

Christmas Markets Trip 2019

Notes about an 8-day Christmas Markets bus trip in Europe with Trafalgar. Then three days in London.

The Participants

Ann, Rick, Amanda and Indianna.

Misleading

The Christmas Markets trip should be renamed the "The European Markets at Christmas Time". The implication from the title is that the markets are all about Christmas. However, they are just markets, with some having a Christmas theme.

Be Warned!

Some markets were EXTREMELY busy. We were pushing through crowds of people. Salzburg was the worst. There are also numerous alcohol stalls with people milling around generally blocking the way and many of these people smoke.

Lost & Not Working

My wallet, and on the first day. A massive inconvenience. My phone did not work reliably (not fixed). Amanda's CC card was not working (fixed later). Amanda's email not working (fixed later).

Accommodation

Most accommodation was adequate. Some were disorganised with rooms not ready, cards not working and ongoing renovations. The hotel in Munich had the worst breakfast arrangement. 400 guests and only 150 seats in the breakfast area. Furthermore, some expert decided that the breakfast area be arranged as lots of nooks and crannies making it harder to find a seat. Some advice: make the room open with lines of tables and chairs.

Best Scenery

- Engelberg, a ski town in the Swiss mountains, where we went on horse drawn carriage ride around the town and had a tour of a dairy with some food snacks. Scenic views on the way there and back.
- Pilatus, a mountain ski resort in Switzerland. Took a gondola to near the top which took 4 people per cabin. As we climbed up, we went through the clouds and above looked like a lake. Then swapped to a larger unit which took about 50 people. Modern buildings at the top. We found a tunnel that wound around the mountain with occasional views.

Best Big Town

Vienna. Wide streets and pavements, lots of green areas, a river runs through the city. Has trams. We walked 15km around the city one day. How can you compare a lovely town like Vienna to New York which is horrible?

Annoying

- All hotels used swipe cards as the room key. They also use them in the lifts. You swipe or insert your card in the lift and select your floor. Stops unwanted people getting into the hotel. Unfortunately, did not always work and we ended up on the wrong floor.
- Plane on first leg from Melbourne filled with screaming kids. Lady and kid beside me got in and out 4 times making me either stand up or squash up. A young kid sitting behind Ann was kicking the seat back until she gave him her dagger stare and he disappeared. Impossible to sleep.

Overrated

The Glockenspiel in central Munich. The worst thing was the Macca's nearby had no chips!!

A Big Improvement

Australians can now use the eGates at Heathrow Airport. It was great. Breezed through in minutes. Better than the hours we previously spent in queues.

Disappointed

Have been to London many times and seen most sights. It is becoming very crowded and the traffic is horrendous. For example, Westminster Bridge was so crowded that we had to push our way through. Oxford Street was the same. And there are few public toilets around. We also went to a "Winter Wonderland" in Hyde Park. Luckily, we went there the first night and it was not very crowded. However, we passed Hyde Park on Saturday night, on a bus, and the lines to get in were enormous. It was also cold in London and the days were short.

Some Interesting Places and Things

- We were taken to a town in the mountains and it was snowing. Walked around the town (with the snow falling). Had coffee in nice little cafe. Ann bought some stuff and a cuckoo clock. Had the clock shipped to Australia because very big. The sales tax on items is near 20% which visitors can reclaim. If you ship items overseas, the sales tax is not paid. In our case, the cost of shipping was the cost of the sales tax.
- A guided tour of Dachau concentration camp near Munich. It was interesting, depressing and very cold.
- Schonbrunn Palace in Vienna. Been there before but worth going again.
- Boat cruise around Lake Lucerne was good. Excellent commentary.

Not Impressed

Macca's in Oxford Street. Worst Macca's ever. Small shop, extremely busy, no toilets.

Trip Rating
6 out of 10.