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# HOME & AWAY

MAY/JUNE 2009



*It's Hoppin'  
in the Tropics*

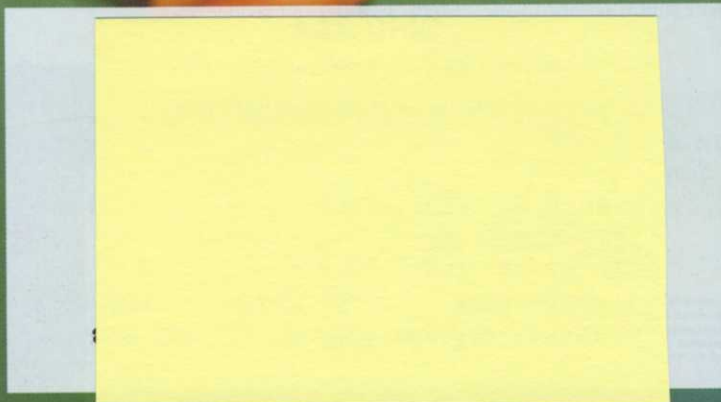
## Costa Rica IS ADVENTURE

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# ALPINE ADVENT

**When I told my friend Allison about my plans to travel to Germany, Switzerland and Austria for the Christmas markets, she said, “Non-stop beer, tons of sausage and Christmas everywhere you look? That sounds like my version of the afterlife.”**

Who needs the North Pole when central Europe has everything necessary to make the season merry, bright and memorable? Insight Vacation's nine-day Winter Wonderland tour took me through scenes of Old World charm, including the quaint Oberammergau, where residents will perform their famed Passion Play in 2010, and shopping markets throughout the area. It was well worth springtime planning.

Having experienced Christmas mainly in the states, I naturally associate it with cookies, shopping and presents—lots and lots of presents. It's not unusual to see people here leaving shopping malls loaded down with so many bags they

BY BARBARA  
WAYMAN

can barely wrestle them to their cars. A European Christmas is different. Every December in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, towns set up outdoor stalls to sell ornaments, candles, cakes, outerwear, crèches and scores of other things. I saw fried bread bowls filled with sauerkraut, fingerless gloves, sheepskin slippers in a rainbow of colors and Santa hats with Viking braids, but I never saw a shopper carrying heavy bags.

Most carried no bags at all. Shoppers' purpose for coming to the markets was to browse, connect with friends and warm themselves with hot sausages and steaming mugs of mulled wine. There was a sense of joy I've never felt in a stateside shopping mall. It showed me a whole different side of the season.

## SEASON TREATS

The Winter Wonderland tour kicked off in Frankfurt, which had the most packed Christmas market of any I encountered. Every inch of space between vendor stalls was full of people, so many so you could not walk without being pressed up completely against others front, side and center. Yet, a holiday mood prevailed, so I let myself be pulled along by the crowd, enjoying the scent of roasting meat mingled with warm wine and looking at tasty pastries glinting from display tables and shop windows.

“Christmas as a secular custom really began in Germany,” guide Sue Mason said. “They originated the tradition of trimming and lighting a tree to symbolize the Garden of Eden. Gradually, people decorated their trees with cook-



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