

Southwest Germany: The Land of Christmas Cookies

The Taste of Christmas: Springerle, Hutzelbrot and Dambedei

Southwest Germany's festive Christmas markets are full of the sights, sounds and smells of the holiday season. Half-timbered houses provide a backdrop to stalls selling locally-made gifts and Christmas decorations. Cinnamon, cloves and star anise perfume the air. Starting in late November, locals head to markets, to meet up with friends and families, sip glasses of steaming Glühwein (hot mulled wine) and munch treats such as Christmas cookies and traditional sweet breads. Read on to tickle your taste buds; then follow our recipe below and bake your own Butter Cookies at home!

Hutzelbrot: Dark, Dense, and Delicious

Hutzelbrot (pear bread) is crammed with dried fruit: pears, prunes, figs and apricots. Candied lemon and orange peel add zing; toasted hazelnuts and almonds provide crunch; spices, even a drop of rum, round out the flavour. The loaf is really dark and keeps well, so take some home from a Christmas market or bakery. But beware: it is so yummy that it rarely lasts long! TIP: It makes a great partner for cheese.

Dambedei: The Little Man That Children Love to Eat

With his round head, raisin eyes, almond mouth and buttons made of nuts, Dambedei looks like a child's drawing of a man. During the Christmas season, this little 'dough boy' turns up everywhere, though each region has its own legends about his origin. The addition of a pipe, for example, represents a bishop's crozier. On December 6, St Nicholas Day, people excluded from worship received bread that had been blessed. In some areas, this tradition still continues, though the Dambedei is distributed to everyone. Other communities hand it out on November 11, St Martin's Day.

Springerle: A Christmas Speciality

In Southwest Germany, nothing says Christmas more than Springerle. These hard aniseed-flavoured biscuits can be eaten – but are also used as decoration in cafés, restaurants and even on Christmas trees! The dough is made of eggs, flour and sugar; wooden moulds, carved in medieval patterns, scenes and figures, create the traditional design. Moulds are sold in the Christmas markets and make a nice souvenir.

Neujahrsbrezel: The Special New Year's Pretzel

Legend has it that the pretzel, or Brezel in German, was created 500 years ago in Bad Urach, an hour southeast of Stuttgart. You can eat pretzels year round, for breakfast, lunch or just a snack. And there are countless variations in design and taste. Extra-special are the Neujahrsbrezel, traditionally made for breakfast on New Year's Day. Soft, sweet and large enough to be shared, it is often shaped in a circle, representing infinity. An old Baden custom is to add coins to the dough; finding one guarantees good luck for the coming year!

Reutlingen Mutschel: Follow that Star

The ancient town of Reutlingen, 30 minutes south of Stuttgart, is home to the Mutschel. This sweet spice bread is shaped into an eight-pointed star, which represents the star followed by the Three Wise Men. Locals insist that it was invented here, back in the 13th century by one Albrecht Mutschler, a baker. And they remember him on Mutscheltag, or Mutschler Day, the Thursday following January 6, which is Epiphany/Three Kings Day. Everyone plays games of dice and the winners get huge loaves of Mutschel!

PRESS RELEASE

RECIPE: Butterplätzchen: Simple Butter Cookies

Makes about 30 small cookies

For the cookies

125 g cold butter

200 g of flour

1 egg, beaten

100 g sugar

5 ml vanilla extract

For icing & decoration

28 ml lemon juice

85 ml icing sugar

Decorations: sprinkles, dragees

Put butter, flour and sugar into a bowl and mix together. Get the children to help; they can use their fingers! Make sure the butter is blended in well.

Then, add the vanilla extract and the beaten egg. Make sure all is blended evenly. Wrap the dough in grease-proof paper and put in the fridge for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan-assisted 160°C).

Flour the worktop. Roll the dough out to about 5 mm thick and cut out with Christmas cookie cutters (stars, hearts). Place cookies on a baking sheet and bake for about 7-10 minutes. Check after 7 minutes as they may be done. If not, watch carefully! Allow to cool completely.

For the icing

Mix the icing sugar and lemon juice together and spread over the cookies with a spoon. Add colourful sugar decorations. Let the icing harden. Alternatively, brush the cookies with an egg wash (egg beaten with a little water) and sprinkle them with sugar decorations before baking. The egg wash gives a lovely golden colour.

A digital version of this press release - as well as more detailed information on Southwest Germany - is available on our website <https://www.tourism-bw.com/press>

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