Europe on a Shoestring

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First-Time Europe

This combo of major league countries, such as France and Germany, and left-field destinations like Slovenia and Albania, provides an irresistible mix of world-famous sights and unforgettable experiences for the European novice.

Ease into the first two weeks by concentrating on Ireland and Great Britain. The atmosphere of a Dublin bar provides the perfect introduction, followed by a few days exploring the city’s museums and literary haunts. It costs nothing to walk across the Unesco-listed Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland, which leaves more money to enjoy your next stop: London. The city is pricey, but focus on the free museums and royal parks and you’re sure to stay on budget. Travel west to marvel at Stonehenge and wander the historic streets of Oxford and Bath.

Return to London to board the Eurostar for the next couple of weeks hopping between some of the continent’s iconic northern metropolises. In Paris you will be dazzled by the Louvre, Eiffel Tower and Versailles. Check out more classic art, plus those cafes, in enchanting Amsterdam.
Get a taste of Scandinavia in Copenhagen, the coolest kid of the Nordic bloc. And unleash your inner party animal in Berlin where you can also see the remains of the wall.

Go through the former Iron Curtain to the gorgeous old Polish royal capital of Kraków, which was miraculously spared destruction in WWII. If you thought that was stunning wait till you see the architectural glories of Prague. Continue on to Budapest, where you can freshen up at the thermal baths and enjoy numerous cafes and bars, followed by Slovenia’s eco-friendly capital Ljubljana.

The Venetian-style seaside resort of Piran is a good starting point for a journey down the scenic Dalmatian Coast via Split and Dubrovnik both of which have ancient ruins to explore. End up way off the beaten track in Albania where you can sail on a ferry across beguiling Lake Koman and relax at a campsite by the beach in Drymades on the Albanian Riviera.

Cruise across the Adriatic on one of the ferry services to Italy, where your final week’s pit stops include hauntingly beautiful Venice, the exquisite Renaissance time capsule of Florence, and the eternal city of Rome.
This trans-European journey kicks off in the east, a dynamic part of Europe yet where you’ll also encounter under-the-radar attractions. Then enjoy a more leisurely pace of life along the balmy Mediterranean coast as you continue west towards to the resorts of Spain and Portugal.

Begin in Russia’s capital Moscow, where the imposing Kremlin and adjacent Red Square are guaranteed to strike you with awe. Take an overnight train to St Petersburg, home to the magnificent art collection of the Hermitage and gorgeously restored imperial palaces. Another overnight train will whisk you to Latvia’s lovely art-nouveau capital Rīga where you can get a taste of the Baltic. If the weather’s fine consider a day trip to the chic beach resort of Jūrmala.

Poland’s capital Warsaw is a vibrant city that’s survived all that history could throw at it. Continue into Ukraine and spend a few days in Unesco World Heritage–listed Lviv which oozes Central European charm. Move on to Transylvania and sharpen your fangs at ‘Dracula’s’ castle in Bran. Romania’s dynamic capital Bucharest is next, with its good museums, parks and trendy cafes.

Sofia, Bulgaria’s relaxed capital is another recommended pitstop en route to beautiful, chaotic İstanbul: when you’ve had your fill of sightseeing you can relax in a hamam (Turkish bath).

Time to explore the ancient world staring with the Acropolis in Athens. You could easily spend a couple of weeks island hopping around Greece but with limited time focus on volcanic Santorini, then pick up the pace by flying to Spain for the final leg of your trip.

Admire the genius of Gaudí and wallow in cultural riches and glorious food in supercool Barcelona. Zip north to Basque seaside resort San Sebastián, with its delicious food scene, and then to the shimmering Museo Guggenheim in happening Bilbao. Turn south, making a beeline for energetic Madrid, for some of Europe’s best galleries and bars.

