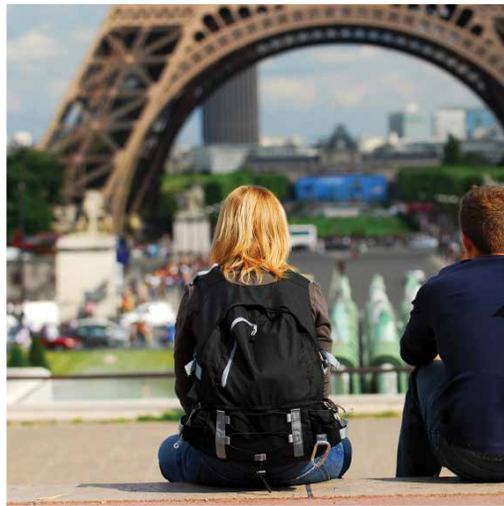


# BACKPACKING EUROPE PLANNING & ESSENTIALS

*guide*



**BAKPAK★EUROPE**  
your adventure begins with bakpak dave



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# Backpacking Europe Planning & Essentials Guide

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## About Shilo Urban

After residing in Austin, Maine, New Zealand, Paris and Seattle, Shilo now lives in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, where she enjoys work as a freelance writer and music publicist. She has been involved in many facets of the travel industry, and has experience working as a travel agent, tour wholesaler, hotel bartender, travel seminar instructor and private guide in Paris and Northern France. Shilo has been to 28 countries, dreams of taking pilot lessons and has a wiener dog named Steve.



## About Bakpak Dave Barish

Bakpak Dave's venture into the travel industry started after he quit his accounting job in New York City to backpack and volunteer around Australia and New Zealand. He helped build walking trails in a National Park, laid down track for a steam train line, and cared for Emus and other native animals in a reptile and fauna park.

He had such a good time staying in hostels that a few years later he opened a top-rated hostel and pub, the Nomads Market Inn, in South Melbourne Australia. He not only welcomed guests from around the world into comfortable beds but doubled as the pub's official bartender and bouncer.

After returning to New York, Bakpak Dave created Bakpak Travelers Guide to provide youth, student and budget travelers an information resource for planning a trip of a lifetime like he experienced. He grew the business from a single publication to a range of guides, travel websites and a travel agency. Bakpak Dave lives in sunny Los Angeles by the beach with his wife and 4 year old daughter. He loves to inspire others to go overseas and experience the world.

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*Photo © Andrew Manley*

# Chapter 1. Introduction to Backpacking Europe



Photo © Charlotte Bassin

*There is perhaps no greater feeling than stepping onto the strange streets of a foreign land with everything you need strapped to your back, as the new sights fill your eyes and unfamiliar sounds and smells stimulate your brain.*

And there is no better place to experience this profound sense of adventure and freedom than Europe. A continent of many cultures and countries to explore, Europe is a vast and varied land, from historic cities that have influenced the course of humanity for centuries to epic areas of natural beauty, including beaches, mountains, canyons and lakes.

Planning a trip to Europe can be intimidating because of the destination's size and overwhelming number of sights, but with a little planning, including expert tips from Backpack Dave – you can realize your dream of traveling through Europe. Whether you want to go it alone to France and Italy with a Eurail Pass, travel with friends in a funky campervan across the UK or sign up for an adventure tour for a few weeks, our useful guide will help you learn everything you need to know about European transportation, hostels and other types of accommodation, how to be safe and most importantly, where to go. With country and city descriptions, maps and a pricing index, our Guide will help you plan an epic European adventure that you will hopefully talk about for the rest of your life.

Keep in mind that one of the very best parts of traveling to Europe may be the things that you discover that are not found in any guidebook or on any map: the smile of an old French lady on the subway, the new friends you make on the Italian Riviera, the ramshackle café in Athens where you learned to say “more ouzo” in Greek. Feeling awkward, uncomfortable and well, foreign is an experience that promotes personal growth and infects tourists with an incurable travel bug before they know it. Try to leave time in your schedule for wandering and the unexpected, and remember: you may discover some of the best sites when you are completely lost.

## Highlights

### *Culture*

Many travelers are drawn to Europe for its rich history, artful lifestyle and diversity of cultures that can be experienced in a relatively small and compact area. Every little village and modern metropolis oozes a unique energy and spirit, and you'll soak in the European experience as you wander at will amongst its many charms. Take in the smells, sights and sounds of local markets, visit a church gathering for solemn insight, try every regional delicacy that you can and find your favorite artistic expression at every place that you visit. You can also attend local events for a thick dose of culture. Going to a theatrical performance, opera, ballet or attending the movies can be a real eye-opener when you're in a foreign land.

### *Outdoor Adventures*

In Europe you'll find a very large variety of outdoor pursuits, scenic experiences and all types of exciting adventures. From the snow-capped peaks of the Alps and the rolling farmland of Provence, to Switzerland's green glacial lakes and the incredible sandy beaches of Portugal, Europe offers something for everyone to explore. Hike, bike or raft your way through gorgeous canyons, lake-studded countryside and deep, dark forests, right out of a fairy tale. Some destinations such as Interlaken (Switzerland), Spitsbergen (Norway) and the Dolomites (Italy) are known for adventure, but you can find an outdoor experience that suits your tastes anywhere on the continent.

### *Festivals*

Europe hosts a ton of both traditional and modern festivals throughout the year. Some traditional festivals have gained worldwide notoriety, such as Munich's popular beer party Oktoberfest and the legendary tomato-throwing celebration known as La Tomatina in Italy. Music festivals of all shapes and sizes abound in Europe, from rock and roll and jazz to electronic music at events like Glastonbury (England), Snowbombing Festival (Austria), Sonar (Spain) and Boom Festival (Portugal). Other cultural celebrations date back centuries, such as fun Italian festivals including Florence's Scoppio del Carro (Exploding Cart Festival), and Venice's legendary Carnevale. No matter when you go to Europe or where you are traveling once you get there, you can find an exciting festival on offer.

### *Nightlife*

In Europe, the party doesn't get started until late, and often doesn't stop until dawn. Certain destinations are known for their exuberant nightlife, including Amsterdam, Berlin, Mykonos and the cities/resort areas of Spain. In any large European city you'll find plenty of after-dark action, and the newer, bigger hostels often have bars that are quite nice and popular at night. Central European cities such as Budapest, Riga and Prague have become preferred party destinations thanks to inexpensive clubs and plenty of cheap beer. For the ultimate nightlife destination in Europe, head to Ibiza – a tiny island off the eastern coast of Spain that contains many of the world's top clubs, where you can party nonstop in a spirit of pure unadulterated hedonism, and then hit the beach the next day to recover.

## Trip Styles & Lengths

### *Lengths*

When traveling to Europe, you should try to go for as long as you can afford. For a grand backpacking adventure that covers a large part of the continent, you need at least one month of travel time and maybe more. A smaller European adventure can be had in 2-3 weeks, but don't expect to step foot in every country if you only have 14 days. Short trips of 7-10 days can be used to explore 1-3 countries, and if you have less than 7 days, consider making your trip all about one destination and really getting to know that place you've always dreamed of exploring, whether that is Paris, London or the Greek Islands.

### *Independent Travel*

Traveling independently in Europe is great for those with a little foreign experience under their belt, for adventure seekers and for those who need complete freedom from schedules and itineraries. Europe is quite easy to get around by yourself, with a combination of public transportation, point-to-point rail tickets, bus trips and flights on budget airlines. For those who relish the hassle of having to be in control, independent travel is an ideal option.

### *Organized Tours*

Organized tours take the uncertainty and frustration out of planning a trip to Europe. You don't have to decide which German cities are worth your time because the tour company does it for you. Tours are hands-down the easiest way to travel - you'll never get stuck at midnight in Venice without a hostel bed or hotel room.

### *Rail Pass or Hop-On/Hop-Off Pass*

A rail pass or hop-on/hop-off bus pass are perfect for the independent traveler who has some idea of their preferred itinerary and schedule. You can save a lot of money by purchasing a larger pass instead of buying point-to-point tickets each time you want to travel. Depending on the amount of traveling you would like to do, the countries you would like to visit, and the length of your European adventure, you can find a rail pass or hop on/hop off bus pass that fits your needs to a tee.

### *Independent Travel + Short Tours Combo*

Combining independent travel with a short tour is a great idea for freedom-minded travelers who perhaps feel a little apprehensive about traveling alone initially or just enjoy the fun of being part of a group once in a while. Start your trip on short three to five day tour that interests you: exploring the Highlands of Scotland, the castles and countryside of Ireland; sailing along the Croatian coast or Bohemian tour of Eastern Europe. Follow your short tour with free days for independent travel – by the time your tour is over, you'll feel confident enough to head out on your own.

## *Should I Stay Or Should I Go?*

One very important factor when planning a trip to Europe is to consider the pace of your trip. While many modern travelers and especially young backpackers seem to prefer the “cram it all in now” approach to European travel, others pick one ideal destination for a home base where they can really get to know a place and people. Some people like to be on the go almost constantly and see all the sites that they can, while others prefer to laze the day away at a beach or café and let the cultural experience wash over them. Either way is fine – just make sure that you and your travel companions have the same expectations for your daily pace.

## *Trip Pacing*

Some people like a quick pace when they travel, preferring to move from place to place every couple of days and cramming in as much sightseeing as possible. Other travelers prefer a slower pace, and would feel rushed and unhappy if they only had two days in Paris. It is important to know your general speed so that you can plan your trip accordingly. If you purchased the *Bakpak Europe GO Kit*, take the quiz: *What’s Your Travel Style – Fast or Slow?* to better understand the pace best suited for you.

**Fast travelers** will be happy spending a maximum of two to three days in each city, and might want to take advantage of overnight sleeper trains and budget airlines in order to cram in as many destinations as possible. Also consider geography – it’s easier to see several destinations in one region of Europe than it is to hit the entire continent from Ireland to Greece. Fast travelers may also enjoy a whirlwind escorted tour that moves at a quick pace.

**Slow travelers** need more time for relaxing and soaking up the atmosphere of each destination. In addition to scheduling fewer stops overall than fast travelers, slow movers may want to visit places of lower energy where there isn’t as much pressure to experience all the “must-see” sights. Beach towns, rural villages and destinations near mountains and lakes are places where it is easy to unwind and recharge the batteries. You may also want to schedule several empty days in your itinerary for wandering around, people watching or simply sitting in a sidewalk café.

## *Schedule Flexibility*

No matter if you are a fast or slow traveler, you may want to schedule in one or more “cushion” days on your itinerary when nothing is planned. This gives you room in your schedule to be spontaneous; you can check out that hidden beach you just discovered, hang out with new friends for an extra day or hit the amazing castle that you previously didn’t know existed. It sounds silly to plan for spontaneity, but having a few extra days in your schedule will allow you to be more flexible during your trip.

## **When to Go to Europe?**

The time of year you choose to travel to Europe will have a big impact on your trip: will you be splashing on the beaches or skiing down the mountains? Will you be waiting on long lines or waltzing through the main entrance. You’ll need to consider two things: the seasons of travel (high, shoulder and low seasons) and the seasons of the year (spring, winter, summer and fall).

## Seasons of Travel – High, Shoulder and Low

For most students, the decision of when to travel is limited by school schedules and vacations – but rest assured that anytime school is in recess, that’s high season in the travel industry.

Summertime (June, July & August) and the winter holiday season around Christmas and New Year’s (late December through early January) are the busiest times to travel, and along with thicker crowds, you’ll experience higher prices on hostels, flights and tours. However you’ll also encounter the most festivals during this time, and hostels will be packed with a diversity of people.

If you’re not hemmed in by your school schedule, a much better choice is to travel during shoulder season – April, May, September and October. Flights, hostels and tours are less expensive and the weather is mild.

Finally, during low season (late January, February, March, November, early December), you’ll find the cheapest rates on transportation and accommodation – but the weather might be cold and rainy, and some attractions may be closed.

## Seasons of the Year – Spring, Summer, Winter and Fall

No matter when you travel to Europe, each season offers a different climate and unique opportunities to experience the continent, including music festivals, sporting events, holiday celebrations and more.

### *Spring*



*Photo © Jaap Hart*

There is a reason they write songs about Paris in the springtime. All over Europe the parks, gardens, and fields spring to life and the citizens of the Old World emerge from their winter hideouts to once again explore their cobble stoned cities.

Plane tickets and hostel beds are less expensive than in the summer, crowds are smaller, and the service industry professionals are fresh, having just begun the tourist season. Garden lovers will delight in a visit to Europe this time of year; from Monet’s flowers at Giverny to the bougainvilleas of Italy, the continent is splashed in color and life. Warm days and cooler evenings await you during springtime in Europe, providing the perfect palette for strolling, wandering, meandering, and maybe even painting a picture en plein air yourself (painting outdoors/on location).

## What to Do/Expect in Spring

- Take advantage of the free concerts and choir performances in churches and cathedrals across the continent.
- Enjoy the lengthening days with a long, languid, riverside picnic with your favorite cheese, fresh local bread, and a bottle of your favorite vintage.
- Check out the many cemeteries of Europe that are not only the final resting grounds of the famous from centuries ago, but bona fide sculpture gardens that drip with gothic romance.
- Flower and bird markets are in full bloom and fun for idle shopping; flea markets are often covered and can provide unique and inexpensive souvenirs.
- Use a rainy day as an excuse to spend hours exploring your favorite art, science, or history museum.

## Summer



Photo © David Dolder

It's sunshine and party time in Europe during the summer when festival season gets into full swing with musical celebrations and cultural events across the continent. With gorgeous weather and plenty of beach time, the crowds come out, so make sure to book your flights, train seat/couchette reservations, and hostel beds well in advance.

Many schools offer summer-study programs and cities like Aix-en-Provence teem with university kids going out after

classes to blow off steam. Packing is easier and more fun in the summer (bikinis take up a lot less room than parkas) and you will find no shortage of dance parties, crazy parades, and music festivals from Sweden to Sicily. With busy beaches and plenty of buzz in the air, summertime in Europe is a merrymaker's delight and the most popular season to hop the pond.

## What to Do/Expect in Summer

- Hit the beach! All across Europe travelers and locals alike swarm to the ocean for a refreshing and inexpensive outing. Bring a picnic!
- Heat getting to you? Head to a movie theatre- they are almost always air-conditioned and are often shown in English- but the subtitles will help you improve your slang.
- Discover new music at one of Europe's many outdoor festivals- ask the tourist office.
- Summertime is ice cream o'clock, and every country seems to have its own special to indulge in, from Berthillon in Paris to espresso gelato in Florence.

- Water sports abound on the beaches of Europe and you can learn to SCUBA in Greece, Jet Ski on the French Riviera, or windsurf off the coast of Spain.

## Winter



Photo © David Dolder

Europe in wintertime is magical: street markets sell spiced bread and steaming Glühwein, twinkling lights lead your way down the Champs-Élysées, and huge holiday window displays move, spin, whirl, and capture the attention of children of all ages and adults too!

Though many rural areas of the continent go 'off-season' (not the time to wander the vineyards of Tuscany, for example), the grand cities of Europe come alive in a big way. Cozy up with a traditional fondue in a Swiss brasserie, linger all day at art museums gazing upon the finest works of the masters, and shop in gourmet food stores until you drop. The crowds in winter are miniscule and plane tickets and hostel rooms are less expensive **(except for Christmas and New Year's Eve)**; you will have whole cathedrals to yourself as well as plenty of open seats at heated sidewalk cafes to sip hot chocolate and Amaretto. On top of all this merriment add some of the best skiing and snowboarding in the world, and you've got all the seasonings for a wonderful trip.

### What to Do/Expect in Winter

- Bundle up and hit all the major sights at any time of day you want- no waiting!
- Intersperse your day with plenty of coffee, hot cocoa, or hot spiced rum stops to keep your belly warm and your spirits high.
- Find a local park or 'green space' and take a quick hike to an overlook to get your juices flowing.
- Cold, long nights are no match for a night at the opera or ballet, and most performance halls will offer a tour of the venue before the night's event gets underway.
- Amusement parks like Tivoli in Copenhagen deck themselves out for the holiday season, complete with metal urns of hot coals to warm your hands as you head for the Ferris wheel.

## Fall

Crisp morning air and crunching leaves await you as the European continent slows down its pace and breaths a big sigh of relief after the mad summer season. Cooler temperatures mean smaller crowds- and more room for you to enjoy the orange leaves falling in the fountains of Rome and the countryside glowing gold from the late autumn sun. Throughout Europe, vineyards are being harvested and from Bordeaux to Chianti you can join in the fun by helping

gather grapes or just by celebrating the vintage over dinner with your friends. Autumn is shoulder season, which means plane tickets and hostel beds are less expensive than summertime, and you can often find deals as hoteliers try to fill up space before the slow winter season.

- Celebrate Beaujolais Nouveau Day on the third Thursday of November when the fresh young red wine is released and the whole country of France celebrates with glasses in hand.
- Hunt for the elusive truffle in the Piedmont region of Italy with trained pigs or dogs.
- Cruise the Rhine for a day on a barge and take in the fall colors at a slow and relaxed pace.
- Take a scenic train ride through the Swiss Alps.
- Cozy up in an Austrian inn with a traditional fondue: cheese, bread, and friends are all you need.

## Visitor Visas for Travel to Europe

Most travelers heading to Europe will not need a visa. However it's wise to know the various entry guidelines and tourist visa policies. Please note if you are planning to work or attend school on your trip to Europe, you may be subject to a different set of visa rules.

### *Schengen Agreement*

Citizens of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are traveling to Europe for less than 90 days only need a passport to enter the countries designated as being in the Schengen Area (see below) for a maximum stay of 90 days in a six month period, whether consecutive days or split up to make 90 days. *Please be aware that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after the date of your return flight to be accepted, and you should always travel with proof of your return flight on hand.*



#### ***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

**You cannot leave the Schengen area briefly and return in the hopes of getting another 90 days to travel! You would have to leave the Schengen area for 90 consecutive days before trying to re-enter to gain another 90 days of travel!**

Europe is defined for visas by the “Schengen Agreement” which includes: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. This list also includes the future Schengen countries of Bulgaria, Cypress and Romania. Find out more about the Schengen details here: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_4361.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_4361.html)

Note: New Zealand passport holders have much more flexible visa options and may stay in many of European countries for 90 days *each* before needing a visa. Please visit <http://www.safetravel.govt.nz/destinations/europetips.shtml> for complete details.

### *European Countries Outside the Schengen Area*

For the United Kingdom, citizens of United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are allowed to stay up to 6 months without a visa. For Ireland, citizens of United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are allowed to stay up to 3 months without a visa (as opposed to 90-days). You also do not need a visa for Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Turkey and Russia require visas and the policies are as follows:

Turkey: Visas are required and can be purchased at the point of entry into the country for 20USD in cash only – and exact change is required. Your visa will be good for 90 days.

Russia: Visas must be obtained in advance and will cost \$170-\$250, depending on whether you do it yourself or through a visa servicing center. You must wait until 60 days before your arrival to apply for the visa, and processing takes about 7-21 business days. Your Russian visa will be good for 30 days.

### *Longer Stays*

What happens if you want to stay in Europe for longer than 90 days or the UK for longer than 6 months? In this case, you will need a long-stay visa to grant you residency in the country of your choice for one year or more. The method you use for obtaining your long-stay visa can differ greatly, depending on the country in which you would like to stay.

