

THE EUROPE BOOK

A JOURNEY THROUGH
EVERY COUNTRY ON THE
CONTINENT

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INTRODUCING EUROPE



VISIONS OF EXTREME CONDITIONS, JAW-DROPPING SPECTACLES OR WILD WEST–STYLE ANTICS MAY NOT IMMEDIATELY FIGURE IN YOUR WARM AND FUZZY DAYDREAMS OF EUROPE, BUT PEEL BACK YOUR BLINKERS AND YOU’LL SEE THIS SUPERLATIVE CONTINENT IS SURPRISINGLY DIVERSE.

EUROPE WINS

Starting with the statistical stuff, there’s the world’s largest country (Russia), which boasts the deepest lake (Lake Baikal) and the longest river (Volga); there’s the largest island (Greenland); and the smallest country (the Vatican). Andorrans have the world’s highest life expectancy (83½ years), Moscow has more billionaires than any other city, and Scotland has the highest proportion of natural redheads. Slovenia has the oldest vine in the world, Armenia is home to the last Caucasian leopards and Malta’s megalithic temples are the oldest freestanding structures. And if that doesn’t impress you, there’s the astounding contribution that Europe has made to global culture and science.

PRIZES FOR CULTURE & SCIENCE

Ancient Greece and Rome were breeding grounds for great thinkers such as Socrates, Aristotle and Plato (from the former) and Ovid, Virgil and Cicero (from the latter). After a fairly bleak Middle Ages, art fancied a slice of that ancient magic, and thus the Renaissance was born. Spurred on by the arrival of Byzantine scholars fleeing Turk-conquered Constantinople, this boom in European art and architecture was also inspired by the first printing press, invented in Germany by Gutenberg circa 1450, which began to spurt out classical texts. Italy epitomises the era with Brunelleschi’s cathedral dome in Florence and Michelangelo’s perfectly sculpted *David*.

Around the same time, Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus made a breakthrough, rocking religion with proof that the earth revolved around the sun.

Hot on his heels, Galileo Galilei invented the telescope in Italy and started to map planets. In the following centuries, Englishman Sir Isaac Newton and German Albert Einstein crafted theories of gravity and relativity, which revolutionised mathematics and physics. In the 18th century, the British-born Industrial Revolution thrust the mechanisation of industry and improved transport networks upon Europe and beyond. As most Europeans came to grips with technology, others worked on the human body. Frenchman Louis Pasteur devised medical microbiology in the 19th century with German Robert Koch, studying germs and producing vaccines, including one for rabies. In the 20th century a Scottish research scientist, Sir Alexander Fleming, cultivated penicillin.

Culturally things had hardly slowed down. The roll call of European literary, musical and artistic protagonists is remarkable – ‘Picasso, Monet, Renoir, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, Hardy, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Keats, Shakespeare...’ barely scratches the surface.

NOT JUST A CLASS NERD

For all the eye-popping gifts Europe has bestowed upon the world, there are smaller sources of pride: Venice gave the world spectacles; Switzerland spawned absinthe and the World Wide Web (not simultaneously); Hungary produced the ballpoint pen, the Rubik’s cube and discovered vitamin C. But Europe’s not just a grade-A student – it’s also great fun.

Different national identities, languages, cuisines, traditions and histories sit snugly side by side. Where else might you attend a Big Nose Championship, a



Wife-Carrying Competition or the Air Guitar World Championship? Where else would you opt to jump in and out of freezing water before being beaten by birch twigs, celebrate the summer solstice in a prehistoric stone circle, or be able to choose between sweltering beaches, semidesert, permafrost, glaciers, volcanoes, hot springs and the Arctic? Europe is the place. It's also where, in some parts, drinking your body weight in beer is a national obsession, the range of cuisines is mouthwateringly delicious, natural beauty and wildlife are satisfyingly accessible, and people believe in fairies.

IN THE BEGINNING

But let's go back to the beginning. The birth of Europe can be traced to the human settlers who came to the peninsula between the ice ages or, more intriguingly, to the legend of Europa. The mother of Minos and Minoan civilisation, this virginal princess was seduced by Zeus in his disguise as a pure white bull (each to their own), and then swept off to the shores of Crete. Thus Europa left her native Phoenicia (now south Lebanon) to make her home in ancient Greece, and the continent that now bears her name was born.

It took a while for her moniker to catch on. For a long time the area was known as Christendom; since the Romans adopted it in AD 313, Christianity was, and continues to be, Europe's major religion. This label was only dropped during the 18th century when the Enlightenment's preference for logic over religious belief led many writers, including Rousseau and Voltaire, to adopt the more neutral term, Europe.

WHERE NOW?

At its eastern limits, Europe is generally accepted as meeting Asia at the Ural Mountains (for this book we've included the whole of Russia). To the south, some geographers cut Europe off at the Black Sea and the Bosphorus, but political and cultural common ground make a more interesting border below Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. On the other flanks, the Atlantic and Mediterranean split Europe from the Americas and Africa.

Internally, Europe's borders have merged and diverged over the years. Throughout history, wars and ideologies have created empires and dynasties, unions and alliances. It is hard to believe that less than a lifetime ago the continent was a bloody battleground at war with itself and the world. Or that a physical and symbolic wedge such as the Iron Curtain really bisected Europe, separating East from West. Today the focus is on coalition, expressed by many countries' eagerness to join the European Union. And yet not all wish to accede, and so the borders within this peninsula continue to shift.

