



# Christmas Markets

A MINI TRAVEL E-GUIDE

**HotelREZ**  
HOTELS & RESORTS



# About

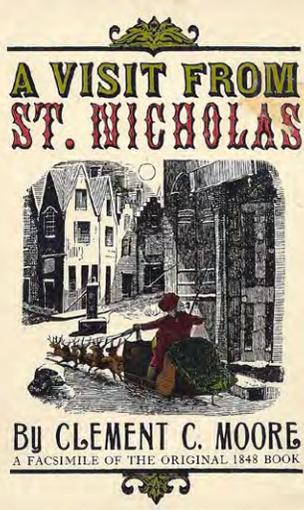
## Presenting Europe's Christmas Markets

The original Christmas Market is believed to have started somewhere in central Europe, more precisely in Germany, Austria, South Tyrol and the Alsace region; but has long since spread throughout Europe to become a tradition in many cities.

From the world-famous Prague market to lesser-known gems in Denmark or Spain, HotelREZ Hotels & Resorts has compiled a list of top market recommendations in its latest mini travel e-guide. Look no further for exceptional arts and crafts, unique gift inspiration and copious amounts of mulled wine, gingerbread and many other local specialties.



**COOK**



**READ**

## Getting In The Festive Spirit

**Read:** [A Visit From St. Nicholas](#) by Clement C. Moore

*"Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse"*

Until 1823, St. Nicholas - a bald Greek Orthodox Bishop who helped the poor - was a very serious religious figure. So, what happened? American academic Clement C. Moore gave old Saint Nic a jolly makeover, a brand new red velvet suit and hat, and eight reindeers!

**The Faber Book Of Christmas** by Simon Rae

This is a book about the history of Christmas, as you might have never heard it before: from its roots in a variety of Pagan cultures to several accounts of Christmas spent in the different parts of the world.

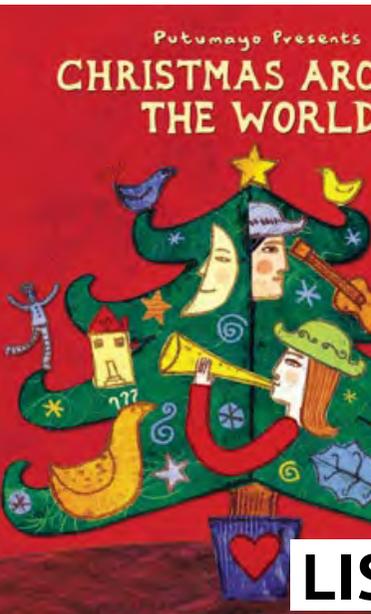
**Listen:** Perhaps one of the most famous Christmas carols of all time, **'Silent Night'** (from the German 'Stille Nacht') was composed in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber to lyrics by a young priest, Joseph Mohr, and first performed on Christmas Eve at St Nicholas parish church in Oberndorf, a small Austrian village on the Salzach river.

For something a bit less traditional, try Putumayo's collection of familiar Christmas songs performed by artists from around the globe. From a Cuban rendition of 'Joy to the World', to a flamenco version of 'White Christmas', **'Putumayo's Christmas Around The World'** is bound to give your holiday season a unique international flavour.

**Cook:** Give your Christmas a special taste: try some of these mouth-watering [Christmas recipes](#) from around the globe.

**Watch:** Widely considered to be the ultimate film version of Charles Dickens' classic novel, **'Scrooge (A Christmas Carol)'** is a 1951 classic British adaptation, starring Alastair Sim as Ebenezer Scrooge.

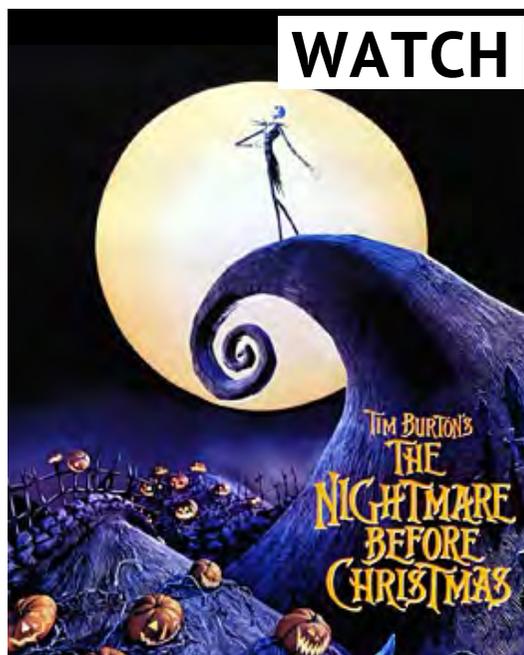
A stunning work of stop-motion animation, **'The Nightmare Before Christmas'** tells the tale of Jack Skellington, aka the Pumpkin King. Despite having recently presided over a very successful Halloween, Jack is bored with his job and feels that life in Halloweenland lacks meaning. Then he stumbles upon Christmastown and promptly decides to make the Yuletide his own!



**LISTEN**



**WATCH**





# Top Markets

Get ready for merry carollers, glittering tea lights and the smell of sweet cinnamon and spice in the air: these are Europe's finest Christmas markets.



## Barcelona

**La Fira de Santa Llúcia** is a traditional Christmas fair taking place in front of the Barcelona Cathedral and which dates as far back as the 18th century (i.e., 1786). According to local history, the fair, initially hosted around the 13th of December, in honour of patron saint St Lucy, was also known as the “girls' fair” as it was the place for unmarried women to go in search of possible suitors.

**Highlights:** This is a very Spanish market and does not have the typically German feel of most Christmas markets, so don't go expecting to find mulled wine or bratwurst in here. However, there is an undeniably Christmas feel - particularly in the evening, when the lights in the stalls sparkle against the backdrop of the impressive Barcelona Cathedral. There are 300 or more stalls selling all kinds of handcrafted decorations and gifts, along with mistletoe, poinsettias and tones of Christmas trees. There is also a Nativity Scene contest, musical parades and exhibitions, including a popular life-size Nativity Scene at the Plaça Sant Jaume.

**When:** 1st - 23rd December

**Where:** Pla de la Seu & Avda de la Catedral, Barcelona, Spain

**What to Buy:** Best for nativity scene figures and traditional crafts. The most popular being the Catalan figure of the **Caga tió**.