**If you are planning to stay in Europe longer than 90 days, it is essential that you research the particular visa requirements for the country in which you wish to reside before your arrival.**

Many countries (such as France) require that you apply for and receive the long-stay visa before ever leaving your home country. You must then apply for temporary resident status – a very expensive and time-consuming process that requires multiple documents and trips to government agencies.

Other EU countries permit travelers to apply for visas after they've already arrived, however most require some action to be taken by the traveler before they leave their home country. Each country has a unique visa process. Arranging a long-stay visa can be a complicated task, which often involves applying in-person at a local consulate with a stack of documents that prove everything from your income to (lack of) police record.

## Chapter 2. Things to See & Do in Europe



*Travelers flock to Europe for many reasons, and you'll find all kinds of fun and exciting things to do on this vast continent. From "high" culture like architecture, amazing art museums and magnificent historical monuments to clubbing and pub crawls, Europe's got it all.*

You'll also find a huge selection of adventure sports and activities in nature, boating, bike tours, shopping, markets and of course – eating!

### Historical Icons

With a proud heritage that spans centuries upon centuries, Europe is stacked with historical attractions that have long captured the imagination of travelers. Celts, Gallic tribes and other groups first settled this vast land, which was later conquered by the Romans who left their stories in a number of triumphal arches, arenas and waterways across the continent. The Medieval age left its mark on Europe as well, and you'll find winding streets of half-timbered cottages, relics of royalty and fortified castles from Wales to Germany's Rhine Valley and beyond. The opulent palaces of France, Austria and elsewhere evoke the era of the Renaissance and the bright Baroque period that followed, and the soaring cathedrals and churches found all across Europe are religious icons whose power has crossed the ages. From the marble steps in Rome to the memorials of two World Wars found imbedded all over the continent, Europe's rich history is very much still alive.

### Day Tours

Enhance your European experience by signing up for a day tour that is customized to your interests and activity level. From cooking classes in Tuscany and kayaking trips in France to bike excursions in the Netherlands and walking tours just about everywhere, day tours are a fun way to learn more about your destination and about yourself.

Local tourist offices in cities will be happy to point you toward reputable tours and activities, or you can book your adventure at your hostel or hotel. Some tours last a few hours only, while others are half-day or full-day events. Led by local guides with insider knowledge of the area, day tours are an ideal way to expand your understanding of the destination, meet other travelers and experience your destination or neighborhood in a whole new way.

## **Bike Rentals**

Renting a bike is a fantastic way to experience Europe while enjoying a bit of adventure at the same time. In cities like Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Berlin, many people ride bicycles to work; in rural areas like the Loire Valley and the Tuscan countryside, bike riding is an exceptional way to slow down and truly immerse yourself in your destination. Many countries (especially Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands) provide bicycle rentals at major train stations, and you can usually pick up a bike in one spot and drop it off in another.

## **Adventure Sports**

Add some heart-pounding excitement to your European trip by signing up for some extreme sports and soft adventure excursions, including bungee jumping, skiing, hiking, parasailing, base jumping, white water rafting and more (although you might want to wait until you've arrived safely back on the ground before telling your mother). Europe is stacked with mountains to hike during the summer and to ski or snowboard during the winter, from the Italian Dolomites to the Swiss Alps, and its many beaches provide hours of water sports excitement (parasailing on the French Riviera and water skiing off the coast of Spain). Some countries are known for high adventure; head to Norway to realize your base-jumping dreams or to Switzerland to bungee jump out of a cable car. Aim to include at least one adventure sport in your itinerary, because a brush with death can heighten your senses – and the pictures may be some of your favorite of the entire trip.

## **Boating & Sailing**

Many of Europe's great destinations were settled because of their proximity to water: lakes, rivers and oceans. You can experience the view from the water first-hand with a wide range of boating experiences. Most cities situated on rivers and canals (including Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Bruges and more) offer cruises that last 1-2 hours, leisurely boat rides that give you a whole new perspective on the city. Dream of sailing one of the seven seas? Sailboat tours on the coast of Croatia, Turkey and Italy are also popular activities, and you can find options to fit every budget. In Greece you'll also find large-scale budget cruises, with bare-bones rooms on boats that hit the famous Greek islands, or you can sign up for a multi-day river tour (Rhine, Danube, Main and Elbe rivers) that cruises past cliff top castles and scenic farmland. Finally, you can get your boating cred on a ferry – they run between Europe and the UK, Ireland and other ports as well.

## **Festivals**

All across the European continent, massive celebrations and festivals mark the seasons of the year with a wild variety of events focused around music, sports, art, food, history, religion and more. While concentrated during the warmer months of late spring, summer and early fall, festivals are held year-round and come in all styles, shapes and sizes.

Attending a festival during your trip requires a little extra planning and the energy to navigate large crowds, but these cultural events can add an interesting layer to your European

experience that is well worth it. Some of the most popular European festivals are well known around the world, such as Oktoberfest in Munich, the Tour de France bicycle race and La Tomatina tomato-throwing festival in Valencia, Spain.

You'll also find heaps of religious festivals and saints days, especially in Catholic countries like France, Spain and Italy. Carnevale in Venice and Carnival in Nice are two masquerade-themed events that celebrate the end of Lent.

Europe also hosts a huge number of music festivals, from folk sounds and rock and roll to electronic music blowouts and outdoor hippie-friendly events. A few of the most exciting music festivals include Sonar (Spain), Glastonbury (England), Boom Festival (Portugal), Roskilde (Denmark), Melt! (Germany) and Outlook (Croatia).



*Photo © Tom Gufler*

## **Museums**

Europe has been known as a hotspot for the fine arts and high knowledge since the Renaissance, and you can experience the rich cultural heritage in a number of art, history and science museums. Paris itself boasts over 400 museums, including the world-famous Louvre and the more modern Musee d'Orsay. In London you can head to the British Museum and look at artifacts of the empire, while Italy is home to numerous treasures including the Uffizi and Accademy Galleries in Florence, and Athens boasts the incredible Acropolis Museum. Truly, all of Europe is a museum, so keep your eyes open for priceless works of art wherever you go.

## Markets

From big cities to small villages, it seems that every neighborhood in Europe has a market. These markets sell a huge range of products: fresh produce from the countryside, seafood from the coast, organic fruits and vegetables, local artwork, handmade crafts, antiques, souvenir trinkets and straight-up junk. Some sell all of the above and then some – but all are experiences that are sure to stimulate the five senses. Ask someone at your hostel or another local what the market days are, and be sure to check out at least a couple during your time in Europe. You'll also find charming Christmas markets in Germany, Hungary and Austria from late November to late December.



Photo © tella\_db

## Shopping

Bring home fun souvenirs for your friends, your family and yourself when you go shopping in Europe. Besides local markets, other great places to find budget souvenirs are grocery stores and discount shops – merchandise that seems plain to the locals will be exotic once you get it home. Try to avoid purchasing items in major tourist areas, where everything will be more expensive. Seek out craftsmen and women in local markets and other shopping areas, and try to budget enough to buy yourself at least one amazing souvenir that you want to keep forever.

## Pub Crawls

Many destinations in Europe are known for their friendly local pubs, including Ireland, England, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary and more. One of the best ways to experience a variety of local bars while making new friends is on a pub crawl. Many cities have professional pub crawl tours which you can join. Alternatively, some hostels organize informal pub crawls several nights of the week; ask the clerk or watch for signs posted in the lobby.

## Clubbing

The nightclubs and dance halls of Europe are notorious for wild parties that last all night. Some destinations like Berlin, Ibiza and Amsterdam are known as nightlife hot spots, and many young travelers go there just to party. Electronic music is widespread on the continent, so you won't have a problem finding a packed dance floor in most cities and towns. In Spanish cities like Barcelona, the fun often doesn't get started until well after midnight, so have a siesta followed by a late dinner before you go. Prague is also known for its nightlife, along with London and the party-happy Greek Islands of Ios and Mykonos.

## Beaches

For beach lovers, Europe offers an astonishing array of beautiful beaches. From the posh boardwalks and sun loungers of the French Riviera to the popular sandy beaches of Spain and the hot holiday destinations of Portugal's Algarve region, there is a European beach for everyone. Whether you like secluded inlets that are hidden from the crowds or big party-friendly beaches packed with beautiful young people, you'll find it on your travels to Europe. While the coasts of Portugal, Spain and the Greek Islands are a sure bet, you'll also find amazing beaches in Croatia, Turkey and even the UK.

## Eating

Indulging in Europe's incredible cuisine is always high on the list for travelers, and all across the continent you'll find a delicious smorgasbord of one unique cuisine after another. While dining in fancy restaurants can get expensive, try to enjoy at least one truly unforgettable, multi-course meal while you're in Europe to really experience the cuisine. The rest of the time, you can save money by eating like the locals do: from street vendors, outdoor markets, grocery stores or picnicking in the park. You'll usually find less expensive fare in a city's student neighborhood, and try to avoid purchasing food items on trains – it's more expensive and the quality is usually poor.

# Chapter 3. Traveler Dynamics & Types



Photo © Ekaterina Krasnikova

*Who you choose to travel with is almost as important as where you go. Each travel dynamic offers a different trip experience. Your travel buddies can make or break the trip – and your trip can make or break your relationships.*

## First-Time Travelers

If you are a total newbie when it comes to European travel, congratulations, this trip will be forever lodged in your memory. Learn all that you can before you leave home by researching and by talking to people who have been there - but don't forget to cut yourself some slack when you get lost.

- *Pros:* You will gain a sense of strength and confidence like never before – you're a world traveler now!
- *Cons:* It's hard to even know what you want to do or see in Europe before you've even been there. You are likely to make silly newbie mistakes and feel quite uncertain at times.

## Female Travelers

Women are a fast-growing travel segment, and tour operators report that a majority of their patrons are female. While safety is generally more of a concern for females in this world, as long as women keep their heads on straight, Europe is a great destination to explore.

- *Pros:* You will feel powerful and amazing, and you will inspire other females to see the world as well.
- *Cons:* Women might not be used to aggressive flirting from European men. It's perfectly fine to avoid eye contact and ignore unwanted advances; you're not being rude, you're being safe.

## Solo Travelers

Imagine doing exactly what you want, when you want, where you want. You sleep on your schedule and no one else's, you eat when you are hungry and you don't have to answer to anybody. Traveling alone in a foreign country is a vastly empowering experience, one that everyone should experience.

- *Pros:* You have complete freedom when it comes to schedule and itinerary, and you will make many more random friends along the way.
- *Cons:* You might get lonely and miss having a buddy to laugh with; hotels often do not offer single person rates (but hostels do); some tour companies charge single-supplement fees.

## Traveling with Friends

Experiencing Europe with a group of close friends is a really fun way to go, and this traveling dynamic definitely produces the most laughs. Everyone will have to compromise on schedule and routing, however, and the more people in your group = more chances for drama.

- *Pros:* Your trip will be filled with lots of fun and laughter.
- *Cons:* You might not get to see or do everything you would like to and will have to compromise your trip expectations according to the group majority.



### ***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

If you are traveling with a friend/romantic partner or a group of friends, take some time to yourself, especially if you have never traveled solo. Spend a half day exploring on your own or maybe split up for a few days and meet up in the next city.

## Traveling with a Friend

Two people are an ideal group size for European travel. You'll fit well into restaurants and hotels, and you'll always have someone to have a laugh with. You can watch each other's backs and split the price of accommodation, making hotels a more viable travel option.

- *Pros:* Traveling in a pair is easy because tourist infrastructure is often arranged for two people. You can cement a relationship for life.
- *Cons:* If things go south between you and your travel buddy, it can really affect your trip experience and your friendship in a negative way.

## Traveling with a Romantic Partner

Europe is an unbelievably romantic destination. It seems like the streets of Paris and the canals of Venice were made for lovers, and traveling across the continent with your one-and-only can be a truly inspiring experience.

- *Pros:* You could deepen your relationship; sex in new places.
- *Cons:* You could destroy your relationship; sex in hostel dorm rooms.

## Traveling with Strangers

Sign up for an escorted tour and you will be thrown together in a foreign country with a group of strangers from many different walks of life. This is a fantastic way to get to know yourself, because you are free from any existing roles and social expectations in your life.

- *Pros:* You'll make new friends and test your personality with a new group of people.
- *Cons:* You might not get along with the group; introverts might get exhausted.

# Chapter 4. Money and Budgeting your Trip



Photo © Kati Molin

*One of the most asked questions travelers want to know is how much will my backpacking Europe adventure cost?*

*While the correct answer is quite subjective, you can quickly get a good sense of overall costs below.*

The major categories of expense you can expect for your backpacking Europe trip are:

- Airfare to Europe (\$700-\$2000)
- Transportation around Europe and/or Escorted Tour (\$500-\$3500)
- Hostel Accommodation (\$15-\$40 per night)
- Food (\$10-\$20 per day)
- Day Tours/Admissions to attractions (\$10-\$20+)
- Souvenirs, personal items (varies by person)

If you purchased the *Bakpak Europe GO Kit*, you can play with budget numbers and get a better estimate for your trip by using the *Budgeting Guidelines & Worksheet*. You can also go to our website ([www.bakpakguide.com/europe](http://www.bakpakguide.com/europe)) to find pricing on tours, rail passes and hostels.

## Currency & Exchange Rates

Since most European countries in the European Union adopted the euro as currency in 1999, traveling through different areas of the continent has become much easier. However you'll still need to pay attention to currency and exchange rates when you travel.

### *Currency*

All European countries use the euro except for the United Kingdom (Great British Pound), Bulgaria (Lev), Croatia (Kuna), Czech Republic (Korunas), Denmark (Krone), Hungary (Forint), Iceland (Krona), Latvia (Lat), Liechtenstein (Swiss Franc), Lithuania (Litas), Norway (Kroner), Poland (Zloty), Romania (New Leu), Russia (Ruble), Sweden (Krona), Switzerland (Swiss Franc) and Turkey (Lira).

## Exchange Rates

Exchange rates fluctuate daily. It's best to check the exchange rates for your home currency a few days before you travel. Always round up in your estimate to include fees – a few decimal points of underestimating your expenses can really add up after a few weeks traveling through Europe!

To give you an idea of rates, as January, 2013, exchange rates were as follows (go to [www.x-rates.com](http://www.x-rates.com) for updated rates):

European Currency	USD	British Pound (£)	Euro (€)	AUD \$	CAN \$	NZ \$
1 Euro =	\$1.33	£0.82	x	\$1.25	\$1.30	\$1.57
1 British Pound =	\$1.62	x	€1.22	\$1.52	\$1.59	\$1.91
1 Swiss Franc =	\$1.09	£0.67	€0.82	\$1.03	\$1.08	\$1.29
10 Czech Koruna =	\$0.52	£0.32	€0.39	\$0.49	\$0.51	\$0.61
100 Hungarian Forint =	\$0.45	£0.30	€0.34	\$0.43	\$0.44	\$0.53
1 Bulgarian Lev =	\$0.67	£0.42	€0.51	\$0.64	\$0.66	\$0.80
1 Romanian New Leu =	\$0.30	£0.19	€0.23	\$0.27	\$0.30	\$0.36
1 Croatian Kuna =	\$0.18	£0.11	€0.13	\$0.17	\$0.17	\$0.21
1 Polish Zloty =	\$0.23	£0.20	€0.24	\$0.31	\$0.32	\$0.38
1 Latvian Lat =	\$1.90	£1.18	€1.44	\$1.80	\$1.87	\$2.25
1 Danish Krone =	\$0.18	£0.11	€0.13	\$0.17	\$0.17	\$0.21
1 Swedish Krona =	\$0.15	£0.10	€0.12	\$0.15	\$0.15	\$0.18
1 Norwegian Kroner =	\$0.18	£0.11	€0.14	\$0.17	\$0.18	\$0.21



### **Backpak Dave Tip:**

Once you start your trip, pace yourself on the spending. It is too easy to spend more than you allocated for that nice dinner, extra beers or a cool souvenir. Besides, you will have to carry the souvenir with you throughout the trip or pay for postage to mail it home.

# Money

How do you get money while you are in Europe? The following options are available to you.

## *Cash*

Bring cash. Your bank at home will be happy to order euros or other foreign currency for you before your trip – for a fee. You might want to show up at your destination with at least some local currency (ask your bank to order smaller bills).

Many travelers – regardless of what country they are from - often travel with a spare 100USD tucked into their luggage somewhere. Many airports and retailers will accept United States dollars instead of the local currency, and the secret stash can save you in a pinch.

- *Pros:* Accepted almost everywhere.
- *Cons:* Can be lost or stolen.

## *Debit Cards*

The easiest and most cost-effective way to get money while you are in Europe is by using an ATM or cash machine with your debit card. While most banks will charge a fee (often 3%) for you to use an ATM, the exchange rates given are usually some of the best. Make sure that your debit card has a Visa or Mastercard logo for best results, and withdraw money only every few days so that you don't rack up huge fees.

- *Pros:* Convenient and safer than carrying tons of cash.
- *Cons:* Can be hard to find ATMs in some places. Fees can add up if you hit the ATM often.



***Bakpak Dave Tip:*** Notify your credit card company or bank of the countries you intend to travel to so they do not decline your card believing the charge to be fraudulent.

## *Prepaid Debit Cards*

Safer than regular debit cards because they are not linked to your bank account, prepaid debit cards are a great alternative to cash and are accepted by most retailers. Simply load up your prepaid Mastercard or Visa debit card with funds before you go (or top it up as you travel), and use it wherever you would a debit or credit card.

- *Pros:* No credit check or bank account required.
- *Cons:* Most have a monthly fee, plus additional fees for international use.

### *Credit Cards*

Like debit cards, credit cards are safer than carrying around cash, although you will be charged a fee for every transaction (usually 3%). It's a good idea to use a credit card for bigger purchases (six nights at a hostel) but not for small purchases (lunch, souvenirs).

- *Pros:* Convenient and safer than carrying cash. Good exchange rate.
- *Cons:* Might not be accepted in some places like small retailers or airport visa desks; fees.

### *Traveler's Checks*

A relic from the travel era before ATMs, traveler's checks can be handy in places where credit and debit cards are not accepted.

- *Pros:* Safer than cash; good back-up option.
- *Cons:* Can still be lost; acquiring and using them can be a difficult and painfully slow process.

## **Saving Up for Your Trip**

Traveling around the world is no longer limited to the realm of the über wealthy. Anyone can travel, and travel big, as long as their priorities are in line. Many jet-setters drive old cars or live in smaller homes so that they can afford to travel more often. Where you spend your money says a lot about who you are; choose to save for traveling and you'll be flying to Europe in no time.

You may be starting out small, but as the dollars begin to add up, your enthusiasm for saving to travel will grow and grow – and so will the number of stamps in your passport. The following tips can help you save for your trip. Choose your favorite, or pick them all.

### *Dedicated Savings Account*

Open a savings account dedicated to your travels. Many banks will let you open a savings account for free. Label it "Travel Fund" or "European Adventure." This way you can see exactly what amount you're saving, and hop online anytime to transfer small amounts into your travel savings.

Ideally, your savings account will be at the same bank as your checking account, so that you can set up automatic savings. If you have to start small, that's okay – begin with \$25 per month and work your way up to larger amounts, like \$5 a day. You won't miss the money – but you will watch your travel savings grow.

