

Cultural Tidbits CT # 12: : *Christkindlesmarkt* (Nr. 1)



If you look at a map of Europe and draw a line East to West from Prague to Paris and another line North to South from Copenhagen to Milan / Rome, you will find that the two lines will intersect just about where the city of *Nürnberg*, Germany is located. That East / West and North / South axis was one of the most important European trade routes of earlier times. The strategic location of Nürnberg made that city one of the most vibrant commercial centers of the 16th century. At that time these two trade routes crossed in the center of Old Nürnberg, where the market place developed, site of the present *Christkindlesmarkt*.

It was also in Nürnberg at about the same time that the guild movement (today's workers' unions) began. A poet and shoemaker by the name of Hans Sachs lived in Nürnberg and was a strong advocate of the guild movement there. It was his idea that all the shoemakers of Nürnberg should get together and form an association for mutual aid and protection and for the furtherance of their professional interests. If shoes can be "shipped" in all directions along the trade routes right from our own city, so he argued, then let's make the best shoes in the world. Other craftsmen soon followed suit and the guild movement received a strong impetus. "Made in Germany" is a handsome attraction and selling point for any product to this day.

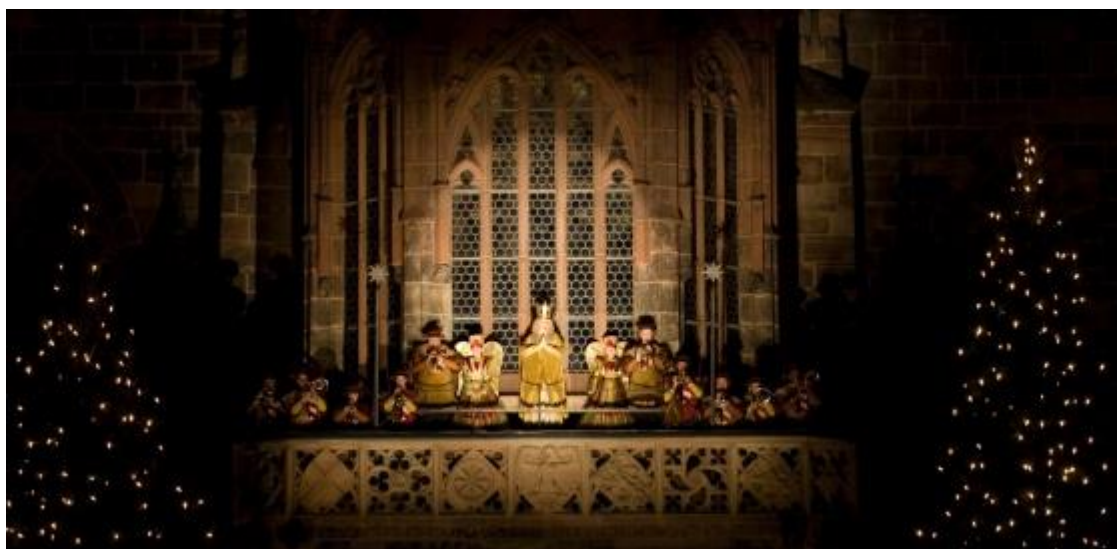


Christkindlesmarkt of Nürnberg

For centuries Nürnberg has also been the toy capital of Europe. Even nowadays the international "*Spielzeugmesse*" (toy fair) annually takes place in Nürnberg. And when are toys needed, traded, sold more than at any other time during the year? Christmas, of course. Put all those factors together, and it is but a short step to the founding in the 16th century of one of the oldest Christmas Markets in the world: the Nürnberg "*Christkindlesmarkt*." Located in the heart of Nürnberg, between the Gothic fountain and the "*Liebfrauenkirche*" (Church of our Lady), this Christmas Market, generally opening on either December 1st or on the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent every year, is certainly also one of the prettiest. In addition it is the one with the most attractions: there are daily programs, such as performances of choirs and brass ensembles or other bands and the regular appearance of "*Christkindl*" (an angel-like figure reminiscent of the Christ Child) on the balcony of the gothic church.

The fragrances of the Glühwein, the Bratwurst and roasted chestnuts or almonds, the sound of Christmas music and the glitter of the *Christkindlesmarkt*, or any other Christmas market in Germany, - yes, it's all commercial - but Christmas just wouldn't be the same without it!

Enjoy!



Here are two internet addresses that John Culbreth has kindly sent out. Thanks, John!

<http://www.germany.travel/en/specials/christmas/christmas.html>

<http://www.germany-christmas-market.org.uk/>

Dr. Werner J. Dobner

CT # 12a: Cultural Tidbits: Christmas Markets (Nr. 2)

The German Christmas markets are a romantic tradition: they are feasts for all the senses. With their magic mixture of warm and warming drinks, spicy goodies and colorful ideas for Christmas gifts, they bewitch millions of visitors



during this joyful season.

Tradition says that the city of Dresden has the oldest Christmas Market. The city annals mention a market event around Christmas time back in 1434! Originally, the market only lasted a day or two and was to provide people with things they needed to overcome the cold winter season: warm clothes, fire wood, oil lamps and candles, dried fruit and various grains that could be stored without the danger of spoiling. Over the course of centuries, these markets changed in nature, length and purpose - and even in name.

In Munich the earliest of such markets goes back to the so called "*Nikolaimärkte*", conducted on the eve of St. Nikolaus, Dec. 5th and on Nikolaustag, Dec. 6th. At first only dealers from Munich were allowed to exhibit their goods, but soon wood carvings from nearby Oberammergau, nativity scenes from Italy, gingerbread goods and wooden toys from Nürnberg as well as decorations for the Christmas tree from the *Fichtelgebirge* were offered. Under the influence of the Age of Enlightenment and the Reformation the name was changed to "*Christkindlmarkt*."

Measured by the number of visitors (4.5 million), the city of Essen, which celebrates the famous annual “Feast of Lights” at this time, has the biggest Christmas market, followed by Stuttgart, Munich and Frankfurt with 3 million visitors each. Measured by the number of market booths, Berlin with 400 seems to be in the lead before Dortmund, which boasts 300. In addition Dortmund claims the tallest Christmas tree of 45 meters consisting of 1700 individual smaller trees mounted on an iron support grid.



Weihnachtspyramide in Dresden

With the biggest “*Weihnachtspyramide*” (14 m) Dresden entered the Guinness Book of Records in 1995. The “*Weihnachtspyramide*” is a wooden pyramid structure with candles, which when lit will generate thermal heat that drives a propeller on top of the pyramid. Thus the pyramid turns slowly and displays scenes of Christ’s nativity. Another specialty of Dresden is its famous “*Christstollen*”, a loaf-shaped cake with fruit, nuts and *Marzipan*, which has been a tradition here for over 700 years. The Dresdeners call this Stollen “*Striezel*” which gave their Christmas market its name: “*Striezelmarkt*.”

An attraction at the Christmas market in Leipzig is an oversized 857 square meter big Advent calendar. Here the 24 windows of the calendar are real windows of a number of buildings stretching over a whole block.

Those who prefer to visit Christmas markets on a smaller but often more romantic scale may wish to go to Ludwigsburg, Esslingen, Rothenburg, Ludwigslust or last but not least Annaberg in the Erzgebirge, where traditional carvings of Christmas art and *Klöppelarbeit* (bobbins-lace work) as well as a parade of the natives wearing local folklore outfits can also be seen.

‘Tis (soon) the season to be merry!

Dr. Werner J. Dobner