

# Bumper winter season predicted, as Aussies return to Europe

Pent up demand combined with great value airfares and accommodation for the European winter season is expected to result in strong sales.

By Jenny Burns

**W**ITH Australians re-discovering their love of European travel major industry players are predicting a bumper European winter season ahead. It seems the many benefits of visiting Europe at this time of year, including lower costs and special activities such as Christmas markets, far outweigh some cold weather.

According to Creative Holidays acting managing director, Andrew Yell, as a market, Europe is a booming destination for Australian travellers and Creative has experienced consistent growth and increased demand year on year.

"The value of travelling Europe in winter is recognised through great value accommodation and airfares, less crowded cities and the opportunity to see and do more as less time is spent waiting in lines," he said.

"We see a broad cross-section of markets travelling to Europe in winter, led predominantly by middle-aged travellers and baby boomers, independent travellers, repeat visitors and families."

Rail Plus national sales and marketing manager, Greg McCallum, is also expecting a strong winter season. "There are a number of mitigating circumstances," he said.

"The youth market is time rich between December and January, due to university winding down after exams. Students interested in travelling around Europe must take advantage of their window of opportunity and travel during a northern winter. Off-peak air and accommodation prices also suit the price conscious youth traveller."

Rail Plus also finds many Australian travellers are looking for a unique experience by spending Christmas in Europe.

"The weather is vastly different and Australians are certainly not used to a white Christmas, which is the case in



Mulled wine, roasted chestnuts and German Christmas markets are just part of the appeal of a European winter (© GNTO)

many parts of Europe, so it all makes for an extremely memorable time," McCallum said.

"Night markets in Germany are also a feature of being in Europe at Christmas time. Travelling around Europe in winter on high speed trains (it's now only three hours 15 minutes from Paris to Amsterdam) is a fantastic method of transport as European trains are efficient, fast and most importantly warm.

"There are no icy roads to contend with and the on time, departure efficiency remains well above 90 per cent, even in winter."

Toga Hospitality is also predicting a strong winter for its Adina Apartment Hotels. "Occupancy forecasts indicate that the chill in the air will do little to dampen our guests' enthusiasm for travel," said chief executive officer, Rachel Argaman.

Driveaway Holidays' Chris Hamill is reporting solid inquiries from VFR traffic. "They didn't travel last year due to the financial crisis and as we know VFR travellers love to get home

at least every two years to see the family," he said. "Similarly after staying home during the GFC Australians are desperate to get overseas!"

Hamill said apart from extreme weather in some specific areas, Europe was still a wonderful destination to visit in winter.

"This appeal continues to grow thanks to experiences such as sitting around a log fire drinking red wine.

"There still seems to be airline capacity and good deals leading into Christmas which is also very important."

France and Italy were the stand-out performers to date.

According to Insight Vacations managing director Lorraine Sharp travelling to Europe in winter has never been more popular with Australian travellers. "This is evident in the recent release of our 2010/11 Winter Europe and Eastern Mediterranean brochure, our biggest offering to date to meet the growing demand," she said.

Sharp believes the popularity is due to more Australians recognising the benefits of travelling at this time.

"Not only are all the iconic sights and attractions free from the crowds found in summer, there are also a host of unique experiences on offer that are unavailable at any other time of year," she said. "These include the festive Christmas markets, seasonal specialties such as mulled wine and roasted chestnuts, and of course, spectacular snow-covered sights."

Travellers were also drawn to travel in winter due to the fantastic savings on offer. "Itineraries featured in Insight's 2010/11 Winter Europe and Eastern Mediterranean brochure are up to 27 per cent less than those in high season," she said.

"Combined with airfares that are traditionally less expensive during this period, for example our offer with Qantas and British Airways flying to either Frankfurt, London, Munich, Paris, Rome or Vienna from as little as \$1999 (including taxes), these discounts make for a great value holiday.

"As such, our conversion levels for winter holiday options have been extremely promising."