### *Make a Savings Plan*

Determine exactly how much money you will need for your trip (use our handy budget worksheet if you purchased the *Bakpak Europe GO Kit*). Then figure out how much you'll need to save each month to achieve your goal. Make it fun – create a colorful savings chart and update it often. Post pretty photos of your destination to inspire you to keep saving for travel when all your friends are blowing their money.

### *Cut Back in Concrete Ways*

There's probably an area of your life where you know you are spending too much money and would like to cut back: eating out at restaurants, clothes shopping, and alcoholic drinks are likely culprits. Make a promise to yourself to put a certain amount of money into your travel savings account every time you resist the urge to spend the cash on something else. For example: if you tend to eat lunch out at work instead of bringing a sandwich in a paper bag, promise yourself that every time you pack a lunch, you'll add \$5 to your travel savings. And do it!

### *Save All Found Monies*

When you receive unexpected money, like a birthday check from Grandma, a product rebate or a work bonus, it's tempting to blow the cash all at once. Resolve to put ALL your "found monies" right into your travel savings account. With saving rules in place, you won't be tempted to spend your windfall on junk that you really don't need.

### *Create a Savings Jar*

Empty out a glass jar (pickle and spaghetti sauce jars work well), slap a photo of your destination on it and make a sign that says: "EUROPE FUND." Put all your loose change into this jar, and "sneak" cash into it whenever you can. Got \$8 in your wallet? Slide \$2 in the jar. This old-fashioned savings trick is surprisingly effective, because you'll get a kick out of sneaking cash into savings. Resolve not to rob the jar when your cash is tight, and go to the bank with your stash every month so that you don't build up too much money at home.

# Chapter 5. Europe Tours & Transport Options



Photo © Mikael Damkier

*Sometimes the journey is just as important, if not more so, than the destination – and how you choose to travel around Europe will have a great effect on your overall experience. You're not just limited to a rail pass anymore!*

Today there are more transportation options than ever before. You can hop on a budget flight, buy a hop-on/hop-off coach pass, join an escorted tour, rent a campervan, or take the traditional route and travel with a Eurail pass.

## Airfare to Europe

It used to be that on-campus student travel agencies and charter flights offered the cheapest way to fly to Europe. These days, travel technology has both simplified and intensified the flight shopping experience.

There are more bargains and special deals out there than ever before and a myriad of ways to find them. In order to fast track the bargain hunt, try these tips:

- Get a benchmark published airfare price for flights to your desired destination using Orbitz, Travelocity or Kayak. From here, you can base whether special deals you dig up, are indeed, really special.
- As far as European gateway cities go, London, specifically Heathrow airport (LHR), is generally the cheapest touchdown point. And from one of London's three airports, you can find cheap airfares on Europe's budget airlines to your desired European destination. Other airports that are on the cheaper end (but generally more than London) are Paris' Charles de Gaulle (CDG) and Amsterdam's Schiphol (AMS).
- Check student travel agencies such as [Student Universe](#) to see if they have specials to (or near) your desired destination. If you purchased the *Bakpak Europe GO Kit*, you get a \$10 voucher towards your airfare purchase.
- Check for rates and specials on the national airline of the country you are flying to. Often, their deals beat the online travel. For London, try British Airways, for Paris, Air France, for Frankfurt, try Lufthansa, for Amsterdam try KLM for Dublin try Aer Lingus, just to name a few (see our list of National Airlines below).

- Clear your cookies: checking out the online travel sites we suggested or any other? Going back to book? Remove the cookies from your Internet browser's history, otherwise the website will remember you were already there and jack up the price. You see that the rate has gone up and think, "uh-oh, I better book it now!" and wind up paying more than you should have for your ticket.

### *Student Tickets*

The student ticket is also not what it used to be, super cheap and super special, since one of the major student agencies went under a decade ago. But they can still be good deals. As we said, above, shop around because it may not be the best deal available. Often though, student tickets are more flexible in terms of changing tickets or with open-jaw tickets (see below).

If you purchased the *Bakpak Europe GO Kit*, you will have received a \$10 voucher towards the purchase of all ready low student and budget airfares.

### *JAW Tickets*

A jaw ticket allows you to fly into one city and out of another city for the same or possibly higher price. The benefit of a jaw ticket is it saves you time and money by not having to return to a city you have already visited. For example, you can fly into London and depart from Rome. This works well with many of the one-way hop-on, hop-off passes (see separate section below).

### *Consolidators*

Like student travel agencies, consolidators have special arrangements with airlines for discounted rates and you do not have to be a student to purchase fares. You might see their ads in the Sunday travel section. Just be sure to read all the terms and conditions before purchasing.

### *Airline Websites*

Aer Lingus - [www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com)

Air Canada - [www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com)

Air France - [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com)

Alitalia - [www.alitalia.com](http://www.alitalia.com)

American Airlines - [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)

Austrian Airlines - [www.austrianair.com](http://www.austrianair.com)

British Airways - [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com)

British Midland - [www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)

Continental - [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)

Delta Airlines - [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)

Finnair - [www.finnair.com](http://www.finnair.com)

Iberia - [www.iberia.com](http://www.iberia.com)

Iceland Air - [www.icelandair.com](http://www.icelandair.com)

Lufthansa - [www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com)

KLM Airlines - [www.klm.com](http://www.klm.com)

Olympic Airways - [www.olympicair.com](http://www.olympicair.com)

Qantas Airways - [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)

SAS Airlines - [www.flysas.com](http://www.flysas.com)

TAP Air Portugal - [www.flytap.com](http://www.flytap.com)

Turkish Airlines - [www.turkishairlines.com](http://www.turkishairlines.com)

United Airlines - [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)

US Airways - [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)

Virgin Atlantic - [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com)

XL Airways (France) - [www.xlairways.com](http://www.xlairways.com)



**Bakpak Dave Tip:** Remember to remove the cookies from your Internet browser's history, otherwise the airline website may remember you were already there and jack up the price of your ticket.

## Rail Travel

Despite the onslaught of budget airlines in Europe, many people's favorite way to backpack Europe is still by rail. Life and even vacation go by pretty quickly these days, but on a train from Milan to Amsterdam you have no choice but to slow down and soak in the world around you.

If you are considering riding the rails this year but haven't decided, here are pros and cons to help guide you along. All Aboard!

### *Pros*

- Rail travel is slower and more romantic; it gives you a closer look at the countries you are visiting and forces you to take your time and enjoy the journey for travel's sake.
- Many train stations are located in the very center of the European city.
- Train travel is better for the environment than air travel.
- You are more likely to encounter and engage locals, not just foreign travelers.
- The rail system in Europe is vast, often fast and efficient
- Traveling by train, you avoid the security delays that often arise at airports.
- Can sleep while covering longer distances, saving money on overnight accommodation
- A Eurail pass purchase includes excellent discounts on ferries, accommodation, attractions and transportation.

### *Cons*

- Traveling long distances by train (Paris to Venice, for example) can be time-consuming and costly. Overnight cabins can be expensive and not provide the best sleep.
- In some countries, you have to make a reservation for your train seat and pay a reservation fee, even if you have a rail pass, which can be more difficult to get in the busy summer or holiday seasons.
- The European rail system may be confusing for Americans who are not used to comprehensive, multi-state public transportation system.
- The train just doesn't always go where you want in some areas of Europe (like the Loire Valley, for example).
- In some cases, air travel or a hop-on, hop-off pass can be cheaper and faster.

### *Point to Point or Rail Pass*

Depending on how long you are traveling and how far, buying a few point-to-point rail tickets could be cheaper than buying a rail pass. The only way to know is to actually price out each segment of your trip and compare to a rail pass. If you are traveling for a few weeks or more and want to see as many cities/destinations as possible, a rail pass is most likely your best bet.

## *Rail Passes Options*

Rail passes are available in a variety of options based on where you want to visit, how long your overall trip will last and how many days you want to travel by train. Prices are based on these factors as well as your age and number of travelers in your group. Discounted youth passes (under 26) and discounted groups passes (saver passes with 2-5 travelers traveling together at all times) are available.

When selecting a rail pass, there are four key considerations:

- Number of countries you want to visit
- Type of pass (consecutive or flexi) and how long you want to travel
- What class of travel you want
- Are you eligible for a discounted pass



### ***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

With the purchase of your Bakpak Europe GO Kit, you can get a special code for 5% off hostel bookings when you purchase select rail passes from Bakpak Dave. On a 3-week trip, this can save you \$25-50! See the GO Kit Redemption section for complete details.

## *Number of Countries to Visit*

If you plan on exploring just one country in detail, then single country passes are ideal, and can also often save you money if you only need two or three tickets within a single country.

On the other hand, multiple country passes are great for exploring from 2 to 20+ countries and include passes like the France and Italy Eurail Pass, the Europe Eastern Pass, the Eurail Select Pass - any 3-5 bordering countries - to the granddaddy of all passes, the Eurail Global Pass - 21 countries!

## *Multi-Country Passes*

Regional rail passes are available for the following country/region combinations: Austria - Czech Republic, Austria - Germany, Austria-Hungary, Austria-Switzerland, BeNeLux-France, BeNeLux-Germany, Croatia/Slovenia-Hungary, Czech Republic-Germany, Denmark-Germany, Denmark-Sweden, Finland-Sweden, France-Germany, France-Italy, France-Spain, France-Switzerland, Germany-Poland, Germany-Switzerland, Greece - Italy, Hungary-Romania, Italy-Spain, Norway-Sweden, Portugal-Spain, and Scandinavia.

## *Single Country Passes*

Single country rail passes are available for travel in the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

<b>Most Popular Rail Passes</b>			
<b>Pass</b>	<b># of Countries</b>	<b>Adult 1<sup>st</sup> Class Price</b>	<b>Youth 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Price</b>
Eurail Global Pass	21	US\$733-\$2024	US\$476-\$1311
Eurail Select Pass	3-5	US\$464-\$1020	US\$303-\$665
France/Italy Pass	2	US\$392-\$664	US\$256-\$433
Britrail Pass (England, Scotland, Wales)	3	US\$266-\$1098	US\$216-\$875
Europe Eastern Pass (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary)	5	US\$222-\$508	Not available

### *Type of Rail Pass & How long you Will Travel*

You can choose between a consecutive pass and a flexi pass. **Consecutive passes** allow you to travel for 4-90 days consecutively so you can travel every day during the period that your pass is valid. **Flexi passes** provide for a set number of days of travel in a given period of time. For example, a 15-day Eurail Global Flexi Pass provides for 15 days of rail travel over a 2-month period. This is good if you will be staying in your destinations for a while or will not always need to get around by rail every day or for a period of time.

### *Class of Travel – 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Class?*

1<sup>st</sup> class travel is obviously more expensive but you gain larger, more comfortable seats, more legroom, more luggage space, and often less crowded cars.

### *Discounted Rail Passes*

If you are under 26 years of age on the first date of travel (not when you purchase the pass), then you can get big discounts on over 30 rail passes by purchasing a **Youth Rail Pass**. Of course nothing is free in life which means you'll have to travel 2nd class, but hey, "the experience" is what traveling is all about, right?

And, if you are traveling with a partner, friend, or group of friends, consider the saver priced rail pass. **Saver Rail Passes** are available in youth and regular options and represent discounted prices. However, everyone in the group must travel together at all times to keep the pass valid.

### *Extra Costs*

Rail pass prices do not include: reservation fees (when required), couchette/cabin costs and additional fees for traveling on certain trains such as high-speed trains.

You can find complete details on pass types and descriptions on our website at:

<http://www.bakpakguide.com/europe/rail-passes/>

## Hop-on/Hop-off Passes



Photo © Busabout

With a Europe Hop-on/Hop-off Pass, you can backpack Europe independently, similar to a rail pass, but in modern coach buses with the added benefit of a driver/guide AND hostel to hostel pickup and drop off service.

The Europe Hop-on/Hop-off Pass coach network operates between May and October and includes more than 30 of the most popular European destinations!

Three types of passes are available: **Loop Passes** cover specific regions of Europe and start/end at the same stop. You can choose to start/finish at any of the destinations along the loop. On the other hand, **One-Way Passes** have set routes, and you must start and finish as dictated by the pass route.

If none of the Loop or One-Way Passes meet your needs, you can create your own itinerary with a **Flexitrip Pass** which includes 6 stops with additional stops available for an extra daily charge. With the Flexitrip Pass, you can choose where to start and finish as long as the stops follow each other as coaches travel in one direction (so you cannot backtrack or mix and match destinations).

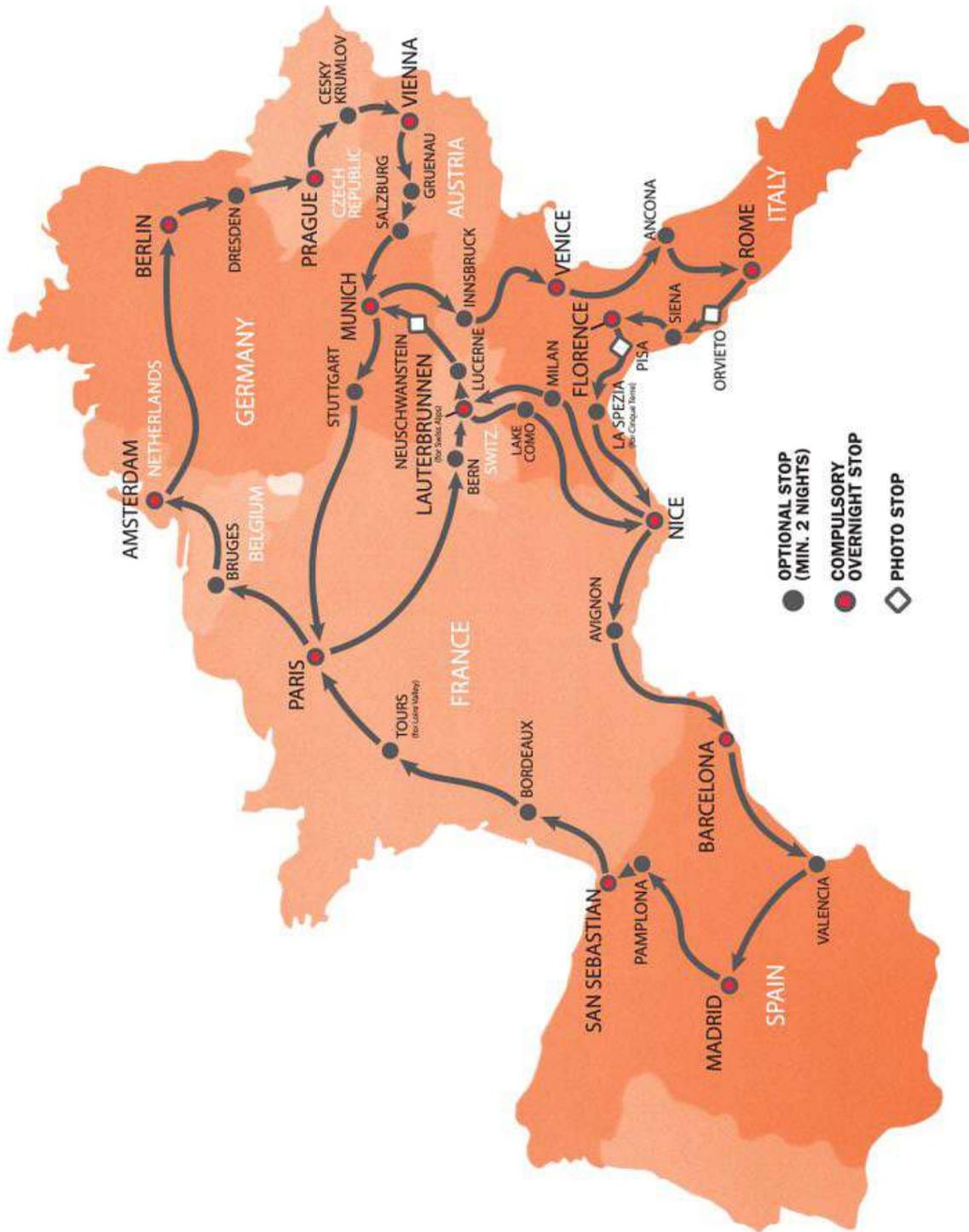
Loop and One-Way Pass options are detailed on the following pages. The network map on the next page shows destinations and the direction in which coaches travel. Passes are valid for 6 months from May to October and buses run through every destination every second day.

### *How Passes Work*

With the Hop-on Hop-off Pass, you decide how long you stay at a particular destination within certain constraints based on every second day service – how often the coaches pass through each destination. There are 14 **compulsory stops** where you can spend any odd number of nights with a minimum of one night. And there are 19 **optional stops** where you can stay any even amount of nights with a minimum of two nights. If you are skipping an optional stop, you simply stay on the bus to the next overnight stop.

Most people spend 3 to 5 nights at compulsory stops so they have time to explore all the sights as buses usually arrive in the afternoon or evening and depart in the morning. Thus, a one night stay will not give you much time to see or do much. Taking into account travel time between destinations, you will find that the two-day minimum at optional stops works out perfectly, and you may even want to stay longer.

**Please note passes do not include accommodation, just door-to-door transport from city to city.**



There are also a few **photo stops** that allow you to take a quick picture and then jump back on the bus and head out to your next adventure!

Distances between stops range from 2 to 10 hours but average about 5 hours. Most buses depart in the morning and arrive in the afternoon or early evening.



**Bakpak Dave Tip:**

With the purchase of your Bakpak Europe GO Kit, you received a 10% discount off the purchase of a Hop-on/Hop-off Pass from Bakpak Dave. See the GO Kit Discounts section for complete details.

**Compulsory Stops include:**

Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Munich, Venice, Rome, Florence, Lauterbrunnen, Nice, Barcelona, Madrid and San Sebastian (minimum 1 day stay or any odd number of days).

**Optional Stops include:**

Bruges, Dresden, Cesky Krumlov, Gruenau, Salzburg, Stuttgart, Innsbruck, Lucerne, Bern, Milan, Lake Como, Anconia, Sienna, La Spezia, Avignon, Valencia, Pamplona, Bordeaux and Tours (minimum 2 day stay or any even number of days)

*Pros*

- You get hostel to hostel transport service.
- Freedom to travel on your own once you arrive at each destination.
- You can book your next stops online in advance or as you travel.
- Coach buses come through each destination every two days.
- Coaches are air-conditioned with power outlets and WiFi (extra fee).
- Great way to meet other like-minded travelers while traveling on the bus.
- The driver/guides will book your accommodation before arrival in the next city and make recommendations for things to see and do.
- Passes are valid for six-months.

*Cons*

- Fewer destinations to choose from compared with traveling with a Eurail Pass.
- If you don't want to stay at the designated hostel in a given city, you have to make your way to and from your desired accommodation.
- Coaches only operate from May to October each year.

## Loop Pass Options

### NORTH LOOP



**North Loop** – includes destinations in France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic & Austria with a minimum trip length of 15 days from \$659.