**Other markets:** **La Fira de Nadal a la Sagrada Família**, is a Christmas market taking place around the gardens outside the Sagrada Família. Smaller in size than the Fira de Santa Llúcia, it makes however for a good opportunity to see the iconic Barcelona building and go Christmas shopping in one trip.





## Bath

Arguably England's best, the **Christmas Market in Bath** has been taking place in the city centre since 2000. Nevertheless, and thanks to its unique setting in the shadows of notorious Bath Abbey, it is certainly one of the prettiest. Selling everything you could possibly need for your festive celebrations, from local produce to handmade original decorations and gifts, this market is the reason Bath is now nicknamed the 'Christmas Capital of the West'.

**Highlights:** For 3 weeks, the romantic streets and square between Bath Abbey and the world famous Roman Baths are transformed into a Christmas shopper's haven. Hundreds of wooden stalls line up the streets, each offering original, handmade gifts, Christmas decorations and traditional foods. Many of the items on sale are made within the local area, giving the market a distinct identity and feel. A big Christmas tree in the Abbey churchyard completes the unique setting.

**When:** 26th November – 13th December

**Where:** Around Bath Abbey and next to the Roman Baths, in the heart of the city's main shopping district.

**What to Buy:** This is a very British take on the traditional German Christmas market, so it's a great place to try the best produce of Bath and the South West. Take your pick from award winning ciders, artisan cheddar, handmade chutneys, pickles, preserves and curds.





## Berlin

A true delight to the senses, Germany's Christmas markets are a tradition since the Middle Ages. Expect aromas of spiced mulled wine, gingerbread and sausage to fill the air as you wander through the finger-tingling cold streets.

**Highlights:** Many believe the **Weihnachtszauber at the Gendarmenmarkt**, in the heart of the central Mitte district, to be Berlin's best market. This rather upscale market is a true Winter Wonderland, set in one of the city's most beautiful squares, edged by three elegant and impressive buildings: The Neu Kirche or Deutsche Dom (German Church), the Konzerthaus (Concert Hall) and the Franzosische Friedrichstadtkirche (French Church). Boasting culinary temptations from some of the country's top chefs as well as lots of entertainment including: jugglers, acrobats, fire artists, dance groups, choirs, classical, jazz and gospel ensembles.

**When:** 23rd November - 31st December

**Where:** Gendarmenmarkt square

**What to Buy:** Best for unique gift ideas and handmade crafts such as flax embroidery, ivory or wood carvings, as well as gourmet delicacies such as white hot-chocolate, fried apple, top-notch bratwurst and mulled wine.

**Other markets:** **The Berliner Weihnachtszeit**, in front of the Roten Rathaus in alexanderplatz, is one of the oldest Christmas markets in Berlin and its many stalls are decorated in the style of the beginning of the 19th century, giving it a very unique and historical look. There is also a gigantic ferris wheel and a large ice-skating rink.

A 30 minute walk away from the Gendarmenmarkt is **Potsdamer Platz Market**, which promises a more modern and adventurous event featuring Europe's largest mobile toboggan run.

Across the city, the **Lucia Christmas Market** is Nordic-Scandinavian themed, offering a romantic and intimate atmosphere.



## Copenhagen

Copenhagen is considered a real 'Christmas' city, not just because Greenland (part of Denmark) is the home of the Julemand (i.e. Santa), but because the season itself is eagerly anticipated all year by the Danes. So, like many other European cities, the Danish capital pulls out all the stops and gets filled in bright decorations and illuminations this time of year. But, unlike most, the atmosphere here is less commercial and more festive.

**Highlights:** Every year up to a million people descend on the **Christmas fair at the Tivoli Gardens**, Europe's oldest amusement park. Decorated wooden huts selling food and gifts sit alongside thrilling rides and rollercoasters, an ice rink and hundreds of trees decked with glittering lights. Pony rides and other amusements are available for young children, and you can admire a colourful light show on a part of the Tivoli Lake. Make sure you sample glögg, a Nordic spin on the traditional mulled wine, featuring raisins, almonds, cinnamon sticks, cloves and a generous splash of spirits (blame the sub-zero temperatures!).

**When:** 14th November - 3rd January

**Where:** Tivoli Gardens

**What to Buy:** Fine handmade crafts, including the traditional Scandinavian Christmas figurines of clog-clad pixies in pointy red caps.

**Other markets:** Another traditional market is in the **Grey Hall at Christiania**, the alternative bohemian district of Copenhagen. Unusual and unique handmade products are on sale here, for a ten day period in the middle of December.

From mid-November, the historic **Nyhavn district** will also be full of Danish yuletide, booths selling souvenirs, æbleskiver, roasted almonds, glögg and other traditional foods.





## Florence

In Florence, you really know Christmas is coming when the iconic Piazza Santa Croce sets up for the annual **German Christmas Market** (in Italian the 'Mercatino Tedesco di Heidelberg'). Every year, since 2003, the German town of Heidelberg literally moves to Florence with its holiday season traditions and festive atmosphere. The two cities were connected by a bond of marriage: the wife of Prince Elector of the Palatinate of Heidelberg was Maria Luisa, the last descendant of the Medici family, nicknamed the Electress Palatine.

**Highlights:** Walking in Florence is always a pleasurable experience, but at Christmas time it's even more special. The beautiful Piazza Santa Croce is filled with small wooden stalls selling both Florentine and German gifts and dishes, from the Italian panforte (a dense, spiced Christmas fruitcake) to German bratwurst. One of the main highlights is a large carousel transformed into a rotating bar which slowly spins while you sip on some vino caldo (the Italian version of hot mulled wine)!

**When:** 26th November - 21st December

**Where:** Piazza Santa Croce in front of the famous Santa Croce Basilica.

**What to Buy:** It's a great place to pick up stocking stuffers, holiday decorations or try local delicacies.





## Prague

Although not as many as their German counterparts, Christmas markets (Vánoční trhy) are a key ingredient of the festive season in the Czech Republic, and the Prague Christmas markets are the country's most impressive. The most famous is the one held in the **Old Town Square**, where you can expect to be greeted by sparkling lights, Christmas trees, and wooden huts with vendors selling many crafts and treats.

**Highlights:** Brightly decorated wooden huts selling various traditional handicrafts, as well as plenty of food and drink to warm you up on a cold winter's night. There is a large Bethlehem Nativity Scene and also an animal stable, particularly popular with the children, where you can pet sheep, goats and a donkey. Most impressive, however has to be the Christmas tree, shipped in from the Krkonose mountains in the North of the Czech Republic. The tree is switched on every night around 5pm. Set against Prague's dark gothic skyline, this is truly a spectacular sight.

