

## BASEL AT CHRISTMAS



This lovely city on the Rhine takes on a very special charm during the Christmas period and makes a charming destination for an excursion. There is so much to see and do in Basel that you could easily spend three or four days visiting the wonderful museums, strolling through the old town and visiting some of the Christmas markets that take place from late November until 23 December. Do call in at the tourist office on arrival at the railway station where you can pick up many different themed guides of the city (architecture, museums, different walking tours etc.).

If you have just one day, I would recommend concentrating on the biggest Christmas market in Switzerland with more than 180 wooden chalet-style stalls full of wonderful treats. It is laid out over several squares which can be easily reached by walking. I took the 9h15 (check that this is still relevant in 2019) train from Nyon and arrived in Basel at midday. Just in time for lunch. There is

plenty of food to be had at the Christmas markets but if you are looking for a healthy meal before attacking the stalls, you might like to visit the “Markthalle” just near the station. Housed in an impressive dome that was built in 1929, it served as a fruit and vegetable market until 2004. Today it is a food hall selling amazing dishes from all over the world with a great informal atmosphere. <https://www.basel.com/en/Media/Gastronomy/Restaurant-Basel-Hauptbahnhof-Markthalle-Basel>.

The Christmas market at the Barfüsserplatz is closest to the station and a good place to start. There are numerous stalls selling usual and unusual items, many made by artisans and some are more weird and wonderful than others. There are many jewelry stalls, fine Christmas decorations and other gift articles, hats, scarfs and gloves and of course lots of food stalls of one kind or another, selling mostly something cheesy or sweet. One that caught my eye sold hot-dog-buns filled with cheese fondue. They are quite messy to eat and I was amused to see that a lot of the hot melting cheese found its way over fingers and down chins! In addition there are also the stalls selling mulled wine and hot chocolate drinks. The lights are gorgeous and especially later in the afternoon when darkness falls they create a magic atmosphere. The Barfüsserkerche that dominates the square houses the Basel historical museum and is beautifully restored. It towers over the square and if you feel cold, you could do worse than to warm up in its very stylish large lobby.

A short stroll through the old town, festively decorated, will bring you to the Münsterplatz. But before you get there, you will pass by the city hall which is hard to miss with its eye-catching red façade, and definitely worth a short stop. Do have a look at the inner courtyard where you are treated to an array of murals, statues and architecture.



Just opposite the town hall is the patisserie Schiesser, the oldest in Basel and seemingly not changed since the 1930s. The cafeteria is upstairs and is a bustling and charming place for tea and cakes.

The Christmas market extends to the Münsterplatz. Here you find a paradise for kids with rides, displays and many stalls where they can turn their hands to making candles, cookies, wood carving and other crafts. This is also where you find an enormous Christmas tree and more stalls with christmas gifts and food and drink, all magically illuminated by hundreds of snow globes. The Basel cathedral on the Münsterplatz is open to visitors and hosts many advent concerts in an enchanting atmosphere.



Since I had just one day, I concentrated on the markets as described above but there are several more Christmas markets throughout the city - Claraplatz with its famous Sennenhütte fondue restaurant, the Adväntsgasse in Glaibasel on the other side of the river which concentrates on culinary delights and other pockets of Christmas cheer everywhere. Therefore if you can stay longer than just a day, you will be able to soak up more of the atmosphere and also find time to tackle some of the other pleasures that the city has to offer.