



**ROUGH
GUIDES**

THE ROUGH GUIDE to First-Time Europe



INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION Includes a useful FAQ section along with inspired ideas to enrich your journey.

THE BIG ADVENTURE Expert advice to help you create your perfect itinerary, with tips on transport, budgeting, packing and what to expect from life on the road.

WHERE TO GO Profiles of 35 countries, giving you a taste of what they hold in store, with rundowns of the top attractions and details of local transport.

DIRECTORY The latest websites and apps, for everything from finding cheap flights to photography.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

First-Time Europe

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Introduction to First-Time Europe

Italians don't serve "deep pan" pizza. Swedes aren't all blondes. And the French probably won't French-kiss you when you first greet. But none of these little cultural realities is reason enough to put off your trip to Europe – the "Old World" offers more architecture, wine, music, fashion, theater and gastronomy per square kilometer than any other continent. Which means heading off the main routes will still land you waist-deep in cultural treasures. The continent (including Russia) boasts over seven hundred million people, in excess of 450 World Heritage Sites and more renowned paintings than you can point your camera at. And it's usually just a matter of a short bus or train ride to get from one place to the next – though even a bicycle will often suffice.

Europe stretches 3900km from the Greek island of Crete to Hammerfest, on the northeastern coast of Norway, and just as far from Lisbon to Moscow. But with the reunification of East and West at the end of the 1980s leading to widespread improvements in roads and rail, Europe became more accessible than ever. Despite the ongoing debt crisis, the existence of the eurozone has made spending easier across much of the continent, and means you're no longer giving away fistfuls of coins that the other countries won't accept when you try to change money. What you put this saving towards is quite limitless: climbing a Swiss Alp, tasting wine at a French château, renting a surfboard in Portugal, having tea and scones in England, chilling out in Sweden's *Ice Hotel* or sipping a local Karlovačko beer while soaking your toes in the Adriatic off the Croatian coast. For more clever budgeting tricks and strategies to help cut costs along the way, see "Costs and savings" (p.60).

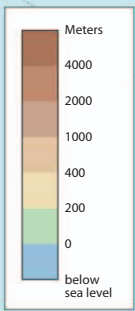
Europe's riches are waiting; the decision to find them is yours. In other words, this book is not going to try to persuade you to travel, nor try to convince you that stomping around with a backpack will fulfill whatever may be missing from your life. Travel is an

urge best cultivated from within. In fact, one of the biggest favors you can do for yourself is to travel when you want to, not when someone else thinks you should. The more eager you are to open yourself up to life on the road, the more willing you'll be to shrug off the prepacked experience and reap real rewards. In some ways it feels like there's never a good time to go – it can feel hard to disconnect from everyday life. On the other hand, there are some key junctures – before studying, after studying, before you have kids, after your kids have moved out – that lend themselves to extended travel.

Of course, that first trip overseas can be intimidating, and few people ever feel completely ready. You'll invariably make some mistakes along the way – we all have – but with this book you'll be able to sidestep the major pitfalls. The **big adventure** section will walk you through some of the more baffling bits of the planning process that tend to trip up many travelers, show you how to enrich parts of your travels that commonly get glossed over, and help you to make sure you have your gear and documents in order before leaving, as well as give you pointers on how to bring the entire overseas experience together well within your budget. You might start by opening the map (see pp.6–7) and letting your eyes wander over the possibilities. Then flip to Chapter 1 and learn how to start customizing your journey.

The country profiles in the **Where to go** section provide a glimpse into each country to assist with your preparation, highlighting landmarks and festivals, providing weather info and letting you know if there are any bus or train passes you should consider buying before your arrival. Of course, you'll want more specific information eventually, either from websites and apps listed in the **Directory** section at the end of the book or from your guidebook once you arrive, but at this point such facts and figures would bog down the planning process rather than help it along. Besides, there is such a thing as too much planning. One of the greatest thrills of travel is making your trip up as you go.







FINLAND

ESTONIA

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

RUSSIA

BELARUS

RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

POLAND

UKRAINE

SLOVAKIA

MOLDOVA

HUNGARY

ROMANIA

BLACK SEA

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

IRAN

BULGARIA

TURKEY

SYRIA

IRAQ

GREECE

SWEDEN

BALTIC SEA

CROATIA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

MONTENEGRO

ALBANIA

MACEDONIA

CEPHEAN SEA

Crete

CYPRUS

LEBANON

Helsinki

St Petersburg

Tallinn

Riga

Vilnius

Minsk

Moscow

Warsaw

Kiev

Kraków

Vienna

Bratislava

Budapest

Zagreb

Belgrade

Bucharest

Chisinau

Podgorica

Sarajevo

Pristina

Skopje

Tirana

Athens

Patras

Istanbul

Ankara

Tbilisi

Yerevan

Bari

Brindisi

Izmir

65

50

40

FACT FILE

• **Biggest countries:**

Russia (17,075,200 sq km, over two-thirds of which lies in Asia), Ukraine (603,700 sq km), France (547,030 sq km), Spain (504,782 sq km) and Sweden (449,964 sq km)

• **Smallest countries:**

Vatican City (0.44 sq km), Monaco (1.95 sq km), San Marino (61.2 sq km)

• **Highest point:**

Mt Elbrus, Russia (5642m)

• **Lowest point:**

Lemnefjord, Denmark, and Prins Alexander Polder, the Netherlands (both 7m below sea level)

• **Highest temperature:**

Seville, Spain (50°C)

• **Lowest temperature:**

Ust'Shchugor, Russia (-58.1°C)

• **Most sunshine:**

Rhodes, Greece (3480hr per year)

• **Most rainfall:**

Crkvice, Montenegro (4650mm per year)

• **Biggest economy:**

Germany (GDP €3.5 trillion)

• **Highest per capita GDP:**

Luxembourg (€82,075)

• **Highest life expectancy:**

Andorra (83 years)

• **Biggest beer consumers:**

Czech Republic (average 148.6 liters per year)

• **Biggest coffee**

consumers: Finland (12kg per year – more than four cups per day)

• **Most paid vacation time:**

Sweden (25 days a year, plus national holidays)

• **Most internet users:**

Iceland (96.5 percent)

FAQ

Q: I've just got a month. Is that too short?

Well, it's too short to travel around all of Europe, but fine for hitting about 7–11 cities. You just need to figure out a manageable amount to conquer on your trip (see p.18).