**When:** 28th November - 1st January

**Where:** Old Town Square

**What to Buy:** Traditional Czech glassware, jewellery, wooden toys, metalwork, ceramics, scented candles, Christmas tree ornaments, hats, gloves and scarves, and puppets and dolls dressed in traditional costumes.

**Other markets:** The market on **Wenceslas Square** is a mere 5 minute walk away from the Old Town Square. This market has its own brightly lit Christmas tree, which can be admired from all over the square.

There is also a smaller Christmas market on **Republic Square** and another in **Havel's Market**, the city centre's permanent market selling fruit and vegetables, flowers, leather goods, arts and crafts, wooden toys, puppets and ceramics.





# Traditions

From a giant log which drops gifts when beaten with a stick, to a witch like old woman who brings gifts to children on epiphany eve, the holiday season in Europe is full of curious traditions and intriguing characters.

# Traditions



## Caga Tió

A conspicuous four-legged log with a big nose and a smiley face who plops out gifts when your little ones hit it with a stick. Originating from Catalonian traditions, from December 8th all through Christmas Eve the Caga Tió is covered with a blanket and pampered with food. On December 24th, however, in a dramatic turn of events the log is tossed into the fire, beaten with sticks and ordered to poop out candy!



## Christmas Pixie

Pixies or Nisse, in Danish and Scandinavian tradition, are household spirits responsible for the care and prosperity of a particular house or farm. Usually described as a short man or woman wearing a red pointy cap, on Christmas Eve, it's the duty of the family to offer the pixie with a gift, generally in the form of a single bowl of porridge with butter, or else the spirit could turn against its masters.



## Shoe Tossing

A Slovakian tradition still followed by many in the Czech Republic. During Christmas the single women stand at the front door of their home, then remove one of their shoes and toss it over their shoulder. In the event the shoe lands with its heel facing towards the door, the woman is destined to spend the next year single, if however, the shoe lands with the toe pointing towards the door, the woman is believed to be married soon.



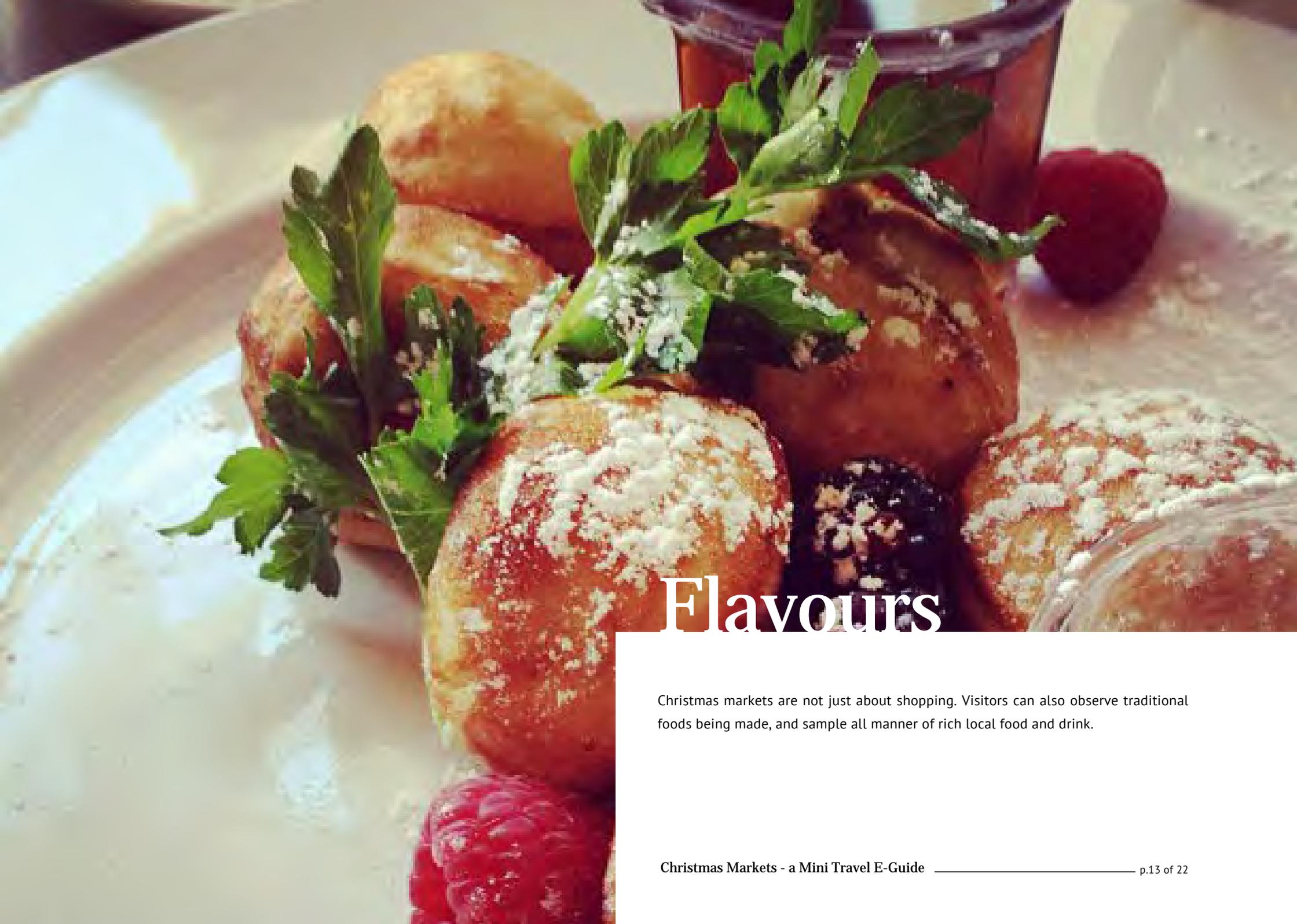
## La Befana

An Italian tradition, La Befana's story starts when the three wise men come to her doorstep on Christmas eve, looking for baby Jesus. She first turns them away, saying she is too busy, but then regrets her decision and hurries out of the house with candy, fruit and a broom. Alas, she is too late and never finds the Magi again nor the baby. That is why on Epiphany Eve, January 5th, she comes to a house where she knows a child lives.



