



The Northern Illinois University Alumni Association
Presents



Christmas Markets of France and Germany

November 24 – December 1, 2018

\$3,389 Per Person, Double Occupancy from Chicago



This is an exclusive travel program presented by the Northern Illinois University Alumni Association

Did you know the Christmas tree first made its lyrical appearance in 1605? Many of our signature holiday traditions and customs - Christmas trees, gingerbread, nutcrackers, St. Nick and candy canes - come to us from Europe. We invite you to enjoy the Christmas Season as never before; return to the days of yesteryear and take pleasure in a dusting of snowflakes, hot mulled wine, stirring carols and festive squares while exploring the Christmas markets of France and Germany.

Day by Day Itinerary

Saturday, November 24 – CHICAGO / EN ROUTE (I)

We depart Chicago's O'Hare International Airport this afternoon by scheduled service of United Airlines and take to the skies as we begin our transatlantic journey to Zurich, Switzerland.

Sunday, November 25 – ZURICH / COLMAR (I,HD)

As the sun begins to rise on the Swiss Alps we arrive in Zurich, Switzerland where we'll meet our Tour Escort who will accompany us on vacation. Leaving Zurich Airport, we'll travel to the fairytale town of Colmar, France, considered the best-preserved city in Alsace. Christmas is a magical time in France and the markets of Colmar are no exception. A world of delicious fragrances, delightful craft goods and lights take shape along the rows, where surprising and mouthwatering discoveries await. As we'll soon find out, in the heart of winter Colmar sparkles and glows with a joie de vivre!

Monday, November 26 – COLMAR (B,L)

A leisurely day will begin with a walking tour of the idyllic town of Colmar, famous for its beautiful Renaissance and medieval half-timbered buildings. We'll begin in the Place d'Unterlinden, home to France's most visited Museum of Fine Arts, after those of Paris. Then we'll stop in the Place des Dominicains, where we'll visit the elegant Église des Dominicains, noted for its remarkable stained-glass windows. Next, we'll enjoy the sights of Place Jeanne d'Arc where we'll find St. Martin Collegiate Church. Built between 1235 and 1365, the church is the most imposing example of Gothic architecture in the Alsace. From here we'll make our way into the heart of the Old Town and take in the Koifhus, the former customs house. Our tour will come to an end in the iconic Petite Venise district, where we'll enjoy a stunning view from the Saint-Pierre Bridge, one of the most photographed views of Colmar. After lunch, the remainder of the day is at leisure. Colmar may be famous as the birthplace of Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty, but at Christmas it's equally well known for its markets. A route sparkling with illuminations will take you through the pedestrian streets of Colmar to discover five traditional Christmas markets, each of them constituting a mini-village with its world passionate craftsmen. And, you'll want to be sure to sample the tasty local fare of bredle aniseed and mulled wine with cinnamon and orange, along the way.

Tuesday, November 27 – COLMAR / STUTTGART

(Strasbourg) (B,HD)

Today we depart Colmar and travel to Strasbourg, the capital and principal city of the Alsace region. We'll begin our sight-seeing with a canal cruise encircling Strasbourg's Old Town, a perfect introduction to the city's covered bridges linked by medieval watchtowers and the scenic Petite France, once the tanners' district, dotted with mills. Next, we'll visit the Cathedral de Notre Dame built in 1439, with Renaissance-era stain glass windows, and a famous astronomic clock. Afterward, we'll have an opportunity to journey back in time to discover the spirit of the Strasbourg's Christmas Markets. It was in Strasbourg in 1570 that one of the very first Christmas markets in Europe took place, called the "Christkindelsmärik". The setting is perfect: old half-timbered houses richly decorated in an abundance of lights, good food, Christmas cookies and gingerbread, all combine to offer an unforgettable experience. Departing Strasbourg, we'll set our sights on the lively city of Stuttgart, Germany. Every year in Advent, Stuttgart is transformed into a glittering Christmas city. Second to none, the illuminations and festive concerts held in the Renaissance courtyard of the Old Palace and the "Winterland" on the Palace Square all contribute to the joyful Christmas atmosphere, enchanting visitor's year after year.

Wednesday, November 28 – STUTTGART

(Esslingen & Ludwigsburg) (B)

This morning we'll travel to nearby Esslingen am Neckar, where the medieval half-timbered houses create a unique and spectacular setting to the Esslingen Christmas and Medieval Market. The beautifully-preserved buildings surrounding the Rathausplatz are the perfect backdrop for the market's medieval flags, torches and banners. Craftspeople, blacksmiths, basket-makers and glass-blowers display their goods, while jugglers, stilt-walkers and entertainers perform to the visitors' amusement. We'll also have an opportunity to sample the tasty local fare of baked goods, hot wine, or brandy punch to help ward off the cold. This afternoon we'll travel to Ludwigsburg to explore the Baroque Christmas Market. We'll breathe in the scents of mulled wine, roasted chestnuts and gingerbread, and marvel at the uniquely decorated market square with over 170 adorned stalls offering traditional arts and crafts that make perfect presents.

Thursday, November 29 – STUTTGART /RUDESHEIM (Heidelberg) (B,HD)

Today we depart Stuttgart and travel to the tranquil riverside setting of Heidelberg, located on the banks of the Neckar River. As we'll soon learn, Heidelberg's Old Town radiates Christmas magic, with the scents of roasted almonds, cinnamon and hot chestnuts wafting through the winding alleyways. The atmosphere is unique - the stalls nestle idyllically amongst the historic squares of the Old Town, offering a warming glow of light along one of the longest pedestrian zones in Europe. Following our visit to Heidelberg, we'll set our sights on the village of Rudesheim, nestled in the Rhine River valley. This evening be sure to step into the holiday wonderland where twinkling Christmas trees dot the tiny lanes, tantalizing aromas waft from beautifully decorated stalls, and the sounds of merriment fill the air.