Q: I've got \$3000 saved up. Will that get me to Europe and around it for a month?

If you figure a tight budget of \$50 per day, that's \$1500, a rail pass will cost \$400–\$800 and a plane ticket from North America about \$1000. You'll need some gear and an emergency stash in case things go wrong, so you might say three weeks to be safe. To figure out a daily budget that fits your comfort level, see "Costs and savings" (p.60).

Q: How do I use my smartphone while traveling without it costing me a small fortune?

You're going to have to make some adjustments to your mobile usage (see p.147). Exactly what depends on how long you're staying in one spot and what you're willing to spend for the convenience of constant connectivity. If you're spending a couple of weeks or more in one place, it can be worth your while to pick up a local SIM card. Otherwise, you'll probably want to shut off data roaming until you find a wi-fi hotspot.

Q: How do you know where to sleep each night, what to see during the day and how to get around?

Carry a guidebook – or a digital version of one. It will cover all the sights in each town, with a short review of the best affordable accommodation, often accompanied by a helpful map (although getting a bit lost now and then is a healthy way to travel). In peak season, you may want to book accommodation a day or two ahead of time, easily done on the internet, since just about every remote hostel can be booked online these days. If you want to think even less, just wander into the tourist office, often conveniently located in train and bus stations or in the center of town, tell them your budget, and they'll call around and make a booking for you, draw it on a free map, and tell you how to get there.



WHAT'S THE EUROPEAN UNION?

It's not a federal government, like the United States. Nor a continent. They like to call it "a family of democratic European countries, committed to working together for peace and prosperity." It started with a proposal by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950 and originally consisted of six countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. There are now 28 EU member states; Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are the most notable countries that opted not to join (but they, along with Liechtenstein, are members of the European Free Trade Association, which keeps them from economic seclusion). Not all EU members decided to adopt the **euro** – Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom and several Eastern European countries, still use their own currencies, while unofficial state members like Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City have taken on the euro. All in all, 338 million Europeans in nineteen of the European Union's 28 member states use the euro. The European Parliament, with 751 members, works from Brussels, Belgium, and Strasbourg, France. The Central Bank is run out of Frankfurt, Germany. And the Court of Justice is based in Luxembourg.

Little-known fact: even though Denmark is part of the EU, Greenland – which is part of the Kingdom of Denmark – isn't. The island became a reluctant member when Denmark joined in 1973, but left in 1985 after gaining home rule in 1979. It is the only region to ever leave the European Union without leaving its mother state.

Q: I can mispronounce about five words of French and fewer than that in Spanish. Can I manage traveling around Europe speaking English?

Better than your digestive tract will manage only eating at *McDonald's*. Learning the local language would enrich your experience and make it easier to understand your new environment, but even the least gifted linguist can pick up "please," "thank you," "excuse me," "how much?" and "no, that's my backpack you're smelling" in twenty minutes – about the time it takes to make the final descent before you touch down in the new country. If you must use English, lose the slang, keep your speech slow and basic; and don't take a puzzled look as a sign to speak louder. Besides, most Europeans speak English.

Q: Are there some basic precautions that can help me travel safer?

Quite a few. You can learn how to make yourself less of a target for pickpockets and muggers (see p.154), and learn how to avoid unsafe neighborhoods in each city (see p.155).

Q: I'm thinking of going with my best friend. Is that a good idea?

It's a tough decision. And if it doesn't seem like one, that's probably because you haven't fully considered what you're getting into. Learn what the potential pitfalls are and how to minimize them (see p.55).

Q: Will my credit cards work in Europe?

Yes, but they'll work far better if you take three basic steps: 1) alert your credit card provider roughly where you'll be and for how long so they don't block your card as a safety precaution; 2) make sure to learn your PIN code for the embedded chip; 3) select a credit card that doesn't charge you a conversion fee every time you use it (see p.120 for a selection of these cards) and combine it with a bank card that doesn't charge extra fees at ATMs (see p.121). These few actions will save you a huge headache and possibly a few hundred dollars as well.

Q: C'mon, do I really need travel insurance?

Only if you get really sick. Or injured. Or sued for some driving accident. In short, yes. But unless you get insurance that fits your travel plans, it won't do much good (see p.99).

Which means you shouldn't necessarily sign up for that convenient policy your travel agent pushes across the desk or the convenient "click here for insurance" button when you buy your ticket online. If you plan to ski in the Alps but your policy doesn't cover you for skiing (and you get injured), it's a policy payment down the drain and you've still got an enormous bill to cover. Oddly, insurance companies rarely cover the exact same things, so you have to read through the small print to find out.

Q: I want to make my journey alone, but I'm worried about several things... about feeling alone, about foreign diseases, about getting injured, about getting everything stolen.

There are hundreds of thousands of travelers out there right now making solo journeys and most of them had just as many concerns as you do. Loneliness can be a problem, particularly at the beginning of a trip and during some meals, but you'll find your stride and start meeting other travelers before long. For tips on coping with this, see our advice on "culture shock" (p.142). For advice on how to handle injuries, diseases and other survival issues, it's not a bad idea to pack a little emergency kit.

Q: I hear a lot about "attractions," "must-sees" and "wonders." Is it tourist-bureau hype or is there something to it?

A bit of both. When the hype lasts long enough, it seems to become legend, or even fact. Truth is there's no such thing as a "must-see" and you'll have a far more enriching trip if you personalize your journey (see p.31) and don't construct it around the major attractions.

Q: Is there one thing I'm likely going to forget?

Earplugs. Hostels and cheap hotels are often located next to busy streets and nightclubs. Some buses and trains have minimal ventilation and you'll need to keep the windows open, which lets in plenty of air but more decibels than you'd care for. And don't forget about the snoring roommate – there's typically one assigned to every dormitory room. There are a few more things you'll want to bring (see p.106).



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ideas to enrich your journey

There are many lists telling you what to see before you die, but that's not a very immersive way to travel. Thinking in terms of "doing" rather than "seeing" will enhance that most vital and often elusive dimension to your travels: depth.



2



1 PARTICIPATE IN A FESTIVAL

Why just watch when you can get involved? Oktoberfest, Munich, Germany

2 VIEW ATTRACTIONS EARLY, BEFORE THE CROWDS ARRIVE

Then catch up on your sleep with an afternoon siesta. St Peter's Basilica, Rome, Italy

3 LEARN HOW TO MAKE A LOCAL DISH

This is one of the best "souvenirs" you can bring home. Making pasta, Italy

4 TASTE SOME WINE AT A CHATEAU

It's hard to beat free samples. Château de Monbazillac, France

5 RENT A BIKE AND EXPLORE

The best and quickest way to lose yourself in a new city. Amsterdam, The Netherlands

3



4







6 TRY THE LOCAL FIREWATER

Think of it as travel experiences for your liver.

