The winter city break checklist

For Europe and the UK, from wherever you are coming

For a winter city break in Europe or the UK, whichever side you are coming from. Every official link is listed at the end. Tick the boxes as you go.

The 3 things that can end a trip before it starts

- ☐ Your passport and entry rules: find your line in the next section.
- ☐ Travel insurance, bought before you go, that covers medical treatment abroad.
- ☐ Your medicines: anything on prescription, in its original packaging, with a copy of the prescription, in your hand luggage.

Passports and entry rules: find your line

Going to the EU (most of Europe, the Schengen area):

- **UK, US, Canadian or Australian passport:** it must have been issued less than 10 years before the day you arrive, and be valid at least 3 months after the day you leave. You can stay up to 90 days in any 180. The first time you arrive you give fingerprints and a photo at the border (EES). Check whether ETIAS has started: it is expected from late 2026, costs €20, and must only be bought on the official EU website.
- **EU passport or national ID card:** your ID card is usually enough to travel within the EU. EES and ETIAS do not apply to you.

Going to the UK:

- **EU, US, Canadian or Australian passport:** you need a UK Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) before you travel, one per person including children. It costs £20, lasts 2 years or until your passport expires, and must only be bought on gov.uk or the official UK ETA app. Since 25 February 2026 you can be refused boarding without one.
- **EU citizens:** you need a passport to enter the UK. National ID cards have not been accepted for most visitors since October 2021.
- **UK and Irish passports:** no ETA needed.

Health cover, by passport

- **UK:** carry your GHIC in the EU. It covers state treatment, not everything, so buy travel insurance as well.
- **EU:** carry your EHIC. It works across the EU and also in the UK, for state treatment.
- **Australia:** Australia has reciprocal health agreements with the UK and some European countries, for limited state treatment. Check the list before you go.
- **US and Canada:** there is no reciprocal cover in Europe or the UK. Make sure your insurance covers medical treatment abroad.
- **Everyone:** travel insurance that covers medical treatment, bought before you go, with a printed copy in your bag.

Phone, money and plugs

- Phone: EU plans roam at home prices within the EU. UK, US, Canadian and Australian plans usually charge abroad: check, buy an add-on, or use an eSIM.
- Money: when a card machine or cash machine offers to charge you in your home currency, choose the local currency. The home-currency option uses the machine's own exchange rate.
- Plugs: travellers really need 3 adapters. UK 3 square pins (type G); European 2 round pins (types C, E, F), which fits all of mainland Europe; US 2 flat pins (types A, B). Australia uses its own slanted pins (type I), so Australians need an adapter everywhere in this list. See the table for your destination.
- Voltage: Europe and the UK run at 230V. If you are coming from the US or Canada, check your chargers say 100–240V before you plug them in.

Plugs for popular winter city breaks

Adapter to pack	Where it works
European 2 round pins (types C, E, F), 230V	France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland. In Italy and Switzerland a slim round-pin plug fits every socket; a chunkier one may not.
UK 3 square pins (type G), 230V	UK, Ireland, Malta, Cyprus

- Coming from the US, Canada or Australia? Your own plug fits neither. Pack a European 2-round-pin adapter, and a UK 3-pin one if the UK or Ireland is on the trip.

One adapter for everything

- An adapter only changes the shape of the pins, not the voltage. The same US flat-pin adapter works at 110V and at 220V, so you never need two of one kind.
- Choose one rated 250V and 10A or more. It is safe at the lower voltages too.
- What matters is your device. Look at the small print on the charger: "100–240V" works everywhere with just an adapter. Most phone, laptop, camera and toothbrush chargers say this.
- Hairdryers, straighteners and curlers are often 220–240V only. They will run weakly or not at all at 110–127V. Pack a dual-voltage travel one, or use the hotel's.
- Easiest of all: 1 universal travel adapter with UK, European, US and Australian pins and 2 or 3 USB ports, so it charges your phone, watch and power bank at once.
- Pick one with slim round pins, so it also fits the recessed sockets in Switzerland and Italy, and buy a known brand with a UKCA or CE mark. Cheap unbranded adapters can overheat.
- A short extension lead or multi-plug from home means 1 adapter powers all your chargers.

4 weeks before

- [ ] Book the airport transfer you need, or look up the train: most city airports have a direct train or bus into the centre, and it is usually the cheapest way in.
- [ ] Look up the dates of the Christmas market, if that is why you are going. They change every year.
- [ ] Check the public holidays and shop opening days. In some countries most shops close on Sundays, and Christmas Eve can be a public holiday.