### SOUTH LOOP



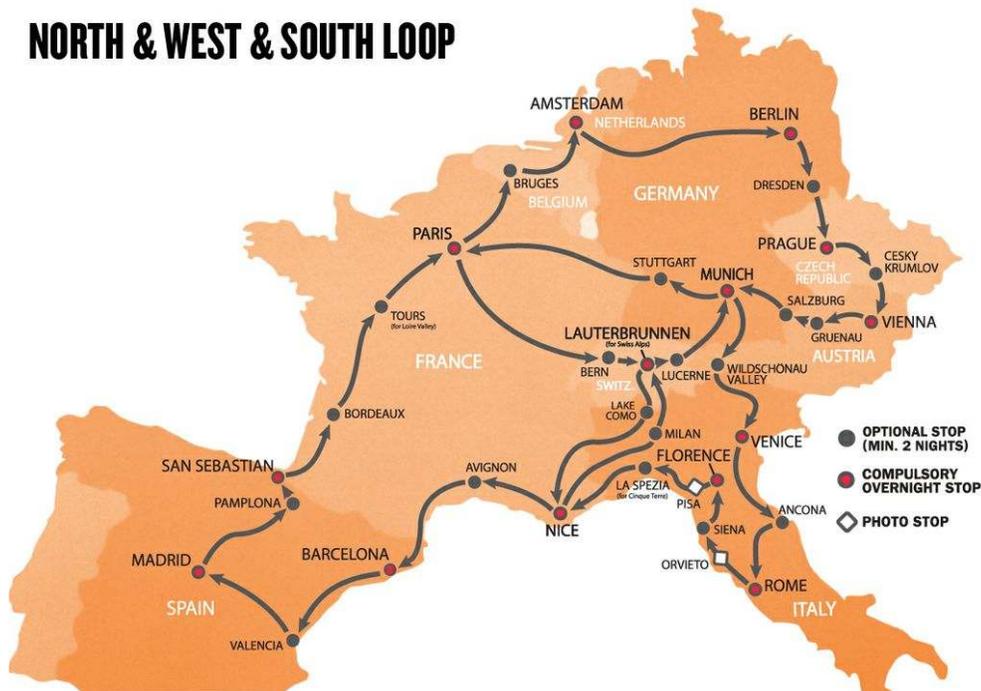
**South Loop** – includes destinations in Germany, Italy, France & Switzerland with a minimum trip length of 15 days from \$659

## WEST LOOP



**West Loop** – includes destinations in France, Switzerland, Italy & Spain with a minimum trip length of 15 days from \$659.

## NORTH & WEST & SOUTH LOOP



**All Loop Pass** - you can also combine any two loops or all three to cover the entire network. Two Loops passes cost from \$1,135. The All Loops pass costs from \$1,375.

## One-Way Pass Options

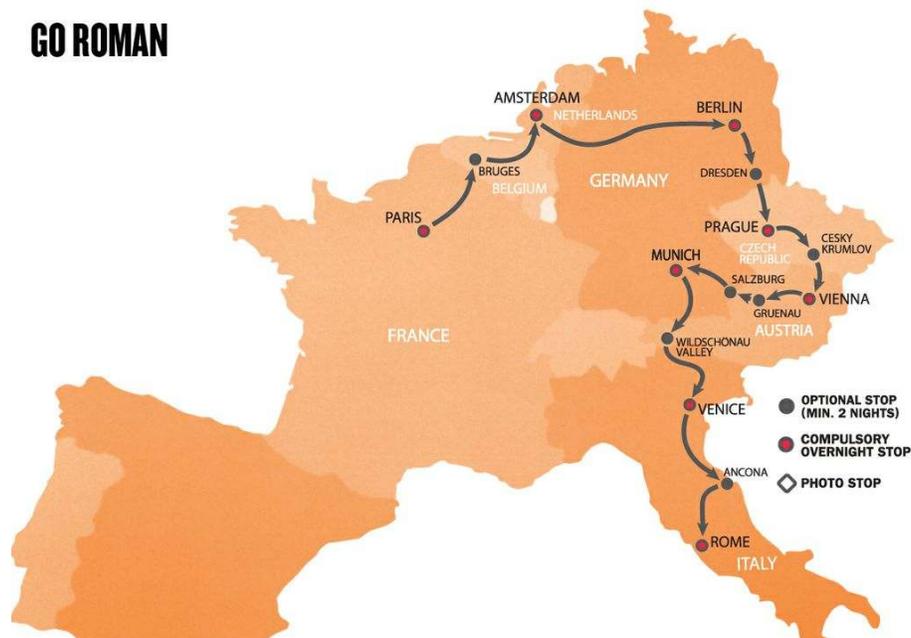
One-way passes start in one major European city and end in another. These routes cover one direction only as indicated under each pass.

### GO WEST



**GO West** – takes you from Rome to Paris via France and Spain and includes Florence, Nice, Barcelona and Madrid with a minimum trip length of 18 days from \$789.

### GO ROMAN



**Go Roman** – takes you from Paris to Rome via Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Italy and includes Bruges, Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich, Prague, Vienna and Venice with a minimum trip length of 21 days from \$789.

## ALPINE PASS



**Alpine Pass** – takes you from Rome to Amsterdam via Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands and includes Florence, Nice, Lauterbrunnen, Munich, Paris and Bruges with a minimum trip length of 21 days from \$789.

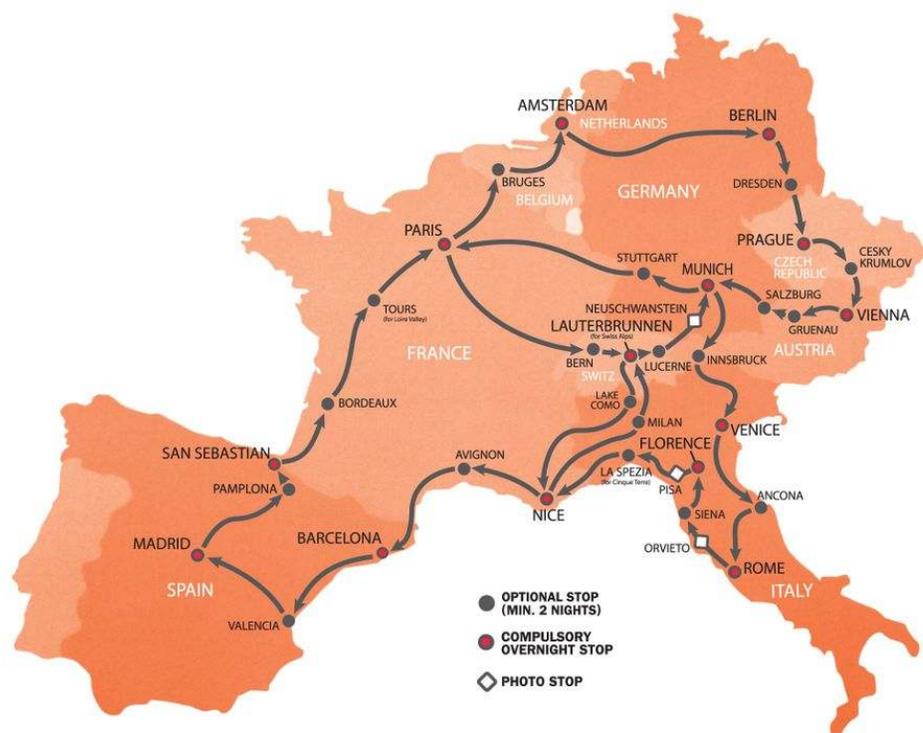
## EPIC ADVENTURE



**Epic Adventure** – takes you from Berlin to Madrid via Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Italy, France and Spain and includes Prague, Vienna, Munich, Venice, Rome, Florence, Nice and Barcelona with a minimum trip length of 26 days from \$945.



## Flexitrip Passes



Flexitrip Passes allow you to create your own itinerary. Each Pass includes six Flexistops and you have the option to add additional Flexistops, either at the time of pass purchase, or from the driver as you are traveling. Best of all you can start and finish anywhere on the coach network. And stay as long as you want in each destination!

When creating a Flexitrip Pass, your beginning destination does not count towards the six included. You can build a pass that follows the arrows around the coach network (see map above) and choose only compulsory stops or add in a few optional stops too.

For example, if you wanted to travel from Rome to Paris, you could add stops in Florence, Nice, Barcelona, Madrid, San Sebastian and Paris. This would be a 6-stop Flexitrip Pass.

Alternatively, you can jump off at one stop and jump on again at another destination near or far away (in this case, you are responsible for travel to the next Flexistop). For example, start in Paris get off in Amsterdam and pick up again in Rome and continue on.

**The key is they are flexible!**

You can find complete details on passes on our website at:

<http://www.bakpakguide.com/europe/transport/hop-on-hop-off-pass/index.shtml>

## Escorted & Independent Traveler Tours



Photo © Contiki/The Travel Corporation

Do you dream of seeing the world but don't necessarily want to do it alone, and all your friends and family are more interested in video games, monster truck shows at home and/or experiencing life from the couch?

Escorted and independent traveler tours run the gamut from larger group tours like Contiki to small group tours like those run by Radical Travel.

Ideal for singles, couples and small groups of friends, tours take care of most of the transportation and accommodation for you so that you can take a relaxing break from figuring everything out. While not as challenging and enriching as true independent travel, these tours can be a smart option for those who don't want to have to make each decision and every plan.

### *Pros:*

- Tours are great for beginning travelers, and for those who just want a taste of Europe so that they can come back later and explore on their own.
- You'll meet lots of interesting people, other travelers like yourself that come from different countries and different walks of life.
- Smaller tours offer "on-the-ground" experiences with local guides that you most likely would never arrange on your own, like learning to weave in a small village, exploring a jungle cave or jumping in on a community wedding celebration.
- Fewer worries! You can disengage your brain from decision-making and not worry about where you are staying, where you are eating or where you are going tomorrow. It's all arranged for you – just bring your camera and show up.
- Easy to book. Tours are easy to plan for and book – a less stressful way to travel than arranging everything yourself.
- Knowledgeable guides will explain local attractions, and you'll get far more out of your trip to the cathedral or castle than if you show up on your own.

### *Cons:*

- Lack of freedom. If you see a sign pointing to a hidden waterfall down a gravel road, you can't just follow your curiosity and check it out. Your itinerary and schedule are pretty much set.
- You're stuck with a group. You will be forced to socialize, whether you like it or not. Loners and introverts might get a little burned out.
- On big group tours, buses simply cannot go where a smaller vehicle can, so you'll miss out on all those smaller destinations and off-the-beaten-path attractions.

- Tour groups must find restaurants and hotels that can fit everybody – traveling with a large group, you won't be able to stay at that cute bed and breakfast or eat dinner in the tiny corner bistro.
- You'll be hanging with your tour mates quite a bit, and won't meet the locals like you do when you travel on your own.

### *Contiki Tours*

Contiki offers a range of tours of Europe for travelers aged 18-35, including twenty four budget style tours ranging from 9 to 47 days. Many of the budget-style tours incorporate overnight stays in hotels, hostels and exclusive accommodations including Contiki Villages, a French Chateau and a Swiss Chalet.

Contiki tours include accommodation, some breakfasts and dinners, a professional tour manager, driver, modern air-conditioned coach buses with power outlets and sightseeing tours of the major destinations included in the itinerary.



#### ***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

With the purchase of your Bakpak Europe GO Kit, you will receive a voucher for \$25-\$75 off the purchase of Contiki Escorted Tour from Bakpak Dave. See the GO Kit discounts section for complete details.

An sampling of Contiki's budget-style tours to Europe are listed below. For further information, please go to [www.contiki.com](http://www.contiki.com).

**European Horizon** – see 8 counties in 12 days/10 nights from \$1385 or \$116 per day. Starts in London and includes Amsterdam, Rhine Valley, Munich, Tyrol, Venice, the Swiss Alps and Paris. You can end the tour in Paris or return to London (includes 10 nights of accommodation and 15 meals).

**European Highlights** – see 9 counties in 16 days/14 nights from \$1885 or \$118 per day. Starts in London and includes Paris, Chateau de Crux, French Riviera, Florence, Rome, Venice, Munich, Rhine Valley and Amsterdam. You can end the tour in Amsterdam or return to London (includes 14 nights of accommodation and 20 meals).

**European Whirl** – see 10 counties in 20 days/18 nights from \$2355 or \$118 per day. Starts in London and includes Amsterdam, Berlin, Prague, Munich, Tyrol, Venice, Rome, Florence, the Swiss Alps and Paris. You can end the tour in Paris or return to London (includes 18 nights of accommodation and 26 meals).

**European Experience** – see 11 counties in 22 days/20 nights from \$2555 or \$117 per day. Starts in London and includes Paris, Chateau de Crux, French Riviera, Florence, Rome, Venice, Tyrol, Munich, Swiss Alps, Rhine Valley and Amsterdam. You can end the tour in Amsterdam or return to London (includes 20 nights of accommodation and 33 meals).

**European Escapade** – see 12 counties in 27 days/25 nights from \$3195 or \$119 per day. Starts in London and includes Paris, Chateau de Crux, Barcelona, French Riviera, Florence, Rome, Venice, Vienna, Munich, Tyrol, Swiss Alps, Rhine Valley and Amsterdam. You can end the tour in Amsterdam or return to London (includes 25 nights of accommodation and 41 meals).

**European Adventurer** – see 18 counties in 39 days/37 nights from \$5059 or \$130 per day. Starts in London and includes Paris, Chateau de Crux, Barcelona, French Riviera, Venice, Florence, Rome, Athens, Mykonos, Preveza, Durres, Dubrovnik, Zadar, Ljubljana, Vienna, Tyrol Munich, Swiss Alps, Rhine Valley and Amsterdam. You can end the tour in Amsterdam or return to London (includes 36 nights of accommodation and 59 meals).

### *Radical Travel Tours*

Radical Travel encompasses three tour companies, Shamrock Adventures covering Ireland; Haggis Adventures, covering England, Scotland and Wales and Busabout Adventures, covering the rest of Europe. Popular tours include:

#### **Ireland**

All Ireland Rocker – 7 days exploring Ireland and Northern Ireland from \$565.

Celtic Rocker – 5 days exploring the best of Ireland from \$379.

Western Rocker – 3 days exploring western Ireland including Galway from \$209.

#### **Scotland, England, Wales**

Compass Buster – 10 days exploring Scotland from \$739.

Island Explorer – 7 days exploring Scotland from \$515.

Cornwall Crusader – 5 days exploring Southern England from \$369.

Welsh Explorer – 5 days exploring Wales from \$369.

Skye High – 3 days exploring the Isle of Skye in Scotland from \$205.

#### **Mainland Europe**

Busabout offers a range of adventure tours that include some accommodation and meals, ranging from 3-10+ days, including special Festival tours for Oktoberfest and La Tomatina.

They also offer sailing tours of Croatia and Turkey, a range of tours through Eastern Europe.

Popular tours include:

Croatia Sailing Island Hopper – 8 days from \$705.

Greek Island Flexi-Hopper – 9 days to 5 months from \$445.

Spain & Portugal – 7 days departing from Madrid from \$829.

Scandi-Baltic Adventure – 8 days exploring parts of Scandinavia and the Baltics from \$869.

Classic Rhapsody – 9 days traveling from Prague to Split, Croatia from \$979.

Go to [www.bakpakguide.com/europe/transport/backpacker-tours](http://www.bakpakguide.com/europe/transport/backpacker-tours) for a complete list and details of tours available and for discount bookings.

## Campervan Rentals

Imagine charting your own course across Europe, with the freedom to travel when and where you want in your very own vehicle that converts into private lodging at night. This is the type of experience that renting a campervan in Europe will provide. Campervans like those below are available for pickup in London, Dublin and Edinburgh.



### *Pros and Cons of Renting a Campervan*

Are you considering renting a campervan for your European adventure? There are plenty of reasons why you should and some why it might not be for you.

#### *Pros*

- Comfortable and fuel-efficient, campervan rentals are an affordable travel option and less expensive than a car rental plus hotel room each night.
- Campervans offer far greater freedom of itinerary than a group tour or even a rail pass. You can get off the beaten path and leave the masses behind. Explore rural regions and small villages where public transportation doesn't go.
- Rent a campervan and you can also set your own schedule - no early morning departure times or late arrivals unless you want them.
- A campervan is as easy to drive as a minivan, and rentals come with 24/7 roadside support - just in case.
- No need to pack and unpack every time you go to a new destination – your home travels with you!
- Meet likeminded travelers at campsites, including parks and farms across Europe and the UK.

#### *Cons*

- No bathroom facilities
- Bed may not be as comfortable as a bed in a hotel or hostel (this is subjective)
- You have to learn to drive on the other side of the road for England and Scotland.
- Need to learn the local road rules and customs

## *Campervan Rental Costs*

Rental costs include a base daily rate plus optional insurance (daily charge of £5 to £15) and one time charges for optional extras like: roof racks (£50), surfboard rack (£50), bike racks, table and chairs (£20) or a GPS or Sat Nav (£30).

Daily rates depend on the length of the rental and the time of the year. A one-week rental in March ranges from £30 for a 2-berth version to £62 for a 4-berth van. In August, a one-week rental would range from £55 for a 2-berth version to £80 for a 4-berth van.



### ***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

With the purchase of your Bakpak Europe GO Kit, you receive a 5% discount off London, Dublin, Edinburgh or Lille campervan rentals booked by Bakpak Dave. See the GO Kit Discount section for complete details.

## *Campervan Features*

Rent a campervan in Europe and you'll be driving a tricked-out, multiuse vehicle that is a kitchen, living room and bedroom all in one. Most rentals are late model Toyota vans with all the modern features: air conditioning and heating, air bags, power steering, central locking and electric windows. Choose whether you need a van for 2, 3 or 4 people.

Most campervans come fully equipped with:

- Interior double bed
- Portable gas cooker
- Internal kitchen table
- Small refrigerator
- Large storage areas for baggage and gear
- Curtains or blinds
- Kitchenware and pans for cooking
- Water tank
- AM/FM Radio with CD and MP3 hookup

Other options you may find in your campervan:

- Back awning and side awning
- External table and camping chairs
- Sink with running water
- 20 cm DVD screen & DVD player
- iPod AV cord
- Dual side doors
- Linens including sheets, blankets and pillowcases
- Pop-up roof or roof-top sleeper with second bed

## *Great Destinations for Campervans*

Campervan rentals are ideal for independent travelers who want to get off the beaten path and check out rural areas and regions where public transportation is limited or lacking completely. You need a sense of adventure and your own vehicle to explore these amazing areas:

Provence, France: Covered in fields of lavender and sunflowers, Provence is a land of hilltop villages, whirring cicadas and groves of olive and cherry trees. Most tour buses can't even get up the side of Provence's many hills, and you won't find train tracks in the incredibly charming villages of Roussillon, Les Baux or Gordes.

Tuscany, Italy: Dotted with centuries-old farmhouses, rolling farmland and fertile vineyards, Tuscany is a dream destination to those looking for a slower pace of life. Most tour buses hit the bigger city of Siena on a quick stop from Rome to Florence only, and many of the most beautiful Tuscan villages cannot be reached by train.

The Cotswolds, England – A scenic rural area of outstanding natural beauty, the Cotswolds are a range of hills in central England that enjoy a bucolic way of life. Stone-built villages seem to grow out of the ground, and almost every yard has a garden. Trains don't run to these villages, and buses run once per week.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Q: Where can I pick up a campervan rental?**

A: Campervans are available in London, Dublin, Edinburgh and Lille, France, so plan your itinerary accordingly.

### **Q: What kind of gas mileage do campervans get?**

A: Most get 7-12 liters per 100 kilometers, or 20-24 miles per gallon.

