



In the gloom of a Baltic winter, Vilnius is alive with light and celebration

Vilnius

3 December – 6 January

Though the locals decided to keep their city secret while in the throes of shaking off their Soviet past, Vilnius has now burst onto the Christmas scene with a vengeance and its new market is set to rival the best and oldest markets of towns in Germany and Poland. For the third year running, Town Hall Square will be converted into an arena for the fun and frivolity only a good December market can bring. There are heartfelt cheers amid labyrinths of carts displaying festive knick-knacks and delicious food. Lithuanian specialities, often overshadowed by the more popular cuisines of surrounding countries, are on offer in every corner of Town Hall Square and include delicacies such as herring, mushroom-filled dumplings and cranberry pudding all washed down by jugs of homemade cider. The Vilnius Tower, standing at 326m high, is decorated with lights from top to bottom to resemble a Christmas tree, the tallest one in the world, according to Vilnians.



Krakow

1 December – 31 January

Come December, Krakow is a winter wonderland where revellers hum to the cheerful buzz and Christmas hilarity ensues.

The Christmas market is a visual feast and is set to the backdrop of one of Poland's prettiest cities. Though winter brings bitterly cold weather, young and old alike brave the snow to experience the brightly coloured wooden chalets and the myriad gifts and trinkets on offer in and around the main square and its market building, the Sukiennice (Cloth Hall). Mouth-watering *piernik* (honey cake) and a vivid cornucopia of nuts, cookies and dried fruits go well with mouthfuls of *grzaniec galicyjski*, or hot mulled wine. But the heartiest winter warmer is a dish of dumplings, eaten at a market stall or in one of the restaurants on the square.



Try the Swiss seasonal treat of *brunli* - brownies - with a cup of mulled wine

Geneva

25 November – 24 December

Its name conjures images of conventions, treaties and world peace, but Geneva isn't all about geopolitical landscapes and a neutral arena for diplomacy. It's a lakeside gem nestled in the middle of Europe and in winter becomes a haven of festive lights, fluffy snow and lots of hearty food.

In the centre of the city at the popular Place de la Fusterie, Geneva's Christmas market has a decidedly jovial atmosphere: smiles are in abundance and kids stare in awe at carved wooden toys as smoke billows from roasted meat stalls. Swiss delicacies such as *brunli* (Christmas brownies) and *zimtsterne* (cinnamon cookies) are enough to put a spring in your step and a sip of hot mulled wine is the perfect accompaniment.



///NEWS In beautiful San Miniato, a hilltop town in Tuscany, November is the month of the truffle. A quarter of Italy's revered white truffles come from this region, and the yearly Truffle Fair which celebrates the harvest stretches over the last three weekends of November. san-miniato.com