

Cologne Itinerary

December 4-5

I planned this trip to Cologne in **December** for the purpose of visiting the **Christmas markets** and getting away for a **quiet weekend**. I am convinced that the Germans know how to do Christmas better than anyone else, and I have vowed that as long as I'm living in Europe, I will make a trip to Germany every Christmas season.

We didn't do much sightseeing, just a visit to the **Cathedral**, but we did walk around quite a bit and the Christmas markets were well worth the trip. We saw three of the markets on Saturday and the last two on Sunday. I recommend visiting all **five markets** as each one is a bit different.

The markets are not made up of your typical stands with selling junk. The little huts are decorated wonderfully and some are full-on shops that you can walk into. The planning that goes into these markets is quite impressive. There are many shops with **quality gifts** (yes, I ended up spending much more money than I had planned!) and of course each market has at least one *gluwein* (hot spiced wine!) and **pretzel** vendor. This was a good trip to take just before Christmas, when things are busy, you don't want to come back exhausted, and leaving Saturday morning still leaves you Friday night in Paris. And snow on Saturday evening and Sunday was just the trick to put us in the Christmas spirit!

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Sat, Dec 4	Cologne	<i>Train:</i> 10h01 PARIS NORD 9421 13h15 KOELN HBF <i>Hotel:</i> Cologne Marriott Hotel Johannisstr. 76-80, Altstadt Köln, 50668 Germany Phone+49 (0) 221 94222700 Fax+442070127006 E-mail cork.ecommerce.reservations@marrriott.com Dinner: Brauerei zur Malzmühle Heumarkt 6 50667 Köln Tel. 0221 210-117 Métro : Heumarkt I highly recommend this restaurant—it's a brewery with local dishes , not expensive, lively atmosphere. Crowded, but worth the wait (you can always grab a beer while you wait! Or better yet, go at non-peak hours.)	€182 each (round-trip train) €143.44 total (hotel)	<p>We didn't have to get up at the crack of dawn, yet still arrived in time for lunch.</p> <p>The hotel was quite nice. The lobby is nothing special but the room was fantastic and may be the best hotel bed I've ever slept in. It's on the other side of the train station from the city center, which is not ideal, but it's in a pleasant residential neighborhood and still only a 5 minute walk from the train station and a 10 minute walk from the city center. Cologne is quite walkable—we didn't need the metro, buses or taxis the entire weekend.</p> <p>Keep in mind that food is cheaper in Cologne than in Paris so eating out is not a splurge. One vendor was convinced that without dinner reservations made well in advance, we wouldn't find anything on a Saturday evening during Christmas market season. So if she's right, reservations would be wise, but we went to a great spot that didn't take reservations anyways.</p>
Sun, Dec 5	--	<i>Train:</i> 19h11 KOELN HBF 9462 22h35 PARIS NORD		

Note: As I was on a Christmas market roll, I went to the **Christmas market** the weekend after in **Lille**, just as a day trip. It was a long day, and the Christmas market was not nearly as good as the one in Cologne (we ended up sneaking into a movie to kill a few hours in the afternoon—good use of my UGC pass!), but it was worth the trip to see Lille, as hadn't been before. The train trip is just one hour and cost us €47 each, round-trip:

09h58 PARIS NORD 7029
11h00 LILLE FLANDRES

22h02 LILLE EUROPE 7298
23h02 PARIS NORD

Keep in mind that there are two TGV train stations in Lille. They are in walking distance but be sure you know which one you are going to or you could be cutting it too close!