine in the early evening after all the crowds have left. Second, it's centrally located on the rail line to easily access Paris and Strasbourg for transit. Plus, it's connected to the Navettes de Noël for easy transport between smaller mountain towns. Finally, Colmar will have the most dining options of the smaller towns included in this guide. However, if fine dining is a priority for you, I'd recommend staying in Strasbourg. Hotels do book out ahead of time, so don't wait to make a reservation.

HOTEL SUGGESTIONS

La Maison des Têtes, a Relais & Château hotel

\$\$\$

Colmar, France

Historic, centrally located hotel. Exceptional service and wonderful rooms. Great breakfast. Super reasonably priced for a five-star hotel.

Le Chambard, a Relais & Château hotel

\$\$\$\$

Kaysersberg, France

Kaysersberg is a charming town and would be a lovely place to base! You can still access the shuttle and receive five-star service.

L'Esquisse Hotel & Spa

\$\$\$\$

Colmar, France

Located on the park, this hotel offers a nice break from the crowds and a wonderful spa to relax in after a long day in the cold.

Hotel Le Colombier

\$\$\$

Colmar, France

Located in the Little Venice area of Colmar, this hotel is in a prime location and offers comfortable, stylish rooms.

Where to Eat

Alsatian cuisine is unique to the region. It's very meat heavy and you'll often find similar options on every menu. For lunch, you can grab a quick sandwich or tarte flambée at the markets, but **for dinner you absolutely need a reservation planned ahead of time.** Even your own hotel restaurant may be fully booked by the time you arrive.

La Cocotte de Grand-Mère

A lovely, cozy, and intimate stop with a small menu that changes regularly. Definitely reserve ahead of time!

L'Arpège

Great food and a good atmosphere. Vegetarian options were available when we went, which was a welcome change of pace.

Brasserie Historique at La Maison des Têtes

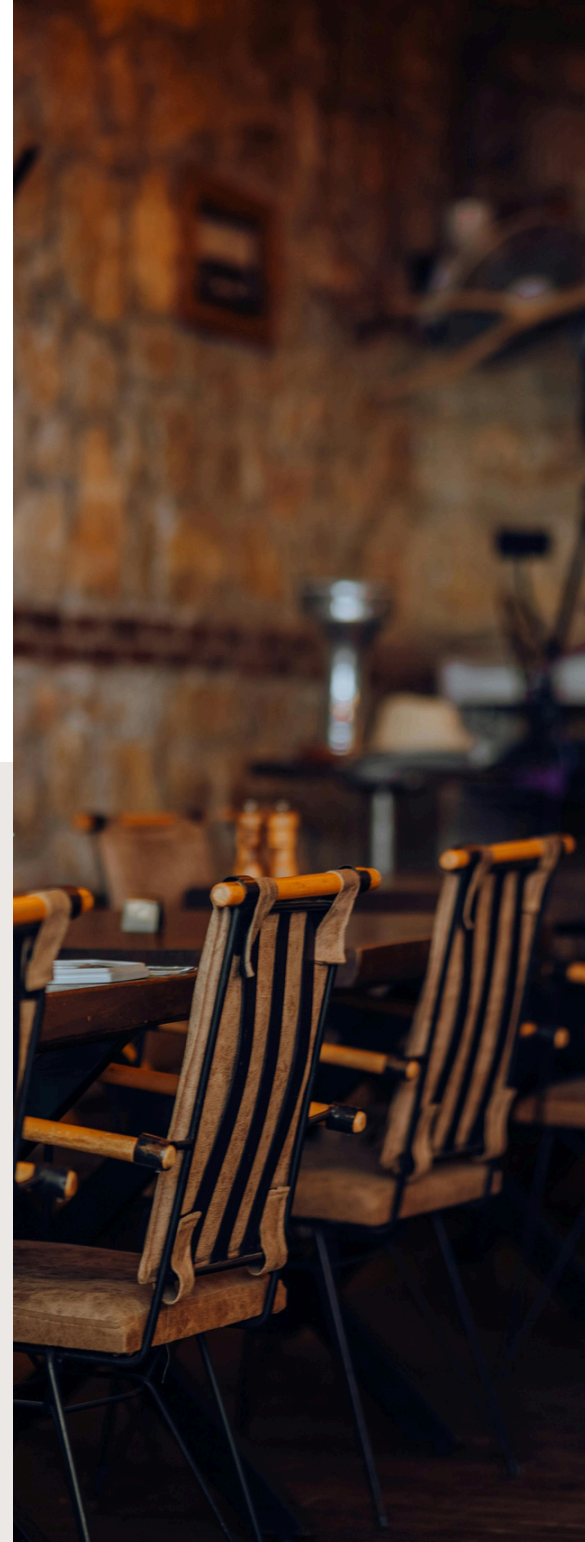
After a day walking around in cold, dreary weather, the historic restaurant at La Maison des Têtes is a welcome warm-up. If you're not a guest, it's definitely worth visiting for the atmosphere alone, but luckily for us, the food is excellent.

Marché Gourmand Noël

A giant tent in Colmar with different food stalls. It's a very fun, festive vibe, but the food offerings are limited. If you have dietary restrictions you may want to stop by before dinner, but don't plan on filling up here. It's a great place to taste and try the different wine offers of Alsace!