## Krampus

A beast-like creature from Germanic folklore, but which spread far beyond Germany's borders, thought to capture and punish children who misbehaved during Christmas. Traditionally on the evening of December 5th, young men dressed up as the Krampus and roamed the streets frightening the children with rusty chains and bells. Some places such as Southern Bavaria, or Austria still maintain this century's old tradition.



# Flavours

Christmas markets are not just about shopping. Visitors can also observe traditional foods being made, and sample all manner of rich local food and drink.

# Christmas Specials



## Panettone

A sweet, dome-shaped bread loaf studded with raisins and candied citrus peels, the Panettone is one of the most famous Italian Christmas sweets. Interestingly, the dough takes several days to make: same as sourdough, it has to be cured. Great served up with either a hot beverage or a sweet Italian wine.



## Tortell de reis

In Spain, there is a long tradition of having the children receive their Christmas gifts, not from Santa Claus, but from the Three Kings (Tres Reis in Catalan), during the night of January 5th (i.e. the Biblical Magi Eve). The next day, people usually celebrate by eating a special cake, the Tortell de reis. This is a dried fruit cake with an oval shape and for decoration, fig fruit, quinces, cherries or dried and candied fruits.



## Christmas Pudding

Traditionally made five weeks before Christmas in the UK, and consumed on the 25th of December. It originates from medieval times, and used to contain poultry, pheasant, partridge and rabbit and later sugar, apples and raisins were added to it. In the 14th century it became more like what is eaten today with suet and rum. A spring of holly is usually added on top and the pudding is often flamed before eating.



## Trdelník

Made from rolled dough wrapped around a stick, then grilled and topped with sugar and walnut mix; this is a traditional Christmas sweet originally from Hungary, but which spread in the 18th century to the Czech Republic. Accompany it with a cup of hot mulled wine or any of the famous Czech beers like Pilsner Urquell, Staropramen and Budvar.



## Æbleskiver

Original from Denmark, æbleskiver are traditional apple doughnuts usually slathered with black current jam and sprinkled with powdered sugar. In December, they are often served with a cup of gløgg, a Scandinavian version of mulled wine.



# Where to stay

HotelREZ Hotels & Resorts has a vast selection of hotels across Europe. From charming boutique hotels in the countryside to luxurious city centre hotels, there is something for everyone.



# Barcelona

Spain

[More hotels in Barcelona](#)

★★★★

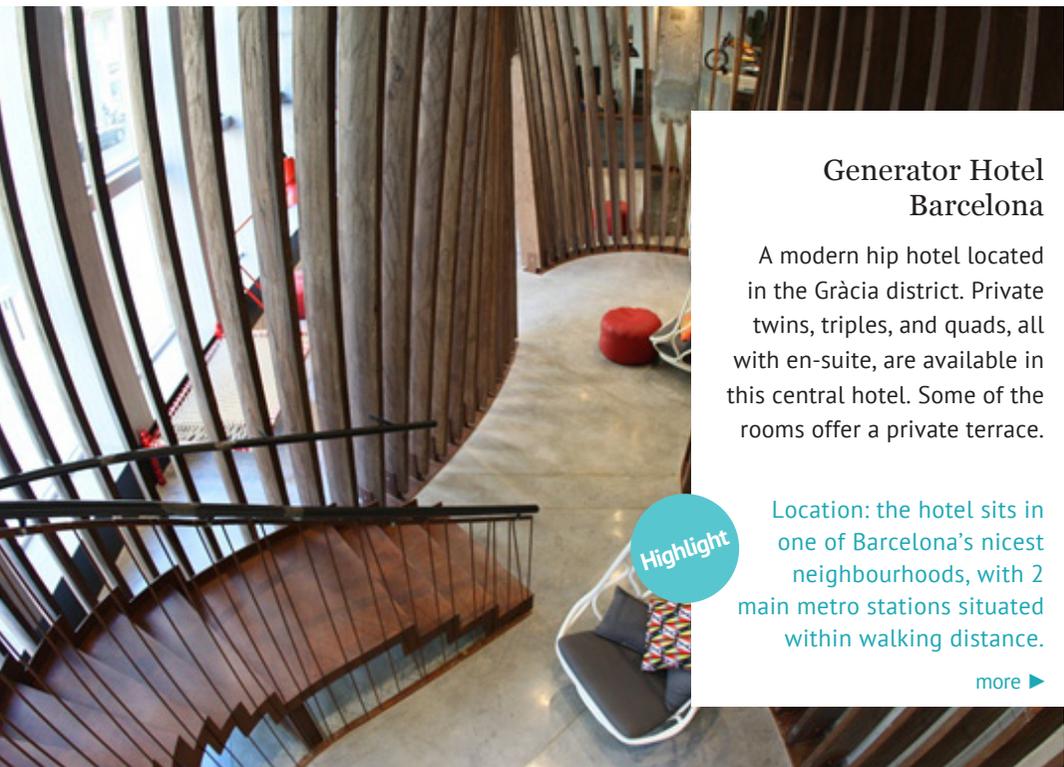
## Ciutat Vella

Ciutat Vella is located in the heart of Barcelona, near Las Ramblas and close to Catalonia Square. The hotel offers 40 fully equipped rooms, all featuring free WI-FI.

There is a Jacuzzi located in the terrace, and a solarium at the top floor of the building, from where you can enjoy splendid views of the city below.

[more](#)

Highlight



## Generator Hotel Barcelona

A modern hip hotel located in the Gràcia district. Private twins, triples, and quads, all with en-suite, are available in this central hotel. Some of the rooms offer a private terrace.

Location: the hotel sits in one of Barcelona's nicest neighbourhoods, with 2 main metro stations situated within walking distance.

