

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

## WEIHNACHTZEIT / CHRISTMAS SEASON

### NIKOLAUSABEND—NICHOLAS EVE der 5. Dezember

#### YOU'D BETTER NOT POUT—KRAMPUS IS COMING TO TOWN

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St. Nicholas turns to his horned, hairy sidekick to deal with less than stellar children.



and, in addition to chastising children, they would often slap the bellies of young girls with their birch branches as an invocation for a healthy pregnancy, a tradition that undoubtedly originated with pagan fertility rites.

For a time, the church banned *Krampus* celebrations, and though it never really died out, in the past decades the mythical monster has been making a huge comeback with literally hundreds of groups throughout Austria attending events in countless villages.

Bierbaumer wanted to participate in *Krampus* since he first saw the creatures at five years old. It wasn't long before he got his first mask and began to take part in the celebrations. About fifteen years ago, he formed the first *Krampus* group in Munich.

“(*Krampus*) has a lot to do with where you come from,” said Bierbaumer. “In the city, years ago, it wasn't popular. In the mountains, they're doing this all the time, it's tradition. Munich is about as far north in Germany as it goes.”

In some rural areas, the *Krampuslauf* can get fairly rough, with blood drawn and visitors knocked in the snow. In larger cities, like Salzburg, or at the many ski resorts that capitalize on the popularity of the monsters, things are more toned down.

“Sometimes people get a little crazy with it,” Bierbaumer admitted. “In the mountains, they're used to it. Here in Munich, we're more family friendly.”

What started in Munich fifteen years ago with a handful of monsters has grown to be one of the highlights of the city's Christmas Market. In 2013, some six-hundred *Krampus* marched through a city center so packed with visitors that the creatures themselves could barely get through.

“Some people think, ‘oh, five-hundred guys coming all drunk on beer,’ but on our runs, there's no beer allowed,” said Bierbaumer. “No alcohol before a run! It's too dangerous for the visitor.”

As organizer for the Munich event, Bierbaumer exercises strict control over his groups. Drinking before the event will get the performer grounded, and this year, the “*Ruten*,” or traditional club of birch branches, has been banned. He also demands adherence to tradition from his runners.

“With some of the young groups, it's gotten a little ‘Halloween,’ with latex and bloody masks,” Bierbaumer said. “(*Krampus*) has nothing to do with Halloween. This is a Christmas tradition. Here, Christmas is getting more and more like the Santa Claus from Coca-Cola, but that has nothing to do with Bavaria. I love American Christ-