Riga, Latvia

7 WANDER THE BACKSTREETS

Get off the streets with English (tourist) menus.

Kotor Old Town, Montenegro

8 DISCOVER A PLACE THAT'S NOT IN THE GUIDEBOOK

The most unique and authentic experiences aren't found in guides.

Winterton-on-Sea, England

9 TRY THE STREET FOOD WHEREVER YOU GO

Don't forget to push your culinary boundaries – this is part of the adventure.

Jemaa el Fna, Marrakesh, Morocco

10 LET A EUROPEAN TRAVELER YOU'VE MET ALONG THE WAY SHOW YOU THEIR HOMETOWN

A great reason to stay in touch.

Gothenburg, Sweden

11 TRY A FAMILY STAY

Get an insider's glimpse into local living.

Loire Valley, France

12 TRAVEL BY FERRY

Remember, cruise-ship passengers pay big money for these views.

Cyclades, Greece



13 CHECK OUT A SPORTING EVENT

Watching on TV doesn't count – as long as you're there, see it live. The Highland Games, Scotland



15 VOLUNTEER TO DO SOMETHING YOU'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT

Travel doesn't have to be just about getting experiences; it can also be about giving. Conservation work, Fuente de Piedra Lagoon, Spain



16 HUNT FOR BARGAINS AT THE LOCAL MARKET

Arrive early and learn the "real" price before you start bargaining. Soviet army belts, Moscow, Russia



First-Time Europe

The big adventure

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1

Planning your big trip

Deciding where to go, how to get there, what to do and how long to stay is a lot easier than it sounds. In this chapter, the planning process is chopped into smaller, easier-to-chew pieces that will get you under way, from figuring out what activities are available in each place to avoiding troublesome weather and catching the festivals you don't want to miss.

How much time do you need?

Here's a better question: how much time can you spare? You could easily spend a lifetime hopping around Europe and not experience all it has to offer. So, carve out whatever time you can and worry later about what you'll do with it. Besides, it's easier to come home early than try to push back deadlines once you're on the move.

The truth is, you won't know how long you'll want to go for until you get out there. You might meet someone who will invite you along on a camping trip, or you may stumble across a great course that lasts two months, or suddenly have a burning desire to sketch Italy's most famous frescoes. The trick at this point is to structure your trip so that those unforeseen experiences can happen. So, how do you do this?

If you already know how long you've got, you should be thinking about the pace of your trip. How many countries, cities and activities should you try to tackle in that amount of time? A good guideline is this: don't plan more than four multi-day activities per month in advance. (Sorry, visiting Spain doesn't count as a single activity; but things like a two-day cooking class, a short stay

In this guide, you'll find prices listed in euros (€) in nearly all cases. At the time of research, the **exchange rates** were approximately €1: \$1.10 and £0.71 (\$1: €0.90; £1: €1.40).

I DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY – SHOULD I TRAVEL CHEAP OR WAIT UNTIL I'VE GOT THE FUNDS TO DO IT IN STYLE?

Independent budget travel in Europe isn't for everyone. Especially if you're not thrilled about eating most of your meals picnic-style on park benches or in youth hostel kitchens, or spending the night in a place that considers the urine stain on the mattress all the decoration the room needs. If this doesn't seem like it would faze you, you're in luck; the **cultural and social payoff** of budget travel is enormous, the experience invaluable. As nice as it may sound to travel in comfort, a thick wallet has a tendency to insulate you from the very culture you're trying to experience. That is, you don't want the only locals you meet to be the ones checking you into the hotel and serving you drinks. A tight budget will encourage you to seek out places you perhaps would normally overlook.

If you're not ready to travel on the cheap, you'll still find plenty of essential information and itinerary ideas from the ensuing pages, but you may have to limit your time on the road, or knock off a bank. Three months of air-conditioned tours, meals served on real tablecloths, comfortable hotel rooms and a plane ticket could set you back €30,000, whereas it can be done for €7000 or even less with a few tips (see p.61).

with a relative, a few days exploring a major city or a hiking trip do.) Fewer than four is even better. If you plan to see, say, Paris and Rome in June, that doesn't necessarily mean you're only going to see these two cities. It means you get to make up the rest of your plans on the move as you travel between the two. This approach allows for ample **flexibility**, plus any transport delays you may encounter (when it comes to transportation strikes, the French and Italians are in a league of their own).

If the length of your trip is largely dictated by budget, check out the "Costs and savings" chapter (see p.60) to help calculate your time on the road and maximize the funds you have. However, you don't need to let your initial funds shorten your trip. "Working, volunteering and studying" (see p.76) covers jobs and volunteer projects, so you can leave home with minimal money or stretch your trip for years.

Any amount of time is better than none, but less than a month doesn't give you much of a chance to get into the rhythm of travel. You may get accused by "hardcore" travelers of not getting a real taste of the road on a short trip, but don't be put off by their comments; if you concentrate your trip in one area and take a course in something or stay with locals, you'll get a more culturally enriching experience than those with a year of travel grime under their belts who merely look the part.

A year off has a nice ring to it, but that's not a realistic time frame for those with jobs to return to or student loans that need paying off. Two to six months is a reasonable target. It will give you a chance to do some exploring and even allow you to dig a little deeper with one or more cultures. The best option is to have a flexible ticket so you can return when you're ready.

WHY YOU NEED A PIT STOP AND WHEN YOU SHOULD TAKE IT

Travel can be **romantic** and **adventurous**, but finding your way around a city, coordinating train schedules, locating a place to stay, taking the stairs up every tall structure for a scenic overview, using perplexing toilets, sampling palate-numbing foods and testing each country's unique beers – the things that give independent travel its bite – combine to form an exhausting experience. Give yourself a **chance to relax**.

To some extent, taking a break is going to happen on its own. You might stumble upon a place you can't resist, get stuck waiting for a ferry that's not running due to inclement weather, find a fun person or group of travelers to hang out with or just hit the sensory-overload wall.