Head south to see the beautiful Moorish architecture of the Alhambra in Granada and the stunning Mezquita of Córdoba. Cross over to Portugal, where the fascinating capital Lisbon offers clattering bright-yellow trams, a lamplit old quarter and superb pastéis de nata (custard tarts) in the waterside Belém district.
THE WESTFJORDS (ICELAND)
Surround yourself in Iceland’s most dramatic landscapes, including jagged bird cliffs, broad multihued beaches, jaw-dropping coastal fjords, immense central mountains and tiny fishing villages embracing traditional ways of life. (p202)

INARI (FINLAND)
This tiny village is home to the wonderful Siida museum devoted to Sámi culture and environment, and a great base for hiking in the nearby Lemmenjoki National Park and Kevo Strict Nature Reserve. (p184)

ABISKO (SWEDEN)
A prime viewing spot for the Aurora Borealis, Abisko lies near the national park of the same name and is the start or endpoint for the spectacular 425km Kungsleden hiking trail. (p170)

DAUGAVPILS (LATVIA)
With a fairly well-preserved historical centre and a mighty fortress, Daugavpils has more recently been put on the tourist map by the new Rothko Centre devoted to contemporary art. (p832)

BREST (BELARUS)
This relatively prosperous and cosmopolitan border town has plenty of charm as well as the impressive 19th century Brest Fortress. Reconstruction has been rampant as Brest gears up for its millennial celebrations in 2019. (p775)
If you like pristine sand and wild sea, this area offers some of Europe’s most sublime beaches. Aljezur, Carrapateira and Odeceixe are all small, pretty towns with cheap lodging and eating options.

(p475)

A Coruña has a lovely beach, fabulous seafood and is the gateway to the Costa da Morte and Rías Altas. Inland, Lugo is surrounded by some of the world’s best preserved Roman walls.

(p416)

Use the lively capital of Chişinău as a base from which to explore this Central European country’s fledgling wine-tourism industry, delightfully unspoiled countryside and authentic village hospitality.

(p762)

An energetic, decadent boomtown of pastel-coloured neoclassical buildings, famous for its Potemkin Steps sweeping down to the Black Sea and Ukraine’s biggest commercial port.

(p769)
Andy Symington
Scandinavia, Germany & Benelux, Spain & Portugal  Andy hails from Australia but has been living in Spain for 15 years, where, to shatter a couple of stereotypes of the country, he can frequently be found huddled in sub-zero temperatures watching the tragically poor local football team. He has authored and co-authored many LP guidebooks and other publications on Spain and elsewhere; in his spare time he walks in the mountains, embarks on epic tapas trails, and co-bosses a rock bar.

Nicola Williams
France, Switzerland & Austria  British writer and editorial consultant Nicola Williams has lived in France and written about it for more than a decade. From her hillside house on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, it’s an easy hop to Paris where she has spent endless years revelling in its extraordinary art, urban architecture, boutique shopping and cuisine. Nicola has worked on numerous titles for Lonely Planet, including France and Discover France. Find Nicola on Twitter at @Tripalong.
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Dublin, Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

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Central & Eastern Europe  Mark Baker is an independent travel writer based in Prague. He’s lived in Central Europe for more than 20 years, working as a writer and editor for the Economist, Bloomberg and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and is an enthusiastic traveller throughout the region. He’s author of several Lonely Planet guides, including Prague & the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania, Romania & Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia. Tweet him @markbaker prague.

Tom Masters
Balkans  Tom has been travelling in Eastern Europe since the early ‘90s when, as a young teenager, he travelled by train across the newly liberated ‘Eastern Bloc’ with his mother, an experience not unlike a Graham Greene novel. Having studied Russian and lived in St Petersburg, and currently residing in the former East Berlin, Tom knows this part of the world like few others, though it constantly manages to surprise him. You can find more of his work at www.tommasters.net.

Korina Miller
Italy, Greece & Turkey  Korina grew up on Vancouver Island and has been exploring the globe independently since she was 16, visiting or living in 36 countries and picking up a degree in Communications and Canadian Studies and an MA in Migration Studies en route. Korina has written nearly 40 titles for Lonely Planet and also works as a children’s writing coach.

Simon Richmond
Great Britain & Ireland, Russia & the Baltic Coast, and Plan and Survival Guide chapters  UK-born writer and photographer Simon’s first taste of continental Europe was on a family holiday to Mallorca in the 1970s. Many subsequent Euro trips have followed including work assignments to, among other places, the Baltic States, Belgium and Portugal. Simon is co-author of Lonely Planet’s Russia and Trans-Siberian Railway guides. Read more about Simon’s travels at www.simonrichmond.com and on Twitter and Instagram @simonrichmond.