The week before

- [ ] Phone plan checked, or an add-on or eSIM bought.
- [ ] A card that does not charge for spending abroad, and a little cash in the local currency, for the stall or the artist who takes nothing else.
- [ ] The chargers check: the right travel adapter, the CABLE for every device, and a power bank.
- [ ] A photo of your passport and insurance policy saved on your phone and emailed to yourself.
- [ ] And a PRINTED copy of your insurance policy and its emergency number in your bag. No signal, no affordable data, no wifi or a flat battery always happens at the worst moment.
- [ ] Your own medical box: everyday basics (painkillers, plasters, something for an upset stomach) plus any prescription medicines, in their original packaging, with a copy of the prescription.
- [ ] Antihistamine (allergy) tablets in your handbag, not your suitcase. A new food, a new drink, even a new hand cream abroad can cause a reaction you have never had at home. Swelling of the face, lips or throat, or any trouble breathing, is an emergency: call the local emergency number (112 across Europe, 999 or 112 in the UK; look up the number anywhere else before you go).
- [ ] Hand luggage: check your airport's liquids rule before you pack.
- [ ] Offline maps of the city downloaded, and the address of where you are staying saved on your phone.

Pack for below zero

- [ ] Layers rather than one thick jumper: you will go in and out of warm cafés all day.
- [ ] A warm waterproof coat.
- [ ] Thermal tops and tights or leggings, from November.
- [ ] Boots with thick soles and a good grip: old town cobbles in December are icy.
- [ ] Thick socks, and a spare pair.
- [ ] Gloves, a hat and a scarf.
- [ ] Lip balm and hand cream: cold air dries everything.
- [ ] A small rucksack or cross-body bag, closed with a zip, for crowded markets.

When you get there

- When a card machine offers to charge you in your home currency, choose the local currency.
- Buy anything you forgot in the supermarkets and chemists: the brands you know are there, often next to local ones at better prices.
- Prices follow the location, not the brand: the same item can cost up to double in the busiest tourist streets.
- Popular restaurants in old towns fill up early in the evening. If there is a queue, try a street or two outside the centre.
- Days are short. Do the sights in daylight and keep the markets and the lights for after dark.
- Cold drains phone batteries fast: keep your phone in an inside pocket and the power bank charged.
- Learn hello, please and thank you in the local language. It is always noticed.

Coming home

- Leave room for presents, and pack a folded shopping bag.
- Bottles of local drink go in your hold luggage, not your hand luggage, unless you bought them after security.
- Wrap anything glass in socks or a scarf, in the middle of the case.
- Check your allowance for bringing alcohol and tobacco home.
- Into Great Britain from the EU: no meat or dairy in your luggage, not even vacuum-packed from a shop. Sausage, ham and cheese stay behind. Chocolate, biscuits and sweets are fine.
- Into the US, Canada or Australia: food rules are strict. Declare any food you are carrying when you arrive; Australia in particular fines people who do not.

The night before

- [ ] Passport (or ID card, within the EU)
- [ ] Phone, plug AND cable
- [ ] Cards and a little local cash
- [ ] Your medical box, with allergy tablets in your handbag
- [ ] Printed insurance policy
- [ ] Your house keys

What we forgot

- Ian: winter boots and thick socks. He does not own any, so he did not pack any, and we bought warm insoles, socks and gloves on arrival.
- Olesia: her charging cable, twice in a row. The right plugs, no cable. Ian always has a spare in his suitcase.

Useful links

Every official site mentioned in this checklist. Rules and fees change, so always check the official page before you travel.

What	Where
UK travellers: entry rules country by country	www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
US travellers	travel.state.gov
Canadian travellers	travel.gc.ca
Australian travellers	www.smartraveller.gov.au
EU travellers	your own foreign ministry's travel advice
EES (fingerprints at the EU border) and ETIAS	travel-europe.europa.eu
UK ETA (visiting the UK)	www.gov.uk/eta
UK GHIC	www.gov.uk/global-health-insurance-card
EU EHIC	ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=559
Australia: reciprocal health care agreements	www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/reciprocal-health-care-agreements
Bringing food into Great Britain	www.gov.uk/bringing-food-into-great-britain
Plug types by country	www.iec.ch/world-plugs

More trips, city guides and craft beer stops from Olesia and Ian at streetsandtaps.com. This checklist is general guidance, not legal or medical advice. Last checked: October 2026.