

# Getting Started

As diverse as it is beautiful, Mediterranean Europe is a region for all tastes. It boasts golden beaches and snow-capped mountains, volcanoes, lakes and forests; it's home to some of the most famous buildings in the Western world and to a large chunk of its combined art collection; the food is great and the wine unbeatable. Whether you want to swim, ski, surf or bungee jump you'll find somewhere to do it.

And it needn't cost a bomb. Accommodation runs the gamut from backpacker crash pads to luxurious five-star palaces, transport is efficient and reasonably priced, and there are any number of eating options. English is widely spoken in the main tourist centres, but attempts to speak the local language will generally elicit a friendly response. In the region's rocky hinterland you might encounter some language difficulties, but they'll rarely prove insurmountable.

## WHEN TO GO

Any time's good but the best months to visit are May, June, September and October. The weather is pleasant (hot enough for the beach but not overpowering), it's far less crowded and prices are lower than in July and August. If at all possible, avoid August. Temperatures are at their highest (in some parts they can hit 45°C) and the crowds are stifling. Everyone in France, Spain and Italy takes their holidays in August, which means that prices are sky-high, accommodation is fully booked and the major attractions are packed. That said, travelling in August has its advantages: there are any number of festivals to catch, cities tend to empty making them less chaotic (some city-centre hotels even offer August discounts) and the holiday atmosphere is undeniably contagious.

Ski resorts begin operating in November and move into full swing after the New Year, closing down again when the snow begins to melt in March or April. Expect to pay high-season rates in the period between Christmas and the first week in January and then from late January through to late March. Away from the mountain resorts and major cities, winter (December through to March) can be melancholic. The weather, if not cold by northern standards, is often grim and frequently wet, and many resorts simply shut up shop until the next season.

The Climate and When to Go sections in the individual country chapters explain what weather to expect and when to expect it, and the climate charts on p863 will help you compare the weather in different destinations. As a general rule, the Mediterranean coast is hotter and drier than the Atlantic seaboard with most rain falling in autumn and winter (roughly November to March). For the purposes of this book, summer and winter correspond to high and low seasons; for summer, read mid-May to the end of September and for winter, October through to mid-May.

## COSTS & MONEY

Europe is not cheap, but as a general rule the further south and east you go the cheaper it gets. Of the countries covered in this guide, Morocco and the eastern Balkan countries are cheaper than France, Italy and Spain.

Of your expenses, accommodation is by far the greatest. Whether you stay in youth hostels (roughly €8 to €25 for a dorm bed), budget pensions (anything from €40 to €150 for a double room) or midrange hotels (from about €80 for a double) your accommodation will probably amount to between a half and two-thirds of your daily expenditure. Needless to say,

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See Climate Charts (p863) for more information about Mediterranean Europe's weather.

## DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- ID card or passport and visa if required (see p874)
- travel insurance (see p868) – make sure it covers the countries you're visiting and any activities you might be doing (diving, bungee jumping etc)
- your driving licence and, if necessary, International Driving Permit if you're planning to hire a car (see p886)
- photocopies of all important documents
- plug adaptor, power transformer and mobile-phone recharger (see p866)
- a torch – in some places blackouts are more dependable than the street lighting
- a 'going-out' change of clothes – a smart shirt for him, a dinky black number for her
- sandals/thongs for showers and pebbly beaches.

prices drop considerably outside of the main tourist centres and in the low season, sometimes by as much as 40%. You'll also save yourself a euro or two by asking for a room without breakfast (if there's the option). Hotel breakfasts, especially in budget places, are often disappointing and rather than pay over the odds for a shrink-wrapped pastry and a cup of lukewarm coffee, you'd do better nipping out to a nearby bar or café. For details of accommodation options see p857.

Eating can be as cheap or as expensive as you like. Grab a bite from a roadside snack bar and you could pay as little as €1.50. Alternatively, sit down to a full meal in a restaurant and you should reckon on at least €25. Many places do set lunch-time menus, which are often cheaper than ordering off the regular menu. Drinking the local wine rather than beer will also keep costs down.