The last one will occur if the first four don't. This exhaustion – think of it as cultural burnout – typically occurs after two to four months of continuous, fairly fast-paced travel. There's one main symptom: you spend increasingly more time in cafés and hostel lounges and less time out exploring towns and museums. There's also one simple remedy for recharging your wanderlust: stay put. Give yourself a chance to absorb and process what you've seen. Write some long letters. Get to know a few locals. Volunteer. Earn some money. Fall in love. Whatever.

Give yourself the **flexibility** to stop when you need it, or plan ahead so you end up at your dream hangout, or take an interesting course. A decent formula is two weeks of "down time" for every three months on the road.

How much time do you need in each place?

Two days. That is, two days longer than you think. Maybe even two weeks. The faster you go and the more ground you cover, tempting though it may be, the less you'll see. According to the author Wendell Berry, "Our senses... were developed to function at foot speeds." The same way that slowing down improves your peripheral vision when driving, **reducing your speed** enables you to take more in while you travel. Or take the advice of travel author Peter Moore: "If you're having a good time – stay. If you've met someone you fancy and who fancies you – stay. If you're too bugged to move – stay. If the police are closing in on you – go." If you're not pressed to press on, you might forge a friendship with the traveler you met over breakfast or find out that your favorite musician is giving a concert in an ancient amphitheater nearby, or that the local cultural center is offering free palm-tree-climbing lessons. With enough time and curiosity, something interesting is bound to happen.

Where should you go? (Not where you might think)

Since no traveler can do it all, the tendency is to head for the "best" places. What are the best places? It feels like a natural question, but you're better off refraining from asking it as you gather information about your upcoming trip, because it isn't going to reveal much useful information. Ninety percent of

your travel experience will be made up of the people you meet, the weather, spontaneous adventures and little cultural discoveries you make along the way. It goes the other way as well: a bad experience is colored with random mishaps ranging from bus breakdowns to bedbugs to boring travel companions.

Here's the good news: you can't miss. **There's no wrong place to go.** It's what you decide to do there that makes the real difference. Want to spend two weeks in France? Two weeks at a farmstay learning French, two weeks visiting the tourist attractions in Paris, and two weeks at an intensive cooking school are so different they can hardly be summed up as "spending a fortnight in France." Even on that same farm, at those same attractions and at that same cooking school, you'd have a hard time replicating the experience of someone else who did those things. There are simply too many variables. Forget about trying to find the "Top 10" this and the "best-of" that – you *can* find a magical experience, but if you don't push yourself off the tourist trail and do something that moves you, there will be very little "top" or "best" or "magical" of anything, unless you count "best staged photo in front of famous sculpture". And remember: what may seem awful at the time might, in retrospect, prove to be the most life-changing event of your journey.

To find the best places, the only person to consult is yourself. Grab a pencil, take a look at the five points below, and start jotting down places, sights and activities that sound appealing. You can figure out how to connect them later.

Go where you speak the language

No, not English. A second language (although an English-speaking country is a fine place to begin your travels). Even if you can just read a menu and a few street signs, you're off to a good start. Europe is a great place for the lingual novice; you can almost always find an English speaker when you need one. However, tapping into these ubiquitous translators should be your safety net, not your crutch. The idea is that once you start using a language, once you start looking around and trying to communicate where you need to go, the learning curve becomes nearly vertical and you're taking a big step into the culture you've come to experience.

WHAT IS ADVENTURE TRAVEL?

These days, with 70-year-olds waiting for hip replacements signing up for "adventure tours", it's hard to know exactly what the term means. An **adventure** used to involve exploring uncharted waters and lands with hidden dangers.

"**Adventure travel**" is typically applied to whitewater rafting, bungee jumping, trekking and getting spun about in jet boats, especially when these activities take place in foreign countries – that is, foreign from our own. The fact remains that they're completely packaged activities with a predictable outcome, rendering them closer to a fairground ride than what any explorer would dub an adventure. Does that mean you should avoid them? No. A little adrenaline is healthy and good fun. Does that mean there are no "real" adventures left? No. Just make sure you understand which kind you're signing up for. Come to think of it, if you need to sign up for an adventure, that's a pretty good indication of what kind it is.

1 Go where you have family or friends

Don't be afraid to look up that childhood pen pal in Estonia or your third cousin once removed in Portugal. To cover your bets, bring along some kind of document or a snapshot to help bridge any gaps. Despite any present-day politics, you'll find Europeans have a special place in their hearts for relatives and old friends who have been separated by oceans for years. With a little luck, you'll find you've got yourself a cultural guide. You'll almost certainly get a free place to stay and, if nothing else, an inside look at the way they live, from food and interior decor to bowling or strip clubs – whatever, in fact, your relatives happen to do for fun.

If you're still at university, take the opportunity to get involved with international groups. Students visiting your university from other countries for a year (or several years) are typically members of an international club, and tend to want to make friends with locals. Hanging out with club members is a nice way to start traveling while still at home and, better yet, you'll have some new friends to visit (and maybe free places to stay) during your trip.

Go somewhere you've longed to see

A little wanderlust goes a long way. If there's some place you've read about, heard people talk about for ages, or had some sort of childhood fascination with, then that's not a bad reason to go – at the very worst, it's a decent starting point. Let James Joyce's *Ulysses* be your tour guide through Dublin, or jump-start your wandering in Salzburg with sites from *The Sound of Music*. If it seems too trivial, keep in mind that many of the travelers who end up in Transylvania are there just because they like the sound of it.

Attractions of the world

When you start traveling, you hear a lot about “attractions” and “must-sees” and “wonders.” Is it tourist-bureau hype or is there something to it? In reality, it's a bit of both. When the hype is old enough, it seems to become legend, or even fact. The classic is the “**Wonders of the World**”, first referenced in the *History of Herodotus* in the fifth century BC. It proved to be such a public relations success that historians, writers and architects have been trying to create updated versions ever since. Not surprisingly, they can't quite reach consensus. Some assert, for instance, that the ancient list was flawed because the Greeks were unaware of such marvels as the Great Wall of China, and have filled in the gaps with a list of “Forgotten” Wonders. Today, numerous lists of geological anomalies and man-made structures have also emerged, each with its own merits. With so many attractions touting their particular wonder, this round-up may provide some perspective to the PR you're bound to encounter.

For the record, Europe had two of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Statue of Zeus in Olympia and the Colossus of Rhodes, both in Greece. Unfortunately, they've both been destroyed. None of the twelve so-called “Natural” Wonders is located in Europe, and only five of the nineteen so-called “Forgotten” Wonders and just three “Modern” Wonders (see opposite). What's

ARE YOU A TOURIST OR A TRAVELER?