Friday, November 30 – RUDESHEIM (Frankfurt) (B,RD)

This morning we travel to the city of Frankfurt, synonymous with banking and big business, and home to Germany's most exciting skyline. Our introductory sightseeing tour will offer a closer look at the Main metropolis as well as guided walk in the Old Town, located on the north shore of the Main River. We'll see the Romer, one of the city's most important landmarks. Meaning "Roman", it has been the city hall for nearly 600 years; its use as an administrative center dates to the year 1435. We'll also take in St. Paul's Church. Originally established as a Lutheran church in 1789, this building later became the Frankfurt Parliament, giving it political importance and symbolism because this was the first public, freely-elected German legislature. Then we'll visit the Emperor's Cathedral, originally built in the 13th

century, where German kings and the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned from 1356 until 1792. Afterward, we'll have an opportunity to explore the Frankfurt Christmas Market, one of the oldest Christkindchesmarkets in Germany. Vibrantly colored stalls with twinkling lights brighten up the grey skies and the chance of snowfall gives the markets an especially festive feel. The market specializes in miniature marzipan figures called Bethmännchen, which originate from the local tradition of baking 6½-foot tall gingerbread men to represent Father Christmas. If there's a chill in the air, be sure to warm up by sampling the traditional German Glühwein while enjoying an assortment of music and street entertainment going on around the marketplace.

Tonight, we'll enjoy our farewell dinner at one of the wine houses along the Drosselgasse; a narrow alleyway lined with taverns where visitors and locals congregate for music, wine and entertainment. Afterward, you'll want to be sure to stroll the open-air booths, decorated with green boughs and large holly berry branches, filled with festive handcrafts, toys, and homemade candies, as you embrace and bring back memories of bygone days.

Saturday, December 1 – RUDESHEIM / CHICAGO (B,I)

This morning we depart Rudesheim and travel to Frankfurt Airport in preparation for our return journey home. No better time to reflect on memories of our *Christmas Markets of France and Germany* vacation to last a lifetime and new friendships made along the way!

*** * * Welcome Home * * ***

Visit myniu.com to make your reservation.

The Tour Price Includes:

- Pre-trip assistance.
- Informational packet.
- Alumni staff assistance for a worry-free travel experience.
- Economy-class air transportation by scheduled service of United Airlines.
- Transportation by deluxe private motor coach with accompanying Tour Escort.
- First-class hotel accommodations.
- Meals as shown in the Day by Day Itinerary.
- Sightseeing as detailed in the Day by Day Itinerary including applicable entrance fees.
- Luggage handling and portorage charges for one suitcase per person at the hotels.
- Taxes for included ground services, **and airline taxes and fuel surcharge of \$470 per person.**

The Tour Price Does Not Include: Items of a personal nature such as passport fees; travel insurance; luggage handling at airports; gratuities to the motor coach driver(s), Tour Escort and local Step-on Guides; and meals other than those stated above.

TOUR CONDITIONS

Tour Deposit and Payment: Reservations may be made by check or credit card (Visa, MC, or Discover). Tour prices do increase every year and it is possible that increases could occur after the printing of this brochure in advance of your tour's departure.

Tour Pricing: This is a package tour in which land tour costs and special group airfares have been combined in the most advantageous way. Should you wish to make any deviation from the package tour by changing your departure and/or return dates, the advantages of the package tour price may be eliminated and additional charges will be assessed.

Travel Insurance: Travel insurance is very important and can be purchased through USI Travel Insurance Services. This insurance is designed to cover you and your trip investment from trip cancellation/interruption penalties and provide medical expense, medical evacuation, baggage and personal effects loss, and accidental death coverage, as well as emergency assistance. There is an advantage to early enrollment in this travel insurance program. Purchasing coverage within 21 days (Plus and Elite Options) of your initial trip deposit can make you eligible for 1) Pre-existing Medical Condition Exclusion Waiver, and 2) Optional Cancel for Any Reason Coverage (Elite Option). If you wish to take advantage of the special above provisions, you must enroll within 21 days of the date your initial trip deposit is received. Contact Travel Insurance Services at 1-800-937-1387.

RESPONSIBILITY

THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION and/or any travel agency and/or supplier of services pursuant to or in connection with this itinerary shall not be responsible or become liable for any delay incurred by any person in connection with any means of transportation; nor for any loss, damage or injury to person or property by reason of any event beyond the control of any agency or supplier, or occurring without the fault or negligence of such agency or supplier. The right is reserved to substitute the airline to be used; the type of aircraft; and to alter the dates of the tour; the tour routing; or to cancel the trip if a minimum number of bookings is not reached for either the air or land portion of this itinerary. The right is also reserved to substitute hotels for other hotels in available categories. Further, the right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain at any time any person as a participant on any tour or to cancel any tour. No refund will be made for voluntary absence from the tour unless arrangements are made at the time of booking. The schedules contained herein are subject to change without notice. All rates are based on current Tariff and Exchange rates in effect at the time of the printing of this itinerary and are subject to adjustment without prior notification in the event of changes therein or in changes in the number of participants on which the rates are based. The carriers concerned are not to be held responsible for any act, omission or event during the time passengers are not on board their plane or conveyance. The passage contract in use by carrier concerned, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the carrier and the purchaser of this tour.

For more information contact the NIU Alumni Association at 815-753-1512 or visit the Travel section at myniu.com to make your reservation.

\$100 of the trip cost is tax-deductible as a charitable donation.

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