If you're travelling with kids note that some hotels don't charge for toddlers who bunk up with mum and dad, and that many state museums in EU countries are free to the under 18s (and over 65s).

As a rough guide, a backpacker cutting all the corners – sticking to youth hostels, snacking at noon and travelling slowly – should reckon on at least €40 a day. Your average midrange daily budget, allowing for cheap hotel accommodation, a modest restaurant meal, travel and a couple of sights, varies from about €50 in Montenegro to anything up to €150 in France and Italy.

Public transport throughout the region is largely efficient and not desperately expensive. Buses and long-distance coaches are generally cheaper than trains, especially for cross-border travel, and ferry travel is reasonably priced. Car hire, however, is expensive and the cost of petrol anything but cheap. To save on car hire, it's always best to arrange it before you leave home (see p887).

The best way to access your money on the road is to use an ATM card. ATMs are widely available throughout the region, allowing you to withdraw what you need when you need it. It's always a good idea, however, to have a little spare cash for emergencies, both in the local currency and in an easily exchanged currency such as US dollars. About €150 should be sufficient. For further details on money matters see p869 and individual country chapters.

## READING UP

For as long as people have been travelling in the Mediterranean, authors have been writing about them. Way back in the 8th century BC, Homer penned *The Odyssey*, his epic tale of Odysseus' adventurous attempts to return home

after the Trojan War. Almost a millennium later, in the 2nd century AD, historian and geographer Pausanias wrote the world's first travel guide.

Two of the greatest Mediterranean travel writers, however, sought their fame elsewhere. The great Moroccan explorer Abu Abdullah Muhammed Ibn Battuta (1304–69) is said to have covered some 120,000km in 30 years of travel in Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, while Venetian adventurer Marco Polo (1254–1324) thrilled with his tales of Asian exotica.

But as home-grown authors have left, so northern authors have sought solace in the southern sun. Goethe and Stendhal, Byron, Dickens and DH Lawrence have all travelled to the region seeking inspiration. More recently, a wave of 'build and tell' authors have created a new literary genre by buying run-down farmhouses in Provence or Tuscany, doing them up and writing bestsellers about the experience.

### Books

Try the following for a vivid portrayal of the multi-faceted Mediterranean: **Leo Africanus** (Amin Maalouf) The 15th-century Mediterranean is brought to vibrant life in this fictional memoir of real-life traveller Hassan al-Wazzan. Follow the African Lion from Spain, across Muslim North Africa to Christian Rome.

**We Followed Odysseus** (Hal Roth) Join Roth in his boat as he retraces Odysseus's legendary 10-year journey. If you're not going to read *The Odyssey*, (and you probably won't), this is the next best thing.

**The Grand Tour: The European Adventure of a Continental Drifter** (Tim Moore) Or why it's not a good idea to drive a clapped-out Rolls Royce from Britain to Venice and back.

**On the Shores of the Mediterranean** (Eric Newby) The ideal travelling companion, Newby turns his sparkling eye to the Italian mafia, Arabian harems and communist Albania as he wanders the length of the Med.

**Route 66: On the Trail of Ancient Roman Tourists** (Tony Perrottet) A light read, this is one of the better 'follow-in-the-footsteps-of-the-ancients' books. Perrottet combines classical references, modern jokes and amusing anecdotes.

**Mediterranean Winter: The Pleasures of History and Landscape in Tunisia, Sicily, Dalmatia and Greece** (Robert Kaplan) In recounting a trip through the off-season Mediterranean, Kaplan vividly recalls the history behind the Mediterranean's great landscapes.

**Pillars of Hercules** (Paul Theroux) With his usual caustic wit and languid style, veteran traveller Theroux leads the reader along the shores of Spain to the French Riviera, Sardinia and Sicily.

**The Seventh Wonder** (Juan Villar) Part travelogue, part guidebook, this is the entertaining account of Villar's attempt to visit each of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World in a three-week holiday.

