

Destination Europe

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The movie *Pulp Fiction* was right: the thing about Europe is the little differences. Thanks to the continent's huge global influence, newcomers find it foreign and, at the same time, reassuringly familiar. Often dubbed a 'living museum', this is a place rich in history and tradition. Fairy-tale castles cast their shadows over lush green valleys and Gothic churches stand proudly amid beautifully preserved medieval towns. Galleries overflow with masterpieces from the likes of Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rodin, Van Gogh and Picasso. Festivals have evolved from ancient pagan rituals. Hell, even beer drinking has a time-honoured track record, especially in countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic and Germany.

But this complex region also presents a patchwork of varied landscapes and an enticing smorgasbord of more than 30 nationalities. Snowy Alps, the fabled aurora borealis and the Mediterranean Sea are all yours for the taking, as are French chic, Italian passion, Nordic minimalism, Spanish flair and much, much more.

And while it's steeped in the past, Europe isn't living in it. Ancient monuments such as Athens' Acropolis and Rome's Colosseum sit amid vibrant, thriving cities. Paris and Prague might look quaint, but their attitude is definitely contemporary, cosmopolitan and liberal, while buzzing multicultural metropolises such as Berlin and London are visibly 21st-century cities.

Europe is also embracing the future, with the EU moving east. For budget travellers this is a bonus. While Europe usually requires a longer, thicker shoestring than other continents, many of the hot Eastern European locations are among its cheapest.

HIGHLIGHTS

BEST CLASSIC CITIES

Barcelona – Feel the lifeblood of this medieval-modern Spanish hybrid pulsing along the famous thoroughfare, La Rambla (p1043)

Berlin – Thrill to the reminders of a roller-coaster history and marvel at the new architecture of this reborn dynamo (p446)

London – Discover why the British capital's heady mix of historic and cutting-edge never goes out of fashion (p157)

Paris – Be seduced by the Gallic charms of one of the world's most romantic cities (p371)

Rome – Have a divine time at the Vatican, the Colosseum and the Sistine Chapel in Italy's Eternal City (p632)

BEST MEDIEVAL CENTRES

Bruges – Even when you learn some of it is reconstructed, it's impossible not to be wowed by this ancient-looking Belgian gem (p128)

Carcassonne – This walled city seems to float like a mirage on its hill above the French plains (p422)

Dubrovnik – Croatia's pride and joy is a magnificent walled city jutting out into the crystal-blue waters of the Adriatic Sea (p262)

Kraków – The breathtaking Polish Old Town, is joined by the splendid Wawel Castle and the former Jewish district of Kazimierz (p877)

Prague – Arched bridges, a magnificent hillside castle and winding cobblestone streets give the Czech Republic's capital a picture-book appearance (p283)

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BEST UP-&-COMING PLACES

Braşov – Base yourself in this cobbled Saxon town while you explore Transylvania (p939)

Český Krumlov – A pretty medieval Czech town with a charming castle and a growing backpacker scene (p296)

Lake Balaton – The southern shore of Hungary's largest lake is becoming a party spot, as new low-cost flights open up a district that includes vineyards and volcanic hills (p570)

Lviv – Sporting Austro-Hungarian, Italian and Polish influences, this quaint Central European city was spruced up for its 750th birthday in 2006 (p1181)

Triglav National Park – A bold new adventure-sports destination in Slovenia, it's perfect for hiking, rafting or paragliding (p1012)

BEST NIGHTLIFE

Amsterdam – Your memory of things could be distinctly hazy after an all-nighter in the Dutch capital's clubs and 'coffee shops' (p824)

Belgrade – Cast off the postwar hangover in Serbia with all-night barge parties (p980)

Berlin & Munich – Germany's most boisterous cities are very different beasts: Berlin is renowned for its techno and 6am finishes (p455); Munich for its cavernous beer halls (p472)

Edinburgh – For a New Year's Eve to remember, you can't better the Scottish capital (p207)

Ibiza – The rave in Spain – the Balearic Islands' clubbing hub is still going strong (p1056)

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BEST OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES

Chamonix – World-class slopes are matched by world-class après-ski in France's legendary Alpine centre, near Mont Blanc (p419)

Carpathian Mountains – From well-priced skiing on Romania's slopes (p939) to hiking in Slovakia's High Tatras, part of the same range (p994)

Tirol – Be tempted by Austrian mountain trails, with free guided hikes in summer (p98)

Berner Oberland – Touch heaven hiking in Switzerland's Jungfrau region, and head for thrill-seekers' paradise at Interlaken (p1137)

Scotland's Highlands & Islands – Immerse yourself in wide empty spaces, heather and thistles (p214)

BEST ARCHITECTURAL ICONS

Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao – A postmodern symphony in stainless steel, this gallery has become a global byword for urban regeneration (p1080)

La Sagrada Família, Barcelona – Anton Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece is testament to his eccentric imagination and style (p1047)

London Eye – It's hard to remember what the English capital was like before the arrival of what novelist Will Self calls 'God's bicycle wheel' (p165), while the Tate Modern (p165) competes for attention

Aya Sofya, Istanbul – Designed in 532 as the world's grandest church, this place became a mosque and later a museum (p1153)

St Basil's Cathedral, Moscow – Famously, the architect of this flamboyantly colourful, onion-domed church had his eyes put out by the Tsar so he could never again create anything so beautiful (p954)

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Itineraries

Continental Drifter

Get a taste of both sides of Europe – West and East – with this grand tour. For variation, you could start this journey by travelling London–Brussels on Eurostar, or London–Paris–Brussels.

Catch a cheap flight to decadent, canal-side **Amsterdam** (p819) and then head to **Brussels** (p119) for beer and chocolate. Fashionistas might want to make a brief stop in **Antwerp** (p124) on the way.

From Brussels proceed to **Cologne** (p492), possibly pausing in charming **Aachen** (p497) en route. After experiencing Cologne's cathedral and its beer halls, continue to sweet **Heidelberg** (p481), which boasts a fairytale castle.

Then either head to the beer halls of marvellous **Munich** (p466) and into Austria. Or head to **Freiburg** (p484) and the Black Forest, then into Switzerland to **Basel** (p1140), **Bern** (p1123) and **Interlaken** (p1137). Head up through **Lucerne** (p1137) and tidy **Zürich** (p1133) and back into Austria.

If you like hiking, stop in **Innsbruck** (p97), otherwise pause in baroque **Salzburg** (p92) before waltzing into opulent **Vienna** (p78).

From Vienna, make for **Budapest** (p560) and then **Braşov** (p939), to explore Transylvania for a few days. Catch the train to **Prague** (p283) and spend a long weekend south in **Český Krumlov** (p296). Visit the quaint town of **Kraków** (p877) and make a sombre side trip to **Auschwitz** (p881). Afterwards, head for the monolithic Polish capital, **Warsaw** (p872). From here, your last stop is the buzzing German capital, **Berlin** (p446).

About 4000km to 4500km; balance your budget by offsetting the more expensive first half of your journey against the cheaper second stretch, but save a small amount for a final blow-out in Berlin. Devote a week to Germany and Switzerland, especially if you plan to hike in the Alps



From London To The Sun

Spin around Britain and Ireland, before escaping across the channel to France, Spain and Portugal.

Enjoy **London** (p157), then head to **Cambridge** (p193) and **Edinburgh** (p203). Continue north to **Inverness** (p214), where you can look for monsters in Loch Ness. The next stop is **Glasgow** (p208). Go via Stranraer for the ferry to **Belfast** (p616). Afterwards bus to **Galway** (p612) and take a ferry to the windswept **Aran Islands** (p614). Rejoin the modern world in **Dublin** (p595).

Take the Dublin ferry to Holyhead, **Wales** (p217), or take a cheap Dublin–Bristol flight, visiting **Bath** (p185) on your return train trip to London.

Take the Eurostar to romantic **Paris** (p371) with side trips to **Versailles** (p388), the **D-Day Beaches** (p397), and **Mont St-Michel** (p397).

Rail south to **Barcelona** (p1043), possibly stopping at Limoges for the **Dordogne Valley** (p411) en route. From Barcelona, it's possible to make a longish round trip to the **Balearic Islands** (p1054) and **Valencia** (p1059). Or, zip up to the Basque seaside resort of **San Sebastián** (p1078) and the Museo Guggenheim in **Bilbao** (p1078). Turn south for **Madrid** (p1025), making day trips to Moorish **Toledo** (p1040) and enchanting **Segovia** (p1038). Then board a bus to the Islamic fortress, the Alhambra in **Granada** (p1068).

Dance a flamenco in pricey **Seville** (p1061) before getting back on the bus to **Lisbon** (p901). Relax and eat custard tarts in Portugal's breezy capital. Sidestep to **Sintra** (p910), before thoroughly exploring this gorgeous but cheap country. North lies **Porto** (p921), and the **Parque Natural da Peneda-Gerês** (p924), with lots of hiking opportunities. The southern **Algarve** (p912) is very touristy, but the train journey along the coast is beautiful.

How long?

1-2 months

When to go?

Jun-Aug; Sep-May
(high/low season)

Budget?

€50-70 per day

About 6500km; omit the British Isles if you're short on funds or time. Linger in the Spanish or French countryside, if you fancy yourself as an artist. If you've got cash left you can catch a boat.



Beachcombing Along The Med

Think Europe doesn't do beaches? It does, but with lashings of culture on the side, as you'll find during this romp along its southern shores.

Head to **Nîmes** (p420), **Marseille** (p423) or **Nice** (p429), and spend time exploring the Côte d'Azur stretch between them. From Nice, take the train to **Venice** (p657). Zigzag back down south to **Florence** (p670), **Pisa** (p676) and eternal **Rome** (p632). Continue south to energetic **Naples** (p682), peer into ill-fated **Pompeii** (p686) and explore the **Amalfi Coast** (p688).

At this point, adventurous travellers might try crossing from Naples to Bari, heading by ferry to the Croatian pearl of **Dubrovnik** (p262), bussing it south through Macedonia and Albania and onwards to Corfu and Patra.

Otherwise take the more conventional route to Greece from either Bari or **Brindisi** (p690). Docking in **Patra** (p530), do a loop of the Peloponnese: bus to Byzantine pin-up city **Mystras** (p532), the ancient heavy weight **Mycenae** (p532) and onwards to Venetian **Nafplio** (p531). Take the train to the ruins of Apollo's temple in **Corinth** (p531), and bus to venerable **Athens** (p520). Bus south to **Piraeus** (p528) for an island hopping expedition to **Mykonos** (p538), **Naxos** (p540), **Paros** (p539) and volcanic **Santorini** (p542).

Continue to island-hop until you've had your fill, then set sail for Turkey from Piraeus, via **Lesvos** (p549). Bus north along the Aegean coast to the ruins of Troy and **Çanakkale** (p1158) and to throbbing, chaotic **İstanbul** (p1149). From here, you can make tracks for the legendary **Cappadocia** (p1168), or even set out in the opposite direction to Bucharest (see Behind the Old Iron Curtain, opposite). Note Eurail is not valid in Turkey.

