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STRASBOURG

Alsace, France

THE MARKET

The Christkindelsmärik, the oldest Christmas market in France, held since 1570. More than 300 wooden chalets from place Broglie to the cathedral, and the Great Tree on place Kléber. The whole city lights up: that is why it calls itself the “capital of Christmas”.

BY CAMPERVAN

You do not take the camper into the centre. Cross the Rhine and sleep in Germany: in Kehl, on Schwimmbadstraße, there is an overnight area for campervans open all year, with 20 places and a stay of three days at most. From Kehl the tram takes you into central Strasbourg in about 15 minutes. Bonus: sleeping in Kehl, Strasbourg’s low-emission zone no longer concerns you.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Come on a weekday, not a Saturday. The market in the Hôtel de Ville park is the quietest of them all, just as beautiful, with fewer chalets. And the cathedral in the morning, before the stalls open, is yours.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Camper area · Wohnmobilstellplatz Am Wasserturm, Schwimmbadstraße 1, Kehl · GPS 48.56339, 7.81396

Kehl → Colmar, ~75 km on the A35, a toll-free motorway · ~1 h by camper. Alsace’s winter obligations apply only in the mountain communes, marked with a sign at the entrance — on the motorway across the plain you normally do not need to worry about them.

2

COLMAR

Alsace, France

THE MARKET

Six markets in one town, spread between the canals of Little Venice and the half-timbered houses. In the evening, when the lights are reflected in the water, it is the most beautiful town of the route.

BY CAMPERVAN

The campervan area at the marina is a ten-minute walk from the old town and has electricity, showers and toilets — but in Advent you book it early. Colmar is also the base for the next stop: from here the Christmas shuttles run to the markets of Riquewihr, Eguisheim, Kayserberg, Ribeauvillé and Turckheim. Stay two nights and leave the camper parked.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Little Venice after 7 pm, once the coaches have left. People gather at the stalls; the canals stay empty.

The villages are done with the Christmas shuttle from Colmar. By camper: Eguisheim is ~7 km away, Riquewihr ~15 km.

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RIQUEWIHR AND EGUISHEIM

Wine Route, Alsace, France

THE MARKET

Two medieval wine villages, small enough to walk through in an hour. In Riquewihr the market is open every day until almost Christmas. In Eguisheim a large arch welcomes you into a small market of around 30 craftspeople chosen one by one, and the streets turn in concentric circles around the castle.

BY CAMPERVAN

In Eguisheim, the town hall car park has a service area with 33 places for campervans. In Riquewihr the simplest thing is not to take the camper at all: the shuttle from Colmar drops you at the entrance to the village.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Eguisheim on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening. The village is lit just as at the weekend, but on the circular streets you are almost alone.

Eguisheim → Kayserberg, ~20 km on the wine-village roads, or the shuttle from Colmar · ~30 min by camper.

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KAYSERSBERG

Weiss valley, Alsace, France

THE MARKET

Around 30 chalets at the foot of the castle ruins, among seventeenth-century houses. It is the most authentic of the village markets — and the strictest with the calendar: it opens only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That is why you come on Friday evening, and not earlier.

BY CAMPERVAN

The trap almost nobody mentions: during the market, the campervan area near the centre is reserved for coaches. You leave the camper at the football ground and take the free shuttle into the centre. Kayserberg sits at the entrance to the Vosges: if you see the winter-equipment sign, you need winter tyres or chains in the boot.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Friday evening, not Saturday. If you also have Saturday morning free, Ribeauvillé holds a medieval market at the weekend, one shuttle away.

Kaysersberg → Hinterzarten, ~90 km: Colmar, the Rhine bridge at Breisach, Freiburg, then the B31 through the Höllental · ~1½ h by camper. The last part climbs towards 900 m; this is where real winter begins.

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RAVENNASCHLUCHT*Black Forest, Germany — Saturday***THE MARKET**

A Christmas village in a gorge, beneath the 40-metre viaduct of the Höllentalbahn railway, lit in colour after dark. The trains pass overhead, through the light. Around 40 exhibitors, Black Forest craft, nothing mass-produced. It is the most spectacular place on the route — and the only one you must prepare for a month ahead.

BY CAMPERVAN

Entry is only with a ticket bought in advance, online, for a slot of about two hours; there is no ticket office at the market. For 2026, sales opened on 14 October and the tickets are gone. Returned tickets appear now and then, but only in the official ticket shop; do not buy from private sellers — the organiser warns that they are often fake. For the years ahead, sales open in mid-October: set an alarm. The market is open from the last week of November until just before Christmas, Thursday to Sunday, on Thursdays only in the evening. The car park by the market only takes vehicles the size of a VW Transporter, so there is no room for the camper. The answer: sleep in Hinterzarten or Titisee and take the shuttle — free, and booked together with your ticket.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Bring cash: signal in the gorge is weak and many stalls do not take cards. And pick an early-afternoon slot: you get daylight on the walls of the gorge and the viaduct lighting up.