[more](#)

Highlight

★★★★

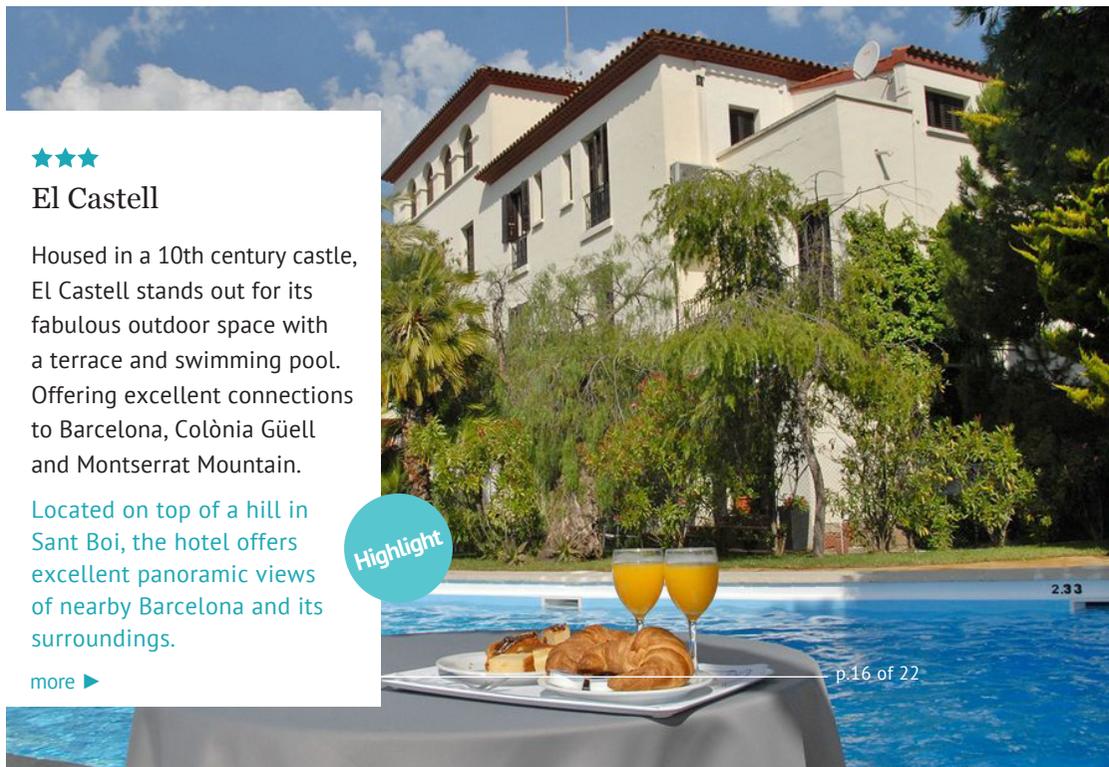
## El Castell

Housed in a 10th century castle, El Castell stands out for its fabulous outdoor space with a terrace and swimming pool. Offering excellent connections to Barcelona, Colònia Güell and Montserrat Mountain.

Located on top of a hill in Sant Boi, the hotel offers excellent panoramic views of nearby Barcelona and its surroundings.

[more](#)

Highlight





## Bath



England



★★★★

### Woolpack Inn Beckington

Located in the quaint village of Beckington only a few miles from Bath's city centre, the Woolpack Inn is a charming country inn perfect for exploring the beautiful Somerset countryside.

A former coaching inn dating back from the 1500s, the hotel was built from three cottages in 1581, and still displays many of its original features.

[more ▶](#)

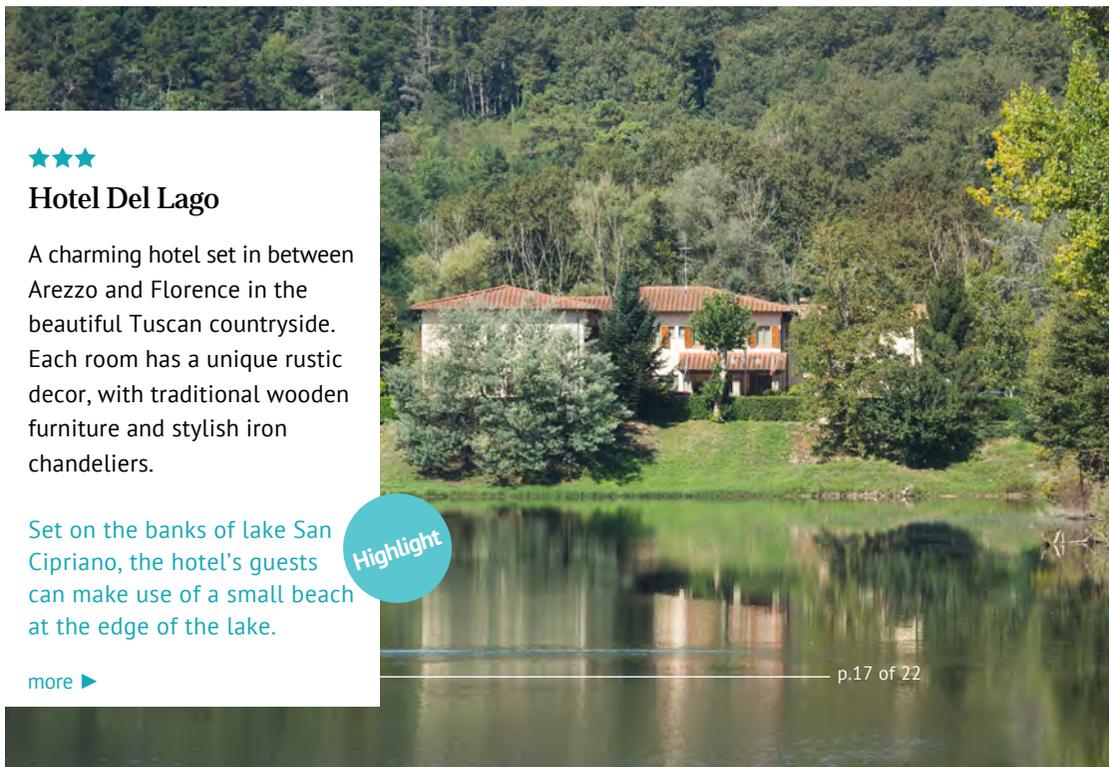
Highlight



## Florence



Italy



★★★★

### Hotel Del Lago

A charming hotel set in between Arezzo and Florence in the beautiful Tuscan countryside. Each room has a unique rustic decor, with traditional wooden furniture and stylish iron chandeliers.

Set on the banks of lake San Cipriano, the hotel's guests can make use of a small beach at the edge of the lake.