Why on earth should you go out of your way to try some sport or activity you've never heard of and will probably never do again? Why bother with any slower, less comfortable mode of transport? Why go anywhere near a squat toilet or, for that matter, a Parisian roundabout in a rented car? Because, if you're not doing something new, you're doing something you've done before. If you're not using the **local language** (or hand gestures and phrase books), you're often speaking with professional guides and concierges. If you're not eating **local food**, you're probably eating food you know from home. The creature comforts of Europe are likely to be similar to the ones where you come from, but finding the differences and trying them is up to you. If you don't, you'll be getting a Disneyfied view of the place you're trying to see. It's often the "strange" food and more uncomfortable elements that give travel its extra dimension, and separate the Eiffel Tower in Paris from the one at the Epcot Center, the gondola ride in Venice from the one in Las Vegas – and the tourists from the travelers.

left? Plenty – **Europe has 384 of UNESCO's 1007 World Heritage Sites**, more than any other two continents combined. These are the world's architectural and archeological treasures, as defined by this special United Nations body. There's a wide range of sites. Many, like the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris or the archeological areas of Pompeii, you're familiar with. Others, like France's fortified city of Carcassonne or Italy's Botanical Garden in Padua, you may have never heard of. Are they less impressive than the more famous sights? Perhaps, but there are almost certainly fewer crowds. To find out where they are and their historical significance, visit @whc.unesco.org.

"Forgotten" Wonders

- The Colosseum, Rome, Italy
- The Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy
- Mont-Saint-Michel, Normandy, France
- The Parthenon, Athens, Greece
- Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England

"Modern" Wonders

- The Eiffel Tower, Paris, France
- The Channel Tunnel, under the English Channel
- Big Ben (Elizabeth Tower), London, England

Follow your interests

This is perhaps the best tool to use to start picking your destinations. The concept is simple enough: instead of thinking about what you'd like to see, think about what you'd like to do. Approach the trip as a chance to collect **unique experiences**, not passport stamps, mementos and selfies in front of famous monuments. If you're a golfer, you might pursue the sport to its roots with a round at the Old Course in St Andrews in Scotland. Or try a twist, and stop for a game of ice golf in Finland, where you can play with a bright-orange

1 WANT TO TRY SOMETHING NEW?

Can't think of **something active** to do while traveling? Here are a few ideas. To find out where, simply enter the activity and the place you're heading into your favorite search engine.

Alpine skiing • Beer tasting • Bike touring • Birdwatching • Bungee jumping • Canal barging • Canoeing • Canyoning • Caving • Cross-country skiing • Deep-sea fishing • Fly-fishing • Golfing • Horseback riding • Ice diving • In-line skating • Kayaking • Kiteboarding • Learning meditation • Long-distance ice-skating • Mountaineering • Off-road driving • Painting • Paragliding • Rock climbing • Roller-coaster riding • Sampling haute cuisine • Scotch tasting • Scuba diving • Snowboarding • Studying martial arts • Studying photography • Surfing • Trekking • Visiting castles/palaces • Whitewater rafting • Windsurfing • Wine tasting • Yachting

ball, tee up on an ice cube, hack out of the fairway and putt on icy “whites.” If you like to cook, you might take a crepe-making course in Brittany or try a day of pasta preparation at a villa in Tuscany. The more original your approach, the more unique your experience is likely to be.

Go somewhere you know nothing about

Consider Croatia. Maybe Latvia? How about Albania? Head off the beaten path and chances are that's where you'll find the highlights of your journey.

When to go

On a long trip, you can't be everywhere at just the ideal time. Don't knock yourself out trying. Usually, if it's too hot inland, you can head for the coast. And if it's too hot on the coast you can move to higher elevations, where temperatures are milder. Sweating it out in Rome? It's only 25km from the beaches of Fregene and Ostia in the coastal town of Fiumicino. Or take an overnight train into the Alps and hike around Lugano. It's pretty impossible to avoid a day or two of rain, but finding good weather typically requires just two things: keeping your eye on the **weather reports**, and a **flexible schedule**. What you need to investigate, therefore, is not the ideal time to be in each location, but if there are any dates you should absolutely avoid (see p.26).

Much of this depends on what you plan to do. Southern Italy in January may be chilly but it's fine for city exploring, especially if you plan to be inside museums and churches, whereas the weather in Chamonix in January may render mountain biking impossible. If you plan to hitch sections of your journey on boats, make sure you check out the seasonal schedule. Similarly, you'll want to know if there are any **dates not to miss**. If you're applying for a seasonal job, there's usually a tight window. And it's a pity unwittingly to arrive in Venice a day after Carnevale has ended; you're stuck with the crowds but have missed the event. See the individual country profiles in the “Where to go” section for more information on local weather and events.

Travel seasons

Traveling in the peak season is climatically favorable, but the advantages of touring Europe **out of season** are numerous: low-cost (sometimes over fifty percent less) and less-crowded flights, better chances of finding a room at the cheapest hostels, shorter lines at museums, less need for reservations and – best of all – fewer visitors to distract you from the culture you came to observe. However, you may be looking at a few hidden expenses. Some of the cheapest hotels shut down in the off-season, so you may be forced into more expensive digs. If it's cold enough to rattle your teeth loose at night, expect to pay extra for a room with heat. If you've arrived in the hot and sweaty season, be

MUSEUM HEAVYWEIGHTS

British Museum

Where: London, England
 What: artifacts, architecture and other items uprooted (read: looted) by the British Empire
 Most famous pieces: its mummy collection and the Rosetta Stone

🌐 britishmuseum.org

Deutsches Museum

Where: Munich, Germany
 What: natural sciences, technology and industry
 Most famous piece: its aeroplane collection

🌐 deutsches-museum.de

Hermitage Museum

Where: St Petersburg, Russia
 What: classics, sculptures and artifacts
 Most famous piece: possibly Cézanne's *Girl at the Piano*

🌐 hermitagemuseum.org

Kremlin and Armoury

Where: Moscow, Russia
 What: royal carriages, guns and tsars' clothing
 Most famous pieces: Fabergé eggs, Orlov Diamond, Tsar Cannon and Bell

🌐 kreml.ru/en

Kunsthistorisches Museum

Where: Vienna, Austria
 What: classics
 Most famous pieces: its Goya, Titian and Giorgione collections

