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Celebrating an Indianapolis Sister City Relationship with a Christkindlmarkt Tour

The Indianapolis-Cologne Sister City Committee celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2018 by partnering with Ambassador Travel Club to host a tour of Christmas markets in Germany, France and Switzerland. Twenty-five people signed up to join our week-long tour.



The entrance to one of Cologne's Christkindlmarkts
Photo courtesy Steven Schmidt

The trip began with a three-day stop in our sister city of Cologne. The evening we arrived, our counterpart committee hosted a welcome dinner in our honor. The next morning, we were treated to an official welcome by the deputy mayor of Cologne in the City Hall's Hanseatic meeting room, which dates back to the 15th century. This was followed by a private tour for the group of the magnificent Cologne Cathedral, known locally as "Der Dom."

Our group was a mixture of novice and seasoned travelers, so the folks who were in Cologne for the first time were treated to a walking tour of this beautiful 2,000-year-old city, while the returning travelers visited the "Praetorium," the ruins of the massive Roman Governor's

Palace, which was unearthed beneath the modern City Hall. Our next stop was the "Schokoladenmuseum" (Chocolate Museum) to see how cocoa is grown, harvested and turned into the chocolate bars we all know and love.

After that, the group split up into small groups to visit the many Christkindlmarkts around Cologne. The hundreds of booths featured ornaments, clothing, toys, pottery, china and an endless variety of food. Window shopping through the booths during the day was a lot of fun, but after dark, the markets changed from fun to magical. The growing crowds were obviously enjoying the spirit of the season buoyed, no doubt, by the ever-present hot spiced drink, Glühwein!

It should be said that even though the predominant language around us was German, most of the vendors spoke excellent English, so a lack of language skills should never keep you away from experiencing this fascinating part of the world.

All too soon our all to brief visit to Cologne came to an end, and we boarded the bus to Freiburg, our base camp for the next several days. From this central point, we visited the Christmas markets in Speyer, the villages of Riquewahr,

Kaysersberg and Colmar in the Alsace region of France, and Basel, Switzerland. On the way to catch our flight home, we stopped at the Heidelberg Christkindlmarkt for a wonderful farewell dinner. The following morning, we collapsed into our seats on the flight home, exhausted but filled with memories, photographs and Christmas spirit -- and very full luggage.

The Indianapolis-Cologne Sister City Committee meets at 5:15 pm on the second Monday of every other month at the Athenaeum, 401 E. Michigan St. in Indianapolis. There is no cost, and no knowledge of German or a German heritage is required, just a willingness to enjoy the similarities and difference between our two cities. Please send your questions to indianapoliscolognecommittee@gmail.com. ■

*By Steven J. Schmidt
Past President
Indianapolis-Cologne Sister City
Committee*



Capturing a few final memories at the farewell dinner
Photo courtesy Steven Schmidt