

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

ADVENTSSITTEN / ADVENT CUSTOMS
ADVENTSKALENDER / ADVENT CALENDAR
 calendar: der Kalender, die Kalender

GENGENBACHS RATHAUS ADVENTSKALENDER

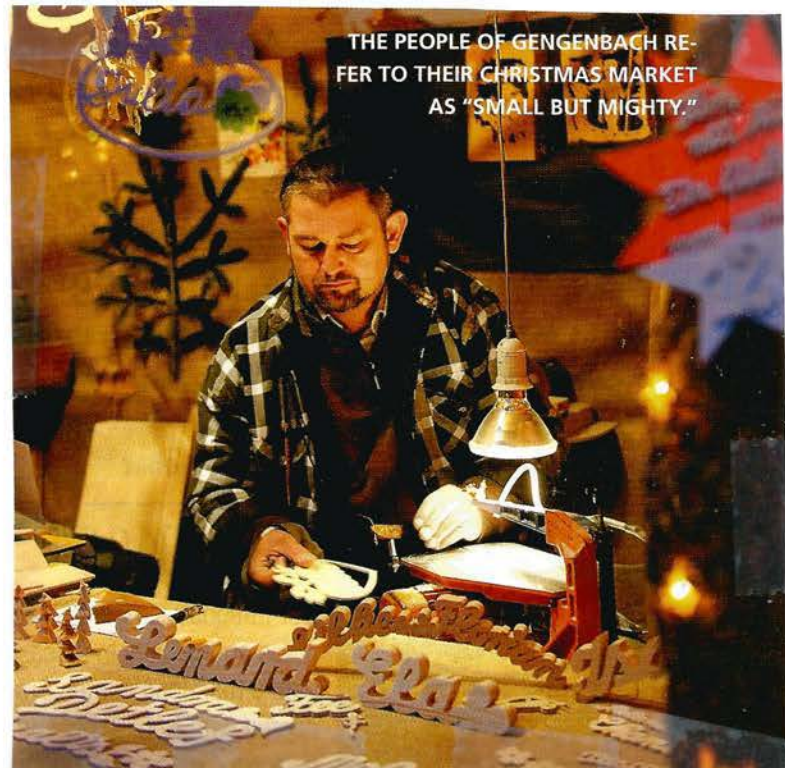
will find handmade wooden bird-feeders, amber jewelry from Poland, other beautiful silver and gemstone jewelry, crystal salt lamps, hand-knitted caps and scarves, natural soaps, rare minerals and fossils, scented candles, hand-sewn decorations, artistic objects made of metal, and, of course, many types of Christmas ornaments. If you set up a nativity scene at home in the United States keep an eye out for Harald Krämer's stand. Besides repairing television and radios, Krämer sells his own tiny illuminated campfires, lanterns, and stars for use in Christmas crèches. (Internet orders at www.ledkette.de.) Gengenbach, like other Black Forest towns, is also a center of the Swabian-Alemannic *Fastnacht* or, as the Gengenbachers say, *Fasend*: the Carnival weeks before Lent. At the Christmas market you will also find souvenirs of that other high season of the Gengenbach year, when groups of masked and costumed Carnival revellers parade and go on mischievous rampages through town. Look out for carved wooden *Fasend* figurines, hand-painted ceramics decorated with the typical *Spättle* (a jester-like figure clothed in countless colorful cloth patches), or even shoes made of braided corn-husks, typically worn during *Fasend* by men disguised as ghoulishly grinning *Hexen* (witches).

Of course, the market also offers many tempting things to eat and drink. The only *Glühwein* served is the product of Gengenbach's own association of wine-growers, which presses the grapes of the astounding 600 (!) growers within a ten-kilometer radius. At their market stall you will find hot *Glühwein* ready for slurping out of mugs decorated with a photo of the Gengenbach *Rathaus* Advent calendar that you can buy along with the wine. You can also buy bottles of both red and – a local specialty – white *Glühwein*, or jars of *Glühwein Gelee*, which is tasty on bread or as a condiment for pork or game. The locally-made *Bratwürste* is the uncontested market best-seller, but also try the *Schupfnudeln*: dense finger-sized potato dumplings tossed in a huge, sizzling pan together with Black Forest smoked bacon bits and sauerkraut.

Make sure to also wander through the shops surrounding the marketplace. At the Stigler butcher shop, you will find pre-packaged selections of their excellent smoked Black Forest ham and cured sausages. Their own liverwurst and other handmade specialties in cans make good Black Forest souvenirs. A perfect gift from Gengenbach could also be a chocolate-box version of the *Rathaus* Advent calendar from Café Honig, with a handmade sweet behind every tiny door, or a wooden-box of Schnapps-filled chocolates bearing a photo of the Advent calendar

Rathaus, from Café Birnbräuer, which also sells two regional cake specialties: the tall, ring-shaped *Baumkuchen* (“Tree Cake”), and a relic of Austrian influence in the region: fruit-filled *Linzer Torte*. Also be sure to stop in at the ancient *Klostermühle* (monastery mill) bakery, where food was prepared for monks and travelers in the Middle Ages. (Gengenbach was in fact on a pilgrimage route to the relics of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain). Try the *Datschkuchen* there, a local specialty evolved long ago from flattened bits of bread dough that bakers tossed in their ovens to test the heat – now topped with bacon, herbs, and cream cheese.

At its Advent peak, the last weekend before Christmas, the square in front of the *Rathaus* is so packed, I was told, that even if you over-imbibe of the *Glühwein*, you cannot possibly fall down. For a more peaceful visit, go on a weekday. Or to see the calendar with all its windows open — and without the jolly commotion of the concerts, ritual, and Christmas market — visit between Christmas Day and Epiphany, January 6, when the “treasure trove of fantasy” that was the Advent calendar turns back into the simply lovely old town hall.



THE PEOPLE OF GENGENBACH REFER TO THEIR CHRISTMAS MARKET AS “SMALL BUT MIGHTY.”