About 5500km to 6000km; weeks will slip away in this idyllic region. Allow at least a week in each to savour the atmosphere in Italy, explore Greece and Turkey.



Behind The Old Iron Curtain

Europe's communist era has been consigned to history, but while some former totalitarian countries have forged ahead, others offer a fascinating glimpse of a past most of us are grateful not to have lived through.

Pick a cheap flight to **Berlin** (p446), a city once straddling the East-West divide. Then travel to **Prague** (p283). Cut through **Vienna** (p78) and **Graz** (p89) to Slovenia's **Ljubljana** (p1005) with a side trip by bus to **Bled** (p1012).

Afterwards, train to Croatian capital **Zagreb** (p252) then head for the coast at **Split** (p258). (You can also go via Serbia's **Novi Sad** (p981) and **Belgrade** (p976), the capital city.) Ferry from Split to sun-soaked **Hvar Island** (p260). Then bus to the stunning walled town of **Dubrovnik** (p262).

Continue by bus to **Mostar** (p146) and **Sarajevo** (p140), both in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Stumble off the tourist map by bus into Montenegro's **Cetinje** (p781) and **Durmitor National Park** (p781).

Bus into Albania's **Tirana** (p58) and Macedonia's deep blue lake at **Ohrid** (p750). Keep going to **Sofia** (p229). Turn south to see the amazing striped monastery at **Rila** (p234) and east to **Plodiv** (p235), before hitting Bulgaria's Black Sea Coast at **Varna** (p240).

Head inland to picturesque **Veliko Târnovo** (p237), then north for a brief stopover in the Romanian capital, **Bucharest** (p932). Sharpen your fangs at 'Dracula's' castle in **Bran** (p942). Forge onward by train to baroque **Braşov** (p939) and the cobbled streets of **Sighişoara** (p942), and by bus to Romania's relaxed **Cluj-Napoca** (p943).

Catch a train to **Budapest** (p560), with a brief pause in **Bratislava** (p989) on the way to **Kraków** (p877). From here you can visit **Auschwitz** (p881).

How long?
2-3 months

When to go?
Mar-Dec, but shoulder seasons (Apr-May, Sep-Oct) best

Budget?
€30-50 per day



About 7000km; lower costs mean your budget will stretch further here so you can linger longer. Belarus, Russia and Ukraine tend to be the most expensive in the region. Pack plenty of clothes and be prepared for delays in freezing January or February.

Or head through vibrant **Warsaw** (p872) into the Baltics. Otherwise, travel from Kraków to faded but still charming **Lviv** (p1181) in Ukraine. Make your way to **Kyiv** (p1177), and onwards to Soviet poster-child **Minsk** (p107) in Belarus. Catch the train to **Moscow** (p954) and **St Petersburg** (p961).

Afterwards, party in Estonia's **Tallinn** (p329) and visit the former-KGB cells at **Tartu** (p334). Bus to **Riga** (p707), and then to **Jūrmala** (p712). Continue by bus to Lithuania's **Vilnius** (p726) with trips to the Hill of Crosses at **Siauliai** (p732) and the **Curonian Spit** (p733), before finishing in Warsaw.

OVER THE TOP

Fjords and forests, saunas and democratic socialism mind their manners in Europe's northernmost latitudes.

From the USA, it's easy to find stopovers in **Iceland** (p577). Then fly to Denmark's **Copenhagen** (p306). Day-trip to Hamlet's Castle in **Helsingør** (p313), and the Viking ship museum in **Roskilde** (p314). Rail to cyclable **Odense** (p316). Return to Copenhagen, and train across the magnificent Øresund Bridge to Sweden's friendly **Malmö** (p1108), then train to **Lund** (p1110) before visiting the beautiful capital **Stockholm** (p1110). Hop across the gulf to Finland's time-worn **Turku** (p354) and **Helsinki** (p346), power north to a romantic region of lakes and forests surrounding **Kuopio** (p359) and cycle around progressive **Oulu** (p360). Bus to Lapland's **Rovaniemi** (p361) for a reindeer-sledding safari before bussing into Norway's **Bodø** (p862) – a jumping-off point for the spectacular **Lofoten Islands** (p862). Return to the mainland and jump a train that passes through Hell (a real town) en route to **Trondheim** (p861), and visit the fjords of **Bergen** (p854) and **Flåm** (p859). End your tour in **Oslo** (p844).

About 4500km; with Viking precision, you can 'sack' Scandinavia's capital cities in a week or more. Then spend a week or two trotting through pure, unfiltered nature, such as Norwegian fjords, Stockholm's archipelago or the Finnish lake region.



Getting Started

Of course, like all good Scouts, travellers should be prepared. What's less often said is that it's just as important to remain flexible. Build a little slack into your schedule so that when a detour or little adventure presents itself you can grab what could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

This chapter gives information for the region as a whole; refer to the country chapters or the Europe Directory (p1184) for more information.

See Climate Charts (p1189) for more information.

WHEN TO GO

Europe has a high season in summer and another in winter. Crowding is the main difficulty in the warmest months of June, July and particularly August. In some countries, such as France and Italy, many shops and restaurants close in August while locals take their own holidays.

Global warming has meant a later start to the skiing season; often, decent snowfalls aren't recorded until January (or even February). December is always busy in locations such as Paris, Prague and any Austrian or German city with a quaint Christmas market. Easter is another busy time.

You can find bargains by visiting traditionally 'summer' destinations such as Greece in winter, but be aware that public transport might be less frequent. In some northern locations such as Scotland and Scandinavia, it might not run at all as heavy snow and ice means services are seasonal.

For all the above reasons, it's often worth visiting in shoulder seasons such as late May/early June and September.

WHAT TO TAKE?

Packing light is the (often elusive) goal. A backpack that won't fit in luggage racks or hostel lockers is a drag, literally, and everyday essentials are widely available in most European cities. Still, it's sensible to make space for some of these:

- Earplugs – Necessary unless you're a very heavy sleeper; a snoring dorm mate and traffic noise are almost inevitable at some point.
- First-aid kit – Just the basics: some aspirin, sticking plasters, antiseptic cream, sun block and perhaps, if you have a delicate stomach, antidiarrhoea pills.
- Mobile phone – Not only useful in emergencies and for staying in touch with the occasional SMS, it also doubles as an alarm clock. For technical specifications, see p1198.
- Padlock – For hostel lockers and train luggage racks.
- Photocopies – An absolute essential. Make two copies of your passport title page, visas, travellers cheque serial numbers and tickets, leaving one copy at home and packing the other separately from the originals. Make a note of your credit card numbers and keep it somewhere safe.
- Plastic bags – Just a couple to line your bag and keep the contents dry or to isolate dirty laundry.
- Power adapter – Preferably with both a chunky UK plug and a Continental plug with two round prongs.
- Rain gear – It *always* rains in some parts of Europe.
- Small torch or flashlight – To prevent painful bumps in the night.
- Swiss Army knife – Handy if opening tins and beer bottles; less handy if you accidentally leave it in your carry-on airline luggage – so don't.

COSTS & MONEY

Excluding transport costs, you can get by on about €40 to €80 a day in Western Europe. You might be able to squeak by on less in smaller towns and in Mediterranean Europe, but Switzerland costs at the upper end of the range.

Eastern Europe is the cheapest region, costing a daily total of €30 to €50, although Ukraine and Russia can be more expensive. Scandinavia is slightly dearer than Western Europe (especially when it comes to alcohol).

The quickest way of getting cash these days is to withdraw it directly from ATMs in each new place. The best way to track such spending is to set up your account for online banking. Do this before you leave home and, on the road, remember to log off properly in internet cafés. International transactions might take a few days to register on your statement.

For more information, see Money (p1194) in the Europe Directory.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Generally, travel goes smoothly in orderly Europe. Dusty roads, buses that constantly break down and general chaos are only really found on the continent's outer fringes. Which is why Europe can make an ideal destination for a first-time trip.

More often than not, you'll roll into town on a train that's not too late and easily find a train-station locker to store your backpack until you can check into your hostel at 5pm. A nearby tourist office will usually be on hand to help with anything this book can't provide.

More than in other parts of the world, sightseeing is dominated by churches and museums. But there are also spooky catacombs, cobblestoned streets and quaint houses in Europe's compact cities. And there are also places where being a visitor is all about hiking, cycling or perhaps even skiing.

It sounds relatively effortless, but even in Europe a month-long holiday can start to feel like...work. So pace yourself. Of course, it's great to

spend lots of time in hostels drinking with dorm mates. But you might want to try to treat yourself to your own room and a little privacy every two weeks or so.

There's a lot to see in Europe, but try to avoid the 'if-it's-Friday-it-must-be-Rome' syndrome. Plan extra time to rest up in one of your fantasy cities. Spending several days in one hostel also makes it easier to get to know people.

Concerns about the effects flying has on global warming have made train travel and cycling more fashionable with some travellers in recent years. So, it's nice to know that going slowly is not only an ethical way of getting around, but frequently more interesting and less stressful too.

CONDUCT

One of the great delights of travelling in Europe is the way so many cultures live shoulder to shoulder. The differences can make your head spin – especially as you enter countries such as Bulgaria where they nod their heads up and down to say 'no'.

Introductions

Don't assume everyone speaks English or will suddenly get it if you speak very loudly. Learn a few local phrases instead. 'Hello' and 'goodbye' are particularly useful in the many countries where it's customary to greet the proprietor when entering and leaving a place. 'Thank you', 'please', 'sorry' and 'do you speak English?' are always good to know, too.

Watch the local customs for hand and body gestures. Be careful, for example, about raising your fingers to order two beers; even with your palm facing the bar staff, it's rude in some countries.

Public etiquette is helpful to know. If on foot, stay out of the bicycle-only paths in northern Europe. In Eastern Europe be prepared to give up your seat to the elderly or infirm.

HOW MUCH FOR WESTERN EUROPE?

Camping €10-15

Hostel €15-25

Budget restaurant meal
€10-20

Local transport (single
fare) €2-3.50

Museum fees €3-12

One beer (500mL) €3-5

TEN TIPS TO STAY ON A BUDGET

- Buddy up – Finding a travel partner slashes accommodation costs.
- Spend more time East – Things still cost less in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.
- Head for the countryside – Where the living is also cheaper.
- Investigate buying a rail pass – If you're travelling extensively in expensive Western countries, it will save money. Local fares and deals are cheaper for quick trips and in Eastern Europe.
- Overnight on trains – Sleeping in your seat or couchette on longer trips saves on a night's lodging.
- Hand wash clothes – Do your laundry in hostel and hotel sinks; even hostels that forbid it don't notice the odd item or two.
- Invest in a phonecard – The cheaper alternative for calling home or within Europe.
- Eat cheap – Buy food from street stalls or eat at informal, self-service places, where tipping doesn't even enter the equation.
- Look up old mates – And don't be shy about being a (gracious) guest of friends of friends living in the countries you're visiting.