## Rug up and enjoy smaller crowds in winter



HAVING joined a Contiki tour through Europe in February, Zoe Hector fully appreciates the many advantages of a European winter holiday.

While admitting it was cold, Zoe believes the benefits outweighed the chilly weather.

"It was cold but all you had to do is put on extra clothes!" said Zoe an international travel consultant with NSW agency, Flight Centre The Junction.

"We were also fortunate that it didn't rain.

"The great advantage of touring at this time was the lack of people, you could enjoy the attractions without thousands of other people around."

Not that Zoe's clients need to be convinced about the benefits of a Europe

in winter holiday. "Most people who come to book European winter holidays have already decided this is what they want," Zoe explained.

A number of these people are looking for a northern hemisphere ski holiday with Switzerland and France being the popular destinations this year.

"Then you have the people who have decided they want to have a white Christmas," Zoe said.

"Some travellers are also attracted by the lower prices during the winter months."

Coach touring was particularly popular with Zoe's older and younger clients.

"I find the older clients like Trafalgar, the younger Contiki," she said.

## DriveAway releases Peugeot deals

DRIVEAWAY Holidays is offering several specials on Peugeot cars available for collection in late 2010.

"We have had these cars made available to us and they provide some excellent value," said DriveAway chief executive sales and marketing Chris Hamill.

"Peugeot is great for clients after a longer term option – 25 plus days in Europe."

Four bonus offers are available, all of which include free delivery and collection fee outside France and free GPS.

For more information visit: <http://www.driveaway.com.au/peugeot/specials>.

THAI Airways is reporting strong demand for its European services.

"Europe has been strong for us all year as we've had some special pricing in the market to celebrate our 50th anniversary during 2010," said a Thai Airways spokesperson.

## TG demand strong, as the airline marks 50 years

"In particular London, Rome, Paris and Madrid all show strong demand as do the Scandinavian cities of Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo.

"Strong demand for Paris made it necessary to bring a new leased 777

aircraft on the route with a three class Royal First, Royal Silk and economy class configuration.

Despite now offering two flights a day from Bangkok to Paris, seats are still difficult to find, particularly in

Royal Silk (business) class.

"The strength of our Europe network was highlighted during the Iceland volcano disruptions when the diversity of our online cities came into play to assist getting passengers into Europe."



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# Toga to open two more European apartment hotels



Berlin's famous Hackesche Höfe area

TOGA Hospitality will open two new properties in Europe in late 2010 and early 2011.

The Adina Apartment Hotel Hamburg Michel is due to open in December 2010.

Close to Hamburg's landmark St Michaelis ('Michel') Church, Adina Apartment Hotel Hamburg Michel features 128 studio apartments and one and two bedroom apartments.

It incorporates all of the designer Adina comforts such as separate lounge and sleeping areas and fully equipped kitchens and laundries.

Like the other Adina apartment hotels across Europe and Australia, the hotel has a stylish and contemporary décor. The views it offers over Hamburg's harbour and downtown is another highlight. Other facilities include the Alto Restaurant and

Bar, gymnasium, swimming pool and conference facilities.

The Adina Apartment Hotel Berlin Hackescher Markt will open in early 2011. Featuring 145 one and two bedroom apartments and studio apartment rooms, the hotel is located in the heart of the historic Mitte district. It's also close to Berlin's famous Hackesche Höfe area that boasts ancient courtyards with a large selection of shops, restaurants and theatres.

Other nearby attractions include the Red Town Hall, the Berlin Cathedral, Boulevards Unter den Linden, Alexander Platz and Staatsoper Unter den Linden. The underground and tram is located just a minute's walk from the hotel and the Berlin Tegel Airport is 25 minutes by car.

Hotel facilities include the Alto Bar and Restaurant, gymnasium and spa and sauna.



## APT unveils first winter Concerto Class cruises

THE 12 winter departures of APT's Europe river cruises will be on the company's new Concerto Class rivership, the *MS Amabella*.

