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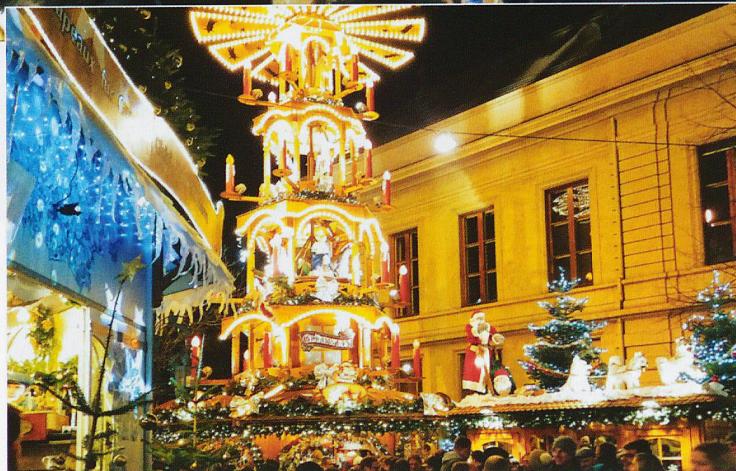
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Christmas Markets Plus

Christopher Platford



The colourful Christmas Market in Barfüsserplatz.

Photos: Christopher Platford

murals. Escalators lead up to a modern gallery with seating areas and a range of retail outlets. The cavernous ground floor station buffet dining room with white cloths and silver service is good value for money and one can visualise the old days when well-to-do travellers stopped here for refreshment. The décor and furnishings don't seem to have changed with the passage of time. Opposite the station are the numerous tram stops serving this major interchange. Take care! With frequent services on lines coming in from different directions, and the occasional bus, you need eyes in the back of your head to avoid a brush with a tram.

STS can always be relied upon to provide well-located, comfortable hotels. We found ourselves within two/three minutes walk from the SBB station. A free travel pass provided by the hotel gave us unlimited travel on Basel's extensive public transport network. There were direct lines down to the markets, old town and river Rhine. A short ride took us to Barfüsserplatz, the largest of several Christmas Markets around the centre of the city. Quietest during the morning and early afternoon the markets were buzzing in the evening as people on their way home from work stopped to purchase gluhwein and snacks from the many outlets, whilst many seemed to be meeting with friends to celebrate the season. Continuing the tram journey from the Barfüsserplatz in the direction of the Rhine the route passes through Marktplatz with its thriving produce market, and a delightful tearoom over the cake shop facing the Rathaus. Less well known to tourists is the new market hall near to Basel SBB. A wide variety of fresh produce, dried fruits and spices are on sale here daily. There are also food outlets offering a range of international cuisine. It is the place to eat at lunchtime for those in the know; popular amongst the local office workers. With time running out I missed the opportunity to visit the railway model shop located just off Marktplatz, but now I have an excuse for a return visit to Basel. 

Purchasing an "off-the-shelf" STS (Swiss Travel Service) Christmas Markets holiday package based on three nights in Basel, we chose to pay extra and fly from our local airport at Manchester to Zürich, giving us the bonus of the train ride from Zürich Flughafen to Basel. We enjoy the buzz of a good continental Christmas Market and over the years we have collected various Swiss Christmas tree decorations. We would not be disappointed on this occasion.

In addition to attending Basel's multiple markets the package also combined day trips by rail to visit similar markets at Freiburg in the Black Forest and Colmar in Alsace. Thus in three days we travelled with SBB, DB and SNCF. The excursion to Freiburg was by express train, 40-45 minutes duration and brought home the inter-country connectivity of the European rail network. The destination of the DB ICE train was Berlin, and the following day's rail trip from Basel to Colmar was of similar duration in a train en-route to Strasbourg. The old town centres of Colmar and Freiburg are indeed colourful and their markets were extensive, however one needs to be prepared for a longer walk (of about 10 minutes) from Colmar station to the old town centre than the short one to the Freiburg market.

One cannot fail to be impressed by the architecture of Basel's SBB station, the imposing concourse, wood panels and its huge