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Highlight



# Copenhagen

Denmark



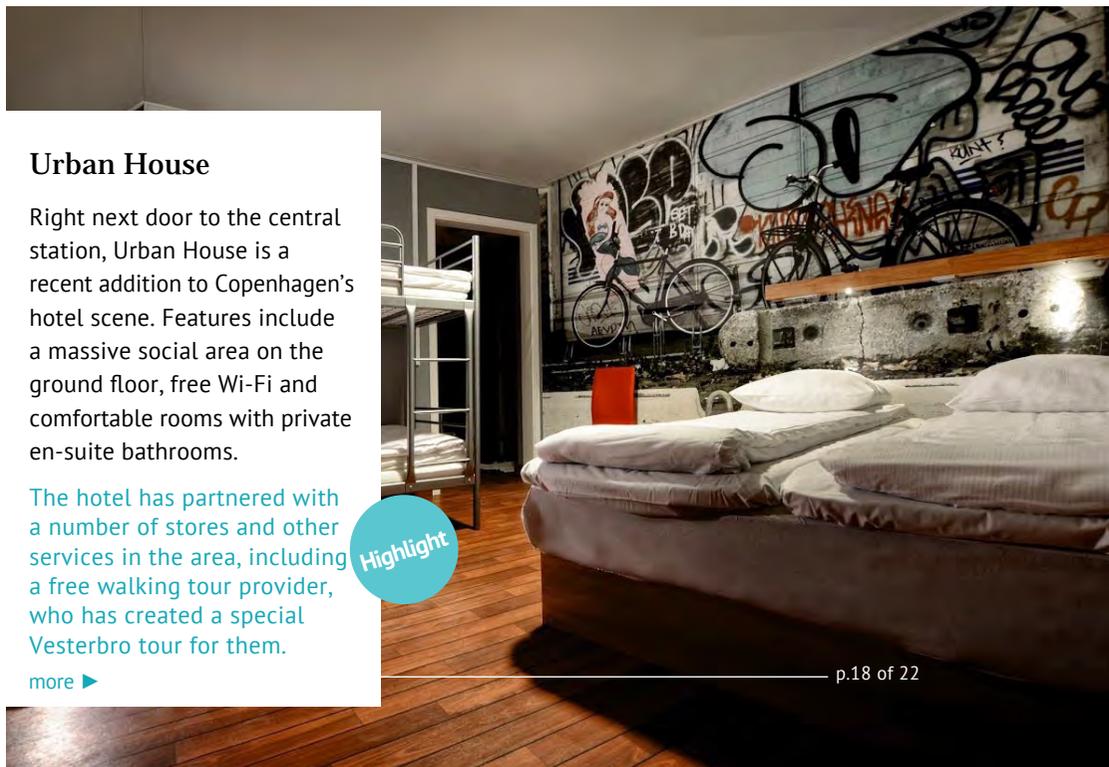
## Generator Copenhagen

In the heart of Copenhagen, and located in one of the city's most lively areas, this stylish property offers several room types from singles, twins or quads all featuring en-suite bathrooms.

The Generator Copenhagen is set in a former luxury apartments building designed by world-famous designer Philippe Starck.

Highlight

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## Urban House

Right next door to the central station, Urban House is a recent addition to Copenhagen's hotel scene. Features include a massive social area on the ground floor, free Wi-Fi and comfortable rooms with private en-suite bathrooms.

The hotel has partnered with a number of stores and other services in the area, including a free walking tour provider, who has created a special Vesterbro tour for them.

Highlight

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# Berlin



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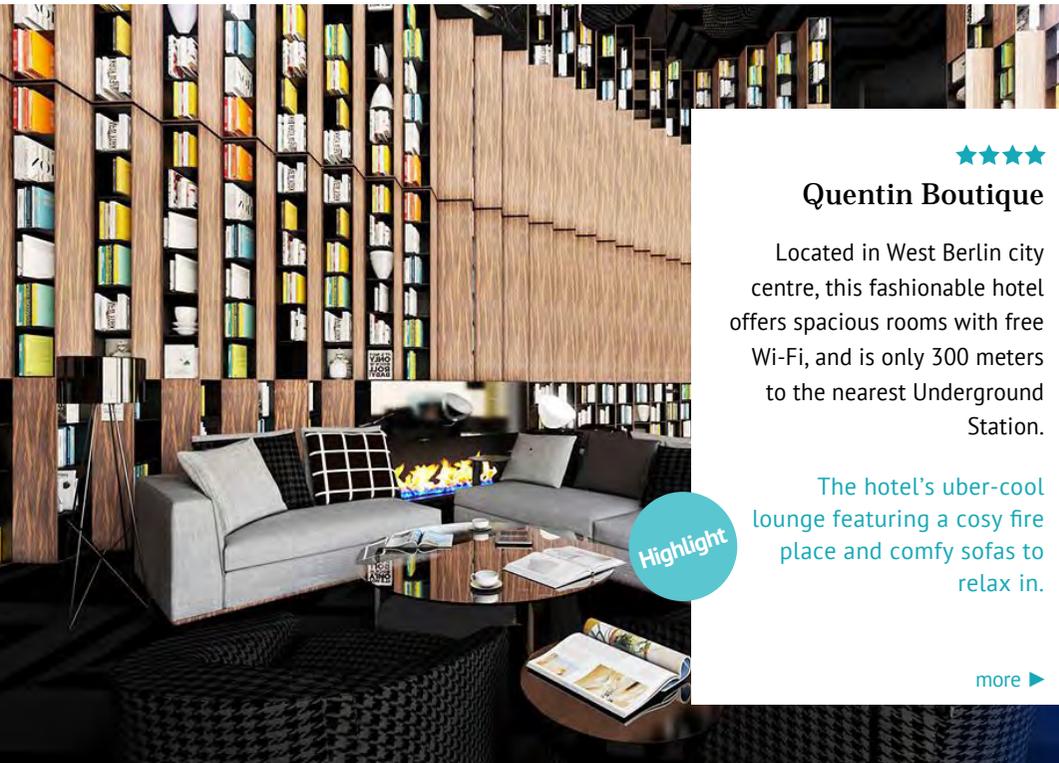
## Generator Berlin Mitte

Slap-bang in the city centre, Generator Berlin Mitte is a trendy hotel offering a variety of brightly decorated room types, a 24-hour reception, bar and free Wi-Fi in the lobby areas.

Stunning décor, featuring artwork by legendary Berlin Wall street artist Thierry Noir, which adds to the property's bohemian character.

[more](#) ▶

Highlight



★★★★★

## Quentin Boutique

Located in West Berlin city centre, this fashionable hotel offers spacious rooms with free Wi-Fi, and is only 300 meters to the nearest Underground Station.

The hotel's uber-cool lounge featuring a cosy fire place and comfy sofas to relax in.