At the markets

Expect light fare like sandwiches, tarte flambée (like a crispy, thin crust pizza. There's almost always a vegetarian version of these.), pretzels, sausages, and occasionally soup. It's pretty much the same food at every market and often the lines can be long, with very few places to sit. It's not ideal, but it's also to be expected with festival and market settings. Even the boulangeries tend to offer limited menus. If you prefer to sit down and take a break during lunch you'll need to make a reservation ahead of time.



Dietary Needs

If you're vegetarian, vegan, or dairy-free you may have to put a little extra effort into meal planning. Research ahead of time and make reservations at locations you know are likely to have options you can eat.



Getting Around

Visiting the smaller Christmas markets around Colmar

The best option for getting around during the Christmas markets is using the Navettes de Noël. It's a low-cost shuttle (really, it's a coach bus) that runs on a regular timetable between each of the smaller towns surrounding Colmar.

The lines and timetables are [posted online here](#) but they're also listed at each stop and on the back of tourist maps.

The shuttles are very manageable during the week and earlier in the season, especially if you go early and catch the first or second bus out. However, on a Saturday or Sunday they can fill up quickly, so go early and be prepared to wait for the next bus. And on a weekend close to Christmas I would personally hire a driver for the day. While each town does offer parking if you choose to rent a car, it's limited and you often have to park away from the town itself.

Your best plan of action is to:

1. Buy your ticket ahead of time (go ahead and buy your ticket to cover all the lines)
2. Plan to leave on the first or second bus of the day
3. Head to the first or second stop. They don't limit the number of passengers per stop.
4. Get in line or form a line if one doesn't exist. People get pushy!
5. Don't panic if you don't make the first bus. Another will come!

The only city where I would recommend not taking the Navettes de Noël is Eugesheim. It's close enough to Colmar that you can Uber to and from, which is much faster (and more comfortable) than waiting in line for the bus. Just be sure to schedule a return Uber ahead of time so you aren't stuck waiting around for another Uber to become available.

We never had an issue finding a spot on the bus, especially because we caught the second bus each morning, so we moved through the towns earlier than most people, but it's best to be prepared.

Also be warned: people get pushy about getting on this bus. There was no attendant managing the line and different cultures queue differently, so it can get messy. But don't let it ruin your day! Just be prepared for a slightly chaotic start.

Getting Around

Visiting Strasbourg

Getting to Strasbourg is pretty easy, as there are multiple direct trains from Colmar daily.

Check the rail times the day before to figure out when you want to leave. I love using the app Trainline, but you can also buy tickets at the station. They're pretty cheap, around \$5-\$20 per ticket.

If you're visiting Strasbourg on a Saturday or Sunday be prepared for a packed train. You may have to stand, but it's not a very long journey.

The trip is only about 30 minutes, usually with one stop in between and no train changes. It's also a very easy and pleasant flat walk from Colmar city center to the train station, so don't let the map distance fool you!

This is what the bus looks like



And this is the logo for Navettes de Noël,
You'll see it indicating a shuttle stop.



Navettes de Noël
L'Alsace Essentielle - Pays de Colmar

Tips and Practicalities



Do I need to speak another language?

Nope! I never ran into a situation where I couldn't communicate with someone. Learning a few words of French or German will go a long way, but the people here are used to massive influxes of international tourism in December, and English is widely spoken.



Do I need cash?

While I wouldn't say it's absolutely necessary, it is helpful to have cash on hand. I visited only 2-3 market stalls that didn't take cards, but the real plus is being able to pay and move on quickly with cash, especially for low-cost items. There are ATMs located throughout Colmar and Strasbourg.



What should I pack and wear?

You'll need layers, rain gear, warm socks, and good walking shoes. I would also recommend waterproof shoes and an umbrella. While I was there most days were dreary with a light drizzle and the temperature stayed cool, but not frigid. I was generally damp and chilly the entire time, but not miserable. I would say that this region is more casual than Paris, so you'll be fine in jeans, a sweater, and a puffy coat for most situations.



How much walking will I do?

A lot! But almost all of it is flat. There are a couple of hills in the smaller towns, but you can take them at a leisurely pace and stop into shops along the way. I didn't encounter many stairs, either. However, I do think a wheelchair or crutches would be difficult to navigate through the crowded streets.

Tips and Practicalities



Will I feel safe?

I felt safe the entire time I was there, even in large crowds. Of course, it's important to be aware of your surroundings and alert to activities around you, but overall this is a very safe destination as long as you remain a smart traveler. Check the Department of State website before heading out to make sure there aren't any security updates.



What is the food situation like at each market?

See "Where to Eat" for more details, but prepare for a meat and cheese-heavy diet. Another piece of advice is that if you purchase a plastic or glass souvenir cup for drinks, you can re-use the cup to get discounted refills in any of the cities mentioned in this guide.

Additional Resources

The best place for up-to-date information, schedules, and event announcements is the Alsace Christmas website. Access it here: <https://www.christmas.alsace/>.

You'll find the Navettes de Noël schedule here, or look for the information on city maps when you get into town: <https://noel-colmar.com/fr/navettes-de-noel-2024>