Become a couch surfer – Join www.couchsurfing.com, where residents let travellers stay with them for free (see p1186).

TEN MUST-SEE MOVIES

- *All about My Mother* (Spain, 1999) Pedro Almodóvar's tribute to Barcelona, mothers and transvestites.
- *Amélie* (France, 2001) An utterly charming Parisian fairy tale.
- *The Beat My Heart Skipped* (France, 2005) A dodgy, violent real-estate agent finds taking up the piano interferes with doing the job.
- *Bicycle Thieves* (Italy, 1948) Haunting catch-22 situation in postwar Rome.
- *The Death of Mr Lazerescu* (Romania, 2005) Grim but masterful mortality [sic] tale. *ER* it ain't.
- *Festen* (Denmark, 1998) Hand-held cameras and dark family secrets – the ultimate in naturalistic Dogme movies.
- *Good Bye Lenin!* (Germany, 2003) Heart-warming comedy where Berliners pretend the wall never fell.
- *The Seventh Seal* (Sweden, 1957) Death plays chess for a man's life in this Bergman classic.
- *Trainspotting* (UK, 1996) Scrappy heroin junkie eventually chooses life. Great soundtrack.
- *Vera Drake* (UK, 2004) Uneasy but Oscar-nominated tale of a 1950s working-class woman leading a double life as an abortionist.
- *Volver* (Spain, 2006) Penelope Cruz shines in Pedro Almodovar's tale of family troubles, murder and redemption

If introduced to locals, follow their cues. In some northern European countries, say Denmark or Germany, it's still common to shake hands with a stranger. In charming France, Spain or Italy, it doesn't matter if people don't know you from Adam, they'll still kiss you.

Dress

Europeans are among the planet's most dedicated followers of fashion, and in über-chic London, Paris, Milan and the like, scruffy clothing will give you away as a tourist. But equally, as long as you're not trying to get into trendy clubs, upmarket hotels or the opera, few will bat an eyelid at anything you wear in northern Europe. Away from the larger northern cities – and even in some of them, such as Berlin – attitudes are more relaxed.

Snobbery can be more acute in southern and Eastern Europe. In the latter region, that's partly a result of nouveau riche attitudes and partly to do with old-fashioned pride in one's appearance.

All this said, the universal uniform of jeans, T-shirt and trainers will do for most daywear. If you're going clubbing or somewhere posh, you can dress up a pair of everyday trousers with a funky top/formal shirt and shoes.

If you're hiking or cycling, obviously you'll need the appropriate clobber. Otherwise, hard-and-fast rules really only apply in places of worship; see below.

Giving Gifts

If you are invited to someone's home, bring them a gift, perhaps a bouquet of flowers or a bottle of wine. One of the hallmarks of a great trip is meeting kind people who help just when you've missed the last train or can't find a room for the night. Bring along a few region-specific gifts – like a magnet, key chain or postcard of your home town – to give to people on the road.

Meals

Habits are changing, but lunch, rather than dinner, remains the main meal in many parts of the Continent. With such rich and varied gastronomic traditions (see p45), Continental Europeans do tend to turn every sit-down meal into a social ritual. However, it's just as common to eat on the run – devouring everything from chips and mayonnaise in paper cones to hot dogs with mustard, pizza slices, spicy kebabs and gelati.

Religion

Be respectful in churches or other religious buildings. Refrain from using flash photography and keep your voice to a whisper, especially during Mass or other services. In mosques, women will be required to cover their heads with a scarf or similar; everyone has to remove their shoes. The same is still sometimes true in Christian churches in more pious countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

HOW MUCH FOR SCANDINAVIAN EUROPE?

Camping €7.50-20

Hostel €15-35

Budget restaurant meal €10-20

Local transport (single fare) €0.60-2

Museum fees €5-12

One beer (500mL) €6-10

READING UP

Rev up your wanderlust with witty travelogues such as Bill Bryson's *Neither Here nor There: Travels in Europe*, Tim Moore's *Continental Drifter* and Peter Moore's *The Wrong Way Home*. For travel-literature classics, try Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* and Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time Of Gifts*. Alternatively, mull over the meaning of it all with pop philosopher Alain de Botton's *The Art of Travel*. See p1188 for further details on each.

Snapshots

CURRENT EVENTS

'It was the best of times; it was the worst of times' – Charles Dickens' famous opener to *A Tale of Two Cities* could apply across contemporary Europe. The addition of 10 new member states to the EU heralded a political rebirth in 2004. But like an adolescent who's gone through a sudden growth spurt, Europe is also experiencing a slump in energy.

'Enlargement fatigue', the *Economist* has called the condition manifesting itself in Europe. In 2005, a year after new members were welcomed in, one of the bloc's oldest and most steadfast members, France, voted 'non' to the proposed European Constitution; days later a Dutch 'nee' followed. Britain then shelved any similar referendum, and returned to bickering with its neighbours about reducing subsidies for French farmers and whether it could continue to receive an annual £3 billion (€5.2 billion) rebate wangled in the 1980s from its EU membership contributions.

Austria vetoed Turkey being allowed to even *discuss* joining the EU, until Austria's neighbour Croatia was also timetabled in. (Accession talks with Croatia had been delayed following accusations it was not cooperating fully with the UN war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.) A row about European trade quotas denying the Continent's women sufficient cheap Chinese bras provided an amusing diversion, but most of these arguments will have to be revisited by the 25 EU members in upcoming years.

Tougher economic conditions, bird flu, the war in Iraq and terrorism – the worries facing the whole planet also confront Europe, especially after the al-Qaeda-linked bombings of the London Underground in 2005 followed similar attacks in Madrid in 2004. Riots in France in 2005 renewed attention on the problems wrought by racial discrimination and marginalisation.

Climate change and 'energy security' have also seen Europe consider going nuclear again. When a resurgent Russia turned off Ukraine's gas supplies in the winter of 2006 – just over a year after Ukraine voted in a pro-Western government – a chill spread across the Continent, where many other national customers weren't keen for huge price hikes to be so vigorously enforced. Discussion of the matter was pencilled in for that year's G8 summit of leading industrial nations – ironically hosted by Russia and iron-man Vladimir Putin (and ultimately dominated by war in Lebanon and that infamous 'Yo Blair!' greeting from George W. Bush).

Yet despite some gloom, there is optimism and unprecedented prosperity in parts of Europe. The Baltic nations are among the Continent's fastest-growing economies, while cheap skilled labour from new EU member states – a sociological phenomenon described by the handy shorthand of 'the Polish plumber' – has boosted many other markets and industries.

At least 15 EU parliaments have passed the European Constitution, but only Spain and Luxembourg have held successful referendums getting their populations to ratify it.

Bulgaria and Romania are scheduled to have joined the EU at the start of 2007 (although under stringent conditions). Croatia is next in the queue, hoping to gain entry in 2009.

NAPOLEONIC COMPLEX

Myth surrounds Napoleon Bonaparte. In reality:

- He was Corsican and never fully mastered the French language.
- He was 168cm tall – not as short as generally believed.
- There's no evidence he ever told his wife, 'Not tonight, Josephine.'
- His Waterloo was in Belgium, not near a London train station.

Norman Davies' international bestseller *Europe: A History* is impressive in size, scope and balance, giving the Continent's east and west an equal hearing.

Surprisingly upbeat, too, is Germany. Down in the dumps since its own enlargement, or reunification, in 1990, the second most populous European nation has finally rediscovered its mojo after hosting 2006's successful Football World Cup. By this measure – 16 years – Europe should be booming by 2020.

HISTORY

'In the beginning, there was no Europe,' writes Professor Norman Davies in *Europe: A History*. In the beginning all that existed was an unpopulated peninsula attached to the western edge of the world's largest landmass (Asia). But after humanoid settlers arrived between 850,000 and 700,000 BC, Europe's temperate climate and unthreatening environment would make it the cradle of agriculture and the birthplace of great civilisations.

Evidence at Çatal Huyuk (7700–5700 BC) points to Turkey as one of the world's earliest sites of agriculture. However, it was in Greece and Rome that the Continent's two great ancient societies arose. Greece (first emerging around 2000 BC) was renowned for its philosophers (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates) and democratic principles. Rome – boasting brilliant politicians, and writers like Cicero, Ovid and Virgil – spread its influence by military might. At its peak, the Roman Empire stretched from England to the Sahara and from Spain to Persia.

By the 4th century AD both empires were in terminal decline. Greece had been swallowed by Macedonia under Alexander the Great, then by Rome itself in AD 146. Although Roman emperors in Constantinople hung on for another 1000 years, the empire's western half fell to Germanic tribes in 476.

This marked the start of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. In 768 conquering king Charlemagne grandly named his lands the 'Holy Roman Empire'. After this territory passed into the hands of Austrian Habsburgs in the 13th century, it became the Continent's dominant political power. Elsewhere, an alliance of Christian nations repeatedly sent troops to reclaim the Holy Land from Islamic control. These unsuccessful 'Crusades' (1096–1291) unfortunately set the stage for centuries of skirmishes with the neighbouring Ottoman Empire as it took control of Asia Minor and parts of the Balkans from 1453 onwards.

Europe's grand reawakening also began in the mid-15th century, and the subsequent Renaissance, Reformation and French Revolution ushered in enormous social upheaval.

The Renaissance fomented mainly artistic expression and ideas (see p42 for greater detail). The Reformation was a question of religion. Challenging Catholic 'corruption' in 1517, German theologian Martin Luther established a breakaway branch of Christianity, Protestantism. Struggles between Catholics and Protestants for supremacy were behind the bloody Thirty Years' War (1618–48).

The French Revolution in 1789 was about the populace's attempt to wrest political power from the monarchy. But in the ensuing vacuum, plucky general Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) crowned himself emperor. Napoleon's efforts to colonise all Europe ended in defeat by the British at Waterloo in 1815, but the civil laws he introduced in France in 1804 would spread the revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality across the globe.

Having vanquished Napoleon, Britain became a major world player itself. With the invention of the steam engine, railways and factories, it unleashed the Industrial Revolution. Needing markets for goods, it and other European powers accelerated their colonisation of countries around the world, bringing new and exotic riches back to Europe.

Meanwhile the death throes of the Habsburg Empire, or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were about to rock the continent. Serbia was accused of backing the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in 1914 and the battle between the two states developed into WWI, as allies lined up on each side (Germany and the Ottoman Empire on the Austro-Hungarian side; Britain, France, Russia, Italy and the USA with Serbia).