### **Q: How much does gasoline cost in Europe?**

A: Gas prices vary by country and are subject to change, but in general the price is slightly over double that of the cost in the United States: \$US7.50 to \$9 per gallon for regular including tax.

### **Q: Are the campervans manual or automatic transmission?**

A: It depends on what type of campervan you rent – both transmission types are available.

### **Q: What side of the road do I drive on?**

A: In the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), you will drive on the left-hand side of the road similar to Australia and New Zealand but opposite to the US and Canada. For the rest of Europe, you will drive on the right-hand side of the road.

### **Q: Where can I actually camp with a campervan?**

A: You'll find all kinds of campsites spread across Europe and the UK, including at farms, parks, campgrounds, beach areas and special sites designed just for campervans.

## European Budget Airlines

Budget travel in Europe is no longer limited to railways and buses. Since deregulation and the birth of budget airlines on the continent over a decade ago, flying to your destination can sometimes be the cheapest option, and it's almost always the fastest.

Check out the following budget carriers to see if their hubs, routes and rates are a good idea for your trip to Europe. Expect to pay extra for your baggage, seat reservation and any on-board refreshments. Please note that the fees listed are per person, per flight segment, and are subject to change – check the airline's website for the most current information.

### *Pros*

- A quick flight can bridge a long distance avoiding costly ground transport or significant travel time.
- Can take a one-way tour and fly back to your starting point for your flight home.
- Good option if you want to see many popular destinations in a short period of time.
- Europe has an excellent public transport network from the city center to major airports.

### *Cons*

- Travel/waiting time at the airport
- Regional plans can be smaller and may have smaller baggage allowances
- Most are no frills services
- Some airlines are notoriously late or cancel flights last minute

### *Ryanair*

One of the original budget carriers and one of the biggest, Ryanair began in Ireland and now flies to 160 destinations, usually to smaller secondary airports outside of major cities. Ryanair is Europe's largest budget airline. <http://www.ryanair.com/>

Airport Hubs: Dublin, London Stansted, Milan-Bergamo, Brussels-Charleroi and Alicante

Major Destinations: UK, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Greece, Spain and the Canary Islands

Fees: £6 Admin Fee, £10 Reserved Seating Fee, £15-40 Checked Bag

### *Easyjet*

Unlike Ryanair, EasyJet focuses on larger, primary airports and caters to business travelers.

Flying over 500 routes to Europe, North Africa and West Asia, EasyJet is the UK's largest airline.

<http://www.easyjet.com/>

Airport Hubs: London Luton, London Gatwick, London Stansted, Bristol and Milan-Malpensa

Major Destinations: UK, Switzerland, France, Germany, Spain and Italy

Fees: £9 Admin Fee, £3-12 Reserved Seating Fee, Fee for Checked Bags calculated at time of booking

### *Germanwings*

Owned by Lufthansa, Germany's national carrier, Germanwings offers guaranteed connecting flights and flies to 86 destinations, including Turkey and Morocco.

<http://www.germanwings.com/>

Airport Hubs: Cologne Bonn, Stuttgart, Hanover, Dortmund and Berlin-Schoenefeld

Major Destinations: Germany, Italy, Greece, Spain and Croatia

Fees: €8 Reserved Seating Fee, €10 Checked Bag (fees waived for some tickets)

### *Air Berlin*

Air Berlin is Germany's second biggest airline and flies to 23 cities in the country. Based out of Berlin and Düsseldorf, Air Berlin has a focus on sunny beach holiday destinations.

<http://www.airberlin.com/>

Airport Hubs: Berlin-Tegel, Düsseldorf, Munich, Nuremberg, Vienna, Zurich and Palma de Mallorca

Major Destinations: Germany, the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands, North Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and the Americas.

Fees: €10 Reserved Seating Fee, 1 Checked Bag Free

### *Smartwings*

Based out of Prague in the Czech Republic, Smartwings is an intelligent choice for flights to Central Europe. <http://www.smartwings.com/>

Airport Hub: Prague and Budapest

Major Destinations: Czech Republic, Central Europe, Greece and Spain

Fees: 1 Checked Bag Free

### *Norwegian*

With plenty of flights to Scandinavian destinations, Norwegian operates 300 flight routes and is the low-cost carrier of choice for travel in the Nordic areas.

<http://www.norwegian.com/en/>

Airport Hub: Oslo-Gardermoen, Stockholm-Arlanda, Copenhagen, Helsinki-Vantaa, Bergen and Trondheim

Major Destinations: Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland), London and other European business capitals

Fees: €6-11 Reserved Seating Fee, €6-12 Checked Bag (when paid online) or €13-15 (when paid at the airport), €5 Credit Card Fee

# Chapter 6. Accommodation Options & Styles



Photo © Lance Bellers

*No one travels to Europe to sleep, but where you choose to rest your head can have a profound influence on your trip experience, on your budget and possibly your future endeavors (just ask Bakpak Dave - he went from bean counter to hostel owner after his first backpacking trip).*

Hostels, hotels and couch surfing arrangements vary immensely across the continent, ranging from dirty dumps to sleek modern palaces.

We at Bakpak have an affinity for hostels, which are first-class in Europe. However, no matter which lodging style you choose, keep an open mind and remember that one of the reasons to travel is to experience new situations and meet new people.

## Hostels

Hostels are the traditional lodging of choice for the backpacker set traveling across Europe. Inexpensive and well suited for young travelers and those in small groups, hostels have housed adventurers and other intrepid types traveling through Europe for decades.

Today however, many hostels offer über modern lodging, easy online booking, organized outings and group events, plus deluxe amenities like on-site bars and even spas. Hostels in Europe run the complete gamut from super snazzy affairs with slick, contemporary rooms and private toilets to bottom-of-the-barrel inns with stinky co-ed dorm lodging and old everything.

Be prepared to experience a wide variety of sleeping styles when you travel – but thanks to the internet, getting a heads up on what to expect will help you to determine which hostel is right for you.

Many hostels offer a choice of dorm rooms (sometimes co-ed) and private rooms, either with or without private bathrooms as well. The private rooms tend to book up quickly, so if you have your heart set on this option, you'll be better off to make your reservations in advance. Hostels in popular destinations like Venice, London and Paris can also get full in high season, so reservations might be a good idea if you are traveling to these places during the summer.



Dorm Room St. Christopher's Inns Amsterdam © St. Christopher's Inns

*Pros:*

- Hostels are one of the least expensive lodging options in Europe.
- You'll find hostels at destinations all over the continent, from big cities to beaches to mountaintop villages.
- Hostels are easy to book online. There are numerous websites that let you not only book your room, but also look at pictures of the hostel and read reviews from past clients.
- Hostels offer a variety of rooms, including co-ed dorm rooms, dorm rooms, private rooms and rooms for 4.
- You'll meet other like-minded travelers while staying at hostels and may even make friends for life!
- Hostels often have a fun "party" atmosphere, and some arrange appealing group outings like pub crawls, beach trips, day tours, etc.
- Hostels often provide free or cheap breakfast, tea and coffee and cheap lunch or dinner meals.
- Hostels usually have a kitchen area where you can prepare breakfast and other meals to save money. And learn new recipes from around the world too!

### Cons:

- Hostels often feature a distinct lack of privacy and personal space. Many hostels provide lockers for your personal belongings, some do not. This can increase safety concerns for those who like to know their luggage is locked up and safe.
- You will probably have to share a toilet and shower with other travelers AKA: Get in line.
- Some older hostels have an absolute dearth of electrical outlets, and charging your camera, phone and other gear in a dorm room with ten other people trying to do exactly the same thing can be quite challenging.
- Heterosexual couples traveling together will not like being split up into the girls' dorm and boys' dorm at some hostels (most have co-ed dorms).
- A hostel's "party" atmosphere can get old if you prefer to sleep, and getting a good night's rest can be difficult in general due to noisy roommates coming and going late into the night or early morning.



#### **Bakpak Dave Tip:**

If you need some personal space to yourself but still want to be social, book yourself into a private room in a hostel for a night every now and then, especially in the cheaper countries. You get the best of both worlds - social life with privacy!

## Apartment Rentals

Renting an apartment in Europe is surprisingly easy thanks to the wonders of the internet, and can be a smart option in any destination where you are planning to stay for a week or more. Websites like Sublet.com, Homeaway.com and even Craigslist are good sources for apartment rentals and reservations. With more space and privacy than hostels plus handy amenities like kitchens and washing machines, European apartment rentals can often turn out to be a very good deal. Do your research and book through a reputable agency whenever possible.

- *Pros:* Private space; you'll feel like a local.
- *Cons:* Can be complicated to arrange; best for longer stays in one place.

## Budget Hotels & Pensiones

If the idea of hostels, shared toilets and dorm-style sleeping arrangements don't float your boat, another worthy option to consider for your European travels are budget hotels and pensiones. These options are particularly attractive for those traveling in groups of 2, 3 or 4, because sharing a room in a budget hotel or pensione can often be less expensive than the cost for everyone to stay in a hostel – and you may even get free breakfast!

Budget hotels are usually 1-2 stars and may or may not come with a private toilet and shower. You may find a complete hole-in-the-wall hotel with holes in its walls, no toilet seat and dirty

sheets, or you may find a dazzlingly beautiful hotel with modern amenities and a perfect location. With budget hotels, it's often a gamble – but you can increase your odds of winning by researching your lodging in advance, reading guest reviews and making reservations online. If you are just walking up to a budget hotel after a long day of sightseeing, be sure to ask to see the room first before you pay.

Pensiones are usually smaller affairs than budget hotels, and they can be a guesthouse that someone is renting out, or even just a spare room. More common the further south in Europe you travel, pensiones usually offer the choice of including breakfast or not. You will most likely be dealing with the lodging's owner, not a clerk, and pensiones can be found both online and through the local tourist office when you arrive at your destination.

- *Pros:* Offer unique lodging; private rooms.
- *Cons:* Can be hard to find.

## Couch Surfing

Couch surfing in Europe is an excellent option for those looking to save money on lodging – and who also have a couch at home that they wouldn't mind someone surfing on. Even more intimate than B&B's, couch surfing brings you into the world of your host, who often provides local advice along with a place to lay your head at night. Head to [couchsurfing.org](http://couchsurfing.org) to gain access to a huge database of world travelers who like to stay close to the ground. This network of like-minded volunteers will hook you up with open couches in your destination, but you have to be willing to open your home to travelers as well.

- *Pros:* Very cheap; get to know locals & learn intimate destination knowledge.
- *Cons:* Host might be creepy; you must offer a couch for lodging at your home as well; safety and privacy concerns.

# Chapter 7. European Destination Guide



Lisbon, Portugal. Photo © Lance

*Where to go in Europe depends on your interests, time available and budget. In general, Europe's most popular destinations are Italy and France because of their laid-back cultures, amazing wealth of attractions and incredible cuisine.*

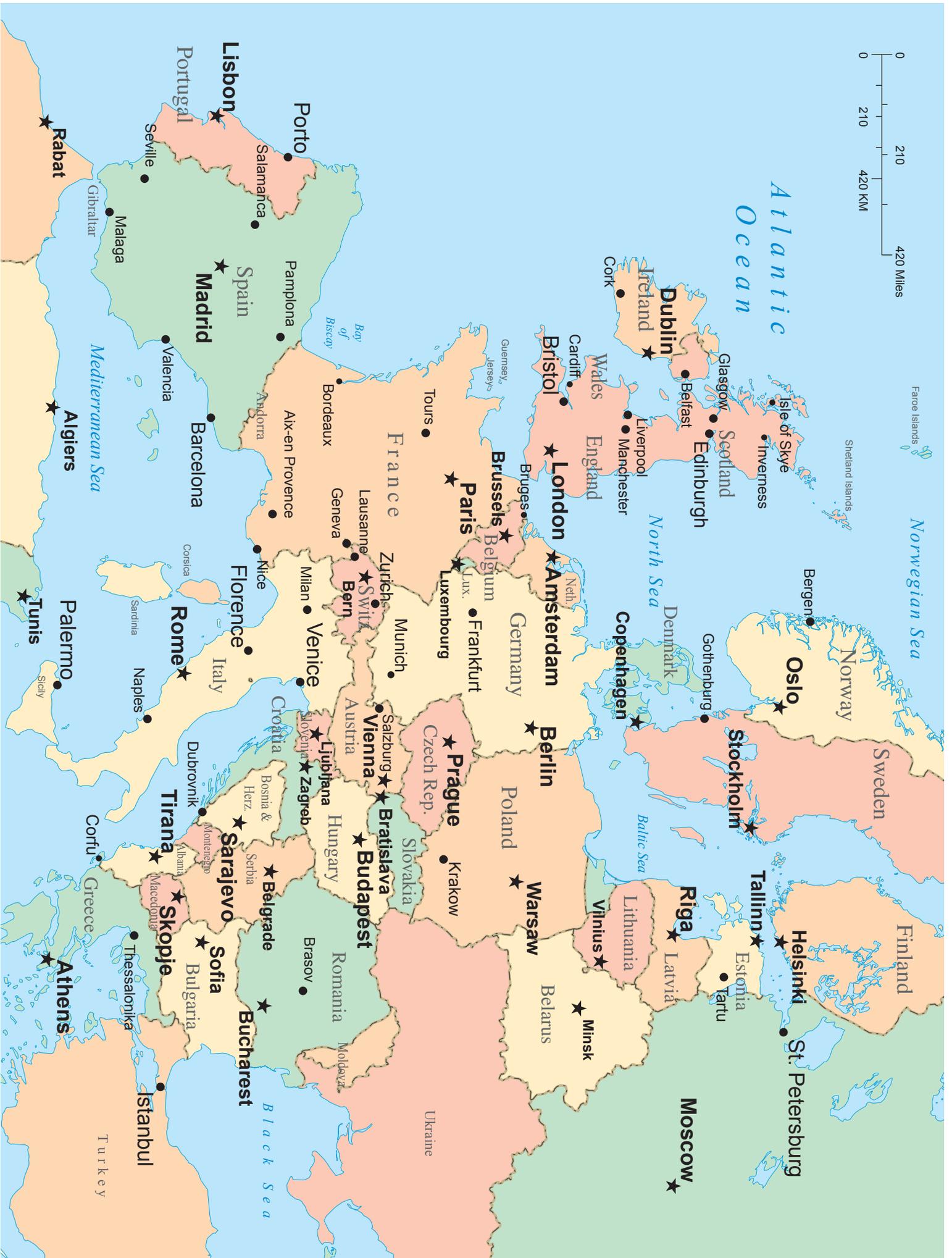
The UK can be a great place to begin your trip if you are nervous about the language barrier – in Great Britain, you can ease yourself into the idea of foreign travel and get along quite well with no other language skills than English. The warm beaches and easy lifestyle of Spain and Portugal are very popular with European travelers themselves, while people head to Germany for history, Old World charm and beer. Belgium and the Netherlands offer picturesque canal cities like Bruges and Amsterdam, as well as flat lands for epic bicycle trips.

Central Europe has also been increasing in popularity in the last decade, with travelers flocking to Prague in the Czech Republic, Budapest in Hungary and to the coast of Croatia for sailing trips. While expensive, Scandinavia is a land of immense natural beauty, which you will also find in the spectacular Alpine regions of Switzerland and Austria. For even more adventure, head further abroad to Greece and her incredible islands, or travel to Turkey to experience an entirely different culture.

Major cities: Amsterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, Venice, Dublin, Zurich, Vienna and Athens.

Lesser Visited: Scandinavia, Portugal, Belgium, Baltics, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Turkey, Slovenia and Poland

**Please note: Your full color map of Europe, Distance chart map and Destinations Summary Chart can be found on the following three pages**



## Destination Cost and Transport Chart

City/Town	<a href="http://www.priceoftravel.com">PriceofTravel.com</a> Backpacker Price Index	City/Town Served by the following transport options:			
		Rail Pass	Hop On/Off Pass	Budget Airline	Escorted Tour
Amsterdam	\$88.95	GP/SP	x	x	x
Athens	\$62.50	GP/SP		x	x
Barcelona	\$70.26	GP/SP	x	x	x
Berlin	\$61.58	GP/SP	x	x	x
Bordeaux	not available	GP/SP	x	x	x
Bratislava	\$36.84	GP/EP		x	x
Bruges	\$63.16	GP/SP	x		
Brussels	\$91.32	GP/SP		x	x
Bucharest	\$31.61	GP/SP		x	
Budapest	\$33.09	GP/SP	x	x	x
Copenhagen	\$82.51	GP/SP		x	x
Dublin	\$67.89	GP/SP		x	x
Dubrovnik	\$68.95	GP/SP		x	x
Edinburgh	\$78.77	Britrail		x	x
Florence	\$69.61	GP/SP	x	x	x
Galway	\$71.58	GP/SP			x
Glasgow	not available	Britrail		x	x
Helsinki	\$82.50	GP/SP		x	x
Krakow	\$26.52	EP/PP		x	x
Lisbon	\$57.08	GP/SP		x	
London	\$69.35	Britrail		x	x
Lucerne	not available	GP/SP	x		x
Madrid	\$64.74	GP/SP	x	x	x
Milan	\$81.32	GP/SP	x	x	x
Munich	\$73.95	GP/SP	x	x	x
Nice	\$70.00	GP/SP	x	x	
Oslo	\$111.11	GP/SP		x	x
Paris	\$81.12	GP/SP	x	x	x
Prague	\$45.10	GP/SP	x	x	x
Riga	\$26.60	none		x	
Rome	\$82.50	GP/SP	x	x	x
Salzburg	not available	GP/SP	x	x	
San Sebastian	not available	GP/SP	x		
Sarajevo	\$29.39	none		x	x
Sofia	\$24.19	GP/SP		x	x
Stockholm	\$101.37	GP/SP		x	x
Tallinn	\$55.05	none		x	x
Tours	not available	GP/SP	x	x	
Valencia	not available	GP/SP	x	x	x
Venice	\$92.63	GP/SP	x	x	x
Vienna	\$81.84	GP/SP	x	x	x
Warsaw	\$35.08	EP/PP		x	x
Zagreb	\$44.41	GP/SP		x	x
Zurich	\$121.36	GP/SP		x	

GP = Eurail Global Pass SP = Eurail Select Pass EP= Eurail Eastern Pass BFP = Eurail Balkan Flexi Pass  
Backpacker Price Index numbers updated January 2013, compliments of [www.priceoftravel.com](http://www.priceoftravel.com)

# Destinations Distance Map



Hours are approximate driving times

## Austria

Austria, a land where music seems to sing from every mountain and every city street, offers the traveler a classic European experience. Home to enchanting mountain villages, lakeside resort towns, spa destinations and the stately splendor of Salzburg, Austria is a land that will waltz right into your heart. From the coffee shops and Mozart melodies around every corner in the exuberant capital of Vienna, to the picture-perfect lakes of Salzkammergut, Austria's bustling big cities and charming small towns offer an exhilarating experience of old world charm.

### *Vienna*

Vienna surpasses her Austrian counterparts when it comes to culture, art and history. Once the mecca of European culture in the 18th and 19th centuries, hosting all the great musical geniuses from Beethoven to Mozart, you can't help but still feel the richness and grandeur of a once glorious empire. Amidst beautiful historic Baroque architecture there also exists a modern-day culture that invites you to take part in a lively and thriving youth scene. Whether you spend an afternoon in a traditional kaffehaus or take part in the cool club and bar scene, you will have the best of both old and new. Be sure to see Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere (palace), Hundertwasserhaus, and the Museum of Fine Arts.



