

Unwrapping Bavaria

A shopping holiday in Munich – Germany’s unhurried second city – is an excellent experience that combines big brands, up-and-coming German designers, concept stores and one of the oldest Christmas markets in the world. **Adriaane Pielou** compiles a list of Munich’s many must-visit shops and spots

As Europe’s A-list cities – London, Paris, Venice, Rome – become ever more crowded, the B-list cities, less well known but often just as interesting, become ever more appealing. Even in December, in cities such as Munich, a favourite among UAE visitors for its atmospheric Christmas market – as well as its medical facilities and clinics – the main shopping streets rarely become as insufferably crammed as the Champs-Élysées or Via Condotti. Year-round, you can view their art collections without wanting to murder the dozen other people standing in front of you. You’ve got a reasonable chance of getting a hotel room, restaurant table, massage or opera ticket at short notice. And you don’t arrive feeling you know the place because you’ve seen it as a backdrop in so many films. All of which puts you in that nicely relaxed mood which, as we all know, is reliably the one most likely to conjure up serendipity and the joy of the just-right purchase – whatever that might be.

In Munich, I’ve discovered, that could be a vegetable peeler. Honestly, I’ve just walked into Manufactum, a household-wares department store in the square off Marienplatz, the prosperous centre of Germany’s most prosperous city, and I am gazing around in surprise and delight. I’ve never seen anything quite like this place. It’s like a cross between the kind of supply store you would have found in a Wild West gold-rush town – everything practical and much of

it handmade – and a luxury home store such as The Conran Shop in London or Gracious Home in New York. I take one of the store’s catalogues, stacked just inside the entrance, and sit at the coffee counter, next to the artisan bread counter. “This shop is amazing,” I tell the waiter, after ordering a €2.90 (Dh12) cappuccino and €3 (Dh14) slice of raspberry flapjack. “A typical German store,” he says calmly, “but thank you.”

I open the catalogue – it must weigh five kilograms – and do a double take. Twelve types of peelers; about 25 types of household brushes, including a four-prong one for cleaning blinds. Plus, grey felt slippers, alpaca blankets, goosedown duvets. Browse while sitting, drinking coffee and eating cake, then saunter off and buy: this is certainly one definition of a perfect shopping experience.

Half an hour later, I emerge into the autumn sunshine, only slightly weighed down (mustn’t peak too soon), turn left – and there’s the famous Dallmayr, a Munich institution not to be missed. I push open the old-fashioned heavy glass, brass and wood door, then breathe in the scent. Think Fouquet’s in Paris. Food, glorious food, with, I quickly discover, a chocolate, cake and biscuits section to make one put on about five kilos just by looking. Chocolate-coated figs, apricots, apple slices and dates? Yes, says the assistant, of course she can make me up a little mixed bag.

Merry old Munich
The Christmas market, held at Marienplatz in the city centre each year, dates back to the 14th century, when it was known as the Nicholas Market.



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