🌐 khm.at

Louvre

Where: Paris, France
 What: classics, sculptures and artifacts
 Most famous pieces: *Mona Lisa*, *Winged Victory* and *Venus de Milo*

🌐 louvre.fr

Prado

Where: Madrid, Spain
 What: classics
 Most famous piece: *Las Meninas* by Velázquez (Picasso's *Guernica* is in Museo Reina Sofia)

🌐 www.museodelprado.es

Tate Modern

Where: London, England
 What: modern art
 Most famous piece: whatever's in the Turbine Hall (exhibitions every six months)

🌐 tate.org.uk

Uffizi

Where: Florence, Italy
 What: frescoes and sculptures
 Most famous piece: any number of masterpieces, from Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* to Da Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi*

🌐 uffizi.firenze.it

Vatican Museums

Where: Rome, Italy
 What: maps, frescoes and classics
 Most famous piece: The Sistine Chapel

🌐 mv.vatican.va

1 prepared to pay more for air conditioning. Sure, you can combat these with a good sleeping bag or a cold, wet sarong wrap, but you might not always be in the mood. As a general rule, the best times to visit are at the **beginning and end of the tourist cycles**, the so-called shoulder seasons (March–June and Sept–Nov for southern Europe; mid-April to June and Sept–Oct for northern Europe), when you get the good weather without the crowds. For skiers, the season slows down for a few weeks just after the Christmas/New Year rush and again at the end of March when the spring skiers head back to work. If there's any decent snow left on the slopes in April, it can be a great time to surf the slush.

When not to go

Rather than aiming for the perfect time to go, focus on **avoiding the wrong time**, bearing in mind that there are degrees of right and wrong to consider as well. For example, you might want to steer clear of Rome in August – all the Italians have left on vacation and the country is invaded by scores of tourists and endures sweltering temperatures. It's not a great time to be there, but it's hardly a catastrophe. However, if you plan on cycling across Scandinavia, you absolutely don't want to be doing it between November and March.

In general, winter (Nov–Feb) in northern Europe is cold and rainy, with snow at times in winter. Southern Europe can get chilly, but is typically quite mild. Summer (June–Aug) is pleasant in northern Europe (though the occasional rainy days can be difficult to avoid) and very hot in southern Europe.

Planning around local holidays and events

Your overnight train pulls into the station, you stagger over to the tourist information bureau and say you're looking for some budget accommodation for a night or two, and the person behind the counter is shaking their head like a paint mixer before you even finish your sentence. There's a Rotary Club convention and a national youth volleyball competition in town and they've taken up all the rooms. The best the tourist office can do is a double room at the *Ritz* for €295. Or you can stay an hour out of town at a little hostel situated next to a minimum-security psychiatric ward.

Occasionally, **scheduling conflicts occur**. A rock concert, business convention or sporting event unexpectedly disrupts your travel plans. So what do you do? First, try to avoid the situation by keeping an eye on your guidebook for national holidays or other events, such as festivals, that might cause a hotel-booking frenzy (see box, pp.28–29). Then, if you expect the

OFF-SEASON TRAVEL

It's not all gravy during the off-season. Some places just never quieten down. I was in Florence, Italy, one November and it felt as if I had taken a bus to Chicago, but for the old buildings and marble statues of pantless men. English, not Italian, was by far the dominant language on the streets, and the people walking around without a camera were in the minority. Florence (and Venice) aside, I found off-season travel to be hugely rewarding. I got into sites faster, my pictures weren't spoiled by people resting their behemoth bums on the 2000-year-old ruins and, above all, a surprising amount of local flavor surfaced, even in places like Paris.

Leif Pettersen

city's accommodation to fill up, email ahead for a reservation, or try booking rooms in advance via a site like hostelworld.com or hotels.com, or delay your arrival until a more auspicious day. If you're already there, the easiest thing to do is to simply move on to the next town. For this, the tourist office can be quite helpful. It's the perfect time to head somewhere not mentioned in a guidebook, but before you do, ask for the list of accommodation they represent. Often, there are several hotels, especially the cheaper digs, not on the list. Give those places a call first; they're the most likely to have a room. Or look for less conventional places to stay, such as university dormitories or campgrounds that rent tents. Better yet, try airbnb.com and other similar private rental solutions (tripping.com aggregates many). Or stay for free with a local via a service like couchsurfing.com. Don't forget to ask about rooftop sleeping at hostels if the weather is favorable.

Researching special activities

The internet works a treat for trip planning. For specific activities, look at specialized magazines and their website. For a cooking course or fine dining, for example, you might look in *Gourmet Magazine* (gourmet.com); for photography trips, *Outdoor Photographer* (outdoorphotographer.com). If you're looking for general ideas, major-city newspaper travel sections are invaluable.

For information directly from other travelers, you might try the straight-up reviews at TripAdvisor (tripadvisor.co.uk) or look for more broad and specific tips at **discussion boards** such as virtualltourist.com, Rough Guides' Community (roughguides.com/community) and Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree (lonelyplanet.com/thorntree), where you can post and read messages on thousands of specific travel topics. Not to toot our own horn too loudly, but roughguides.com is packed with articles, features and practical information like sample itineraries taken from our guidebooks. **Travel blogs** and user-generated sites like wikitravel.org are other great sources of first-hand – and often recent – information.

Preparing your parents and employers

Not everyone may be as excited about your big trip as you are. Some parents might need a bit of convincing on the merits of such an endeavor, especially if you're making a large request for funding. Some employers will wonder what they'll gain by keeping your position available. So here's a little ammunition to help fight your corner.

Pre-talk

Start by softening them up with some early **hints**. Weeks, months or years before you reveal your plans, try to let it slip during conversation that

EUROPEAN FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Cities and towns come alive during **festivals**. The locals are more upbeat and the experience is often more interactive. But if you miss a festival by a day or two, you'll arrive just in time to watch the streets get cleaned while you pay for the still-inflated hotel prices. Festival planning usually takes some advance legwork. Last-minute accommodation, if indeed there is any, gets snatched up several days before the event, but the extra effort it takes to attend a festival is almost always worthwhile. There are hundreds to choose from around Europe. In some you can participate, in others the spectators become part of the spectacle, but the exuberance is nearly always palpable.

Here are a few of the major events around the continent. To find some of the lesser-known festivals, turn to the country profiles at the back of the book.