Staatstheater - Vienna Opera House, Austria © Luke Daniek

### *Salzburg*

The birthplace of Mozart and the site of Julie Andrews' *Sound of Music*, Salzburg remains a city of music, culture and art. At every turn you can either tire of, or indulge in the genius of Mozart (tours, museums etc.) and play out the splendor of the *Sound of Music* (tours, memorabilia etc.)

Aside from being inundated with these two Salzburg claims to fame, the city is truly beautiful and picturesque. Rimmed with views of the beautiful Alps, its Baroque character is perfectly preserved in its magnificent architecture, including beautiful palaces, abbeys and museums.

### *Innsbruck*

With images of lederhosen, yodelers, endless snowcapped mountains and pretty little villages, the Tirol region is post card perfect. In the winter it is the premier destination for avid skiers, particularly Innsbruck, which has many excellent resorts. In the summer, feast on glorious greenery, mountain lakes and superb hiking trails. The main central town of Innsbruck is filled with much history, culture, folklore and natural beauty, making it an excellent base to explore the entire region.

## **Belgium**

Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Belgium is a multicultural destination packed with bustling cities, medieval villages and even beach resorts. In Belgium, you will encounter several languages as you explore exciting cities like Brussels, known for a magnificent town square and incredible chocolate. Time seems to stand still in Bruges, a lovely medieval hot spot, the canals of Ghent encourage lingering and Antwerp offers a cutting-edge artistic scene. With fun beer tasting events, flat land for bicycling and festivals during the summer, Belgium captivates the traveler with a delicious range of pleasures.

### *Bruges*

Its medieval architecture and character is perfectly preserved and invites many visitors. But don't let that deter you from exploring its ancient streets, acclaimed museums and tons of fun pubs and cafés. Make sure to stop by the Groeninge Museum, Markt and Burg squares, and perhaps take a bike tour to take in all the sights.

### *Brussels*

Known for its chocolate, beer and waffles, Brussels is not as picturesque as Bruges or exciting as Amsterdam. But, this thousand year old city is fast becoming a multi-cultural center as people from all over the world have taken up residence here, including a large French speaking African culture. Filled with historic buildings, cobblestone streets, and crowded alehouses, it's worth a stop over.

### *Antwerp*

Once the premier center of Flemish art and culture, Antwerp today offers her visitors a glance into the golden baroque age of past centuries alongside an artistic haven for cutting edge contemporary culture. When exploring the historic narrow, winding streets take in the great masterpieces of artists such as Rubens and Van Dyke, browse through countless modern galleries and shops and gawk at the world-famous diamond district. When you're finished, you can turn in any direction to find a friendly pub or alehouse. Take a nap, and then head towards the dizzying and much celebrated club scene.

## Bulgaria

The first thing you need to know about Bulgarians is that they shake their heads for “yes” and nod them for “no” – as if the Cyrillic alphabet isn’t confusing enough. But orientation difficulties aside, Bulgaria is a still relatively untouched goldmine of stunning vistas, gorgeous coasts, ancient fortresses and trendy towns filled with friendly, fashionable young people.

### *Sofia*

In Sofia, upscale boutiques, student bars and McDonalds’ arches are perhaps more common than churches and museums, yet the city still retains some of its old world charm. It also serves as a gateway into the nearby mountains, home to the awe-inspiring Rila Monastery and other semi-hidden treasures.

## Croatia

Made up of 6,000 kilometers of coastline, Croatia is a haven for ocean side fun. Dalmatia contains the more popular islands and resorts and is well worth the added time and effort to travel south. Inland, the Plitvice Lakes National Park is a gorgeous sprawl of woods and waters. Skip the capital, Zagreb, if you are headed down the coast unless a craving for nightlife sets in.



The Old Town of Dubrovnik, Croatia © mazzzur

### *Dubrovnik*

Located at the southern tip of Croatia, Dubrovnik is the country's most famous destination. It was heavily bombed in the civil war of the early '90s, but with substantial international aid has rebuilt and regained its splendor. During medieval times Dubrovnik held off Venetian aggression. The testament to this strength is in its powerful city walls. Spend a day exploring the old town or hop the ferry to Lokrum Island to relax in more natural surroundings. Look into day trips to the Elaphite Islands, Mljet National Park and Cavtat.

### *Dalmatia*

With the Adriatic Sea on one side and the Dinaric Alps on the other, the southern part of Croatia from Zadar to Dubrovnik contains some of the Mediterranean's most postcardesque scenery. From untouched green isles to old Venetian fortresses, the coast is a haven for sun, nature and medieval architecture and history. Split, Hvar, Korcula and Dubrovnik are beautiful destinations.

### *Split*

This is the largest coastal city and a good stopping point before the journey further south. It is a major hub for buses and ferries. The ruins of Diocletian's Palace, built by the Romans in 300 AD, is worth a visit.

## **Czech Republic**

Located in a region once hidden behind the Iron Curtain, the Czech Republic has burst out onto the scene as a dynamic destination full of cultural charms, exciting cities and a laid-back landscape. Prague is one of the most captivating capitals of Central Europe, a city of tall spires, enchanting medieval lanes and a newfound sense of freedom. From the historic countryside of Bohemia to the chilled-out backpacker town of Telc and the beer halls of Pizen to the incredible castle of Cesky Krumlov, the Czech Republic is a land where centuries seem to flow together like the Vltava River.

### *Prague*

Don't let the other tourists scare you away. Prague is still ridiculously cheap! If you step just a block or two away from the popular tourist spots, you will find that the old-world sparkle of Prague still shines brightly. The amazing buildings, squares, and streets alone are enough to alter one's view of the world. Once you have seen Prague, your perception of beauty will be forever changed.

### *Cesky Krumlov*

Indulge your Bohemian fantasies in Cesky Krumlov, a charming 18th-century town located on the Vltava River in the southern part of the Czech Republic. Known for an incredible castle complex and picturesque old-town square, Cesky Krumlov is a popular tourist destination. With well-maintained Baroque architecture throughout the town, Cesky Krumlov is perfect for wandering, and this Bohemian gem also boasts a thriving café culture, plenty of pubs and exciting nightlife as well.



View over Prague, Czech Republic © Tom De Bruyne

## Denmark

With a friendly and forward-thinking populace and a bastion of progressive thought and policy, Denmark is the only Scandinavian country attached to the continent of Europe. The capital city of Copenhagen is a thoroughly Danish destination, with impressive architecture and detailed design evident on every corner, from Tivoli Gardens to Christiania. Denmark's countryside is dotted with Viking ruins, Neolithic remains and rural villages straight out of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Fun towns like Odense and Ribe offer lively nightlife, Borholm boasts relaxing forest walks and Hillerod features the incredible Renaissance castle of Frederiksborg.

### *Copenhagen*

Copenhagen, the epicenter of Denmark and much of Scandinavia, is a fun, lively cultural city that's largely affordable. Small and manageable, there is nothing imposing, nothing overwhelming – you can easily explore on foot its many museums, castles and ancient structures. Walk through charming cobblestone streets, bike ride along the lake or enjoy lunch in a charming restaurant. As English is spoken everywhere, it won't be hard to meet the friendly and well-mannered Danes, especially if there's liquor involved. Take advantage of this young thriving city's liberal vibe, exhibited in the many cafés, bars and never-ending nightclubs.

## England

A country whose empire has spanned around the globe and back, England is part of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). It is a fascinating destination where centuries of civilized history merge with a dynamic modern lifestyle. England is an island monarchy whose culture still has a great influence on the rest of the world. From the exciting city of London and the ancient rocks of Stonehenge to the charming villages of the Cotswolds, England is a unique land of green pastures, lively pubs, punk rock and afternoon tea.

### *London*

London defies all expectations. This cornerstone of western civilization is hip yet traditional, edgy yet gracious. Whether you're seeking the hippest club or looking for a dose of history and culture, London does not disappoint. Packed with all forms of entertainment, stylish shops, grand monuments, museums and of course, British wit and hospitality, it is an exciting playground for just about everyone.



Blue skies over Stonehenge, England © *fotoVoyager*

### *Southern England*

This region of England offers a variety of historical and adventure activities, beautiful landscapes, coasts and cultural sites. Popular stops include: Brighton, known as Little London by the sea; Bath, a National Heritage City discovered by the Romans; and Bristol, located at the heart of the South West, which is a great base from which to explore the region.

The Devon area has a few university towns, including Exeter, and offers excellent seaside resorts, walking opportunities, historical sites and dolphin spotting. Other towns in this region include Exmoor, Dartmoor, Plymouth and Torquay.

The Cornwall region is an excellent place to enjoy the rugged coast and hang ten on the surfboard. Walking opportunities also abound. Towns to visit include Newquay and St. Ives (surfing spots) as well as Penzance, Sennen and Zennor. Don't miss stopping at Land's End, the very tip of England and the must-see Stonehenge, located 2 miles outside of Amesbury in Wiltshire.

### *Heart of England*

The center region of England offers a variety of cultural and historic sites ranging from cities like Manchester and Liverpool to fabled shires such as Nottingham. And don't forget the birthplace of Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon or the Cotswold region in Gloucestershire.

### *Northern England*

The north of England offers many excellent stops on your way to Scotland including the university town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the town of York and the Yorkshire Moores, the Lakes District and Isle of Mann on the west coast.

The Lakes District sits just under the Scottish border in Cumbria County. This breathtaking region envelops you with its magnificent lakes, mountains and valleys. If you're Scotland bound, it's a terrific and peaceful stop where you can go hiking, climbing or just unwind.

## **Estonia**

The smallest Baltic country, Estonia still makes a big impact on the traveler thanks to its charming seaside villages, pretty green forests and picturesque countryside dotted with incredible crumbling castles. Once known as Europe's best-kept secret, Estonia attracts visitors who want to experience natural pleasures along with cities that mix the medieval and the modern, like Tallinn. As Estonia's premiere metropolis, this city of cobblestone streets offers an exciting range of historic ruins, café culture, art galleries and a nightlife scene to write home about. Visit Estonia for a truly unique European experience.

### *Tallinn*

Estonia's miraculous capital is bound to inspire awe. It's an exciting, thriving center that has recently emerged from Soviet occupation, with many breathtaking Gothic buildings that have somehow escaped war damage.

Tallinn's Old Town is one of the last remaining truly medieval cities in Europe, with subterranean bars that serve locally-made vodka and absinthe and cast an enticing glow from their stone doorways. You can walk the dozens of winding, cobbled streets within the high wall and ramparts, and then stop for a cheap sandwich made on native thin, dense black bread at one of the many cafés - known as "kohviks."

## **Finland**

A frosty land known for immense natural beauty and invigorating modern cities, the Nordic country of Finland provides plenty of inspiration and unique attractions, along with a warm Finnish welcome. From the streets of trendy Helsinki to the far-flung forests of the northern national parks, Finland is a technologically advanced country with a distinctive language and culture. Short summers are the perfect time for saunas, swimming and barbecuing alongside Finland's many lakes (over 188,000 total), and in the winter you can watch for the Northern Lights and visit Lapland, the mythological home of Santa Claus.

### *Helsinki*

The most eastern of the major Scandinavian cities (near Russia), Finland's capital, with its remarkable 19th century neoclassical architecture, is another manageable city with a distinctly Eastern European flair. Helsinki's character is very much dominated by the Baltic Sea as there are many bridges and ferries linking the capital to nearby islands. The many cafés, bars, museums, tours and even spas are easily explored on foot. A huge money saver is the Helsinki Card, which gives free and/or discounted entry to many attractions and tours, and unlimited access to public transportation.

## **France**

Known for its rich artistic heritage, amazing cuisine and diverse countryside full of vineyards, chateaux and fields of lavender, France is one of the most popular travel destinations in the world. From the beaches of the French Riviera and the sunflowers of Provence to the seaside villages of Normandy and the scenic streets of Paris, France enchants the traveler with its leisurely lifestyle and appreciation for the arts. Spend time sipping wine at sidewalk cafes, strolling the streets of medieval towns, basking in the sunshine along the gorgeous coastline and exploring a wealth of rivers, mountains and natural attractions.

### *Paris*

Paris is stunning! Whether you indulge in its grand and monumental history or embrace its intimate romance, Parisian culture will leave its mark on you. Explore the cozy cafés, buy coveted delicacies from the many markets and take in the essential sights. Check out the Arc de Triomphe or the beautiful white domed Sacré-Coeur for one of the most breathtaking views of the city.

### *Tours*

Located on the Loire River in the spectacular central valley region of France, Tours is beloved for its unique architecture, delicious wines and numerous beautiful gardens. Explore Tour's amazing medieval old city, le Vieux Tours, which features half-timbered buildings and a busy public square full of restaurants and bars. Home to a university, Tours has no shortage of young energy and this historic town hosts a number of festivals and fairs throughout the year.

## *Bordeaux*

More than a delicious red wine, Bordeaux is a proud and historic city located in the Aquitaine region in the southwest of France. Walk along Les Quais on the shores of the Garonne River, cross the bridges or hop on a ferry for a unique view of the city. Hit the pedestrian center for shopping, dining and cultural pursuits and explore Bordeaux' many gardens, museums and cafes along with a bottle of – what else? Bordeaux.

## *Aix-en-Provence*

Comprised of picturesque towns such as Avignon, Arles, Marseille and Aix-en-Provence, this ancient region cultivated by the Romans is a world unto itself. Yes, it is often heavily touristed, but the juxtaposition of romance, country life, modern style and innovation has not detracted from Provence's historic character and seductive charm.

Visit wineries and lounge in tiny bistros in Aix-en-Provence, bike ride through wildflowers and visit ancient attractions in medieval Arles and indulge in sophisticated cafés in burgeoning Marseilles. Provence has always delighted her visitors!



Autumn in the Provence, France © Dr. Heinz Linke

## *Nice*

The more laid-back (relatively speaking) large town of Nice has lots of cafés, bars, markets and, of course, pebble beaches (take your flip-flops). Cannes and St. Tropez are better as day trips from Nice, as they are really over touristed millionaires' playgrounds - still fun to check out though, especially if there's a festival in town.

## Germany

A powerful European country with captivating cities, enchanting natural scenery and a checkered past, Germany offers old world charm and a progressive attitude. From cozy castles set high above rivers to shady beer gardens, romantic fairy tale forests to valleys full of vineyards, Germany boasts a beautiful range of natural and manmade attractions. Travelers head to the capital city of Berlin for nightlife that doesn't stop until dawn, to Bavaria for dark woodlands and Alpine scenery, and to Oktoberfest in Munich, a massive beer celebration that is one of the biggest parties on planet earth.



Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin, Germany © Stan Rippel

### *Berlin*

With a cutting-edge arts scene, terrific cafés, imaginative modern architecture and distinct and vibrant neighborhoods, it is impossible not to leave Berlin impressed, if not awestruck. Surprisingly, Berlin is far from being over-touristed. Walking the streets, you will not see crowds following umbrellas or busloads of camera-toting foreigners. Berlin should be visited for its pulsating social and cultural scene that is original and inspiring.

Although Berlin has one of the most efficient and comprehensive transit systems in Europe, a great way to get acquainted with Berlin—both its history and layout, is with a walking tour. For excellent views of Berlin and an example of great modern architecture, head to the dome on top of the Reichstag, home to the German parliament, which is just past the Brandenburg Gate.

## *Munich*

Next to Berlin, this is the city to visit in Germany. It delightfully and authentically lives up to its status as the capital of Bavaria. This wealthy city is an emblem of German tradition and stereotype, however, Munich simultaneously embraces contemporary cutting edge culture. Their avant-garde youth scene means there's much to check out in the way of cool nightclubs, bars and restaurants. But no doubt you will inevitably (and happily) indulge in the more customary tourist scene. After exploring the many neighborhoods, museums and historical attractions, eat your fill of sausage and mustard, then wash it down with two...or three...or even four steins of beer.

## *Cologne*

Köln, or Cologne, is the German capital for mass media, music (nightlife), gay and lesbian life, and for its art scene. Because of Köln's central location within Europe, it is the biggest hub in Germany with direct trains to/from Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Zurich, Vienna, Prague and Berlin. It also serves as a new hub for the low-cost airlines with cheap fares from many cities.

## *Dresden*

Capital of the eastern state of Saxony, Dresden is a city on the rise. The historical beauty and legacy of Dresden was disastrously bombed by the Allied forces in WWII. The tragic event, which spurred the Kurt Vonnegut novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*, not only destroyed beautiful and historical architecture, art and landscapes, but took the lives of tens of thousands of Germans. Post-war, many of the baroque buildings were restored, but today more than ever, the city is determined to recapture its legacy as the German "Florence" and is rebuilding many of its once glorious structures as well as encouraging tourism and cultural development.

## *Hamburg*

After Berlin and Munich, Hamburg is one of the most visited cities in Germany. Once known as "Sin City," for its notorious red light district, today it is visited for its interesting arts scene, cool bars and cafés and vibrant youth culture. Whether you indulge in its harbor and canal atmosphere (sort of like Venice) or enjoy the contrasting park-like feel throughout the city, you will thoroughly enjoy your stay.

## *Frankfurt*

Germany's financial capital is just that...a modern, thriving business center. Largely void of old world German charm in the way of architecture, art and personality, Frankfurt is sleek, wealthy and intellectual. The city recovered from WWII by pushing towards the future and economic success rather than preserving its rather large historical legacy. It did, however, retain a few pockets of preserved culture, such as the old quarter of Sachsenhausen, and is a perfect and refreshing night's stop after the medieval towns of the Romantic Road or before heading onto the less glamorous state of Saxony.

### *Rothenburg/Romantic Road*

The Romantic Road is a heavily touristed route of approximately 290km between the German towns of Würzburg in the north and Füssen in the Bavarian Alps. In between are lovely medieval villages that are so picturesque it's as if they leapt out of a fairytale. You can tour the route by way of bus tours, car, rail or bicycle and stop off at each town (note: Eurail and German Rail passes can be used). There are tourist info centers along the way, but a good place to start is in either Munich or Frankfurt. Of particular interest on the route is the town of Rothenburg. It is the most visited of all the towns for its picture-perfect medieval character. As with many of the most beautiful attractions, the Romantic Road and especially Rothenburg get absolutely mobbed with tourists, particularly in the summer months.

## **Greece**

Ancient treasures and modern wisdom await the traveler to Greece, a land where mysteries of the past linger next to a passionate contemporary culture. Long known as the birthplace of democracy and philosophy, Greece's capital city of Athens offers a wealth of famous landmarks to experience, including the Plaka marketplace and the treasures of the Acropolis, including the Parthenon. Amazing feats like the temple at Delphi, the ruins of Mycenae and the Corinth Canal dot the olive-tree covered Greek countryside, while her many beautiful islands provide a paradise-like setting for sun, swimming and soaking up the good life.

### *Athens*

Athens is one of the few cities in the world in which the installation of a modern metro system is regularly halted by important archaeological discoveries; the artifacts are now on display in its stations. Above the Athens skyline, the Acropolis reigns supreme: brightly lit by night, chock-full of awestruck tourists by day, it is but one of the many ancient and modern treasures that this versatile city provides.