Crippled by a huge bill for reparations imposed at the war's end in 1918, Austria's humbled ally, Germany, proved susceptible to politician Adolf Hitler's nationalist rhetoric during the 1930s. Other nations watched as Nazi Germany annexed Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, but its invasion of Poland in 1939 sparked WWII. During the final liberation of Europe in 1945, Allied troops from Britain, France, the USA and the USSR uncovered the full extent of the genocide that had occurred in Hitler's concentration camps for Jews, Roma (gypsies) and other 'degenerates'.

The Allies carved out spheres of influence, and Germany was divided to avoid its rising up again militarily. Differences in ideology between the Western powers and the communist USSR soon led to a stand-off. The USSR closed off its assigned sectors – East Germany, East Berlin and much of Eastern Europe – behind the figurative Iron Curtain. With the Stasi, Stalinist purges and more, many Eastern European citizens have appalling tales of political repression to relate from these times.

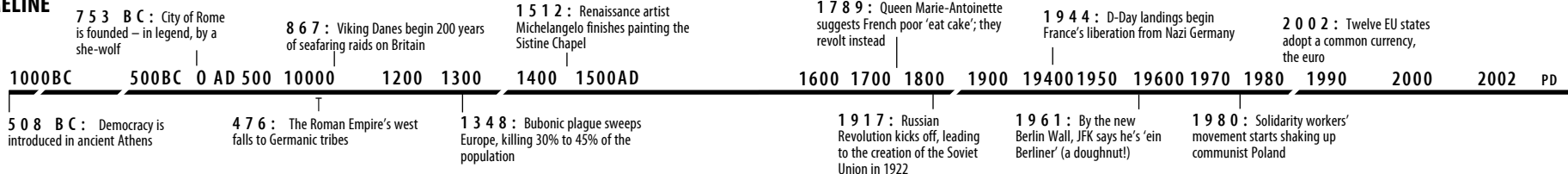
The 'Cold War' lasted until 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. Germany was unified in 1990. A year later the USSR was dissolved. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria grasped multiparty democracy.

The downfall of the Eastern Bloc had a terrible effect in Yugoslavia, where nationalist leaders seized the chance to stir up political unrest and war: some of the young independent nations there are still recovering. For the most part, however, the end of the Cold War has brought a sense of peace to Europe. A sense of cooperation is proving slightly trickier to locate. The EU was formed in 1957 as a trade alliance and has developed fitfully into a political entity since. At this stage, while at least 12 members have adopted a common currency (in 2002), governments are having difficulty pushing through the European Constitution needed (see p39).

Anthony Beevor made history sexy again with the doorstopper *Stalingrad*, about one battle, two tyrants, more than one million poor soldiers and their countries.

In *Imperium*, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Polish journalist extraordinaire, throws light on life behind the Iron Curtain in a way no Westerner ever could.

TIMELINE



THE CULTURE Population

Neither France nor Germany officially records the ethnic background of its citizens. France's policy of assimilation means all are equally 'French', and in parts of Germany questions about race are legally banned.

Accounting for just under one-eighth of the world's population, Europeans are a necessarily diverse bunch. In 2005 the UN estimated the population of Europe at 725 million. The EU proportion is 455 million.

The Continent has had a substantially slower rate of population growth than others in the world. The UN believes it peaked in 2000 and is now in decline. The European populace is also ageing, with 17% of people over 65.

The most commonly spoken native languages are German (24%), English, French and Italian (16%). English is the most common second language; 47% of Europeans speak it.

Despite some heated political debates about immigration, new migrants from outside Europe, according to several sources, only account for 0.15% of the population. Europe's ethnic makeup is extremely complex. Just the term 'ethnic minority' could mean anything from indigenous Sami in Sweden, Roma in Hungary or Basques in Spain, to second-generation Pakistanis in the UK or third-generation Turks in Germany, to little-known groups like the Friulians and Walsers in Italy.

Art & Literature

Today it's considered politically incorrect to promote Europe as 'the cradle of Western civilisation', but the Continent's legacy to the world unquestionably includes some touchstones of world art and literature.

After the prolific creativity of ancient Greek and Roman culture, the Continent went through a fallow period – a kind of communal artistic block – during the Middle Ages. Times were hard, mere survival was difficult enough and the church, the leading patron of the arts, wanted religious icons not realism.

But then in the 15th century a sea-change occurred and European art came storming back with the Renaissance. The movement began slowly in the Italian city-states of Florence and Venice, with the rediscovery of Greco-Roman culture. Then it spread further afield over the next few centuries.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1474–1564) led the Italian Renaissance; spurred on by Jan van Eyck (1390–1441) and other Flemish masters who led the Northern Renaissance in art.

The baroque period of the 17th century was defined by Rembrandt and Peter Paul Rubens' ornate portraits. During the 18th century Romantic painters (such as Eugène Delacroix and Francisco Goya) chose exultant political themes of liberty and great battles.

The late-19th-century impressionists (including Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir) progressively moved away from realism, using small disjointed brushstrokes to create an 'impression' of subject and light, and depicting ordinary people (instead of royalty) engaged in everyday pursuits. Their work segued into that of their successors, like Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

In the 20th century came the Fauvists and the cubists. The Fauvists used colour to suggest figures and motion, and are probably best represented by Henri Matisse. Among the Cubists was one Pablo Picasso, who went on to become a one-man art movement, abandoning perspective and drawing heavily on African and other native art to forge a style of wholly modernist painting. Following generations stripped away more elements of reality. In the 1930s René Magritte, Joan Miró,

Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Alberto Giacometti visually explored the subconscious. Sculpture was escorted into modernity by Auguste Rodin and later by Constantin Brancusi.

In the pantheon of European storytellers, the Greek epic poets (including Homer), dramatists (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) and philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) occupy revered positions. Rome's dominance of the Continent impressed Latin as the voice of learning and literature (namely Virgil's *Aeneid* and Plutarch's histories) until Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*), Miguel de Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) and Dante Alighieri (*La Divina Commedia*), among others, fashioned their native tongues into epics.

Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1450, which was to contribute to the spread of ideas during the Renaissance and the following Enlightenment (see the boxed text, below). The period building up to the Enlightenment was also a time of unbridled creativity in theatre and poetry (William Shakespeare, Molière, John Milton) and political theory (Niccolò Machiavelli).

With the advent of the machine age, the Romantics (eg Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Aleksander Pushkin, Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley) bemoaned the severed ties with nature and looked to ancient Greece. Henrik Ibsen and Charles Baudelaire were also eminent literary figures in the 19th century. Here, too, at the door of modernity, philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche dismantled the absolutes of morality and reality, and Sigmund Freud's theories opened a lid on the subconscious.

The modern age saw the rise of the novel from the character-driven stories of George Eliot, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Thomas Mann among others to the literary experiments of celebrated Irish novelist, James Joyce. In 1960s France, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were the two leading lights of the existentialist movement. Many contemporary European writers (such as VS Naipul, Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali and Hanif Kureishi to name a few) wrestle with such modern problems as the pressures and conflicts of straddling two cultures, escaping political persecution, and balancing love and desire.

THE AGE OF REASON

Forced to pick just one defining era and philosophy to sum up modern Europe, it would be hard to pass over the Enlightenment, or the so-called 'Age of Reason'. This was the period in the 18th century when science and human logic for the first time took supremacy over religious belief. Heavily intertwined with the rapid scientific advances of the time (see p44), it ushered in the modern age with its move away from the church and its emphasis on logic, education, individualism and liberal social values.

Whole university courses are taught on the Enlightenment, its factions (eg rationalism versus empiricism), and its pros and cons. However, two thinkers closely associated with it were the antimonarchist, antireligious liberal Voltaire (1694–1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who believed humans are rational and autonomous beings, so universal moral laws are possible. Kant was also intensely interested in how humans made sense of the surrounding world.

René Descartes (1596–1650), who famously declared 'I think, therefore I am', was one of the rationalist forerunners of the Enlightenment.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) started off as a believer but later fell out with the movement – whose main social consequence was the French Revolution.

Ode to Joy, the choral finale to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, uses words by poet Friedrich Schiller to espouse universal brotherhood and has been adopted as the official EU anthem.

Contemporary European art often rebels against the barriers of 'good taste' and tries to shock. The 'Young British Artists', such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, who emerged in the 1990s, are the perfect example.

Euro-pudding: Underwhelming pan-European film or TV show, often financed by state grants.

Eurotrash: Kitschy, sex-obsessed, trailer-trash TV show of deliberately doubtful taste.

Euro-sceptic: Opponent, often rabid, of the EU and further integration.

The *Eurovision Song Contest* is watched by some 300 million TV viewers annually. Swedes ABBA are still its best-known winners (in 1974).

A 2005 survey for Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine found that 16% believed god created humans, 33% believed in divinely guided evolution and 46% believed in evolution, totally independent of any god.

Science & Medicine

Scientific reason and method are central planks of European identity, and much science has its roots here. The Ancient Greeks were keen investigators of the physical world and many of their theories reigned for centuries, including the notion of four elements – earth, water, air and fire. Aristotle thought the universe was a system of concentric spheres. Astronomer Ptolemy backed this with his contention that the earth was the centre of the universe.

Most Greek publications were lost to the world for centuries, thanks to a paucity of translations. Arab scholars resurrected them and during Islamic rule in Spain the texts reached medieval Europe.

The 16th and 17th centuries marked what would later be called 'the scientific revolution'. Humankind's knowledge of the world changed swiftly and radically, while 'science' came to mean a strict discipline of systemic, empirical observation and experimentation.

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and his notion that the earth revolved around the sun was a forerunner. His work was rapidly expanded by Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), who discovered that planetary orbits were elliptical not circular, and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who honed the primitive telescope and was the first to record the phases of Venus and the moons of Jupiter. Galileo's formulations most famously include the universal speed of falling bodies (irrespective of weight), although he also crucially introduced maths into physics.

Isaac Newton (1642–1727) continued that mathematical application, developing calculus and advancing the theory of universal gravitation. Its aim was to describe the whole world in one mathematical system. This was also what Albert Einstein (1879–1955) was attempting when formulating his theory of relativity – $E=mc^2$ – in the early 20th century.

Without mathematicians and philosophers, such as René Descartes (1596–1650), Blaise Pascal (1623–62) and Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who contributed to geometry, probability and inductive reasoning, none of the earlier advances in physics and astronomy would have been possible.

Great strides in medicine also began during the scientific revolution, with works by Andreas Vesalius (1514–64) and William Harvey (1578–1657) unveiling the mysteries of blood circulation. However, the real

boom in biological knowledge came in the 19th century, led by Louis Pasteur (1822–95) and Robert Koch (1843–1910), who discovered that bacteria, or germs, cause disease.

Around the same time Charles Darwin (1809–92) made a watershed contribution to the understanding of the natural world, publishing *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), thus launching the science of evolution by natural selection.

Food & Drink

European cuisine often represents variations on a theme. Where Italians have ravioli (stuffed pasta), Polish have similar *pierogi* and Ukrainians *vareniki*. Spaniards tuck into rice-based *paella* dishes; Italians are keen on risotto. Turks dish out kebabs and tangy haloumi cheese, while Greeks serve *gyros* and feta.

