

# Welcome to Western Europe

*Interlocking countries and cultures create a jigsaw of history, art, architecture and cuisines, along with time-honoured traditions and inspired new trends.*

## Living History

In Western Europe, history is all around you: in prehistoric Cro-Magnon caves, in otherworldly passage tombs and stone circles, in the tumbledown remains of Greek temples and Roman bathhouses, in ostentatious chateaux and palaces where power was wielded and geopolitical boundaries were shaped and reshaped, in the winding streets and broad boulevards of the many stately cities, and at poignant sites including the D-Day beaches and the remnants of the Berlin Wall. Understanding Europe's history is a vital part of figuring out what makes these countries what they are today, both individually and as part of a greater whole.

## Extraordinary Art & Architecture

An architectural heritage spanning seven millennia has given rise to iconic, instantly recognisable landmarks, from Rome's Colosseum to Cologne's cathedral, London's Big Ben and Paris' Eiffel Tower, along with sky-scraping contemporary additions. This expressive environment is inextricably tied to Western Europe's artistic legacy. The home turf of virtuosos from Michelangelo to Monet, Botticelli to Banksy continues to inspire boundary-pushing new artists.

## Thriving Culture

Distinct cultures, defined by their language, customs, specialities, idiosyncrasies, sense of style and way of life, make Western Europe an endlessly fascinating place to travel. Along country borders in particular, you can see where cultures intertwine and overlap. You'll also see subtle cultural shifts between each country's own regions, and the influence of trade and immigration over the centuries. Wherever you travel, allow time to soak up local life in public squares, parks and gardens, vibrant festivals, and in neighbourhood pubs and cafes where you can watch the world go by.

## Celebrated Food & Drink

Eating and drinking is celebrated with gusto in Western Europe. Every country has its own unique flavours, incorporating olive oils and sun-ripened vegetables in the hot south, rich cream and butter in cooler areas, fresh-off-the-boat seafood along the coast, delicate river and lake fish, and meat from fertile mountains and pastures. Each country has its own tipples too, spanning renowned wines, beers, stouts and ciders, and feistier firewater including aperitifs and digestifs. One of the best ways to whet your appetite is to browse vibrant street markets laden with seasonal produce.



## Why I Love Western Europe

By Catherine Le Nevez, Writer

I love that you only have to travel a short distance in Western Europe to find yourself in a completely different environment. From the language, streetscapes, street food, music and fashion to the climate, topography and spectacular landscapes, as well as the rhythm of daily life, there's an astonishing diversity in this compact area that's easily accessible thanks to its fantastic transport network. What I love most, though, isn't the countries' differences but the similarities that unite them – above all, a passion for the quality of life here and a community spirit that transcends individual borders.

**For more about our writers, see p704**