Hinterzarten → Gengenbach, ~90 km across the Black Forest on the B500 and B33, through Triberg, or ~110 km down towards Freiburg and on the A5 · ~1½ h by camper. On the mountain road, winter tyres are not optional.

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GENGENBACH*Kinzig valley, Black Forest, Germany***THE MARKET**

The heart of the route. The town hall has 24 windows and every Advent becomes the largest Advent-calendar house in the world. Every evening at six the town hall stands in darkness, and a new window lights up with a work of art — a different artist every year. In the square, a small craft market.

BY CAMPERVAN

Gengenbach has a campervan park with electricity, water and disposal, and the old town is small: you cross it on foot.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

After the six o'clock ritual the square empties within minutes. Stay: all the windows opened so far are still lit, and you have them to yourself.

Gengenbach → Esslingen, ~160 km on the A5 and A8, or over the mountains by Freudenstadt · ~2 h by camper.

7

ESSLINGEN AM NECKAR*Stuttgart region, Germany***THE MARKET**

Two markets in the same old town: a Christmas market and a medieval one, with blacksmiths, jugglers, fire artists and minstrels, around 180 stalls and four stages. It is the liveliest market of the route — more show than shopping. Open every day, until 22 December.

BY CAMPERVAN

The Stuttgart region has low-emission zones: without the German green sticker you do not enter, foreign plates included. In the old town the camper has no business anyway. Sleep at a campervan area or a winter-open campsite in the Stuttgart area and come by S-Bahn: line S1 stops at Esslingen, a few steps from the centre.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Climb the castle path through the vineyard to above the town: you see the whole market lit from above. And come from Sunday to Thursday, when it closes earlier and there are fewer people.

Esslingen → Rothenburg, ~150 km north-east · ~2½ h by camper. If you have one more evening, Ludwigsburg has a baroque market beside the palace, 20 km from Esslingen.

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ROTHENBURG OB DER TAUBER

Franconia, Bavaria, Germany

THE MARKET

The Reiterlesmarkt, more than 500 years old, with 61 stalls between the market square, the Grüner Markt and the church, in a town entirely enclosed by walls and towers. The name comes from the “Reiterle”, a rider from the winter legends. Brass bands play every day, and in the town hall courtyard Advent windows made by the town’s children open one by one.

BY CAMPERVAN

The P2 campervan area on Nördlinger Straße has 50 places, is open all year and lies 400 m from the centre, with a bus stop at the entrance. In winter the water may be turned off and the snow is not cleared everywhere: fill your tank beforehand.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

Climb onto the wall-walk at dusk and circle the town from above, with the market lit below. Early in the morning, before the day-trippers arrive, the town is yours.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Camper area · Wohnmobilstellplatz P2, Nördlinger Straße, Rothenburg · GPS 49.37075, 10.18303

Rothenburg → Nuremberg, ~85 km east · ~1½ h by camper.

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NUREMBERG

Franconia, Bavaria, Germany — end of the route

THE MARKET

The Christkindlesmarkt, probably the best-known Christmas market in the world: around 180 chalets with red-and-white canvas roofs on the Hauptmarkt, beneath the Frauenkirche. Tradition is strictly guarded: no plastic toys, no music through loudspeakers. The market is opened by the Christkind, a girl chosen by the city, who speaks a prologue from the church balcony. In 2026 the opening is on Friday 27 November at 17:30, and the market runs until 24 December.

BY CAMPERVAN

The city has a few free campervan areas of eight places each, with a stay of three days at most — in Advent they are full. The safe answer is a campsite open all year and the underground into the centre.

WITHOUT THE CROWD

The opening on 27 November is a spectacle, but with tens of thousands of people in the square. For the market itself, come at 10 in the morning on a weekday. In the evening, climb towards the Kaiserburg: you see the old town lit from above.

End of the route. Karlsruhe is ~260 km west, Strasbourg ~340 km; the ways home are in the practical guide.

THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Distance	~700 km, Strasbourg to Nuremberg
Driving time	~11 h in all, without stops
Recommended length	10–12 days
Stops	9
Countries	FR · DE
Highest point	Black Forest, around 900 m
Direction	west to east, so the weekend falls in the middle
Best months	Dec

GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU LEAVE

The big towns have a market every day, the villages only at weekends: do the towns during the week. In Kaysersberg the market is open only Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

In Kaysersberg, during the market, the camper area near the centre is reserved for coaches: leave the camper at the football ground and take the free shuttle.

In Colmar, the marina camper area is booked ahead during Advent.

THE WEEK OF THE ROUTE

Monday – Tuesday: Strasbourg, then Colmar.

Wednesday – Thursday: Riquewihr and Eguisheim, by shuttle from Colmar.

Friday: Kaysersberg, in the evening.

Saturday: Ravennaschlucht, with the ticket bought in October.

Sunday: Gengenbach, at six.

Monday: Esslingen.

Tuesday: Rothenburg.

Wednesday – Thursday: Nuremberg.

WHEN TO GO

Ideal: weekdays between the end of November and mid-December.

Avoid: Saturdays in Strasbourg and Colmar, and the last week before Christmas, when everything is full.

Steer clear of: Totensonntag, the Sunday before the first Sunday of Advent — a day of quiet in Germany, when some markets stay closed. And the afternoon of 24 December, when everything closes.

Aim for: the opening of the Nuremberg market, Friday 27 November 2026 at 17:30, with the prologue spoken by the Christkind.

FRANCE

Motorways: the A35 between Strasbourg and Colmar is toll-free.

Strasbourg low-emission zone: you need the Crit’Air sticker, foreign plates included — order it only from the French state’s official site, certificat-air.gouv.fr. In 2026 Crit’Air 4, 5 and unclassified vehicles are banned. Fines apply. If you sleep in Kehl and come by tram, the zone does not concern you.

Winter obligations: in the mountain communes of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin, from 1 November to 31 March, you need winter tyres with the mountain-and-snowflake symbol (3PMSF) or chains in the boot. The zone starts at the entrance signs. Fines apply.

GERMANY

Motorways: no vignette and no toll for campervans up to 3.5 t.

Low-emission zones: in cities with a zone you need the German green sticker, foreign plates included. The French sticker is not recognised in Germany, and the German one is not recognised in France — you need both. Order the green sticker from a vehicle inspection centre before you leave.

Winter tyres: compulsory whenever the road is snowy or icy, whatever the date. In the Black Forest in December, that means practically all the time.

WINTER IN A CAMPERVAN

Where you sleep: many campsites close from November. The city campervan areas remain, and in Advent they fill early — arrive by 3 pm.

Gas: butane stops giving pressure below zero. In winter you use propane.

Water: empty the grey-water tank if frost is forecast, and if you are out all day, leave the heating on minimum.

Condensation: air the van for a few minutes every morning, even in the cold. Otherwise a night’s moisture ends up in the mattresses.

THE WAY HOME

Fast: from Nuremberg on the A6 towards Heilbronn, then the A6 and A5 west — Karlsruhe is ~260 km, Strasbourg ~340 km.

Beautiful: back through Rothenburg and along the Tauber valley to Würzburg, then the A81 south towards Heilbronn and Karlsruhe, or the A3 towards Frankfurt if you are heading north. The towns on the Tauber have small markets too, without the crowd.

Can I do the route in reverse?

Yes, but you have to line up the weekend again: Kaysersberg and Ravensaschlucht stay Friday-to-Sunday only. Starting from Nuremberg on a Monday, you still reach them in the middle of the trip.

What if I cannot get tickets for Ravensaschlucht?

Skip the stop and spend another evening in Gengenbach, or stop in Freiburg, which has its own market. Do not buy tickets from private sellers: the organiser warns that they are often fake.

Do I really need winter tyres?

In Germany, yes, whenever there is winter on the road, and in the Black Forest there almost certainly is. In France, in the mountain communes of Alsace, from 1 November you need them or chains.

Can I sleep in the camper next to the markets?

Rarely. Towns close their centres in Advent, and some campervan areas are handed over to coaches, as in Kaysersberg. Each stop above tells you where you actually sleep.

Is it a good route with children?

Yes. Esslingen, with the jugglers and the fire, and Nuremberg, with its children's programme, are the liveliest. At Ravensaschlucht children can send letters from the Christmas post office.

Are the dates certain?

For Nuremberg, yes: they are officially announced. For the others the pattern repeats every year — from the end of November to just before Christmas — but check the exact days on each town's official pages before you leave.

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

*“The day belongs to the road, the evening to the lights.
Arrive with the dark and leave before the crowd —
the market belongs to those who know what day it is.”*

Documentary check: September 2026. Places, hours and conditions change — check them before you leave.