Italy and France are the Continent's two top gourmet destinations, where the love of good food is seemingly inculcated in every citizen. The first boasts homemade pizza and pasta, polenta, truffles, fresh herbs and wonderful *gelati* (ice-cream). The second is the home of classic *haute cuisine*. Yet there's more to traditional French food than rich creamy sauces, steak tartare, coq au vin, duck confit and goose-liver pâté. Rustic French cooking features simple, satisfying dishes, such as *ratatouille* (vegetable stew), *cassoulet* (grain-based stew) or *bouillabaisse* (a seafood stew from Marseille).

Spain and Portugal follow closely behind these two culinary giants, with tapas, ham and grilled sardines on the menu. Along the North and Baltic Sea coastlines, fish is understandably popular, where Scandinavians, for example, find salty 'roll mop' herrings a particular delicacy, and Northern Germans are keen on smoked varieties.

Otherwise, German cuisine has much in common with hearty central European fare. The country shares a love of *Wurst* (sausage) and smoked pork with the Czech Republic and Austria (which also makes a mean apple strudel). And both Germans and Slavic countries are fond of cooked cabbage (*Sauerkraut* to the Germans). The latter consume plenty of *borsch* (beet soup) and vodka.

Like its language, Hungary's cuisine is unique and unusual. Always open to outside influences (especially Ottoman), it makes ample use of spices, such as the paprika found in the national goulash stew. Other European regions have their own specialities: the Swiss are known for fondue, *rösti* (fried, buttery, shredded potatoes), chocolate and cheese, while Belgians favour mussels and chips.

While British cuisine has improved remarkably in the past decade, you can always order curry if in doubt, thanks to the country's links to the Indian subcontinent.

A drink to accompany your meal? The European alcoholic drinks cabinet presents a stunning array. Some of the more obvious tipples are French wine – from Bordeaux Reds to Champagne – or beers from Belgium, the Czech Republic or Germany. However, you'll find a wide range of vodka, plain and flavoured in Russia, Central Europe and Scandinavia. Indeed, Scandinavian akvavit (aquavit) is simply another type of potato-distilled liquor flavoured with caraway and dill. Strong Retsina wine (mixed with pine oils) and aniseed-flavoured ouzo are both from Greece; raki from Turkey. Scotland is justly proud of its single malt scotch whiskies, while the Irish prefer their version, as well as a tippie of Guinness. In the Czech Republic on the one hand and France and Switzerland, you can try two competing types of Absinthe.

Ukraine boasts Europe's most unhealthy snack: *salo* (pure pig fat), which now also comes coated in chocolate. Scotland comes a close second by serving deep-fried Mars bars.

Serving food in courses was a Russian tradition that was widely adopted throughout Europe in the 19th century.

TEN CLASSIC EUROPEAN NOVELS

- *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy (1877)
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)
- *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann (1912)
- *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1605)
- *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert (1857)
- *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1838)
- *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust (1913)
- *The Outsider* by Albert Camus (1942)
- *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (1925)
- *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1904)

(The French/Swiss version has the greater claim to authenticity.) But the best way to learn about this subject is through personal experience, so *bon santé, prost, nazdrave!*

Religion

Ironically, although the Romans weren't particularly fond of Christianity at the outset and fed early believers to the lions, they did much to spread the faith. Not only did this minority religion go with the Roman Empire as it spread across Europe, eventually Rome performed an about face; in AD 313 Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made it Rome's official religion.

When the Roman Empire fell in the west, the church's existing independent hierarchy of popes often assumed state power. In 1054 the church split over a theological debate on the Roman Catholic Church, which spread through most of Western Europe, as well as the Eastern Orthodox Church in Asia Minor. The Roman Catholic Church dominated political, artistic and cultural life in Europe for nearly 500 years until the Protestant Reformation in the 1520s. Inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther, parts of Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary and England broke away from Rome, adopting Protestant tenets that assumed a variety of subsets (Lutherans, Evangelicals, Episcopalians etc).

Today traditionally Catholic countries such as France have a large Muslim minority thanks to immigration from former African colonies. However, Islam (emerging in Saudi Arabia in the 7th century) has had a permanent presence in Europe and North Africa since the 12th century. That's due largely to military conquest, particularly of Spain and the Balkans.

All said, it's worth remembering Europe's history of scientific rationalism. It still has the largest number and proportion of atheists and agnostics in the world.

Sport

An immediate word of warning: don't call it soccer. The 'beautiful game' that is Europe's number one spectator sport – by far – is called football. And if anything, the Continent seems to have gone more football-mad, following Germany's successful hosting of the 2006 World Cup and Italy's win (despite a match-fixing scandal at home). So expect there to be plenty of excitement surrounding Euro 2008 (European Championship; www.uefa.com, www.euro2008.com) in Switzerland and Austria.

In the interim there's always the annual UEFA Champions League and UEFA Cup (both www.uefa.com) where you can watch some of the world's most famous players, like Arsenal, Real Madrid, Chelsea and Manchester United, do battle. National leagues play the same October to May season.

If you prefer your ball elliptical, England, France, Scotland and Wales are all rugby heavyweights. If you prefer your ball to be a puck, you'll find fast-paced ice hockey has a huge following in Eastern Europe and in Scandinavia.

Otherwise you have a wide choice of sports. Two of the four global tennis Grand Slams are held on European soil. The French Open, Roland Garros (www.rolandgarros.org) is held on clay in Paris at the end of May. Grass courts and genteel manners are the order of the day at Wimbledon (www.wimbledon.org) in London every June.

During the infamous Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834), King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella tried to unite their country politically behind a Catholic national identity. Jews, Muslims and Protestants were systemically exiled or persecuted or both.

Traditional European sports are much less widespread than formerly; however, you can still catch games of *boules* (bowls; called *petanque* locally) in quiet French villages. For Scottish Highland games, see the boxed text (p53).

The coldest place in Europe is Vorkuta, Russia (average low -20°C), and the warmest is Seville, Spain (average high 29°C).

Similarly, Formula One (www.formula1.com) motor races take place in Europe, including in England, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Monaco. In summer cricket is the English speciality, while across the Channel the annual Tour de France (www.letour.fr) cycling race in July draws huge crowds. A list of wintertime skiing and snowboarding competitions can be found at FIS-Ski (www.fis-ski.com).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Europe is often referred to as a continent, when it is more accurately a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea. Coastal Europe is much more temperate than it should be at this northerly latitude, thanks to moist warm air brought in on the Gulf Stream. Southern Europe is dry and sunny, while central Europe is more variable.

In between the Baltic Sea and the spine of the Alps lies the European Plain, one of the greatest uninterrupted expanses on earth, stretching from the Pyrenees and the Atlantic coast to the Ural Mountains in Russia. This arable region of grassland and dense forests contains the Rhine, Danube and Main Rivers.

Belting the centre of Europe, the Alps were carved by the retreating glaciers during past ice ages and the mountain range stretches from France to the significantly shorter Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe. Below the Alps is the warm Mediterranean region, running along a volcanic range that was most active between 1628 BC (Thera) and AD 79 (Vesuvio) – although Mt Etna in Sicily remains active today. Its last major eruption was in 2002, but NASA satellites have detected small puffs of vapour from the volcano since. The Mediterranean land is rocky and exhausted from mismanagement, although olive trees, cypress and grape vines thrive. Along the Dalmatian coast, karst shimmers like a jewel.

In the far north, the arctic fingers of Scandinavia dip into the northern Atlantic and the shallow North Sea. Fjords, steep cliffs and mud flats all prepare the Continent to meet water. Glaciers, formed by layers of snow accumulating year after year, are also found here as well as in the Alps (see p48 for more details).

Wildlife

The Mediterranean forests are a range of cork oaks (providing three-quarters of the world's cork supply), holm oaks, cedars, pines and olive trees. The Mediterranean Sea has the world's second-highest percentage of native species, including the endangered monk seal. The Adriatic Sea shelters underwater pastures of the *Posidonia* seagrass, which is abundant with commercial fish.

The Carpathians are considered one of the last refuges of wilderness, with healthy populations of brown bear, wolf and lynx, Imperial eagle and Ural owl, species that have all but disappeared elsewhere. The last population of Iberian lynx lives in the southwestern corner of Spain and Portugal.

The world's largest reed-bed welcomes the Danube River into the Black Sea near Romania and Ukraine. More than half of the world's population of white pelicans, pygmy cormorants and red-breasted geese live in this Danube Delta (see p48). The northern Atlantic Ocean and North Sea provide unique habitats for sharks, seals and migratory birds.

Europe has experienced 17 ice ages through its geologic history.

Parts of Iceland look so out of this world, NASA sent Apollo astronauts to train there. The space agency is still studying the country in an effort to better understand Mars.

Mont Blanc is Europe's tallest mountain at 4807m, followed by the Matterhorn at 4478m. In the eastern part of the Continent Troglav in the Julian Alps is 2863m and Gerlach in the Tatras is 2655m.

National Parks

Europe's first national park was founded in 1910 in Sweden, which joins Finland and Slovakia as the most forested countries in Europe. This is quite a feat in an area where only 2% of Europe's existing forests are protected.

Underdeveloped Eastern Europe is regarded as the region's second chance to grow an environmentally friendly landscape, despite heavy industrial pollution during the communist era. Virgin forests in Belarus and Poland protect the last stand of forests that once stretched across the European Plain. Slovakia's Carpathian Mountains and Romania's rich natural diversity are protected as national parks.

Environmental Issues

Name all the major environmental problems related to densely populated areas and Europe suffers from them. Air and water pollution from industry are high in many regions, and approximately 56% of Europe has been deforested. Rivers have been dammed or straightened, resulting in destruction of wetlands and loss of wildlife habitat. The once-abundant Mediterranean Sea has been overfished and its role as a popular tourist destination puts additional stress on limited resources, like fresh water and open space. Homes and hotels crowd more than half the Mediterranean coast, clawing over each other for a water view.

Since the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (www.icpdr.org) was established in the mid-1990s, pollution in the Danube River has returned to 1980s' levels. However, concerns remain about the building of a shipping canal in the Danube Delta region and its impact on rare wildlife.

Global warming is taking its toll, with unsettled weather bringing extreme heat and drought to some parts of the continent and flooding to others. During a 2003 heatwave, for example, forest fires in Portugal and elsewhere destroyed a total area four times the size of greater London. That same year flooding caused major damage along the Danube River. Two years later flooding again caused major headaches, this time in Switzerland.

In fact, Switzerland seems to have been particularly hit hard, with its glaciers retreating at an alarming rate, causing unstable ground and excess melt-water. In 2005, out of 91 glaciers studied, 84 had receded; the Trift Glacier in Bern canton alone shrunk 216m. The 120-sq-km Aletsch Glacier, Europe's largest, has proved itself a bit hardier, but even it shrunk by 450m between 1987 and 2005, while glacial retreat is a problem in the Italian Alps, too. Scientists at the University Zürich believe 70% of Alpine glaciers will disappear in the next 30 years.