"Concerto Class ships offer revolutionary twin balconies, the largest suites on the rivers, swimming pool, fireside library and an intimate chef's table restaurant, complete with private chef," said APT's Debra Fox.

"With both ships almost completely booked for next year, the October to December cruises provide travellers with a new chance to indulge in the new ship design," she said.

## Xmas festivities with Tempo

TEMPO Holidays is offering a taste of a northern winter with its 11-day "Christmas Discovery" (from \$2124), seven-day "Bavarian Christmas Fantasy" (\$1350) and five-day "Christmas Delight" (\$809) packages which combine an authentic European festive experience with superior tourist class hotel accommodation and sightseeing tours.

Tour highlights include visits to Christmas markets in Leipzig, the fairytale Neuschwanstein Castle, the ancient mining villages of Schneeberg and Annaberg – the home of the German tradition of woodcarving and Christmas pyramids – the medieval town of Rothenburg, the Austrian city of Salzburg and a city tour of Munich.

Tempo Holidays' Eric Langen said the tours provided travellers with a great opportunity to experience a true European winter with a festive Christmas atmosphere.

"They are also a great opportunity to visit Europe without the crowds, allowing you to see more and also enjoy great value for money with prices generally a lot lower than in the usual peak summer time," he said.

"All European cities have ample attractions and options to explore in winter, including indoor attractions and museums."



Neuschwanstein Castle



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\*Taxes are subject to change. The levels shown are applicable for travel from Sydney to Paris via BKK & HEL, in Combination Class both ways, and are accurate as of 18 August 2010.

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Christmas market



## Save \$1000 with Viking special deal

VIKING River Cruises is offering a “save \$1000 per person” promotion on its 2010 European cruises including its Christmas cruises.

“Winter in Europe, and especially the time leading up to the holiday season is simply magical and really different to what you experience in summer,” said Viking’s Teresia Fors.

“The town centres are decorated with ornaments and beautiful multi-coloured Christmas lights. The world famous Christmas markets are a highlight of the year and draw crowds from around the world. Only a couple of weeks ago I met a traveller in Hobart who visited 14 different Christmas markets last year when she travelled through Germany and Austria.”

Cruises offering the \$1000 per person discount include the “Rhine Getaway” which has departures

scheduled for November 20, 27, 28 and December 4, 5, 11, 12, 28. The cruise travels between Amsterdam and Basel and includes stops in Kinderdijk, Cologne, Koblenz, Rudesheim, Heidelberg, Speyer, Strasbourg and Breisach. Costing from \$2270, it includes accommodation in a category D stateroom and six guided tours.

The “Winter Holiday” cruise travels from Nuremberg to Vienna and includes stops in Regensburg, Passau, Linz, Salzburg, Melk, Durnstein and Bratislava, priced from \$2610. The 10-day “European Winter Sojourn” (from \$2020) travels from Budapest to Passau and includes stops in Bratislava, Venna, Durnstein, Melk, Linz, Salzburg, and Regensburg. Passengers arrive in Passau on Christmas Eve allowing attendance at midnight mass at St Stephan’s Cathedral.

## Creative offers winter in Paris deal

CREATIVE Holidays is offering a special deal to Paris during the winter months.