### *Corfu*

The "Emerald Island" is the most tropical of all the Greek isles. Cliffs of lush greenery and sloping hills plunge into sun drenched beaches and blue azure waters. Without losing its hospitable and entertaining character, this delightful island has more of a pastoral feel than the other, more arid, Greek islands such as Ios and Santorini. Several resorts are ideally tucked into the nooks of seaside hills - from popular and lively accommodations, such as the renowned Pink Palace, to more intimate and peaceful lodgings. You can always find something to suit your tastes/needs. Nightlife is mainly centered in town, so pretty much everyone's there...meaning it can get somewhat raucous! Corfu is a little bit of everything for just about everyone.

### *IOS*

Sort of like the never-ending Mardi Gras of the Mediterranean, Ios is a place where you party 'til dawn and sleep it off on the beach with a beer in your hand. The small whitewashed town of Chora, perched high on a hill, is the center of it all. Lots of bars, cafés and nightclubs are

clustered together amidst beautiful churches and squares. At night the small cobblestone streets are teeming with zealous partygoers from all over the world. During the day, relax on the beach or rent a small moped and tour the island taking in the magnificent views of the surrounding sea, cliffs and occasional palm tree.



Santorini Sunset, Greek Islands, Greece © Paul Cowan

### *Santorini*

Hauntingly beautiful, Santorini is justifiably the most photographed of all the Greek islands. Its serene beauty and intrinsically Mediterranean flavor subtly and calmly seeps into your senses. The result of past volcanic eruptions created a dramatic jagged coastline contrasted by the deep blue Aegean Sea and sunny sandy beaches. Picture perfect whitewashed villages carved into steep cliffs sit atop some of the most spectacular views. There are different towns to check out, especially Ia (striking coastline and quaint village with museums, bars, cafés and beach) and Thira/Fira (magnificent architecture, bars, discos etc). Note that Santorini is the most southern of all the Greek islands (9 hour ferry ride from Piraeus).

### *Olympia*

The sprawling ruins here are an UNESCO World Heritage site. They include the Olympic Arena and the Temple of Zeus, which once housed the colossal gold-and-ivory cult statue of Zeus (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world).

## Hungary

Found in the very heart of Europe, Hungary is a magic land of thermal spas, romantic river ways, paprika-infused cuisine and excellent natural attractions. Follow the languid Danube River to Budapest, a historic city split in half by the waterway that features stately buildings, colorful local markets and large urban parks with steaming spas and thermal baths. Travel further abroad in Hungary to find pleasant Lake Balaton, pretty vineyards nestled in the Villany Hills and the scenic farmland of the Southern Plain.

### *Budapest*

Budapest, the capital of Hungary, is an interesting, cosmopolitan city that should not be underestimated. Budapest's beautiful historic section is Castle Hill on the Buda side of the Danube. Across the river is Pest, the sprawling and hectic center of the modern city that saw much of its development at the turn of century. Budapest is possibly more active, enticing, and bewildering than any other European city.



Budapest, Hungary © Bettina Pressl

## Ireland

Known as the Emerald Isle for its lush green scenery of fields and farmland, Ireland is an enchanting country whose friendly populace is always ready with a warm welcome. From dramatic cliff sides and rugged coastal waters to ancient ruins and rolling green hills dotted with sheep, Ireland is a country steeped in beauty, where history is alive and tradition is evident in every encounter. Visit lively pubs in Dublin, head to a summer festival in the Irish countryside or cruise out to the Dingle Peninsula and discover why this land brings its denizens such luck.

### *Dublin*

Dublin is a major European center, known for its youthful culture, rich history, vibrant pubs and cosmopolitan restaurants. With its stunning nearby countryside, it is an inviting and friendly city that serves as an excellent place to start or finish your European journey.

### *Cork (Southwest)*

Cork is the largest county in Ireland, with everything to offer from lively Cork City with its charming footbridges, to the village of Blarney known for its famous castle, to the town of Ballycotton with an expansive port and rugged cliff views. Cork offers golden beaches, beautiful rolling green hills and a vibrant culture in its main city.

### *Kerry (Southwest)*

One of the most picturesque parts of Ireland, county Kerry is just breathtaking. Drive through rural sheep-dotted landscapes and endless mountains amidst unexpected wildlife, majestic lakes and imposing coastline views. The towns and villages of Killarney, Kenmare and Dingle, just to name a few, are welcoming, friendly and offer an authentic taste of small-town Ireland. You can see most of the “must-see” destinations on the Ring of Kerry Drive along N70/71.

### *Clare (West)*

Perched on the west coast, between the raw genuine beauty of Galway and the idyllic landscape of county Kerry, lies charming County Clare. Among miniature colorful villages is such gorgeous scenery as the renowned Cliffs of Moher and the unique limestone caverns of the Burren region. We recommend staying in either Galway or County Kerry and then taking a scenic day trip.

### *Galway (West)*

A juxtaposition of the rough, untrampled natural beauty of Connemara Mountain and the bustling thriving energy of the city of Galway makes this an essential stop on any tour of Ireland. Located on the island’s west coast, county Galway is where old Gaelic Ireland retains its distinct and genuine character. You will encounter some of the friendliest locals whether you’re driving through wild bog landscape amidst a tiny village of thatched roof houses or having your fourth pint with a University student in town...it’s the best of both worlds. For an ideal stay, make your base the city itself.

### *Donegal (North)*

As you go northwest in Ireland, Gaelic beauty and culture becomes even more dramatic. The rough coastline of Donegal hosts spectacular wildlife, beaches, and fishing ports, and is infused with centuries of history and folklore. Drive through the villages and towns of the Gaeltacht (Gaelic) region to appreciate this area's authenticity.

## **Italy**

A country that celebrates pleasure like no other, Italy is one of the planet's great travel destinations. A treasure trove of art and timeless history with world-famous cuisine and style, Italy stimulates the senses with its many charms. From the ancient marble ruins of Rome and the architectural wonders of Florence to the romantic waterways of Venice and the volcanic action on Sicily, Italy offers adventures of every color and flavor. Visit Tuscany for picturesque farmland and medieval villages, head to Lake Como for breathtaking scenery or travel to the jaw-dropping city of Positano for postcard-perfect views of the Mediterranean Sea.

### *Rome*

Rome's magic is indeed alluring and enduring. It is an authentically Italian city harboring not just some of the most famous and historical sites and monuments, but terrific cafés, beautiful piazzas, vibrant personalities, and of course, excellent shopping. When visiting Rome, take the time to indulge in these smaller treasures and you'll understand why it is still one of the great capitals of Europe.

### *Venice*

Regardless of the hordes of tourists and the higher than normal prices (relative to Italy) of this enchanting city, words or images cannot prepare you for the unique and unforgettable experience Venice offers. Whether you indulge in culture and art, history, romance and nightlife, it will be tainted with an intriguing, enduring and exotic flavor that cannot properly be described. By foot and gondola you can explore glorious landmarks, romantic canals and exciting markets. In a pinch and if you must, you can explore Venice as a day trip from Rome.

### *Milan*

Although a historic city with centuries of war and dynastic influence, is today mainly a modern commercial hub and is best suited as a quick stopover on the way to somewhere more inspiring and interesting. For a day or so, though, it's worth exploring the city's ancient churches, monuments and museums as well as browsing through the countless shops and cafés. As the center of international fashion and style, Milan has a cutting edge cosmopolitan flair, attested to by its hip bars, nightclubs and cafés. At the tourist office, pick up a copy of the free city entertainment guide, Milano Mese, for the latest happenings.

### *Pisa*

Known around the world for its famous leaning tower, Pisa is an exciting Italian city that offers much more than one wonky building. A university town, Pisa offers a host of artistic and

architectural treats as well as a thriving pedestrian culture and fabulous cuisine. With a small city center, Pisa is easy to explore on foot. Soak up the sights as you wander through charming streets from the train station Campo dei Miracoli, where you'll find the legendary leaning tower and a whole collection of historic buildings.

### *Florence*

Once the center of Renaissance art and culture, today Florence remains an intriguing and alluring city. Although inundated with tourists, you can still immerse yourself in its rich history and Italian culture. Don't miss the surrounding golden countryside which tempts you with the promise of a true Tuscan experience.



Village of Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre, Italy © Dan Breckwoldt

### *La Spezia*

La Spezia is a big, bustling Italian city located along the gorgeous coastline of the Gulf of La Spezia between Pisa and Genoa. Situated between the mountains and the sea, La Spezia is an important military center with stately buildings, easy-to-navigate streets and numerous museums. Ideal for launching trips into the Cinque Terre region, this large, modern city has a pleasant, mild climate and offers plenty of traveler conveniences and transportation connections.

### *Italian Riviera*

Sun yourself and soak up the good life on the Italian Riviera, the gorgeous strip of coastline between the French border and Capo Corvo near the entrance to Tuscany. Centered by the city of Genoa, this area offers charming old fishing ports, a mild Mediterranean climate and a beautiful seaside landscape that has attracted travelers for centuries. Popular towns on the Italian Riviera include Portofino, Lerici and the five villages of the Cinque Terre.

### *Italian Alps*

Soaring high above the continental plane, the Italian Alps provide a majestic setting to explore with snow-capped peaks, fertile valleys and plenty of hiking and options for outdoor activities. Experience alpine culture with Italian flair in the regions of South Tyrol and Trentino, a cosmopolitan area where the populace speaks largely German. Take a day trip into the Dolomites Mountains, plan for a longer hiking excursion or just sit back, relax and enjoy the incredible mountain views.

## **Latvia**

With an air of mystery and the atmosphere of an undiscovered gem, the Baltic country of Latvia is bursting away from its cold reputation with a newfound passion that enchants the modern traveler. From the cobblestone streets and art nouveau edifices of Riga to the magnificent castles of Siguida and the beach resorts on the coast of the beautiful blue Baltic Sea, Latvia offers an experience of Europe unlike any other. Enjoy an afternoon at a beer garden, head to the pine trees of Gauja National Park or party until dawn in the wild rock and roll clubs of Liepaga.

### *Riga*

Riga is a genuinely beautiful old capital that is just waking up and reinventing itself. With one of the finest collections of Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) buildings anywhere in the world, Riga is a feast for the eyes and exhilarating to explore on foot. The movement's eclecticism shows in ornate tiled entrances, smooth-faced giant modern gargoyles, and stained glass in intricately webbed ironwork. Along these museum-like streets, you'll find a mix of the old and the new, from head-scarved women selling bunches of flowers to younger urbanites congregating among the beer terraces, cafés and late-night clubs. Smart and cosmopolitan, Riga is quickly working to regain its 1930s reputation as the "Paris of the Baltics."

## **Lithuania**

Nestled in the heart of Northern Europe with a small slice of coastline on the Baltic Sea, the country of Lithuania is a land of folklore and forests with a colorful history. From magical lakes set into a serene landscape to exciting nightlife in destinations like Palanga and the capital city of Vilnius, Lithuania offers an experience of contrasts between artistic communities and natural masterpieces. Go boating on the lakes of Aukstaitija National Park and pick fresh berries in the forest, hit the sand dunes of the Curonian Spit or visit the Hill of Crosses, a uniquely Lithuanian attraction.

## Netherlands

A low-lying land famous for progressive attitudes and tolerance for alternative lifestyles, the Netherlands is a densely packed country full of windmills, tulips, bikes and dykes. Resting below sea level, this beautiful destination is home to a shimmering coastline, lovely lakes and fields of flowers. Its capital city, Amsterdam, is well known for its relaxed policy on drugs and prostitution. However this amazing metropolis also offers scenic canals, incredible art museums and a fascinating history. Along with charming towns like Haarlem and Delft, the Dutch homeland is one that appeals to almost everyone.

### *Amsterdam*

Its splendid canals, bridges and architecture envelop the city with charm and lend to its rich artistic history and culture. Its bars, cafés, galleries and numerous forms of entertainment also make this one of the best party towns.

With a relatively small urban base it is easily explored, especially if you rent a bike and take advantage of the well maintained bike paths to the outskirts of the city. Most attractions, museums and hotspots are within walking distance of Centraal Station.



Amsterdam Channel, Netherlands © Max Semyak

## Norway

Known for spectacular fjords, a progressive way of life and interesting Viking history, the Scandinavian country of Norway is a thrilling destination that attracts travelers searching for unspoiled nature. With long sea inlets flanked by tall mountains and surrounded by rugged wilderness, this ancient land offers a peaceful setting for exploring breathtaking natural scenery. Norway's scenic but severe environment is also home to exciting cities such as Oslo, Trondheim and Bergen, all beautiful destinations in their own right. Head out for a fjord cruise, travel to the Lofoten Islands to look for Orca whales or just get cozy next to a fireplace and enjoy the Nordic way of life.

### *Oslo*

Surrounded by mountains and comprised of beautiful parks, wide streets and pretty harbors, the capital of Norway is a pleasant stop if you're traveling through Scandinavia. A combination of medieval, 19th century neoclassical and 20th century contemporary architecture lends to the developing character of this ancient city. With increasing cultural and nightlife activities, and picturesque scenery, especially in the nearby pastoral communities, it is a pleasant and often interesting stop.

## Poland

After struggling through a rough 20th century marred by occupation and war, Poland has come back with full force and gained acceptance into the European Union. The main cities of Warsaw and Krakow are rife with regal history and modern culture. There is also a great deal for the outdoorsy types around the awe-inspiring glazed peaks of the Tatra Mountains. However, the very best reason to visit Poland may be its national drink, vodka, which is made in a wide assortment of fruity flavors.

### *Kraków*

Kraków is the most visited city in Poland and for good reasons. Boasting the largest medieval square in all of Europe, the old town shines with historic majesty and a nightlife that pumps into the morning hours. Spared from the destruction of World War II, you may notice the authentic old world feel. A visit to the city is incomplete without a walk around the infamous Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, once home to 65,000 Jewish residents and now less than 200. Get a taste for Polish cuisine with borsch (soup made from beets) and pierogis (like raviolis) - those with high cholesterol beware!

## Portugal

From the gorgeous resort towns on the Algarve coast to the quiet, castle-laden countryside, Portugal is a stunning destination where much of Europe comes to relax. Sharing the Iberian Peninsula with Spain, this romantic country has a long, meandering coastline that is full of dramatic dune-covered beaches and enchanting inlets. Cities like the capital of Lisbon and the northern town of Porto offer cobblestone streets and café culture, with river views and stately cathedrals. Travelers head to the sunny beaches of Sagres, the university town of Braga and the Roman ruins near Colmbra for a vacation than defies definition.

## *Lisbon*

The capital of Portugal, Lisbon is one of the few major European cities that face the Atlantic Ocean, and the influence of maritime culture is evident throughout the metropolis. With a laid-back atmosphere, meandering alleyways and pretty white buildings topped with red-orange roof tiles, Lisbon is a charming destination. The city also boasts one of the best climates in Europe, with warm summers and mild winters attracting tourists year-round. Explore the steep streets and historic neighborhoods that climb from the banks of the Tejo River, visit the top of the Cristo Rei statue for stunning views of the city, or simply relax in one of Lisbon's many green spaces and parks.

## **Romania**

As Romania struggles to leave its oppressive Communist past behind and enter the European Union, the country is at once seeped in tradition and cloaked in modernity. Outside of bustling Bucharest, cars share the road with horse-drawn carts toting freshly farmed cabbage. From the sensory delights of cheap opera and symphony to the castles of Transylvania, home of the legendary Vlad Tepes (model for Bram Stoker's "Dracula"), and the painted monasteries of Bucovina, Romania has much to offer the adventurous tourist.

## *Bucharest*

Romania's rather bleak, grey capital is easily bypassed by those literally in search of greener pastures, but its rich history and fascinating museums make it worth, at the very least, a brief visit.

## *Brasov*

The best views of this postcard-worthy town are from the top of Mt. Tampa (a one hour hike or quick cable car ride from the center), although the ancient White and Black Towers across town strive to compete. From September to May, opera and orchestra prices can be had at reasonable prices – pick up a schedule or free city map at the helpful tourist office, housed in the Country History Museum in the central square. Be sure to make the 45-minute excursion to neighboring Bran to view the dramatic "Dracula's Castle," and stop in Rashnov to view an impressive, partially reconstructed castle along the way.

## **Scotland**

Indeed one of the most picturesque countries you'll ever visit, it is by no means an extension of England. Scotland is known for its beautiful highlands, castles, clans and offers a variety of outdoor activities including rock climbing, white water rafting and even snowboarding in the winter. The Highlands are a must see, as are the many lochs, castles and former battle field sites that adorn Scotland's countryside. Don't miss Inverness, Fort William, Loch Ness, Aberdeen, the Isle of Skye, and Eilean Donan Castle. There are a host of great tour companies that can get you around Scotland without making a dent in your budget.



Urquhart Castle at Loch Ness, Scotland © TT

### *Edinburgh*

Edinburgh quite gracefully and deservedly holds its title as the capital of Scotland. Named after old King Edwin of the 12th century, this now cosmopolitan city is a juxtaposition of a youthful artistic culture against a backdrop of hundreds of historical architectural landmarks sitting on the base of the magnificent Firth of Forth. It is during the month of August that the brilliance of Scotland's artistic talent shines when the Edinburgh Festival/Fringe Festival takes hold of the city. Thousands of tourists flock to Edinburgh to experience this unique and vibrant community.

### *Glasgow*

Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland. More energetic, down to earth and inviting than its sister city, Edinburgh, Glasgow is a growing urban center that depicts Scottish culture, charm, and wit. As in Edinburgh, there exists a lively artistic community, exhibited in the many festivals it hosts. With interesting gothic architecture, a developing city center and proximity to the gorgeous Highlands, you won't be disappointed if you stop in for some authentic Scottish hospitality.

### *Inverness*

Inverness is the capital of the Highlands and most famous for the legends of the Loch Ness Monster and the lesser known Big Lassy (you'll find out boys). There is a ton on offer here including stunning scenery, lots of lochs and glens, castles and the Culloden Battlefield.

### *Isle of Skye*

A trip to the Isle of Skye, in the Highlands of Scotland, is highly recommended. Most hostels are located in Kyleakin and only a few minutes' walk from the ferry drop off. By day you can rent a bike, hike, take a nature boat tour or explore other parts of the island. At night, join or start a pub crawl - there are only a few to imbibe at.

## **Slovenia**

Home to snow-covered mountains, historic castles and expansive fields covered with flowers and vineyards, Slovenia delivers the diversity of a nation five times its size. A broad-cultured and budget-minded country, Slovenia is a European playground full of green pastures and deep, dark forests. The spectacular Alpine Lake Bohinj is perfect for rest and recreation, while hikers will adore the valley of Logarska Dolina, encircled by jagged mountain peaks. Slovenia also offers urban attractions, including the gemstone town of Ptuj and the charming historic village of Bogojina.

### *Ljubljana*

In Ljubljana, travelers can experience the small town "feel" while taking advantage of this capital city's resources, history and culture. Being centrally located in Slovenia it makes for a good base to explore the country's mountains, lakes and caves. Partially on the Mediterranean and linking central Europe to the Balkans, a mix of Italian and Austro-Hungarian influences abound here and around other parts of Slovenia.

## **Slovakia**

From vast national parks to ancient castles, mountain villages to folk museums, Slovakia offers a Central European experience of old world charm and natural splendor. Slovakia's capital city of Bratislava boasts riverside cafes and a stimulating nightlife scene, along with an authentic Old Town neighborhood littered with restaurants and bars down winding cobblestone streets. Further abroad, you'll find a countryside strewn with towering fortresses, medieval villages and rugged mountain peaks. With a tradition of folk culture alive on its city streets and country lanes, Slovakia is an intriguing destination that appeals to the intrepid adventurer.