In addition to global problems, Europe has had at least one unique issue to deal with. The world's worst nuclear disaster occurred at the Chernobyl reactor in 1986, and parts of Belarus and Ukraine around the reactor remain off limits (unless, bizarrely, you're on a guided tour, see p1175).

More information on these and other topics is available from the European Environment Agency (www.eea.europa.eu), which continually monitors and assesses the state of the environment across the Continent.

One Swiss ski resort, Andermatt, has taken drastic steps to protect its main glacier. It now wraps 3000 to 4000 sq metres of foil blanket around the Gurschen Glacier in summer to reflect the sun's rays and slow melting.

A Year in Europe

The weather is certainly more hospitable in summer, but Europe can keep you occupied all year round with its intoxicating mix of pagan and religious celebrations, its broad mix of sporting activities and quirky festivals that border on the downright weird!

This chapter attempts to highlight a few events that are worth making a detour for – or at least considering.

January

See in New Year in Edinburgh (29 December to 1 January; Scotland; www.edinburghshogmanay.org) Croon ‘*Auld Lang Syne*’ and go ‘first footing’ (popping into strangers’ homes with a lump of coal and receiving a drink) during four days of revelry.

Celebrate Orthodox Christmas (7 January; Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) Missed Christmas at home through travelling, or just greedy and want to celebrate two? Then, join in these countries’ wonderful celebrations and feastlike meals.

Ski the Carpathians (January and February; Romania and Slovakia) Everyone knows about the Alps, but you get more for your money skiing the slopes in Romania (p947 and p938) or the Slovakian Tatras, the highest part of the Carpathians (p994).

Compete in the Inferno Race (third weekend in January; Mürren, Switzerland; www.inferno-muerren.ch) Test your skills in Europe’s biggest and most challenging amateur ski race. There’s a cross-country course, slalom and downhill event, plus the burning of a devil’s effigy.

GOODBYE WINTER!

Think Rio de Janeiro has the only Carnival? Europeans are quite good at it, too. Every year, just before Lent, they take to the streets in a wild array of masks and costumes, tooting loudly and practising their dance moves. Historians believe Carnival has its roots in pagan rituals marking the passage of winter into spring. As so often happened the Christian church then coopted and modified it.

Today it kicks off in the week before Ash Wednesday (the start of Lent), culminating on ‘Fat Tuesday’ or *Mardi Gras* – in short late February or early March.

Most famous is the **Venice Carnevale**, which centres on St Mark’s Square and chooses elegant 18th-century masked balls and costumes. However, northwest Germans also hold their **Karneval** rituals dear, particularly in Cologne (see p493), Düsseldorf and Mainz.

In Bavaria and Austria, it goes by the name **Fasching** (after fasting). In Switzerland, it’s called **Fasnacht**, when it’s celebrated particularly exuberantly in Lucerne and staged with aplomb in Basel. Other Carnivals worth making a detour for are in Aalborg in Denmark, Rijeka in Croatia and Maastricht in the Netherlands.

Many other spring pagan rituals run in parallel with Carnival. In Poland, for example, they have **Drowning Marzanna** on 21 March, when they immerse the straw effigy of a witch in Warsaw’s Vistula and other rivers, to mark winter’s end. Cautious Zürich citizens wait until the third Monday of April for **Sechseläuten**, when they ignite a fireworks-filled ‘snowman’ (the Böögg) to acknowledge the passage of the seasons.

February

Commemorate Sami Day (6 February; Sweden, Norway and Finland; www.sametinget.se) Get to know the native Sami people, with exhibitions and events in their homeland across the entire Arctic region. In mid-July, there's also the Riddu Riddu (www.riddu.com) festival near Tromsø, Norway.

Cheer on Europe's top dogs (first week of February; from Tarvisio, Udine, Italy, to Kranjska Gora, Slovenia; www.tarvisiano.org) Watch more than 1000 huskies and 200 humans as they race 22km, bound for the Slovenian border in the European Dog-Sledding Championships.

Enjoy Valentine's Day in Paris (14 February; Paris, France; www.paris.fr) Declare your undying devotion in the world's most romantic city, when even official public announcement boards are used to say 'I love you' and propose marriage.

March

Get fired up at Las Fallas (mid-March; Valencia, Spain) Spain's noisiest festival celebrates St Joseph by making huge, satirical papier-mâché figures, burning them on a pyre and letting off fireworks. Burn baby, burn.

Toast St Patrick's Day (17 March; Dublin, Ireland; www.stpatricksdays.ie) Raise a pint of Guinness to mark the 'falling asleep' (death) of Ireland's patron saint, while also partaking of the accompanying revelry.

April

Spend Easter in the Med (mid-April; Spain, Portugal and Italy) Strong Catholic traditions mean atmospheric Easter celebrations. In Seville up to 3000 penitents in dark robes and hoods shuffle slowly through the town's during the week of Semana Santa (p1086). Similar events include Braga's Ecce Homo (p926) and various penitent processions in Italy (p701).

Party royally on Queen's Day (Koninginnedag; 30 April; Amsterdam, the Netherlands) Join one million revellers marking the Queen's official birthday in the wildest of fashions, with street performers, bands, markets, booze and more.

SUMMER SOLSTICE

William Shakespeare knew what a rich seam he was mining when he wrote the play *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Even in the modern age, June 22, the longest day of the year, is marked with wild pagan rituals in northern Europe. This was an important time in the Viking calendar, and the Scandinavians particularly have a huge bash, with bonfires and all-night music festivals.

The same is true in Scotland, the very northwest of Germany and the Baltics. Take Estonia, for example, where bonfires are lit for all-nighters along the beach during **Jaanipäev** (St John's Eve; June 23).

A slightly different tradition exists in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, where the summer solstice was seen as a good time for young people to choose a marriage partner. Christianisation has shifted **Ivan Kupalo** to 6 or 7 July, but the evening still begins with folk singing and maypole-style dancing by young women, who then float wreaths (symbolising virginity) down a nearby river. Later, a bonfire is lit, over which couples will jump, holding hands, to test whether – if they maintain their grip – their love will last.

Feel the magic of Walpurgis Night (Walpurgisnacht; 30 April; Harz Mountains, Germany) Merrymakers dressed as witches, warlocks, devils and imps invade the summit of the Brocken Mountain (p467) for a little pagan bacchanalia. Similar celebrations are held in the Czech Republic, Sweden and Finland.

May

Discover your favourite beach island (Greece and Croatia) Intending to party or to chill-out? What you're looking for is always just a boat ride away in these two countries (see p538 and p258).

Listen to Sacred Music in Fès (late May to mid-June; Fès, Morocco; www.fesfestival.com) 'Cleanse your soul' with moving performances of spiritual and religious music from around the world over 10 uplifting days.

Meet the Roma at 'Khamoro' (late May; Prague, Czech Republic; www.khamoro.cz) Learn through music and dance about the little-known and much-maligned Roma culture. The Khamoro Festival culminates in a richly orchestrated parade through Prague's Old Town.

June

Experience White Nights (mid-June to mid-July; St Petersburg, Russia) The sun doesn't set on the imperial Russian capital until very late in summer, casting a bewitching glow over the city. The same effect can be observed in northern Scandinavia and Iceland (where the sun never really sets at all).

Go to Glastonbury (late June; Pilton in Somerset, England; www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk; Somerset) Get knee deep in pop culture, celebrity and inevitably, given the English weather, mud at the world's most famous festival, which should be back after its 2006 'gap' year off.

Rock at Roskilde (late June/early July; Roskilde, Denmark; www.roskilde-festival.dk) Glastonbury with a slightly more grungy feel, Roskilde has big-name alternative bands, folk, soul and reggae.

July

Race to Il Palio (2 Jul & 16 August, Siena, Italy) Bareback riders urge their horses on for three laps around the city's main piazza, Il Campo, in this incredible 'everything-goes' race.

Run with the bulls (San Fermin; early July; Pamplona, Navarre, Spain; www.sanfermin.com) Exercise your adventurous Hemingway-esque streak running before a herd of bulls through 800m of narrow streets. Seriously dangerous and not for the faint-hearted.

Get into the Exit Festival (early July; Novi Sad, Serbia; www.exitfest.org) Virtually 19 rock festivals in one and arguably Europe's coolest, Exit has different stages connected through the labyrinth of tunnels and ramparts of this amazing hilltop fortress overlooking the Danube River (p982).

Party at the Love Parade (early July; Berlin, Germany; www.loveparade.net) The love is back, as the organisers of Berlin's huge techno street parade proudly say. Party between the Brandenburg Gate and the Siegessäule victory column, and beyond.

Raise a glass to Õllesummer (Beer Summer; early July; Tallinn, Estonia; www.ollsummer.ee) The Baltics' largest beer festival mixes Estonian folk culture, local bands and international beers.

Revolt on Bastille Day (14 July; Paris, France; www.paris.fr) *Vive la révolution!* Fireworks, parties and a military parade on the Champs-Élysées mark the French national day (see p439).

Marvel at the Mostar Bridge Dive (last weekend in July; Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina) Carrying on the tradition of the world's oldest high-diving competition, young Mostar men plunge 21m from this famously rebuilt arched bridge (p146).

August

Go wild at Street Parade (early August; Zürich, Switzerland; www.streetparade.ch) Join Switzerland's supposedly uptight bankers as they cut massively loose on street floats and pavements, at one of Europe's largest techno parties.

Be outrageous at Amsterdam Pride (early August; The Netherlands; www.amsterdamgaypride.nl) The Continent's largest annual gay and lesbian pride march is also known as the 'canal parade', as outlandishly dressed participants literally float down the canals on floats and boats.

Attend the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (three weeks in August; Edinburgh, Scotland; www.edfringe.com) Unleash your inner stand-up comedian by enrolling to perform at this alternative arts festival. Alternatively, come to heckle.

Toss your food at La Tomatina (last Wednesday of August; Buñol, Spain) Throw 'em if you've got 'em at the world's largest food-fight. More than 20,000 revellers pelt each other with tomatoes for two free-for-all hours in the tiny town of Buñol, near Valencia.

Revel in the Notting Hill Carnival (last weekend in August; London, England; www.thecarnival.tv) Be dazzled by the colourful floats, the steel bands and the fantastic Jamaican food stalls of this enormous Caribbean-flavoured affair.

September

Arrange a late-year beach party (first half of September; Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) The high season has just finished, so now is a perfect time to hit the remarkably less crowded beaches. But don't dally; it swiftly gets too cold.

Chase the Northern Lights (September to October, also March to April; northern Finland, Norway and Sweden) Nature's most beautiful light show, the *aurora borealis* can be elusive. So give yourself at least a week to spot this quick-changing succession of colours and patterns, created by electrical charges in the upper atmosphere.