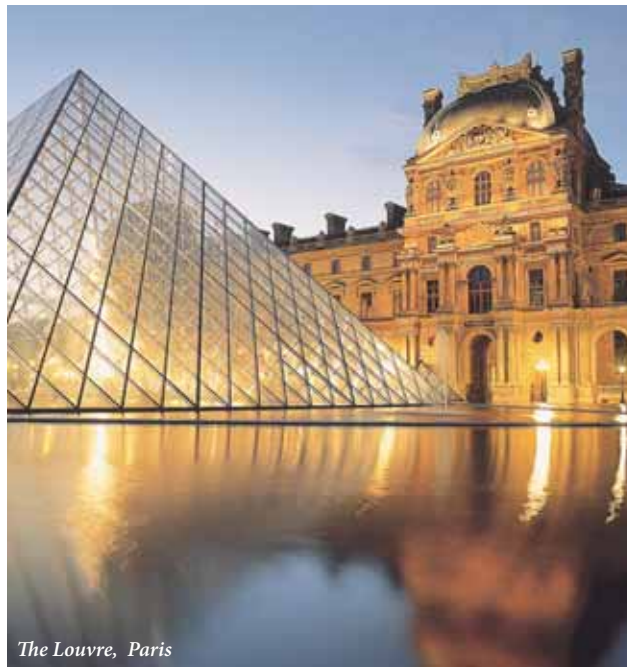
“Paris the City of Light” is a three night package costing from \$707 per person (twin share).

The package includes dinner at the Eiffel Tower, a Seine River cruise, a show at the Moulin Rouge, a two-day Paris hop on and off tour, three-nights at the Jardin De Paris Montmatre and breakfast daily.

Creative Holidays acting managing director, Andrew Yell, said travelling to Europe in the cooler seasons definitely had its advantages.

“It allows clients to embrace a totally different culture to the summer months and ensures they miss out on all the crowds at the fantastic sites, museums, art, shops, fine dining, making the most of their European experience,” he said.

“From a white Christmas in Paris, to the European festive lights, sounds and atmosphere of Germany, or getting cozy in an Italian villa, there are so many ways to enjoy the chilly months in Europe.”



The Louvre, Paris

## SAS promotes punctuality

SAS Scandinavian Airlines was Europe’s “most punctual airline” in 2009, and this summer SAS was once again “a leader in punctuality”.

According to SAS Australian and New Zealand general manager Irmgard Goetjes-Pedersen the results mean agents can choose SAS with confidence, especially with a European winter approaching.

“Winter can result in some extreme weather condition but as our record shows we are one of the most experienced airlines in dealing with such conditions,” Goetjes-Pedersen said.

On-time performance reports for worldwide carriers and airports generated from FlightStats Analytics show that in July SAS was the world’s “most punctual airline” amongst all major airlines.

“For May, June and July, SAS’ punctuality was superior to any other major airline in Europe,” Goetjes-Pedersen said.

In July, SAS’ punctuality was 90.35 per cent, resulting in 14,312 of 15,840 flights being on time. In June the punctuality was 90.62 per cent and in May 91.30 per cent.

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## AF, KLM unveil new interactive trade website

AIR France and KLM have launched [www.afkl.biz](http://www.afkl.biz) a trade website dedicated to travel agents, providing them with an interactive communication tool.

Air France KLM general manager for Singapore, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, Paul Rombeek, said thanks to [afkl.biz](http://afkl.biz), Air France and KLM offered travel agents the possibility of different trade functionalities in real time in only a

few clicks and with total security.

The home page gives immediate access to the latest commercial and operational data from Air France and KLM as well as a direct link to popular pages and favourites.

'You & AFKL' is dedicated to the personal relationship between the travel agent and the two carriers. An agency can access its profile, consult current promotions, identify useful

contacts or take part in quizzes.

The website's 'Promotion and News' pages centralises current commercial news and promotions, any changes to departure and arrival times as well as the most frequently asked commercial questions.

'Your Tools' pages contain all the main trade support services designed to optimise the work of a travel agent on a daily basis. The 'Online Services'

sections give consultants access to online group booking, baggage tracing, flight status as well as city and airport codes.

The 'Products and Services' section is dedicated to the presentation of all the available products and services from both airlines including destinations and in-flight services.

To sign up for [afkl.biz](http://afkl.biz), agents need to register their details online.

## Finnair offers a 'stylish start' to enjoying Europe in winter



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Australian passengers can connect with Finnair flights in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Delhi (and from May 2011 Singapore).

As a result, a passenger from Sydney can be in Helsinki within 20 hours and, if flying with a oneworld partner airline, in London in 23 hours.

