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Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first

Look out for these icons:

- **TOP Choice**: Our author’s top recommendation
- **Sustainable**: A green or sustainable option
- **FREE**: No payment required

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Duncan Garwood

Coordinating author; Italy

British-born Duncan moved to Italy in 1997 and now lives near Rome with his Italian wife and two bilingual kids. He has travelled extensively in his adopted homeland and worked on about 30 Lonely Planet books, including *Italy, Rome, Sardinia* and *Italy’s Best Trips*, as well as the past six editions of this guide. His first experience of the Mediterranean came on a kayaking holiday to France, but it was while island-hopping around the Aegean that he really fell for the region and its passionate way of life.

Read more about Duncan at: lonelyplanet.com/members/duncangarwood

Alexis Averbuck

Greece

Alexis Averbuck lives on Hydra, takes regular reverse R&R in Athens (she wrote *Pocket Athens*), and makes any excuse she can to travel the isolated back roads of her adopted land. She is committed to dispelling the stereotype that Greece is simply a string of sandy beaches. A travel writer for two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat and written books on her journeys through Asia and the Americas. She’s also a painter – visit www.alexisaverbuck.com.

Read more about Alexis at: lonelyplanet.com/members/alexisaverbuck

James Bainbridge

Turkey

Media assignments and extra-curricular wanderings have taken James to most of Turkey’s far-flung regions, from Aegean islands to the eastern steppe via Cappadocia’s surreal rock formations. He has coordinated three editions of Lonely Planet’s *Turkey* guide, and deepened his local knowledge by living in Istanbul and grappling with suffixes during a Turkish-language course. For articles on Turkey, and a link to a blog with advice about travel writing, visit James’s website at www.jamesbainbridge.net.

Read more about James at: lonelyplanet.com/members/james_bains

Mark Baker

Slovenia

Based permanently in Prague, Mark has lived, worked and enjoyed the splendours of central Europe for more than 20 years, first as a journalist for The Economist Group and then for Bloomberg News and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In addition to this book, Mark is coauthor of Lonely Planet’s *Prague & the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia and Romania & Bulgaria*.
Peter Dragicevich
Montenegro After a dozen years working for newspapers and magazines in both his native New Zealand and Australia, Peter ditched the desk and hit the road. While it was family ties that first drew him to the Balkans, it’s the history, natural beauty and the intriguing people that keep bringing him back. He wrote Lonely Planet’s first guide to the newly independent Montenegro and has contributed to literally dozens of other Lonely Planet titles, including four successive editions of this book.

Mark Elliott
Bosnia & Hercegovina British-born travel writer Mark Elliott was only 11 when his family first dragged him to Sarajevo and stood him in the now-defunct concrete footsteps of Gavrilo Princip. Fortunately no Austro-Hungarian emperors were passing at the time. He has since visited virtually every corner of Bosnia and Hercegovina, supping fine Hercegovinian wines with master vintners, talking philosophy with Serb monks and Sufi mystics, and drinking more Bosnian coffee than any healthy stomach should be subjected to.

Anthony Ham
Spain In 2001, Anthony fell in love with Madrid on his first visit to the city. Less than a year later, he arrived on a one-way ticket, with not a word of Spanish and not knowing a single person. Having recently passed the 10-year mark in Madrid, he still adores his adopted city. Anthony also writes about and photographs Spain, Scandinavia, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines around the world.

Tom Masters
Albania Tom is a British writer and photographer whose work has taken him to some of the strangest and most challenging countries on earth. Having lived in Russia, travelled to all corners of eastern Europe in the decade that he’s been working on the Eastern Europe guide and currently residing in East Berlin, he has a good understanding of what makes the former communist world tick. You can find more of Tom’s work at www.tommasters.net.

