

# welcome to Mediterranean Europe



## Natural Wonders

For many people the Mediterranean's main appeal is the promise of summer sun and long, lazy days on the beach. Each year up to 200 million visitors pour into the region, making it the world's top tourist destination. While not all head straight for the beach, many do – and with good reason. The Mediterranean's beaches are superb, ranging in style from big, sporty sands on Portugal's western seaboard to idyllic Sardinian hideaways, and rocky platforms on Croatia's craggy Dalmatian coast. But there's more to the Med than the beach, and, away from the coast, the region's ancient landscape offers some truly spectacular natural sights – snow-clad Alpine peaks, Saharan

sand dunes, bizarre rock formations, even a stunning fjord in Montenegro.

## Cultural Calling

Alongside great natural beauty, the Mediterranean boasts an unparalleled cultural legacy. Spanning 14,000 years, this priceless patrimony provides a thrilling window onto the region's long and dramatic past. Prehistoric paintings reveal the preoccupations of France's primeval cave dwellers; Greek and Roman monuments testify to the power and ambition of the ancient superpowers; Islamic art tells of Moorish sophistication; Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance palaces and baroque facades record the great artistic movements of history.

*Golden sun-kissed beaches, dreamy seascapes, ancient ruins and awe-inspiring art – Mediterranean Europe is a visual and sensual feast. Visit once and you'll be hooked for life.*



(left) People relaxing on Sveti Stefan beach, Montenegro (p618).  
(bottom) Roman amphitheatre at night, Pula, Croatia (p135).



The region's celebrated galleries and museums are pretty special too, housing a considerable chunk of the Western world's combined art collection.

## Food, Glorious Food

The region's passion for the finer things in life also extends to the kitchen. Eating well is part and parcel of everyday life on the Med, as well as one of its great pleasures, and it doesn't have to cost a bomb. Picnicking on a loaf of freshly baked bread with cheese and olives and a bottle of wine bought from the local market could well turn out to be a holiday highlight. For dedicated foodies, France and Italy are the obvious destinations but each country has its own culinary specialities – think tapas

in Spain, tajine in Morocco, kebabs in Turkey. And for wine buffs, the Mediterranean cellar is really quite something, with everything from world famous vintages to thousands of cheerful local labels.

## No Problem

Capping everything is the fact that Mediterranean Europe is an easy region in which to travel. Sure, services might not always be what you're used to, and some areas can be expensive, particularly in summer, but English is widely spoken, public transport more or less works, and with so many accommodation and eating options to choose from, you're sure to find somewhere to suit your style.