

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

On Wine and Christmas in Penang

Christmas in Penang is a special time of year; like every other festival it is celebrated in Penang's own wonderfully multi-ethnic way, with Christmas carols and church services, gift giving and of course, lots of eating. Religious or not, Christian or not, Penangites take full advantage of the holiday to enjoy special meals out with family and friends, and special meals deserve special wines to go with them.



But while the sounds and sights of Christmas in Penang resemble Christmas elsewhere in the world, it lacks the smells that are evocative of Christmas in its heartland, Northern Europe. Pine trees lose their needles in the heat and the earthy smell of pine needles can't be replicated by synthetic trees, no matter how beautifully decorated, and the spicy cinnamon smell of mulled wine (or glühwein), a Northern European Christmas essential is entirely absent in a climate where many prefer even red wine to be chilled.

Although English myself, I believe Germans do Christmas better than anyone else. Not only are the pine trees real, but every branch is decorated with a real candle, and a bucket of water stands at the foot of the tree to deal with the occasional accident. At the annual Christkindlesmarkt in Nuremberg in the central square of the town, a collection of wooden stalls covered by red and white striped awnings, nestled around the old fountain and overlooked by mediaeval towers, sell hand-made Christmas ornaments and toys, Nuremberger sausages and sauerkraut. But it was the smell of the spices wafting up from a hundred mugs of glühwein in a hundred gloved hands that was most redolent of Christmas for me. As the bells chimed twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve, and the snow fell gently around me, flakes melting in my mug of warm red wine, I felt like I was actually inside a Christmas card!

How to replicate this most Christmassy of smells in Penang? The spices on the nose of a bottle of good Argentinean Malbec (served at room temperature) come close. Otherwise, just roll with the festive spirit and drink anything with bubbles in it!

For more information about wine join our wine classes

at

That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road, George Town, Penang

Email info@thatlittlewinebar.com for details