Virginia Maxwell
Italy Though based in far-off Australia, Virginia is a regular visitor to Italy, lured by the country’s history, art, architecture, food and wine. She is the coordinating author of Lonely Planet’s Florence & Tuscany, has covered almost every corner of the country for multiple editions of Western Europe, and has also worked as coordinating author of Sicily. When pressed, she nominates Rome and Florence as her favourite Italian destinations.

Craig McLachlan
Greece Craig has covered the Greek Islands for the last five editions of Lonely Planet’s Europe guidebooks. He runs an outdoor activity company in Queenstown, New Zealand in the southern-hemisphere summer; then heads north for another summer, writing for Lonely Planet and leading tours all over the world, including Greece. A ‘freelance anything’, he has an MBA from the University of Hawaii and leads other lives as a pilot, karate instructor and Japanese interpreter. Check out www.craigmclachlan.com.
Anja Mutić
Croatia It’s been more than two decades since Anja left her native Croatia. The journey took her to several countries before she made New York City her base 13 years ago. But the roots are calling and she’s been returning to Croatia frequently for work and play. She’s happy that Croatia’s beauties are appreciated worldwide but secretly longs for the time when you could head to Hvar and hear the sound of crickets instead of blasting music. Anja is online at www.everthenomad.com.

Regis St Louis
Portugal Regis’ long-time admiration for wine, rugged coastlines and soulful music made him easy prey for Portugal – a country he has travelled extensively over the past decade. Fine memories from his most recent trip include chatting with shepherds in the mountains near Manteigas, hearing avant-garde fado in Lisbon and feasting on delectable percebes (goose barnacles) in The Algarve. Regis is the coordinating author of the last three editions of Lonely Planet’s Portugal, and he has written numerous articles about the Iberian Peninsula.

Nicola Williams
France British writer and editorial consultant Nicola Williams has lived in France and written about it for more than a decade. From her hillside home on Lake Geneva’s southern shore, it is an easy hop to the French Alps (call her a ski fiend), Paris (art buff) and southern France (foodie). She has worked on numerous Lonely Planet titles, including France, Discover France, Paris, Provence & the Côte d’Azur and The Loire. She blogs at tripalong.wordpress.com and tweets @Tripalong.

Read more about Nicola at: lonelyplanet.com/members/nicolawilliams
Whether you’ve got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.

Two Weeks
City Highlights

With only two weeks to travel, the challenge is to see as much as possible while doing justice to each place you visit. This whirlwind tour concentrates on four of the region’s most seductive cities.

Start with three days in the French capital, Paris. Check out the big sights – the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre – and lap up the lifestyle in buzzing Montmartre and the Marais. Armed with your newly acquired savoir-faire, head south to Madrid, Spain’s passionate capital. Admire the vast art collection at the Museo del Prado and pop into the king’s royal palace, before an evening bar-hopping from one tapas joint to the next. After a couple of days, fly over to Venice, Italy’s haunting and impossibly beautiful canal city. Here you’ll have fun losing yourself in the atmospheric lanes and postcard-perfect piazzas, perhaps taking a gondola down the Grand Canal. From Venice, push on to the Eternal City. They say a lifetime’s not enough for Rome, but three days should give you just enough time for the big sights – the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel.
One Month

A Coastal Jaunt

Passing through the French Riviera, several Unesco-listed national parks and a number of full-blooded Mediterranean ports, this three-country route takes in some of the region's finest coastal scenery.

Start in Marseille, France's edgy, multi-ethnic Mediterranean port. A far cry from the postcard-pretty landscape that characterises much of the surrounding Provence region, it's a gritty, atmospheric city with some great sights and wonderful restaurants where you can sample a bowl of bouillabaisse. From Marseille, follow the coast eastwards along the fabled French Riviera. Top up your tan at St-Tropez and catch a film at Cannes as you wend your way along the coast to Nice, the Côte d'Azur's busy, cosmopolitan capital. From Nice, take a train to Genoa, where you can wander the same salty streets that once inspired local boy Christopher Columbus and eyeball sharks at Europe's second-largest aquarium. For more sea thrills take a day or two to explore the Cinque Terre, one of Italy's most spectacular stretches of coastline.

