

# Winners of the ‘European Capital of Christmas 2026’ Awards

**Barcelona** (Spain) awarded in the European Capital category (over 100,000 inhabitants).

**Wels** (Austria) awarded in the European City category (between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants).

**Kirkop** (Malta) awarded in the European Village category (less than 10,000 inhabitants).

The International Jury meeting took place in the city of Waterford (Ireland), in parallel with the International Congress of European Christmas Cities and Festivals organised by the municipality of this Irish city, European Christmas City 2024, with the support of the European Commission and the Christmas Cities Network. This congress, entitled ‘Bright and Green Christmases in European Cities, Building a Sustainable Future’, focused on the study of sustainability, bringing together more than a hundred attendees from different European countries.

The jury, chaired by Dr Danuta Hübner, a prominent economist and European political figure, evaluated the various projects submitted and decided to award this ninth edition of the prize to the cities of Barcelona, Wels and Kirkop. Hübner has been European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member of the European Parliament.

These awards recognise the efforts made by these cities to preserve and promote the Christmas spirit through cultural activities and initiatives that evoke traditions, citizen participation, heritage and festive values, which are inherent to the common values of the European Union.

## Barcelona: European Capital of Christmas 2026

**Barcelona’s Christmas** landscape is enriched by centuries of history, art and traditions, where deeply rooted local traditions converge with a profoundly multicultural identity.

Every detail adds new layers of meaning and creativity: from the Santa Llúcia Fair to the beloved figures of Tió de Nadal and Els Pastorets, Latin American carols, Central European-style Christmas markets and Mediterranean culinary touches.

**Highlights:** Musical performances that fill the streets with warmth and joy, liturgical traditions, Christmas fairs and markets, as well as majestic decorations and gastronomic traditions make the city an unforgettable destination at Christmas. Barcelona promotes celebrating the festivities through low consumption and

sustainable decorations with special workshops, eco-friendly fairs and initiatives to collect trees and decorations of organic origin once the festivities are over.

**Don't miss:** The Three Kings Parade, Christmas carol concerts, the Santa Lúcia Fair and the Christmas lights switch-on show.

## Wels: European City of Christmas 2026

Every Christmas, **Wels** transforms into a dream destination, hosting traditions such as the figure of the “Niño Jesús”, alpine village architecture and a warm, family atmosphere. Monumental decorations, music, gastronomy and crafts are particularly appreciated during the festivities.

**Highlights:** Christmas in Wels brings together magical markets with alpine hut-style décor, carriage rides, monumental sculptures of the “Niño Jesús” and his angels, family activities and immersive environments for children to enjoy, such as the Ledererturm, local cuisine and spectacular decorations.

**Don't miss:** The route of lights, the Christmas market in the centre of Wels, a Perchten parade, the magical world of Pollheimer Park, and a tasting of punch and mulled wine.

## Kirkop: European Christmas Village 2026

**Kirkop** is a small village in Malta with a strong sense of community and deep-rooted traditions that celebrates Christmas with a warm, creative and innovative spirit. The street decorations stand out for their lights, creations made from recycled materials and crafts that showcase local history and folklore.

In addition, there are fairs, markets and concerts featuring artisans, musicians and local talent of all ages. All in an atmosphere marked by solidarity, social spirit, sustainability, gastronomy and tradition.

**Highlights:** Festive initiatives promote local identity to provide visitors with an authentic experience. Characters such as Klaus Percopus, Leonard, Joseph, Menhires and Benedetta bring the streets to life, while children write letters to Santa and receive personalised replies. The activities also promote solidarity and volunteering projects for people in vulnerable situations through collaborations with NGOs and community centres.

**Don't miss:** The route of lights from Triq San Benedetti to Triq Santu Rokku, a local market, live nativity scenes and workshops to learn how to make a Maltese Christmas sweet.

## Special mention for Valduvieco

The International Jury has unanimously decided to award a special mention to the small village of Valduvieco, a town with 32 inhabitants located in the province of León, Spain.

This town's project embodies the collective involvement of its inhabitants in projects that promote the values of solidarity, unity and tradition championed by the Network of Christmas Towns, prioritising citizen participation in order to preserve local customs such as the switching on of lights, the local market, the manufacture of toys and crafts, festive gatherings and live music.

## Awards Ceremony Gala

The award ceremony for the 'European Capital of Christmas 2026' will take place on 13 December in Vilnius (Lithuania), which will develop the winning project in the 2025 competition during this Christmas season.

For more information, please visit [www.europeancapitalofchristmas.org](http://www.europeancapitalofchristmas.org)