

MEDIA RELEASE

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CELEBRATING THE SILLY SEASON

With the holiday season about to commence, it's a tempting thought to escape the madness and take off overseas – particularly when you consider some of the great cities around the world all decked out in its holiday finery. For those of you who are heading abroad for the silly season this year, Flight Centre has compiled their top destinations to drink Vin Chaud, get merry and sing Feliz Navidad.

1. New York City

NYC is transformed into a winter wonderland over Christmas with the annual lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, adorned with over 30,000 lights, marking the beginning of the holiday season for many residents and visitors to the city. When visiting the tree, enter Rockefeller Center from 5th Avenue and walk through the horn blowing angels towards the tree – insiders say this is the best viewing experience. Why not give ice skating a go at the same time – this has been running since 1936!

Window shopping in NYC over the Christmas period takes on a whole new meaning as Manhattan's most celebrated department stores unveil their annual holiday window displays. From Macys to Bloomingdale's and Barneys, a visit to these windows is a must-do.

While you're there, take in the many shows that this great city has to offer – the New York City Ballet is performing The Nutcracker until 31 December 2011.

2. Paris

It may not be snowy white, but the City of Lights lives up to its name as the trees throughout the city get covered with strings of lights and the Eiffel Tower fills the skyline. Viewing the holiday lights in Paris is one of the top things to do when visiting the city in December. The best places to check them out are along Champs-Elysees, in the windows of the big department stores including the well known Galeries Lafayette and at the Notre Dame Cathedral where you can also witness Paris' giant Christmas tree.

One of the biggest attractions for any visitor to Europe over Christmas is the abundance of Christmas markets. These are an essential part of celebrating Christmas in Paris - with treats like mulled wine, gingerbread and specialities from various regions of France, this is a great chance to stock up on traditional foods and gifts.

The market at Champs-Elysees is open from late November through to early January and is the largest in Paris – running all the way to Place de la Concorde.

3. San Juan, Puerto Rico

The Puerto Rican view of the Christmas season is not so much a sprint as it is a marathon with festivities lasting from early December to Three Kings Day on 6 January, incorporating fantastic traditions along the way.

If you can't get enough of Christmas carols then San Juan is the place to be - from mid-December churches conduct dawn masses rich with Christmas carols, while carolers travel from house-to-house.

On Christmas Eve, many Puerto Ricans head to midnight mass, known as Misa de Gallo, to catch a re-enactment of the nativity scene. It's also recommended that you head to City Hall and the fairy-lit promenade Paseo de la Princesa to check out the decorations.

If you're sticking around for New Year's Eve, don't be surprised if the locals make you eat the traditional 12 grapes for luck.

4. Nuremberg, Germany

Often described as medieval, Nuremberg with its imperial castle towering over the city is definitely worth a visit at any time of year, but starting in November and running until Christmas Eve, the famous Nuremberg Christmas market turns the city into a winter wonderland.

The world renowned market lures approximately two million visitors every year, with a giant carved wooden ferris wheel and stalls selling handmade nativity ornaments. Famous for its Nuremberg Bratwursts and its gingerbread cookies, keep an eye out for the little figurines made from dried plums – the signature souvenir from the Nuremberg Christmas Market.

While you're there, brush up on your history and explore the variety of historic buildings and museums. It doesn't fit the usual Christmas mould, but a visit to Reichsparteigelande – the Nazi Party rally grounds – is a must do. When you're finished, head to the Bratwursthäusle restaurant for a bite to eat – ranked highly in Lonely Planet's guide to Nuremberg.

5. Sydney

If sand and sunshine is more up your alley for the silly season, look no further than Sydney. This city really gets into the festive spirit with decorations up from late October including more than 1,500 street banners, decorations and lights, and with the giant Christmas tree on display in Martin Place from late November.

Throughout December you can enjoy carols with some of Sydney's best a capella groups in Darling Harbour –every Thursday to Sunday from 7pm, until New Years eve. If you're after something more relaxed – grab a picnic rug and join in the celebrations at Hyde Park North, with live entertainment. Both concerts feature great children's entertainment and the evening is topped off with a magical fireworks display.

Carols in the Domain is on 17 December 2011 and is Australia's largest free Christmas concert – kicking off from mid-day, take a picnic blanket and make the most of the great entertainment on offer.

On Boxing Day, head to Darling Harbour to watch all the boats set off on the world renowned yacht race to Hobart. It's a huge event in Sydney and free!

It's not too late to book your Christmas adventure - contact your local travel expert at Flight Centre on 0800 427 555 or visit www.flightcentre.co.nz

- ENDS -

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