The road now leads to Rome, as all eventually do. Take in the big headline sights before continuing south to manic, in-your-face Naples. This sprawling city is not to everyone's taste but amid the chaos it harbours some truly amazing works of art, many taken from the nearby ruins of Pompeii. Continuing on, you'll come to the Amalfi Coast, a dreamy stretch of shimmering seascapes and plunging cliffs. From the Mediterranean coast, cross over to the Adriatic port of Bari, where you can catch a ferry for Croatia. While you wait to set sail, pass the time by investigating the lanes and Norman churches in Bari's labyrinthine Old Town. Over in Croatia, the first stop is Dubrovnik, the undisputed star of the Dalmatian coast. Once you've marvelled at the city's marble streets and baroque buildings, jump on a boat for some island hopping. Nearby, peaceful Mljet Island is a seductive mix of forests, vineyards and small villages, while further north Hvar Island boasts sunshine, beaches and a vibrant nightlife. From Hvar, it's a short ferry ride to Split, Croatia's second-largest city and home to the Unesco-listed Diocletian's Palace, one of Eastern Europe's greatest Roman monuments.
One Month
A Balkan Odyssey

Mountainous and covered in great swaths of forest, Slovenia and the Balkan countries present the tougher, more rugged side of the Mediterranean. This 1045km Eastern European odyssey leads through stunning mountain landscapes and beautiful towns as it snakes southwards from Slovenia to Albania.

To get you in the mood start with a few days in Ljubljana, Slovenia’s cultured capital, enjoying the cafe life and exploring the city’s landmark castle. Once done, head northwest to the lakeside town of Bled. A gorgeous spot in its own right, Bled makes a great base for hiking in the surrounding Julian Alps. From Bled double back to Ljubljana to pick up a bus to the Croatian capital, Zagreb. Hang around for a coffee or two in the Upper Town before pushing on to Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH) and Bihać, a pretty staging post on the road to Sarajevo. Before reaching the Bosnian capital, take time to stop off at Jajce, famous for its catacombs, citadel and waterfall, and Travnik, home to some impressive castle ruins. After a few days enjoying Sarajevo’s charming Turkish quarter and hip East–West vibe, continue south to Mostar and its scene-stealing bridge. Known as the Stari Most, this is one of BiH’s most iconic sights, along with the divers who hurl themselves from it during the July diving competition.

From Mostar it’s a straightforward bus journey to Herceg Novi, whose attractive walled town sits on Montenegro’s coast at the mouth of the Bay of Kotor. A spectacular road winds its way along the bay to the magnificent medieval town of Kotor, wedged between dark mountains at the head of southern Europe’s deepest fjord. The route here turns inland, through the thrilling Lovćen National Park, and on to Montenegro’s former capital Cetinje. Continuing eastwards brings you to Podgorica, the nation’s low-key modern capital. About 65km from Podgorica on the southeastern tip of Lake Shkodra, ancient Shkodra provides a good introduction to Albania as well as a convenient base for exploring the remote mountains around Theth. The last stretch of the tour leads south to the capital Tirana, once a model of drab Soviet-style urban blandness, now a crazy, colourful, buzzing city.
Three Weeks
Greek Island Hopping

With their beautiful beaches, ancient ruins and endless pleasures, the Greek Islands have been seducing travellers for millennia. Ferry services are reduced in winter, so this is a trip best undertaken in summer.