### *Bratislava*

From historic neighborhoods and churches to hilltop castle and Communist-era architecture, Bratislava offers many interesting sites to discover. The capital of Slovakia and a beacon of Central Europe, Bratislava features a lovely medieval old town, which has recently been renovated, with narrow streets that wind through a maze of beautiful buildings, connecting to two main squares. Set on the Danube River, Bratislava is also home to an impressive castle set atop a hill, from which you can see all the way to Austria and Hungary on a clear day.

## Spain

With a relaxed lifestyle, wild nightlife and beautiful sandy beaches, Spain is an intriguing country with great cultural and geographic diversity. Known as a prime destination for sunny beach holidays, Spain offers a wealth of exciting attractions, from fresh regional cuisine and historic coastal cities to world-renowned festivals and celebrations like the tomato-tossing celebration La Tomatina. Home to thrilling metropolises like Madrid and Barcelona as well as Moorish-influenced cities such as Cordoba, Granada and Seville, Spain offers something for travelers of every persuasion.



Plaza de Espana in Seville, Spain © Duncan Walker

### *San Sebastian*

Watch your worries float away on the waves at San Sebastian, a vacation destination on the northeast coast of Spain that has long called travelers to its sandy shores. With two glorious beaches separated by an easily climbable mountain dotted with ruins, this cozy little city offers beach time as well as authentic Spanish culture, fresh seafood restaurants, pinchos bars (bars that serve snacks similar to tapas) and traditional buildings. Visit a historic church, stroll the narrow streets or head out to surf in this amazing coastal town.

### *Madrid*

Madrid is somewhat daunting and not so pretty at first, but after a couple of days in this bustling city, you will understand why it is the capital of Spain. Large and vibrant with an equally energetic population, Madrid's cafés, bars and nightclubs are never ending... it's almost

exhausting. There are a number of parks, monuments and museums, including the must-see Prado, to occupy your days. Take your time and explore the cities restaurants, shops, markets and historic sites.

### *Valencia*

Famous as the birthplace of Paella, Valencia is found on the sunny Mediterranean coast of Spain and is the third-largest city in the country. Originally founded by the Romans, Valencia has numerous ancient monuments, natural scenery and a warm climate that makes it a popular destination year-round. Visitors love the city's amazing cathedral, seasonal festivals and the new entertainment complex known as the City of Arts and Sciences. With throbbing nightlife and a charming old town area, Valencia is well worth a stop.

### *Barcelona*

Delightfully eccentric, enthusiastically modern and tirelessly festive, is an essential stop on any European tour. Reborn since the demise of Spanish dictator, Franco, Barcelona's development was spurred when it hosted the 1992 Olympics. Since then, it has regained a spot as one of Europe's most beautiful, interesting and cutting-edge cities. Montuïc overlooks the city, situated on the hill is beautiful castle, many museums, the "Olympic Ring" and various sports facilities that supported the events. Check out La Barceloneta, the waterfront at the bottom of Las Ramblas.

## **Sweden**

The largest Scandinavian country, Sweden is a peaceful post-industrial society with one of the highest standards of living in the world. A land of immense natural beauty, travelers flock to Sweden for the incredible waters, hiking trails and ski slopes, along with exciting modern metropoli including the island city of Stockholm. Sparse and scenic, the vast countryside of Sweden lures campers, kayakers and other outdoor enthusiasts who come to experience solitude and epic beauty in a land largely untouched by the modern world.

### *Stockholm*

Built on islands amidst Lake Mälaren and stretching into the Baltic Sea, Stockholm is one of Europe's most beautiful cities. A blend of well preserved medieval structures and contemporary architecture makes it a city that offers a little bit of everything. There are buses, ferries, subways and bridges that link the different islands, but walking or bicycling around is the best way to get a true feel of this unique coastal city. With its many galleries, bars, cafés and clubs, Stockholm accommodates its large young, liberal and artistic population. Purchase a Stockholm Card for unlimited access to public transport and free/discounted entry to many attractions.

## **Switzerland**

An enchanting fairy tale land of immense Alpine wonders, cozy chalets with flower-filled windows and heart-pounding extreme sports adventures, Switzerland is a mecca for travelers who want to observe and explore incredible mountain scenery. Clean and classic big cities like

Geneva and Zurich offer global appeal, while smaller destinations like Interlaken and Bern attract the backpacker crowd with their outdoor adventures. Home to swans and glassy glacial rivers, picturesque Lucerne is a must-see, and an excellent jump-off point to the nearby Jungfrau Alpine region as well.



The Matterhorn, Switzerland © Leroy Julien

### *Zurich*

Known as a major financial center, Zurich has more to offer than just bank accounts, businessmen and a stock exchange. Sitting on the Limmat River with a backdrop of the magnificent Swiss Alps, it is a picturesque city that, thanks to its significant wealth and central geographical location, is alive with culture and lots to do. Enjoy a more traditional Swiss atmosphere in Neiderdorf, the ancient medieval section of the city, complete with narrow cobblestones streets and charming eateries. But also indulge in the very cosmopolitan vibe exhibited throughout the entire city from varied personalities, art exhibits, bars and a hyped club scene.

### *Lucerne*

Swans like to call Lucerne home, and it's easy to understand why. Set beside a gorgeous (and freezing cold) glacial lake, this Swiss village has mountain views, a restored medieval covered bridge and pretty flower-covered windowsills everywhere. Hike into the surrounding mountains, rent a paddleboat on the lake or wander the winding streets. Lucerne is a great place to try traditional Swiss cuisine like raclette or fondue – and save your extra breadcrumbs for the swans.

### *Interlaken*

The Swiss version of Austria's Innsbruck, Interlaken is, in a word, idyllic. Set in the Bernese Oberland, it is surrounded by snow capped mountains, blue lakes, cow bells, swiss chalets and of course lots of tourists, which should by no means be a deterrent. Visitors can easily avoid each other in this vast spectacular landscape for the couple of days you may spend here. Interlaken is the largest and central town of the region.

### *Berne*

The capital of Switzerland, Berne is a unique village nestled along a scenic curve of the Aare River. Berne is made for taking pictures and features several miles of arcaded walkways and narrow streets decorated with clock towers and fountains. Take an easy walking tour, head down to the river and find a tree swing or visit the city's namesake in the bear pits. Enjoy beautiful views and a clean, crisp city full of charm when you visit Berne.

### *Lauterbrunnen*

Fields of wildflowers, snow-capped mountains and fresh mountain air await you in Lauterbrunnen, a picturesque Swiss village with awe-inspiring scenery and a friendly populace. Waterfalls abound in this region, and you can wander amongst the sheer mountain slopes to hunt them down for a morning excursion or afternoon picnic. Set in one of the Alps' deepest valleys, Lauterbrunnen offers spectacular scenery, ice-cold rivers and forests out of a fairy tale.

### *Swiss Alps*

For sheer beauty and breath-taking magnitude, the Swiss Alps have no equal in Europe. Home to a unique mountain culture that transcends national borders, the Swiss Alps offer an unparalleled alpine experience of glorious views, interesting hamlets and incredible snow covered peaks. Hike in the summer, ski during the winter and try to choose your favorite Swiss village. Also known as the Central Alps, the Swiss Alps are topped by the peak Monte Rosa (15,203 feet).

## **Wales**

With a vibrant coastal landscape dotted with castles, spa towns and hiking trails, the dynamic country of Wales is a fascinating destination for travelers in search of outdoor adventures, historical pursuits and a spirited populace. Part of the United Kingdom that shares the island of Great Britain with England and Scotland, the western country of Wales offers the traveler a range of enticing attractions, from the cozy local pubs of Cardiff and the rugged hills of Brecon Beacons, to the technological charms of Machynlleth and the windswept cliffs and gorgeous beaches of the Gower Peninsula.

# Chapter 8. Travel Tips



Photo © Peter Gustafson

You probably still have questions about traveling to Europe. What type of luggage is best? Do I need travel insurance? Will the language barrier be a problem? How will I stay in touch with family and friends back home, and how do I stay safe? No worries, we've got you covered.

## Types of Luggage

You've got the passport, the plane ticket and the travel plans – now you just have to decide how to carry your belongings around the Old World: backpack or suitcase? Each option has pros and cons – read below to decide which type of baggage is right for your travel style and trip.

### *Backpack*

Carrying everything you need to live right on your back is a sublime experience, and a large backpack is the traditional choice for world travelers who go beyond the borders where wheeled luggage can roll.

- *Pros:* You can cram a LOT into a backpack, and this travel option has the most “cool points” for sure. You'll feel like a jet-setting vagabond, ready to move on to a new city on a whim, and you'll have both arms free for shopping, validating train tickets and fending off gypsy children in train stations.
- *Cons:* With one main compartment, backpacks can make it difficult to stay organized and wrinkle-free. Heavy and bulky, backpacks can aggravate any existing back problems – and anyone that you hit in the face when you forget that you're wearing a 50-pound bag.

### *Types of Large Backpacks*

Large backpacks are the most popular travel option for young travelers heading to Europe. Brands like REI, Eagle Creek and Osprey are guaranteed for life. It's a good idea to shop for a backpack in a brick-and-mortar store so that you can try it on and make sure it fits your frame and is comfortable. Female travelers may want to consider a pack designed specifically for women. Here are some of our favorite large backpacks from reputable companies:

**REI Grand Tour** (\$199) – Available in both men’s and women’s models, this adjustable pack features a removable daypack, main-panel zipper for easy access and numerous compartments for organization.

**Osprey Porter 65** (\$129) – Light and clean, this 65” tall bag is ideal for travelers who like to keep things simple. It features foam-padded sidewalls to protect your stuff, lockable zippers and plenty of padded handles for easy carrying even when it’s not on your back.

**Deuter Quantam** (\$239-259) – Also available for men and women, this deluxe backpack is slim yet tall and features a detachable daypack. An extension collar lets you increase the pack’s capacity by 10 liters (for all those souvenirs) and the outside attachment rings are helpful for carrying wet items or shoes.



***Bakpak Dave Tip:***

Make sure try your backpack on fully packed and ready for travel before you leave for the airport. This might be obvious but I know travelers who did not do this and could not carry their load upon arrival.

### *Small Backpack*

Believe it or not, you *can* travel through Europe for a month or more with one carry-on size bag. You’ll be forced to downsize your toiletries and clothing, but rest assured there are plenty of laundromats on the continent for cleaning dirty clothes. Once you travel with a bag this size, you will never go back to lugging around a giant pack.

- *Pros:* Small backpacks are easiest to carry and deal with in planes, trains, buses and cars. You won’t have to check your bag on the flight, and you’ll be the envy of every traveler hauling around any other kind of bag.
- *Cons:* You’ll have little room for souvenirs, and precious travel time may be taken up doing laundry in random places with questionable machines (many hostels have laundry facilities and detergent supplies).

### *Rolling Suitcase*

With less travel cred than a backpack, suitcases with wheels are nevertheless an easy way to roll and more popular than ever in the backpacker circuit.

- *Pros:* Rectangular baggage makes it easy to keep your junk organized, and rolling your pile of travel gear is much easier than carrying it on your back.
- *Cons:* Wheels only work on hard, flat surfaces – and Europe is full of cobblestone streets and staircases. Plus, you may not feel as cool as all those bonafide backpackers with their straps and patches.

### *Convertible Rolling Backpack*

A hybrid of the rolling bag and backpack, this handy bag can be rolled on flat surfaces and carried comfortably on your back when the road gets rough.

- *Pros:* You'll be ready for any surface and any situation.
- *Cons:* Wheels on your backpack may not look cool, and having both wheels and straps in your luggage takes up space/weight that could be used for clothes and/or souvenirs.

### *Bags for your Baggage*

No matter which type of bag you choose to take on your European adventure, you'll find plenty of handy travel gear to help make packing a breeze:

Ziploc Freezer Bags – Ziploc bags take up very little space or weight in your luggage, come in several sizes and have a million uses, from carrying a wet bikini or bathing suit to separating picnic supplies to packing out trash. Generic brands don't cut it, and freezer-style bags are thicker than storage bags, so they'll last longer without ripping.

Toiletry Bags – If you plan on staying in hostels, a hanging toiletry bag is essential to keep your stuff off the ground in the shower and toilet area.

Compartment Bags – Shaped like a cube or rectangle, these bags are excellent with backpacks because they provide structure for your clothes and are fairly inexpensive.

Compression Bags – If you have too many clothes or are traveling during winter with added bulk, these plastic bags can be compressed into dense packages that create more space in your luggage.

## **Travel Insurance**

Do you need to purchase travel insurance for your trip to Europe? Some people always purchase travel insurance, while other people never buy it and never need it. And then there are the unlucky few that don't purchase travel insurance, and then wind up ruining their trip and losing big bucks because of some unforeseen disaster. Trip insurance covers travel snafus along with emergency medical expenses, and whether or not you should buy travel insurance depends not only on your appetite for risk, but on several other factors as well.

While purchasing travel insurance is a personal decision and Backpack Dave recommends it to all travelers, it's a particularly good idea to buy insurance IF:

- You have pre-existing medical conditions that could affect your trip
- You are purchasing a larger portion of your travel expenses up-front in the form of pre-paid transportation, tours and/or accommodation
- Your trip is worth \$5000 or more
- You are a natural-born worrier

- You are caring for a family member who is sick or in bad shape at home
- You're traveling to a third-world country where medical service is limited
- You are on an escorted tour – most companies require travel insurance

### *What does travel insurance include?*

Most travel insurance policies cover trip cancellation, trip interruption, lost baggage, trip delay, medical expenses and medical evacuation. The cost of travel insurance is based on your trip duration and your age, and policies can be surprisingly inexpensive for young travelers.

Purchase your travel insurance from a reputable third-party like [World Nomads](#), who specialize in backpacker insurance worldwide. If you purchase insurance directly from your travel supplier, make sure they use a third-party insurance provider and are not self-insured. Otherwise, if the travel supplier goes bankrupt, you'll be up a creek without any coverage.

*Please note:* all travel insurance policies differ; be sure to ask the exact coverage and limits of the policy you choose. Many policies also require an additional payment to cover you while participating in extreme sports like bungee jumping, skiing or white water rafting.

### *What does travel insurance cost?*

With [World Nomads](#), travel insurance for US residents for a 4-week worldwide coverage policy costs between \$100 (Standard) and \$140 (Explorer) options. If you are Canadian, it's about \$150Cn and if you are Australian, it's about A\$113 to A\$136. These are guidelines with other more expensive (and higher coverage) policies available.

## **Staying in Touch**

Make your mother happy and don't forget to stay in touch. While traveling through Europe, you'll probably want to contact friends and family back home to let them know that you're doing okay and to make them jealous of your trip with amazing photos and tales of adventure. You have several options for staying in touch, so choose the one that's best for you.

### *Phone*

Most smartphones these days have international calling capacity, though rates on different plans in different countries will vary wildly. Some smartphones have removable SIM cards that enable you to replace your card with one from overseas (Verizon phones can't do this). Call your phone company before leaving home to determine if this option will work for you, and don't forget to ask about texting, which can also be an inexpensive way of keeping in touch.

If you are planning on traveling in one country for several months, it can also be less expensive to buy a cheap phone and a pay-as-you-go plan while you're there.

Finally, payphones still exist in many parts of Europe (unlike say, Asia). You can purchase an international calling card from a tobacco store and call home on a public phone for relatively low rates.

## *Internet*

All over Europe you will find internet cafes as well as Wi-Fi hotspots for those who have iPads or other tablets. Most hostels now offer free or cheap internet via computers or Wi-Fi.

Internet cafes appear on many corners in big European cities; you can pop in and use the computers, paying only for the minutes that you need. Prices vary greatly depending on your destination, but many are relatively inexpensive, about 2-6 euro per hour. At these cafes you can also print boarding passes and such, play games and of course, update your Facebook page and other social media sites.

Wi-Fi hotspots appear at coffee shops, hotel lobbies, hostels and many other places. Providing free internet connection, these hotspots can be handy if you have an iPad or other tablet, or just want to use your smartphone without using up all your data.

## *Postcards*

Postcards are old-fashioned, can be a pain to fill out, and cost a ton to mail in many places, over \$1USD each. But people love receiving them – so send a few out to special people (like Grandma) who might not be online to see the incredible trip photos that you posted to Facebook. If you are the organized type, you can bring pre-printed address labels with you.

## **Safety**

Most adults are perfectly aware of standard safety measures – such as looking both ways before crossing the street – but sometimes it can be easy to slip into a vacation mindset and make mistakes that you wouldn't at home. In general, Europe is a safe destination, but there are some precautions to be made aware of, especially for those not used to travel in crowds or big cities.

## *Pickpockets*

By far, this is the biggest danger in Europe. You can beat the pickpockets 100% of the time by wearing a money belt or neck wallet. Never carry huge amounts of cash, but if you have to, don't carry all your money in one place. For example, stash some in your money belt, some in your backpack, some in your front pocket, etc. Your hostel or hotel may have a safe as well.

Be especially vigilant in train stations or in crowded spaces like markets where people are bumping into you. Pickpockets also sometimes prey on jetlagged tourists riding public transportation from the airport to the city, and if you are swarmed by a group of gypsy children in southern Europe, beware – there's a good chance they are trying to steal from you.

## *Alcohol*

Just like at home, drinking alcohol makes you less aware of your surroundings and more likely to act stupid. Never go out drinking or clubbing alone, and ladies should be vigilant about watching their beverage when they go out so that no one slips anything into it.

### *Rental Robbery*

If you are driving a rental car, don't leave all your belongings in plain sight. Hide electronic gear and lock your luggage in the trunk if possible. Never leave your passport or other valuables in your rental, and in general it's a good idea to carry your passport with you at all times.

### *Swimming*

Every year tourists die on beaches because they underestimate the waves and undertow. Even if you consider yourself a strong swimmer, pay attention to local warnings and when in doubt, ask a local for advice on where it is safe to swim. Stick to beaches with lifeguards and never swim alone.

### *Document Storage*

It's a good idea to have a copy of your passport, driver's license and important tickets tucked away in your backpack in case you lose your originals. You can also take advantage of the many online document storage sites that allow you to securely store documents and access them 24x7 via any computer.

## **Learning the Language**

Traveling to a place where you can't understand what anyone is saying is undoubtedly daunting. Decrease your insecurities and increase your chance for positive interaction by learning a bit of the local language.

Learn a LITTLE – At the VERY least, learn how to say “Hello,” “Thank you” and “Please” in the language of your destination. Making even the smallest effort can go a long way with locals. There are also numerous foreign language apps available for smartphones that make the language gap much smaller. Some of our favorites include:

Google Translate (Free; for iPhone & Android) – Type or speak a word into your phone and translate it into over 60 languages – your phone will speak the word back to you so that you know exactly how to pronounce it.

MindSnacks (Free; for iPhone) – Improve your vocabulary and conversational skills with this game-filled app, which makes learning a language fun.

World Nomads (Free; for iPhone) – Choose your language and get a free guide that includes conversational language lessons and over 200 basic travel phrases.

Learn a LOT – If you are truly interested in learning how to speak a foreign language, consider taking a class or series of classes before you go. If you are out of school, there are plenty of adult education courses that will do the trick. Serious students might also consider planning your trip around a foreign language course that takes place in your destination.