22 November



Sint-Niklaas: the saint in the city's name

The tenth window of our calendar takes us to Belgium. In Sint-Niklaas, you do not have to look far for a connection with Saint Nicholas: it is already there in the city's name. The city archives link local history to the parish founded in 1219 and its patron saint. [1] Our journey thus brings us to a place where the name Nicholas is part of everyday language.

A church as our starting point

The official tourism website describes the Sint-Nicolaaskerk as the oldest church in the city. Immediately beside it lies Sint-Nicolaasplein. [2] The church, the square and the city's name show how a religious tradition can also provide landmarks in everyday life. Walking through the city, visitors encounter it on signs, in conversations and in the history of the centre.

The golden calendar illustration brings these connections together in a festive scene. It invites us to discover the real city behind the beautiful image: the people who keep an old name alive and the ways in which children meet the Sint today.

A house for the Sint

With its ‘Huis van de Sint’, Sint-Niklaas has a special place devoted to the seasonal Saint Nicholas tradition. The city’s tourism website describes a house with several rooms, a theatre and a large toy room. During the Sinterklaas season, children and families can explore the world of the gift-bringing figure there. [3] This is a modern presentation of the tradition, rather than the bishop’s historical home.

History and children’s imagination

This distinction can be explained warmly and gently. Nicholas of Myra belongs to early Church history; the Sint who welcomes children in a city belongs to a living tradition and its portrayal. The two can point towards each other. A wonderful celebration does not need invented historical claims to delight children.

A name that connects people

The city archives highlight the influence of Saint Nicholas on the city’s character since the founding of the parish. [1] From today’s perspective, this shows how a name can create a sense of belonging. It connects the visible city with its past while providing a shared reference point for new ways of celebrating.

Why places like this matter

Children often remember particular places: a gateway, a festive hall or a friendly encounter. Through such experiences, adults can pass on a message without lengthy speeches. Attention, patience and a willingness to listen make the difference between a mere backdrop and a celebration that stays in the memory.

From one Saint Nicholas town to another

For Waidhofen an der Ybbs, Sint-Niklaas is a particularly lovely stop on the journey. Each place shows in its own way that Saint Nicholas can be much more than a figure for a single evening. Their historical connections differ, but they share the pleasure of passing stories on. With this discovery, our journey continues to Switzerland.

Sources and image credit

[1] Stadsarchief Sint-Niklaas: Goed heilig man
[2] Visit Sint-Niklaas: Church of Saint Nicholas
[3] Huis van de Sint

Supplied cover image: artistic illustration. Sources as of 18 October 2026.