Economy, business and combination class fares are available. Combination class fares see passengers fly economy between Australia and Asia and then business class from Asia to Europe. They receive all the benefits of business class travel between Asia and Europe. For example combination

class passengers not connecting to their final destination have access to Via Lounge and Via Spa located at Helsinki International Airport, as do business class travellers.

Facilities at the Via Lounge include free WiFi connection. The Via Spa offers a menu of spa and wellness treatments and passengers can make treatment bookings before leaving their home port.

All Finnair intercontinental flights are on A340 and A330 aircraft which are less than three years old. Every seat has its own personal entertainment unit and screen. Business or combination class passengers fly to Europe in a fully-flat seat which can accommodate passengers up to two metres tall.

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## Insight introduces Select Choice program to winter options

INSIGHT Vacations is offering its new Select Choice program during the European winter.

"We introduced Select Choice into our summer Europe program last year to fill a gap in the market for holiday options which suit those who prefer a more independent style of travel, but want to take advantage of the hassle-free benefits of escorted touring," said Insight Vacations managing director Lorraine Sharp.

"Sales really exceeded our expectations which led to our decision to introduce it into our 2010/11 Winter Europe and Eastern Mediterranean brochure,

"Covering popular destinations such as London, Paris and Rome each Select itinerary includes an orientation tour in each city to help clients get their bearings before embarking on their choice of individual exploration or



Florence at sunset

choosing from a range of experiences that allow them to tailor the itinerary to their individual needs and wants."

## Britrail 20% discount on England passes

RAIL Plus is offering discounts on Britrail England Passes. Travellers who purchase a pass up to February 13, 2011 for travel between November 1 and February 28 receive 20 per cent off the regular price of adult and children passes. A three-day pass normally costs from \$275 per person adult standard class or \$139 per person for a child. First class tickets cost from \$369 for adults and \$185 for children.

## Albatross launches NY London tour

ALBATROSS Travel has introduced a new six-day "New Year in London" tour which includes five nights in the newly built Park Plaza Westminster Bridge Hotel.

A highlight of the tour is the chance to see London's famous New Year's Eve fireworks display on the River Thames.

"The hotel is barely 200 metres from all the key viewing points," said Albatross Travel managing director, Euan Landsborough.

"As with all our tours it's an incredibly inclusive package with guided city tours, entrances to a number of sites including the Tower of London, and Westminster Abbey, tickets to a top West End Show, a ride on the London Eye (pictured), a river cruise to Greenwich, full English breakfasts, special dinners and even a farewell medieval banquet included.

The tour costs \$2129 per person (twin share), however passengers who book and pay in full by October 15 will pay \$1700 per person.



Landsborough is reporting strong demand for the company's winter tours.

"Our Christmas tours are already full, the rest, as usual have guaranteed departures," he said.

The company is this year offering 14 dedicated Christmas and New Year tours that focus on Germany, Switzerland, the Austrian Tyrol, Slovenia, Italy and the United Kingdom.

## Emirates begins Dubai-Madrid services

THE inaugural flight of Emirates flight EK 141 from Dubai to Madrid in August has completed a series of European route launches by the airline.

Madrid was Emirates' third new European route this year. Amsterdam was Emirates' first new route into Europe in 2010, launching on May 1. Prague followed on July 1. As a result, the airline now has an extra 42 flights per week in and out of the region.

Emirates' senior vice president, commercial operations, Europe and Russian Federation, Salem Obaidalla, said the interest in previous years in the airline starting a service to Spain had been reflected in the strong forward bookings.

"Now we are bringing the superb Emirates' product to the Spanish market," he said.

EK141 departs Dubai daily at 0750hrs and arrives in Madrid at 1345hrs. EK 142 leaves the Spanish capital at 1525hrs and gets into Dubai at 0030hrs the following day.

An Airbus A330-200 is being deployed on the route, offering 12 seats in first class, 42 in business and 183 in economy.

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