[more](#) ▶

Highlight

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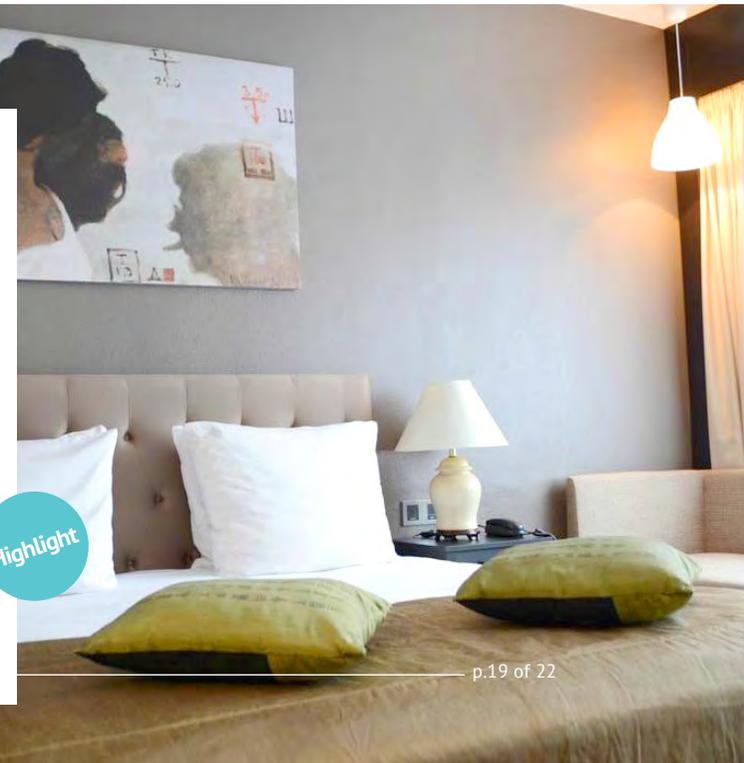
## Quentin Berlin

Quentin Berlin is centrally located in a quiet side street, and a mere 2-minute walk from the famous Kurfürstendamm shopping street and the Underground.

Most rooms come with a private balcony and feature large modern bathrooms with Italian marble, rain showers and free toiletries.

