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53% of restaurants in North Rhine-Westphalia report weak Christmas party bookings

Operators say companies are canceling or shrinking celebrations, leaving a key late-year revenue stream under pressure after sales fell 5.4% in August

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Christmas party bookings are falling short of expectations for many restaurants in parts of Germany, adding to pressure on a hospitality sector that was already dealing with weaker sales heading into the year-end season.

BILD reported on Saturday, November 14, citing a survey by DEHOGA, the German Hotel and Restaurant Association, that 53% of restaurant operators surveyed in North Rhine-Westphalia said they were not satisfied with bookings for Christmas parties and holiday meals in 2026. Only 21% said they were satisfied. The rest said they could not yet make a final assessment or did not provide one.

The figures point to a softer holiday events market in one of Germany’s biggest regional hospitality markets. For restaurants, caterers and hotels, corporate Christmas parties and year-end gatherings usually provide an important stream of banquet and group dining revenue late in the year. A weaker booking season can leave operators trying to fill rooms and private spaces at short notice during a period that is normally expected to support margins after the summer season.

According to BILD’s report, DEHOGA described the booking picture in North Rhine-Westphalia as mixed about six weeks before Christmas. Of the 53% who said bookings were unsatisfactory, 11% said they were disappointed with the level of demand.

The reported weakness appears to be tied to broader economic caution. BILD said companies, clubs and families were all showing more restraint this year, with many businesses cutting back or canceling traditional holiday celebrations because of the economic climate. Industry officials cited by the newspaper said small and midsize companies, which often book earlier, were under particular financial pressure.

Romy Mayer, vice president of DEHOGA in the state of Hesse, told BILD that many restaurateurs were in a difficult position at the end of the year and were trying hard to fill their venues before Christmas. Mayer said some midsize companies that had previously booked parties well in advance no longer had the budget to do so. She also said larger corporations were showing caution, especially if they were cutting jobs, and that celebrations that do go ahead are often being held on a smaller scale.

Similar concerns were reported in North Rhine-Westphalia. BILD cited Patrick Rothkopf, DEHOGA's president in the state, as saying that the industry was once again seeing companies choose to forgo Christmas parties. That matters because business holiday events can generate demand not only for restaurant meals but also for catering services, hotel event space and private room rentals.

The survey results come at a time when the sector is relying heavily on the holiday period. BILD said that, according to Germany's Federal Statistical Office, the industry's real sales performance nationwide at the end of the summer season in August was 5.4% below the level a year earlier. The newspaper said this decline came despite a lower value-added tax rate on food that has been in effect since the start of the year.

Mayer told BILD that the tax relief had, at best, helped businesses keep prices relatively stable and offset part of what she described as very high energy costs. That suggests many operators have had little room to use tax changes to stimulate additional demand, especially when customers themselves are watching spending more closely.

The market data reported by BILD cover regional sentiment in North Rhine-Westphalia, but the newspaper also presented comments from hospitality officials in other German states that point to a broader pattern of caution. Those comments do not amount to a national survey result, but they indicate that the concern is not limited to one local market.

With the traditional booking window still open, parts of the industry are hoping for late demand. BILD reported that restaurants are now looking to last-minute business, especially from families and smaller company events organized at the department level rather than as large full-company celebrations. Daniel Ohl, a DEHOGA managing director in Baden-Württemberg, told the newspaper that after a demanding year there is still a clear desire among consumers to enjoy time out in restaurants.

Whether that late demand will be strong enough to make up for missing corporate bookings remains uncertain. For restaurant operators that count on year-end events to support revenue, the coming weeks are likely to determine how much of the shortfall can still be recovered.