The obvious starting point is Athens, home to some of Europe’s most iconic monuments. From nearby Piraeus, jump on a ferry for Mykonos, one of Greece's top island destinations. A hedonistic hot spot, it boasts action-packed beaches and a pretty whitewashed town. Before leaving, take time for a day trip to Delos, mythical birthplace of the god Apollo. From Mykonos, sail to Naxos, the largest and greenest of the Cyclades islands. Much more than a beach stop, its enticing main town and striking interior make it well worth exploring. From Naxos it’s a quick ferry ride to laid-back Paros and the popular beaches of Antiparos. Santorini is one of the Aegean’s most impressive islands, its volcanic cliffs sheering up from the blue sea. Greece's most southerly island, Crete makes a fitting finale. Just southwest of the main city Iraklio is Knossos, the ancient capital of Minoan Crete where the mythical Minotaur supposedly lived.

Two Weeks
Turkish Delights

Bridging the gap between East and West, Turkey is a compelling cauldron of culture and style.

The place to start is Istanbul, one of the world's great cities, whose highlights include the Topkapi Palace, Aya Sofya and Blue Mosque. Further round the Aegean coast, Çanakkale is a popular base for visiting Gallipoli, scene of vicious WWI fighting, and the legendary town of Troy. Following the coast, you arrive at Bergama, celebrated for the ruins of ancient Pergamum, once a powerful Middle Eastern kingdom. More classical treasures await at Ephesus (Efes), Turkey’s answer to Pompeii, near Selçuk, home to the scarce remains of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. From Selçuk, push on to Patara and its magnificent 20km-long beach. Spend a day or two hanging out in a tree house in Olympos before heading on to Antalya, with its historic Ottoman district and ancient Roman harbour. At this point head inland to Konya, the birthplace of the whirling dervishes, which boasts some fine Seljuk architecture. Further northeast, the eerie, rocky landscape around Göreme is one of Turkey’s most incredible sights.
Five Weeks
Madrid to Marseille

Taking in Spain, Portugal and France, this Franco-Iberian tour works either as a stand-alone itinerary or as half of a longer pan-Mediterranean trip.

Get off to a thumping start in Spain’s capital Madrid before a day trip to Toledo, home of one of Spain’s greatest Gothic cathedrals. Train down to Andalucía, stopping by Córdoba and Granada to admire stunning Islamic architecture, and Seville for its famous, full-blooded lifestyle. Head over to Portugal for stopovers in capital Lisbon and in Porto, where you can try the local tipple, port. Next, bus over to the cathedral city of Burgos en route to Bilbao, home of the extraordinary Museo Guggenheim. East of Bilbao, the seafront city of San Sebastián is considered Spain’s culinary capital. Suitably sated, continue on to Barcelona for a look at the city’s unique Modernista architecture. Continue northwards to Nîmes, a vibrant French city that houses some fine Roman ruins. To the east, Avignon provides an elegant introduction to Provence, France’s showcase region renowned for its beautiful landscapes. As you head to the gripping Mediterranean port of Marseille, take a day to enjoy the bohemian chic of Aix-en-Provence, birthplace of artist Paul Cézanne.

Three Weeks
Artistic Glories

Depending on how much time you have, this whistle-stop tour of Italy and Greece can either be undertaken as a trip in its own right or as a continuation of the Madrid to Marseille itinerary.

Kick off in Florence, the birthplace of the Renaissance and one of Italy’s great art cities. After a few days ogling priceless treasures, drag yourself away for a quick stopover at Pisa, home to the world-famous Leaning Tower, en route to Rome, where you can marvel at headline sights such as the Colosseum, Pantheon and Michelangelo-frescoed Sistine Chapel. From Rome, pick up a train to the Adriatic port of Bari and a ferry for Patra. Once docked, head straight for Olympia, venue of the first Olympic Games in 776 BC. Continue to Mystras, famed for its Byzantine palaces and monasteries, before heading to Nafplio, a charming seaside town with Venetian-style houses and a striking hilltop fortress. Next, push on to mythical Mycenae and the ruins of Ancient Corinth. Across the water, Athens is a chaotic mix of the ancient and the modern. Not to be missed, the Parthenon dominates the cityscape from its position over the Acropolis, and the National Archaeological Museum houses the country’s most important ancient artefacts.