Have a rollicking Oktoberfest (mid-September to start of October; Munich, Germany; www.oktoberfest.de) Germans are so keen to start this annual beer orgy – consuming five million litres of beer and 400,000 pork sausages – that they kick off two weeks before October (see p472).

October

Watch the cows come home (early October; Switzerland and Austria) Decorated with bells and ribbons, local herds are led down from high pastures to winter barns, cheered on by locals in a ritual variously called *désalpe*, *Alpabfahrt* and *Almabtrieb*.

Take a hot bath (all month; Budapest, Hungary) Stave off the Autumn chill by taking to the thermal waters of Budapest's many spas (see p562), just in time for the city's Autumn Festival of classical music, too.

November

Celebrate Guy Fawkes Night (5 November; across England) Bonfires and fireworks recall a failed attempt to blow up parliament in 1605.

Ice-skate in London (late November to late January; London, England) The English capital currently can't get enough of urban ice-skating rinks, the best being at Somerset House (www.somerset-house.org.uk), Kew Gardens (www.rbgkew.org.uk), the Natural History Museum (www.nhm.ac.uk) and the Tower of London (www.hrp.org.uk).

Shop 'til you drop at Christmas markets (late November to late December; across Austria, Germany and Poland) Quaint stalls sell mulled wine, sausages, tree ornaments, Christmas cards and other presents in some thousands of markets heralding the arrival of the festive season.

December

Admire Kraków's Nativity Cribs (first Thursday of December to end February; Kraków, Poland) Crafting ornate nativity scenes (*szopka*), is an ancient Polish art and Kraków's best annual efforts are displayed in the Museum of History (www.mhk.pl).

Ski around Lake Bled (all month; Lake Bled, Slovenia) Avoid the summer crowds that swarm to Slovenia's most beautiful lake, by visiting it and the Julian Alps in winter.

Have your head turned at Mevlana (mid-December; Konya, Turkey) The ancient town where the mystical Islamic order of the Whirling Dervishes was established, Konya still pays tribute to the Sufi saint Mevlana with an annual festival of spectacular dances.

HIGHLAND FLINGS

Many Scots still consider themselves cut from the *Braveheart* tartan cloth, particularly those you find at the numerous Highland Games across the country from May to September. Originally a test of strength and skill for potential clan warriors, such games were revived in the 19th century, with all their caber-tossing (a caber is a tree trunk), hammer-throwing and stone-putting. Bagpipers, Scottish dancers and haggis are all in evidence too.

At the **Lonach Games** (last weekend of August; Strathdon, Aberdeenshire; www.lonach.org) local resident Billy Connolly is wont to bring along celebrity friends, which in the past have included Robin Williams, Ewan McGregor and Dame Judi Dench to name a few. The royal family, by contrast, turn out for the traditional **Braemar Gathering** (early September; Braemar, Deeside; www.braemar-gathering.org).

A good list can be found at www.albagames.co.uk, or ask Visit Scotland (www.visitscotland.com).

The Authors



SARAH JOHNSTONE

Coordinating Author, Germany

Sarah Johnstone is a freelance journalist based in London. She hates author bios and wishes the editors would stop asking for them. Having studied German (and journalism) at university, worked for employers from news agency Reuters to business travel magazines and done an MSc at the London School of Economics, she's spent the last few years dutifully traipsing back and forth across Europe for Lonely Planet.



AARON ANDERSON

Austria

Aaron was first drawn to Austria when his European travels were suspended by an extended stopover in Mayrhofen, Tirol. He enjoyed the Alpine lifestyle so much that he took on a job to make it last longer. Months quickly turned into a year of living it up and garnering an appreciation for everything Austrian. He is based in Boulder, Colorado and enjoys Saturdays at home with his fiancée and bulldog, loves anything outdoors, sometimes wears a mohawk and isn't afraid to sport a handlebar moustache.



SARAH ANDREWS

Spain

An American now based in Barcelona, Sarah has been using travel writing as an excuse to get to know her adopted country since 2000. For this guide, she got to revisit some of her favourite spots in Spain, including San Sebastián's 'Parte Vieja', Madrid's Reina Sofía temple of art, and Girona's medieval centre. Sarah has written about Spain for several Lonely Planet guides.



BRETT ATKINSON

Czech Republic

Brett's first experience of Eastern Europe was Bulgaria when the Iron Curtain was pulled tightly shut. He's since returned to island-hop in Croatia and honeymoon in Sarajevo. While researching the Czech Republic, he furthered his hobby of beer appreciation, especially while watching ice-hockey at the local *pivnice* (pub). When not travelling, Brett lives in Auckland, New Zealand. He advises never to drive a Skoda Fabia across a narrow castle drawbridge – especially if there's no room to turn around on the other side.



CAROLYN BAIN

Malta

After travelling the four corners of Europe, Melbourne-born Carolyn still favours the southern region, and she happily dedicates a good deal of her time to the search for the perfect Mediterranean island. For Lonely Planet she has repeatedly visited Greece and Malta, among other destinations; for this book, it was back to tiny Malta for a spell of *pastizzi*, mad drivers, avoiding rabbit on the menu, and swotting up on the fascinating local history.



OLIVER BERRY

France

Oliver graduated from University College London with a degree in English and now works as a writer and photographer in Cornwall and London. His first trip to France was at the tender age of two, and subsequent travels have carried him from the streets of Paris to the Alpine mountains and from the wine fields of southern France to the chestnut forests of Corsica. He writes for various film, music and travel publications and has won several awards including the *Guardian* Young Travel Writer of the Year.



JOE BINDLOSS

Cyprus

Joe Bindloss was born in Famagusta and spent his early years in Lefkosia and he's been writing for Lonely Planet since the 1990s. Joe has returned to Cyprus numerous times in between trips to Asia, Africa, Australia and the US, brought back by homestyle Cypriot cooking and the chance to explore the streets he walked as a toddler. This trip provided a new experience – his first overnight stay on Altinkum Beach in northern Cyprus in 32 years – a result of relaxing border restrictions between north and south.



BECCA BLOND

Liechtenstein & Switzerland

Becca was born in Geneva and, although she moved to the USA as a toddler, her American parents didn't let her forget Switzerland. She has childhood memories of wearing traditional Swiss Alpine dresses to holiday functions and of feeding goats on family vacations. These holidays inspired Becca to travel, and she's since done a couple of circuits around the world. Even if she could afford not to, Becca likes to think she'd choose budget travel – she likes the backpacker mindset. She calls Boulder, Colorado, home.



GREG BLOOM

Latvia, Lithuania & Kaliningrad

While living in Ukraine from 1997 to 2002, Greg visited Latvia annually for the Jürmala Frisbee tournament. Back then you could find a \$10 hotel room, bribe a traffic cop and hail Ladas in lieu of cabs. Riga was an undiscovered jewel. Returning to the Baltics for the first time in years, Greg reports that a) Riga is no longer undiscovered; and b) you can no longer bribe Baltic traffic cops. The cops are nicer, though, and speeding fines not too expensive. Formerly the editor of the *Kyiv Post*, Greg is now based in Manila.



VERITY CAMPBELL

Turkey

Straight after school Verity visited Turkey and stayed for 18 months, learning the language, teaching English and hitchhiking across the country. She crisscrossed Australia and Turkey for the next 15 years until she convinced both husband and toddler they'd enjoy a year in Istanbul. Verity has worked for six years for Lonely Planet in various countries, but no prizes for guessing where her heart lies. Verity has also coordinated and authored *Turkey and Istanbul*.



TERRY CARTER

Greece

Terry's first visit to Greece was with a Greek-Australian friend returning to his local village in Rhodes for its annual festival. He quickly learned that even the coolest Greek guys only need a couple of ouzos for the inner *zeimbekiko* dancer to surface. Having returned to Greece several times since, he's still puzzled by the attraction of Nescafé Frappé. When not dreaming of hiding away in Monemvasia with a few good books, Terry is a freelance writer and photographer based nowhere in particular.



GEERT COLE

Belgium & Luxembourg

Geert was your atypical Belgian from the start. As a youngster he liked Brussels sprouts, as a teenager he hated fashion and as an adult he pulled the pin...travelling the world instead of building a little red-brick house. Years on the road led to a disturbing discovery – nowhere on earth is founded on beer, chips and chocolate except Belgium. So he returned to Antwerp and met the love of his life, Leanne. Geert now divides his time between Australia, the joys of fatherhood and life on the road for Lonely Planet.



PETER DRAGICEVICH

Albania & Macedonia

Having worked for publications in New Zealand and Australia, Peter's covered everything from honeymooning in Verona to gay resorts in Fiji. He finally gave in to Kiwi wanderlust and set off to chase his diverse roots around Europe, spending time in his grandparents' villages in Croatia, Scotland and northern England. While it's family ties that first drew him to the Balkans, it's the history, natural beauty, convoluted politics, cheap *rakija* (Balkan firewater) and people that keep bringing him back.



LISA DUNFORD

Slovakia

A fascination with Eastern Europe has gripped Lisa from childhood, probably because her grandfather came from the Carpathian region that was once in Hungary, then Czechoslovakia and is now in Ukraine. She studied in Budapest and lived in Bratislava, Slovakia, for several years. There she danced with the country as it became an independent nation, learned the language and made lifelong friends. Lisa now resides on a river in southeast Texas, but she returns to Slovakia often – it still feels like home.



LARA DUNSTON

Greece

Lara first visited Greece eight years ago when she and her other half island-hopped around the Dodecanese on the cheap. Since then she's made countless trips. While Lara's idea of fun in Greece was basking on a beach in Symi, after this trip she's fallen in love with the wildlife and wildflowers of northern and central Greece and the Peloponnese. Lara has degrees in film and international studies, and a career that's embraced writing, film-making and now travel writing – motivated by journeys to 55 countries.



STEVE FALLON

Slovenia

Steve has been travelling to Slovenia since the early 1990s, when a well-known publishing company refused his proposal to write a guidebook to the country because of 'the war going on' (it had ended two years before) and an influential American newspaper told him that their readers weren't interested in 'Slovakia'. Never mind, it was his own little secret for a good 10 years. Though he still hasn't reached the top of Triglav, Steve considers at least part of his soul Slovenian and returns regularly.



DUNCAN GARWOOD

Italy

Duncan has spent much of the past six years carting his rucksack up and down Italy on behalf of Lonely Planet. He's investigated Olympic ski resorts in Piedmont, eaten the world's best pizza in Naples and watched no end of Italian football – on one memorable occasion witnessing Liverpool beat Roma at the magnificent Stadio Olimpico. A fluent Italian speaker, he moved to Italy in 1997 and after two years in Bari settled in Rome, where he's been ever since.