There's no doubt Europe is an awe-inspiringly rich place, with global achievements, a fascinating history and plenty to titillate. For any globetrotter, it's considered a must-see, a place to be 'done' at least once. But it's rather like an onion – its multiple layers make it simply impossible to digest in one bite. More temptingly (and with less tears), it's an endless pass-the-parcel just begging to be unwrapped time and time again, as magical and exciting as you'd expect from the home of Father Christmas.

TIMELINE

850,000–700,000 BC

Humanoid settlers arrive in the European peninsula.



1450 BC

Santorini suffers the largest volcanic eruption on record, prompting the demise of the Minoan civilisation.



776 BC

Greece hosts the first Olympic Games.



753 BC

Rome is founded by the legendary Romulus, son of Mars (god of war) and raised by a she-wolf.



508 BC

Ancient Athens introduces democracy.



AD 301

Armenia is the first country to adopt Christianity.



476

The Roman Empire falls.



800

Charlemagne is crowned Holy Roman Emperor, taking charge of Western Europe.



1096

The Crusades are launched to wrestle the Holy Land from Islamic control.



1278

The beginning of Hapsburg reign, for six centuries one of the most powerful dynasties in Europe.



1348

The Black Death sweeps across Europe, killing over a third of the population.



1431

Joan of Arc is burnt at the stake for heresy.



1453

The Ottoman Turks take Istanbul and quash the Byzantine Empire.



1508–12

Renaissance artist Michelangelo paints the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



1517

Martin Luther publishes *The 95 Theses*, kick-starting the Reformation.



1531

Henry VIII dumps the Catholic Church after it refuses to nullify his marriage (the first of six), and creates the Protestant Church of England.



1543

Nicolaus Copernicus asserts that the earth revolves around the sun.



1605

Guy Fawkes' plot to blow up the English Houses of Parliament is foiled on 5 November.



1784

Immanuel Kant writes 'Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?' for a Berlin newspaper.



1789

The storming of the Bastille on 14 July kicks off the French Revolution.



1815

The battle of Waterloo is the nail in the coffin for Napoleon's European domination.



1899

Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* outlines his first map of the human psyche.



1916

Over a million lives are lost during World War I's bloodiest battle at the Somme.



1917

The Russian Revolution sounds a death knell for the tsars and lays the groundwork for the Soviet Union.



1939

Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland sparks World War II.



1944

The D-day landings herald the liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation.



1989

The Berlin Wall crashes down amid frenzied celebrations; the Soviet Union follows suit two years later.



1992

The Maastricht Treaty creates the European Union.



1997

Princess Diana's death in a car crash prompts an unprecedented global outpouring of grief.



2002

The euro is introduced in 12 European member states.



2004

Madrid's transport network is struck by terrorists – three days later a general election unseats the People's Party, who had taken Spain into the Iraq War.



2012

London hosts the Olympic Games.



EUROPE AT A GLANCE



⌘ ELIZABETHAN OPERATICS AT VIENNA'S STAATSOOPER



⌘ MONTE PELMO MAKES A PRETTY ITALIAN PICTURE IN THE DOLOMITES



⌘ STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN AT THE VATICAN

POPULATION 817.2 MILLION

AREA 23.1 MILLION SQ KM

COUNTRIES 52
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES 40

SMALLEST COUNTRIES

Yes, grand things really do come in small packages – the Vatican is the smallest country in the world, followed by Monaco. Whether it's popes or playboys, no-one can question the influence that these countries have on the international stage.

LARGEST COUNTRY

From one extreme to another – at 17 million square kilometres Russia is the largest country in the world.

MUSICAL HIGH NOTE

Famous for its sensational sounds, Vienna's Staatsoper is the place to hear classical music and opera in Europe.

BEST BITE

If your smile needs a little tweak, thank Liechtenstein for being the world's largest exporter of dentures.

BALMIEST BEACH-HOPPING

With 1400 islands, of which only 170 are inhabited, sandy paradise is only a boat ride away in the Greek Islands.

SPOOKIEST SPOT

For serious shivers, Transylvania wins fangs down with blood-sucking vampires, werewolves and Count Dracula himself – make sure you don't forget your garlic!

PRETTIEST PICTURE

Thanks to mouthwatering art, beautiful buildings and a sexy populace, Italy is unquestionably the best-looking country in Europe.

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

With towering twin peaks, one 5642 metres and the other 5621 metres, Russia's Mount Elbrus is the highest mountain in Europe.

BEST UNDERWATER ACTION

Caves, tunnels, reefs, genuine wrecks, a scuppered tugboat and marvellous marine life make Malta and Gozo's dive spots the best in Europe.

NOISIEST COUNTRY

After Japan, Spain is the noisiest country in the world. A quarter of all Spaniards are exposed to more than the 65 decibels deemed acceptable by the World Health Organization. Ssssh...

TALLEST GENE POOL

For tall, blonde and handsome look no further than the Netherlands, where the average height for a man is 1.8 metres.

BRAVEST MENU CHOICE

Hákarl (rotten shark meat) served with a welcome shot of potent *brennivín* (schnapps) is one of Iceland's more curious snacks, and a bold choice in any language.

LONGEST RIVER

Europe's longest river, the Volga, flows a mighty 3700 kilometres from the Valdai Hills, northwest of Moscow, south to the Caspian Sea.

MOST MULTICULTURAL CITY

With over 300 languages spoken every day in London, the English capital buzzes with multiculturalism.

MOST UNASSUMING NATURAL BEAUTY

According to local legend, when God was creating the world he saved the best bits for Georgia. With snowcapped mountains, raging rivers, lush fauna and a medley of national parks, who's to argue?