[more](#) ▶

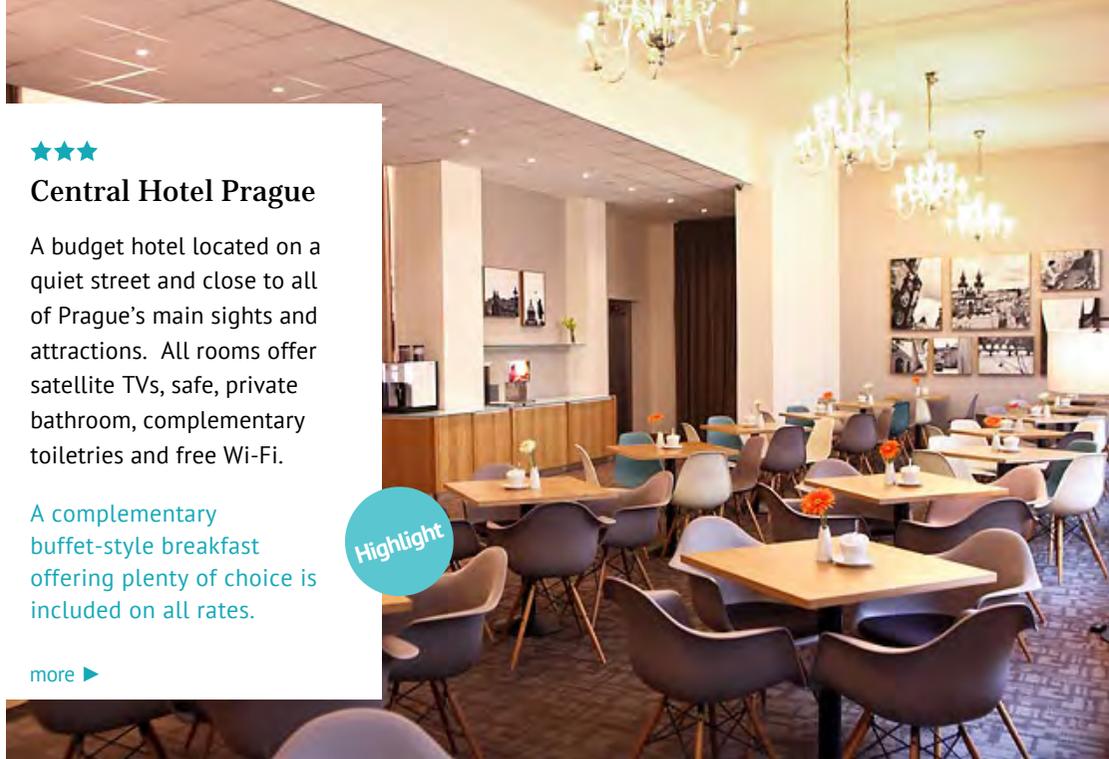
Highlight





Prague

Czech Republic



★★★

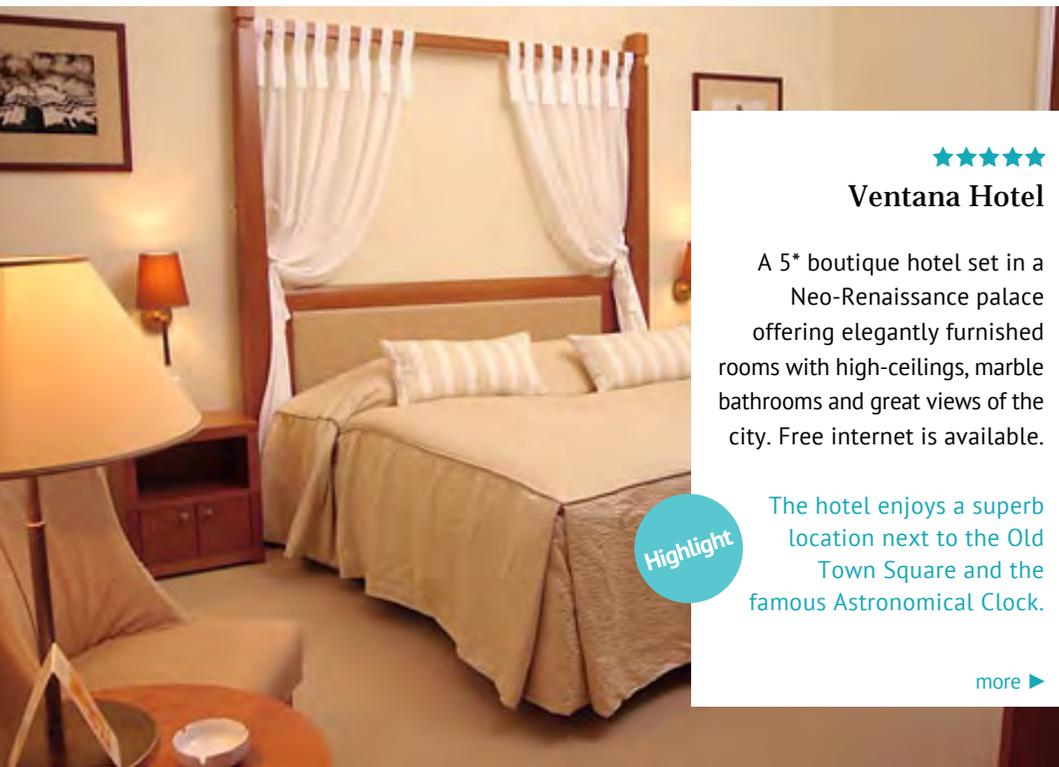
### Central Hotel Prague

A budget hotel located on a quiet street and close to all of Prague's main sights and attractions. All rooms offer satellite TVs, safe, private bathroom, complimentary toiletries and free Wi-Fi.

A complementary buffet-style breakfast offering plenty of choice is included on all rates.

[more ▶](#)

Highlight



★★★★★

### Ventana Hotel

A 5\* boutique hotel set in a Neo-Renaissance palace offering elegantly furnished rooms with high-ceilings, marble bathrooms and great views of the city. Free internet is available.

The hotel enjoys a superb location next to the Old Town Square and the famous Astronomical Clock.

[more ▶](#)

Highlight



★★★★★

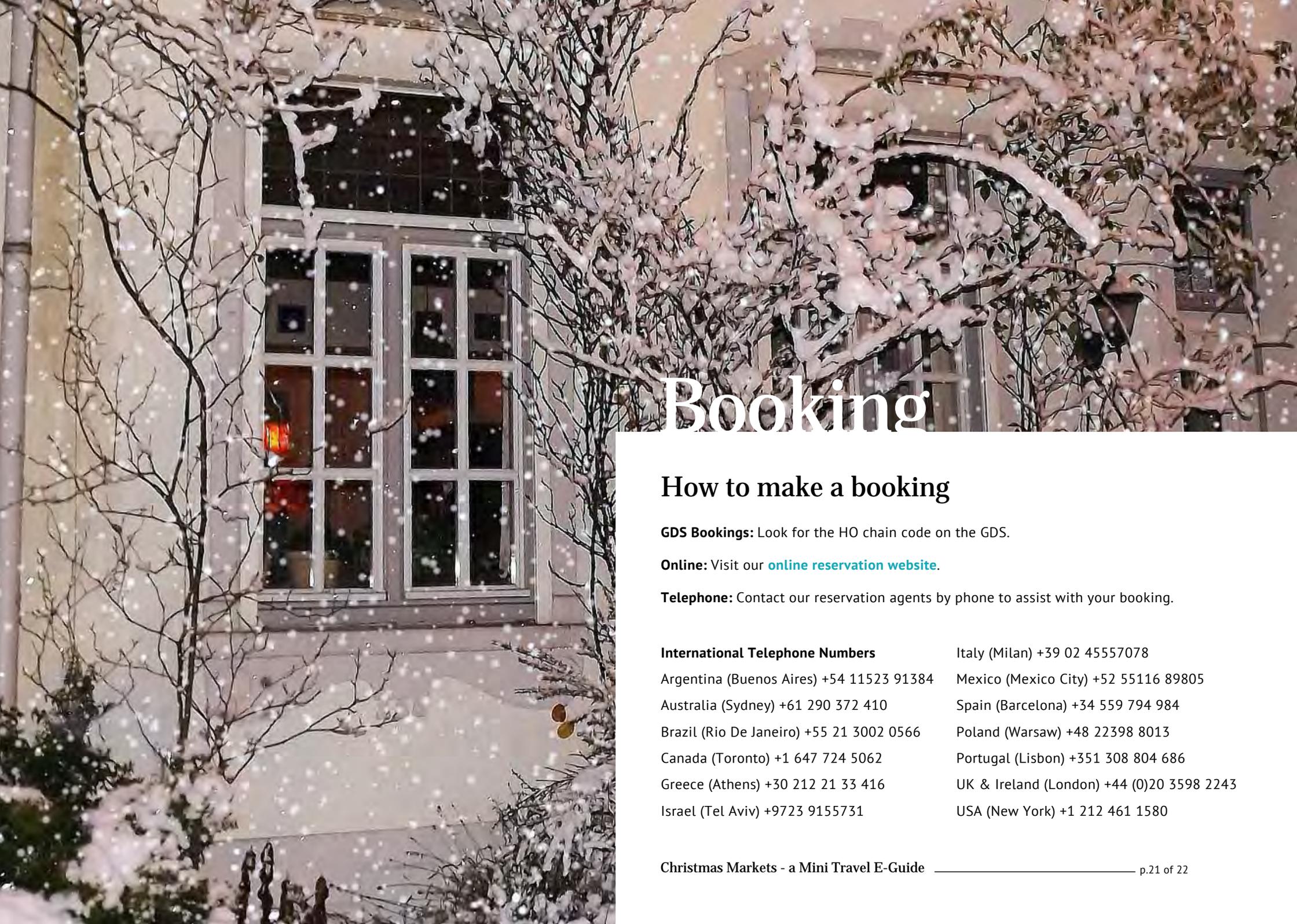
### Jalta Boutique Hotel

Situated directly on Wenceslas Square in central Prague, the elegant and luxurious boutique hotel Jalta is right next to the National Museum.

Unique features include Andy Warhol's original screen print of Franz Kafka, hanging on the lobby, and a previously concealed fall-out shelter from the 1950s.

[more ▶](#)

Highlight



# Booking

## How to make a booking

**GDS Bookings:** Look for the HO chain code on the GDS.

**Online:** Visit our [online reservation website](#).

**Telephone:** Contact our reservation agents by phone to assist with your booking.

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Canada (Toronto) +1 647 724 5062  
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