ANTHONY HAM

Morocco

Anthony's Moroccan love affair began many years ago when he began dreaming of medinas and endless Sahara horizons. These passions continue to drive him in search of the most intimate medina secrets, the most perfectly sculpted sand dunes and the contentment of drawing close around the campfire on a starry desert night. For most of the year Anthony travels, writes and photographs his way around Africa and the Middle East from his base in Madrid, but is called back to Morocco regularly.



PAUL HARDING

Finland

Paul strapped on a backpack to explore Europe 10 years ago. Mesmerised by the midnight sun, Scandinavia's pristine environment and Helsinki's summer nightlife, he has returned often. On this trip, he once again snowmobiled on frozen lakes, suffered mild shock from ice swimming after a sauna and survived Vappu in Helsinki. Fortunate enough to travel and work as a writer and photographer, Paul has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Finland*, *Iceland* and *Scandinavian Europe* guides, among others.



PATRICK HORTON

Bosnia & Hercegovina, Montenegro & Serbia

Patrick was born with restless feet. He travelled extensively in his native Britain before hitting the world trail and ending up in Melbourne. His journeys led him to North Korea, Eritrea, Kosovo, East Timor, Serbia, Tonga, Cuba or just riding a motorcycle over the Himalaya. Some day he aims to find the longest railway journey; the record so far is Helsinki (Finland) to Guilin (southern China). Patrick has contributed to numerous Lonely Planet guides as an author as well as a photographer.



STEVE KOKKER

Estonia

Steve has long found life in Eastern Europe more thrilling and full of exciting possibilities than back in his otherwise-great hometown of Montreal. A frequent visitor to the region since 1992, he has spent most of his time in Estonia, Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe since 1996. He's now living in Tallinn, where his father was born, thereby completing a karmic circle of sorts.



JOHN LEE

Britain

Born and raised in southern England, John decamped to western Canada in the early 1990s. Discovering that he could buy Marmite almost as easily as in the UK, he stayed on. After dabbling with teaching, he became a full-time freelance travel writer, visiting dozens of countries in pursuit of the next big story. Now focusing on Canada and the UK, his work has appeared in more than 100 magazines and newspapers around the world. He frequently returns to the UK to buy strong tea and Yorkie bars.



ALEX LEVITON

Italy

This is Alex's fourth time in Italy for Lonely Planet, leaving her usual haunt of Umbria to explore Rome and the south. She's now a big fan. Alex ended up in Italy on her first backpacking trip after university. A gelato and public art addiction led her to peregrinate back for her annual fix. After graduating UC Berkeley with a master's degree in journalism in 2002, she has split her time between Durham, North Carolina and San Francisco, California, with as much time as possible in Perugia, Italy.



LEANNE LOGAN

Belgium & Luxembourg

Leanne did Europe as a pre-puber in the '70s when Australians felt well and truly alienated from the rest of the world. Six months in a campervan with her family was enough to set her direction in life...travel – ALONE! She worked as a journalist in Australia for a couple of years to finance a long overseas stint. Twenty years later, Leanne's still on the road, but no longer solo. Two little daughters keep her in tow, as does a beer-guzzling, chip-loving chap from Belgium she met on her first assignment for Lonely Planet.



VESNA MARIC

Hungary

Vesna loved researching Hungary in below-zero January temperatures, spending a lot of time warming her bones in thermal baths, eating hot goulash, drinking wine and dancing in smoky clubs. Her first visit to Hungary was some years ago, after an overnight train from Sarajevo, emerging in a springtime Budapest so full of beans and birds and bees, she kept longing to go back for more. Vesna will never forget the joy of skating on a frozen lake, along with a whole Hungarian village.



TOM MASTERS

Russia

Tom first visited Eastern Europe at age 14 when he went to stay with family friends in Bulgaria just as communism was crumbling there. He's had a love affair with the once-obscure region since he can remember, and aged 15 travelled around a newly democratic Eastern Europe by train with his mother (an experience not unlike a Graham Greene novel). At 18 Tom finally got to see Russia, his true passion, while studying the language at university. More of his writing can be seen at www.mastersmafia.com.



VIRGINIA MAXWELL

Spain

Before taking to the road to write a host of guidebooks to the Middle East, Virginia worked as a publishing manager at Lonely Planet's head office in Melbourne, Australia. She travels with her partner Peter and young son Max, and is usually found somewhere between Istanbul and Cairo, only occasionally veering off course to investigate rewarding destinations such as Spain.



CRAIG MCLACHLAN

Greece

An adventurous Kiwi, Craig enjoys nothing more than visiting the Greek isles to enjoy Mythos beer and gyros. Describing himself as a 'freelance anything', Craig has wandered the world with a pack on his back. He runs an outdoor-activities company in New Zealand, in the southern-hemisphere summer, then heads north for the winter, working for Lonely Planet and leading tours to Greece and Switzerland. Craig has an MBA from the University of Hawaii where, he admits, he found it awfully hard to concentrate.



BECKY OHLSEN

Sweden

Becky has her parents to thank for her love of Sweden. But it was the pickled herring and schnapps that clinched it. She makes annual pilgrimages to the motherland and knows the language enough to have conversations that leave her baffled. She likes the gloom of Swedish art and the gleam of its pop – from Strindberg to ABBA. Most of all she loves hiking in Norrland, sharing the road with reindeer, and eating saffron ice cream in Gamla Stan. Becky has also coauthored Lonely Planet's guide to Sweden.



JEANNE OLIVER

Croatia

Jeanne arrived in Croatia in 1996 just as the country was getting back on its feet and has returned every year since. Enchanted by the coastline and fascinated by the ever-evolving political scene, Jeanne spends her vacations in Croatia between writing every Lonely Planet guide to the country. As well as turning out newspaper and magazine articles, Jeanne has launched a Croatia travel website at www.croatiatraveller.com.



FRAN PARNELL

Iceland

Fran's love of the country began while studying for a masters degree in Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, and it has just kept on growing. It's hard not to fall for the cool, clean, colourful city of Reykjavik, with its Viking history, charming and talented people, fine cafés and odd museums. Fran has also worked on Lonely Planet's guides to Sweden, Iceland and Reykjavik.



LEIF PETTERSEN

Romania & Moldova

In 2003 Leif Pettersen left a career with the Federal Reserve to embark on an odyssey of homeless travel writing. Despite no training, he managed modest success by deluging editors with material so raw that a tri-continental support group was formed to cope with the situation. Leif first visited Romania in 2004, and the low cost of living compelled him to stay. Speaking the language, having an apartment and owning a 1990 Dacia 1310, it's said Leif need only learn *țuică* distillation to gain honorary citizenship.



JOSEPHINE QUINTERO

Portugal

Josephine started travelling with a backpack and guitar in the late '60s. Further travels took her to Kuwait where she was held hostage during the Iraq invasion. Josephine moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía, Spain shortly thereafter, from where she has enjoyed exploring neighbouring Portugal, delighting in the differences between the two countries and enjoying her daily quota of *vinho verde* and custard tarts.



ROBERT REID

Bulgaria & Romania

Growing up in Oklahoma, Robert's sense of rebellion led him to old *Soviet Life* mags, and on to the Bulgarian-created Cyrillic alphabet and travels in lands where *sickles* aren't just a convenient word for a pickle rhyme. After studying Russian, Robert took a job at Lonely Planet overseeing shoestring guides. Now based in Brooklyn, Robert maintains a disproportionate attraction to planned cities made to impress Soviet dignitaries and clunky '70s hotels with drastically floral carpets, but he likes the pretty parts too.



TIM RICHARDS

Poland

Tim spent a year teaching English in Kraków in 1994–95. He was fascinated by the massive postcommunist transition affecting every aspect of Polish life, and by the remnants of the Cold War. He jumped at the chance to return for this assignment over a decade later, and was delighted by his reacquaintance with this beautiful, complex country. When he's not on the road, Tim is a freelancer living in Melbourne, Australia, writing on various topics: travel, lifestyle, the arts, technology and pets.



MILES RODDIS

Andorra

Living in Valencia, on Spain's Mediterranean coast, Miles loses count of the times he's nipped up to Andorra for a ski holiday or walking break – though never, ever to shop. Andorra marks the starting point for the 23-day Pyrenean Traverse described in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Spain*, a route he's twice trekked with enormous satisfaction. Miles has contributed to over 25 Lonely Planet titles, including guides, both general and walking, about Spain and France, Andorra's immediate neighbours.



STUART SCHUFFMAN

Ireland

Stuart's writing career began when he self-published *Broke-Ass Stuart's Guide to Living Cheaply in San Francisco*, which somehow snowballed into him writing about Ireland for Lonely Planet (something his doctor has subsequently called 'a two-month bender'). Luckily for him, he has a penchant for Guinness, good whiskey and fried food, so he managed to fit in perfectly. He currently lives in beautiful San Francisco, and occasionally wakes up craving real Irish black-and-white pudding.



SIMON SELLARS

The Netherlands

Simon Sellars has been fascinated by the Netherlands ever since he was old enough to fashion his own Dutch oven. He wishes Paul Verhoeven would stop mucking about and make another dystopian sci-fi blockbuster – preferably starring Rutger Hauer.



JOHN SPELMAN

Norway

John Spellman spends a lot of time trying to obtain refugee status so that Norway will let him immigrate. Until then, he visits as often as possible to drink tasteless beer, freeload off his friends and be overwhelmed by the world's most stunning landscape. When Lonely Planet isn't footing the bill, John is a PhD student researching architectural and urban histories, some of them Norwegian. He currently lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. This is the fourth time he has covered Norway for a Lonely Planet title.



ANDREW STONE

Denmark & Britain

Brought up in southern England and educated in part in Wales, Andrew has tramped over most of the UK in his 30-something years. His favourite area remains Scotland, where he's visited on student backpacking jaunts, boating and fishing trips, city breaks and walking holidays since the 1980s. His big hope is that one day someone invents a deterrent for the bloodthirsty Scottish midge that actually works. Andrew updated the Northern England, Wales and Scotland sections of the Britain chapter for this edition.



WENDY TAYLOR

Belarus & Ukraine

Wendy Taylor is a 35-year-old *luftmadchen* whose affinity for snowy landscapes started as a snowman-sculpting toddler in Anchorage, Alaska. But it was not until the 1990s, when her sense of humour had sufficiently blackened, that she fulfilled all Slavophile prerequisites. She graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Slavic languages and literature and set off for Moscow in 1994, working for the *Moscow Times* and other publications. She's been visiting or living in the former Soviet Union ever since.



RYAN VER BERKMOES

Germany

Ryan once travelled Europe, not on anything as upscale as a shoestring, but more like a piece of ratty twine. The trip left him in love with Europe and also permanently scarred, thanks to a masticating hostel bunkmate. He later lived in Frankfurt where he edited a magazine until he joined Lonely Planet. Since then he's travelled the world but is always happy to return to Europe. Fortunately he needn't worry about missing good German beer as he lives in Portland, Oregon, one of the world's great beer cities.

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