- **Ascot Races** Berkshire, England. You can bet on the horses, but keep your eyes on the pomp on parade. Morning suits for men and formal dresses for women, not to mention hats of all sorts, from those with the shade coverage of a patio parasol to dainty little numbers not much bigger than a cinnamon roll. Third week in June, Tues–Sat; 📍ascot.co.uk.
- **Carnevale** Venice, Italy. A decadent Renaissance festival, pajama party and three-day rager against the backdrop of the world's most picturesque sinking city. The costumes are as elaborate as they are expensive. And guess what? They're for sale. Feb–March (the week prior to Ash Wednesday); 📍carnevale.venezia.it.
- **Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling** Brockworth, England. People have been chasing a cheese down a sixty-degree slope here for over 200 years. Most tumble in a blur of legs, hands and dislocated shoulders all the way to the bottom. Don't worry, there are plenty of ambulances standing by. Last Mon in May; 📍cheese-rolling.co.uk.
- **Glastonbury Festival** Pilton, England. The biggest jam-fest in the UK, for which tickets sell out in hours, months in advance. Performers on the main Pyramid Stage have included Beyoncé, The Rolling Stones, Kanye West and a full cast of platinum-selling album holders. Elsewhere you'll find market stalls (thousands of them) offering everything from goat meat to henna tattoos. Not enough? Check out the freak show or help make a giant rhino out of mud. Late June; 📍glastonburyfestivals.co.uk.
- **Kirkpinar Oil Wrestling Tournament** Edirne, Turkey. Smear yourself with oil and wrestle for a camel and stack of cash? Believe it or not, it's been a winning formula for 600 years and it's still going. Over 1000 contestants sign up every year. July 5–11.

you've always wanted to travel to Europe, see a bit of the world. Or, if you have specific interests like learning a language or taking a cooking course, drop that in as well. Keep it casual and speculative. You don't want a conversation about it at this point; you just want to plant a few seeds.

Passion

Let your enthusiasm shine through. Few people like to get in the way of someone pursuing their dreams. Often, it's infectious, and you'll find parents and employers wishing they could take a journey of their own.

- **Oktoberfest** Munich, Germany. Just grab a seat and a frothy “mas” and start slidin’ back the brew. The atmosphere (fourteen large tents with a combined capacity of almost 100,000 happy drinkers) makes the beer taste even better. But don’t be fooled by the name; most of the event takes place in September. Sept–Oct; 🌐oktoberfest.de.
- **The Palio** Siena, Italy. With bribes, religion and dirty tricks, this horse race is straight out of the Middle Ages. To be precise, 1147. Riders representing Siena’s different neighborhoods battle and race around the town square for three laps. Medical personnel are on alert for both riders and horses. The party starts days before each of the two big races. July 2 and Aug 16; 🌐ilpalio.org.
- **Paris Air Show** France. You don’t need to be on the market for your own private F-15 to attend. The public, 350,000 of them, turn out to see new models unveiled and flown every other year on the spot Charles Lindbergh first landed. It’s the biggest air show going. June (odd-numbered years only); 🌐paris-air-show.com.
- **Running of the Bulls** Pamplona, Spain. People have been testing out their insurance policies at this event for years. Eight days of drinking, reveling in the streets and, oh yes, attempting to avoid stampeding bulls on a narrow, winding, cobblestone street armed with nothing more than a pair of tennis shoes and a hangover. (Two days before, animal activists stage a “Running of the Nudes” in protest.) July; 🌐sanfermin.com.
- **St Patrick’s Day** Dublin, Ireland. If you’re not in green, you’d better have a good excuse. And a hangover that makes you feel green doesn’t count. There’s everything from a rowing regatta to a treasure hunt that has families scurrying around the city. The full week of *craic* culminates with half a million lining the streets for Ireland’s biggest parade on March 17. Mid-March; 🌐stpatricksdays.ie.
- **La Tomatina** Buñol, Spain. Ingredients: one small town that produces cement, one town plaza, 30,000 lunatics (mostly drunk) and 80,000 pounds of tomatoes. Mix aggressively for one hour or until town is sufficiently red, then rinse at a local watering hole. Aug; 🌐latomatina.org.
- **Whirling Dervish Festival** Konya, Turkey. The famed Whirling Dervishes spin their way closer to God only once a year, but the celebrations last a week. The dizzying ceremonial dance is accompanied with drums, flutes and tourist snaps. Dec; 🌐mevlana.net.

Educational value

Traveling through Europe will help instill many of the essentials you just don’t get at university: self-reliance, confidence in navigating through new surroundings, a chance to view paintings and fine architecture and develop new language skills.

Use role models

The strongest examples you can find may be friends of your parents who have taken such trips, and still went on to successful careers. Do some research into some of your parents’ favorite authors, cooks and TV personalities. Chances are

1

more than one of them has taken such a trip in their youth and has probably brought it up during an interview you'll be able to find archived on the internet.

Tie it to a university program

If you can find a study-abroad program that enables you to transfer credit, you may find you have a better argument for staying in Europe over the summer after the program ends or going a few months before it begins. For many parents, the university connection cements the educational value of the entire experience overseas.

Know what you're talking about

Read through this book and you'll have all the background info you'll need to answer your parents' questions about how you're going to get around, what you're going to do and how you can make it the safest possible experience. If you can demonstrate that you've done your homework, then they'll be able to see this is something you've put time and thought into, not just your heart.

Talking money

If asking parents for money, borrow a tactic from the politicians. First sell the concept, then worry about the funding. If they ask what it will cost, tell them you're not sure, still looking into it, but that you'll take all steps to keep it as cheap as possible. Even with generous parents, as a show of good faith, you may offer to put your own money into it to the extent that you can.

Prepare for your return

Some parents may worry that you won't come back for years. Or will become some sort of vagabond, drifting back overseas and never taking what they might consider a "real job" (for my parents, this turned out to be a legitimate concern). Put them at ease by talking about what you'll do when you return. Explain that the trip will help focus your plans for the future. Of course, this will require the daunting task of coming up with some plans. Remember: nothing is set in stone, so if there are some career buzzwords you know they like to hear (such as

DEAR MOM AND DAD,

I know you want what's best for me. I know you want me to be safe. And I know you want me to earn a living/attend university/stop moonlighting as an erotic dancer. We all want those things. But as I see it, life isn't about racing to the finish line. I'll get a job/degree eventually, but I want to appreciate life first. Just now, I have a few things I need to work out, and there's no better place to get a taste of life's options than the world's biggest classroom. This is the perfect time in my life for free-spirited travel. I don't have kids. This may be the one chance in my life to do it on my own terms. And Europe is one of the world's safest destinations. Besides, plan B is to move back in with you.

DEAR BOSS,

I value my job and hope I'll be working here for years to come. But just now, I can feel I need an educational break. Some companies send employees to business school or to various workshops and courses. I'd like the education that comes from travel – an edification investment I plan to pay for myself on an upcoming extended trip to Europe. I will make sure all pressing projects are completed before departing and help train any transition personnel you'd care to bring in. However, if you would take me back upon my return, I believe the company will benefit from my experience. I know I can bring new value to the job: an international perspective, a familiarity with meeting people, more confidence and street smarts. And, with a long-time dream fulfilled, I think you'll find I'll have more focus and renewed energy for the tasks. On paper, it may not look as tidy as sending me to business school, but in real terms it will be more practical. And it will come at just a fraction of the cost with far less time away from the company.

“medical school”), this would be the time to toss them around. Point out that a gap in your CV (résumé) will not hurt. Employees often find journeys like these fascinating, especially if your passion for travel shines through.

How to customize your itinerary

OK, you've got a few places in mind, some weather you want to miss and a few dates you want to hit for festivals or seasonal activities. Before you start stringing it together, there are a few more things to consider.

If it's your first big trip, **start out gently**. If you're going to Turkey, Germany and England, for example, bear in mind that Turkey is the most challenging of the three and won't make the best starting point. Besides, after Turkey, Germany and England won't seem nearly as exciting. If you start in England, it'll still be exhilarating, but much easier. Once you get a feel of getting around on your own, move on to a more challenging country like Germany, where there's a solid infrastructure, but (perhaps) a language barrier. After that, navigating the bus stations and markets of Turkey will be significantly easier to handle.

Take a moment and **consider the balance of your trip**. You want a good mix of attractions, adventure, a course or two, a little wandering, a break, maybe a ferry or canal passage, a measure of hiking, and possibly even a dose of meditation. Chances are your trip may be thin in a few of these areas. Look back at the activity list (see box, p.24) for some ideas on how you might round out your experiences. Just remember to space them out. You don't want to feel like you're trapped in an adventure race, trying to tick a slew of attractions off your list before jumping on your flight back home.

A word of warning: it's not in your best interests to “do” Paris in two days, then “do” Rome in two days, then “do” Prague, and so on. The most you'll be “doing” with such an itinerary is getting a blurry view out of the train window and less cultural depth than can be found on a postcard.

To find out how to connect the dots with the best-suited transportation, see Chapter 2 (see p.35).

1 Register with the State Department/Foreign Office before you leave

Government state departments/foreign offices are all well plugged in with solid digital traveler assistance. Sign up for free and get the latest travel updates and – more importantly – travel alerts while you're on the move. If there's a natural disaster or terrorist act or riot surrounding an economic summit, those who are registered are more likely to get useful alerts about the help provided and direct assistance from the embassy. Depending on how you feel about it, it can be nice to have Big Brother know your whereabouts just in case. But remember to go online and update your travel plans if they change. (And this works well with short trips, too.)

Where to register

- **USA** 🌐 step.state.gov/step
- **Australia** 🌐 smartraveler.gov.au
- **New Zealand** 🌐 safetravel.govt.nz
- **Canada** 🌐 voyage.gc.ca/register

The UK used to have a similar program called Locate, but scrapped it in 2013, replacing it with updates on 🌐 gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice, 🐦 twitter.com/fcotravel and 📘 facebook.com/foreignoffice.

Why you need to book certain activities well in advance

Just because you find the ideal activity, that doesn't mean you have to book it there and then. In fact, you can often save more than fifty percent of the cost by foregoing the middlemen and making arrangements once you arrive. However, there are some courses and tours that fill up well in advance. You can't always tell which these are, but it's possible to make a

EASE OF TRAVEL

Easy (strong traveler infrastructure, many locals speak English):

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Moderate (fair to good traveler infrastructure, some language barriers):

Austria, the Baltic States, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain

Tougher (mixed traveler infrastructure, considerable language barrier):

Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Montenegro, Morocco, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey

decent guess. You could reason, for example, that there's a steady stream of overnight hiking trips heading out in the Alps, so, if you're not too particular about which peak, you'll find a tour that fits your level, even last minute. If you're after something a bit more celebrated, and something specific, such as a short pastry course at Le Cordon Bleu cooking school (lcbparis.com), it's worth booking ahead. You can always call or email, say you're not sure about your arrival dates just yet and ask if they anticipate a problem booking a week or two ahead of time.

Sample itineraries

1. One month

Start in Dublin; bus to Limerick; bus to Doolin, ferry to Aran Islands; ferry to Galway, horseback riding tour; bus to Belfast; bus to Dublin.

2. One month

Start in Zürich; train to Interlaken, adventure activities; train to Montreux for the Jazz Festival; train to Zermatt, climbing course and hiking; back to Zürich.

3. Two months

Start in London; fly to Barcelona; train to Marseille; train to Florence, take cooking course; train to Venice; train to Italian Alps, mountain-biking tour; train to Vienna, visit relative; fly back to London.

4. Two months

Start in Amsterdam; train to Bruges; train to Paris, pantomime lessons; train to Bordeaux, wine tasting; train to Pamplona, Running of the Bulls; train to Barcelona; ferry to Ibiza, club hopping; fly to London; hitchhike to Edinburgh, single-malt Scotch tour; ferry to Amsterdam.

5. Four months

Start in Berlin; train and ferry to Copenhagen, rent bicycle, take train to Frederikshavn; ferry to Oslo; train to fjords, hiking and whitewater rafting; train to Stockholm, kayak in archipelago; ferry to Helsinki, train to St Petersburg; train to Vilnius; train to Kraków, visit Auschwitz; train to Prague, beer tasting; train to Berlin.

6. Four months

Start in Rome, study Italian; train to Brindisi, Greek island-hopping around the Aegean Sea; ferry to Athens, cooking class; train to Belgrade; train to Budapest; train to Vienna, take photography course; train to Salzburg, *Sound of Music* tour; train to Munich, Oktoberfest; train to Venice; train to Rome.

Hate to plan in advance? Consider this

Here's another way to go about it: get a passport, rustle up some cash and hop on the next plane to Europe and head in whichever direction cries out. The drawback to planning your trip, free spirits claim, is that, to a large extent, you decide in advance what you're looking for. So, while you'll