### Websites

**Cheap Flights** ([www.flycheapo.com](http://www.flycheapo.com)) Database of budget airlines operating in Europe.

**Ferry To** ([www.aferry.to](http://www.aferry.to)) Comprehensive site detailing ferry routes, rates and ports, plus links to ferry companies.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Read up on where you want to go, hear from folk who've already been there and exchange thoughts with fellow travellers.

**Michelin** ([www.viamichelin.com](http://www.viamichelin.com)) A driver's dream – get directions, read live traffic updates, check weather forecasts and peruse maps.

**Seat 61** ([www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)) Everything you always wanted to know about European rail travel but didn't know to ask.

**Visit Europe** ([www.visiteurope.com](http://www.visiteurope.com)) A massive online A to Z of European travel with tons of practical travel advice.

### MUST-SEE MOVIES

Star of innumerable films, the Mediterranean's shimmering seascapes and pastel-coloured villages have long charmed international audiences. Here's a selection of celluloid teasers to put you in the Mediterranean mood.

'The Mediterranean's shimmering seascapes and pastel-coloured villages have long charmed international audiences'

**Volver** (2006; Pedro Almodóvar) Mothers, ghosts and Penélope Cruz in sizzling form. There's no mistaking Almodóvar's kooky style in this homage to his windswept, gossip-ridden hometown in Spain's La Mancha region.

**Il Postino** (1994; Michael Radford) The touching tale of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's Italian exile as seen through the eyes of his love-struck postman. Shot in the Aeolian Islands, it's a visual feast of a film.

**Karaula** (2006; Rajko Grlic) A co-production involving all the former-Yugoslav republics, this bitersweet comedy tells of love, syphilis and a state of emergency in a 1980s mountain-top outpost.

**The Sheltering Sky** (1990; Bernardo Bertolucci) Paul Bowles' bleak novel of existential wandering in the North African Sahara gets the Bertolucci treatment – all vast, panoramic shots and bold colours.

**Roman Holiday** (1953; William Wyler) Join Gregory Peck as he whisks Audrey Hepburn around Rome on the back of a Vespa in this classic *dolce vita* comedy.

**Amélie** (2001; Jean-Pierre Jeunet) French actress Audrey Tautou shot to international stardom in this off-beat romantic comedy. Set in Paris, the story centres on impish Amélie and her mission to make everyone happy.

### TOP TEN FESTIVALS

Wild street parties, solemn religious processions, week-long raves, classical concerts and glitzy film fests all feature on the region's festival calendar. For further festival details see individual country chapters; in the meantime here's our top 10:

**Carnevale** (see p465; Venice, Italy; February) In the 10 days leading up to Ash Wednesday Venetian revellers don spectacular period costumes and sexy masks.

**Cannes Film Festival** (see p328; Cannes, France; May) Hang out with the Hollywood A-list at the world's glitziest film fest.

**Oil-wrestling Festival** (see p825; Kırkpınar near Edirne, Turkey; June)

**International Istanbul Music Festival** (see p852; Ystambul, Turkey; June and July) Catch a concert in a sultan's palace or a 4th-century church – there's everything from rock to jazz and opera.

**Fès Festival of World Sacred Music** (see p600; Fès, Morocco; June & July) French choirs and Congolese percussionists are among the international cast of musicians who perform in Morocco's imperial city.

**Hellenic Festival** (see p348; Athens, Greece; mid-June to August) Music, dance and theatre is staged in atmospheric venues across Athens.

**Bašarsija Noći** (see p95; Sarajevo, Bosnia & Hercegovina; July) Sarajevo's ancient bazaar hosts dance, music and street theatre.

**San Fermín** (see p758; Pamplona, Spain; early July) Overdose on adrenaline at Pamplona's annual bull-running.

**Il Palio** (see p490; Siena, Italy; July and August) Medieval festivities culminate in a fierce, bare-back horse race around Siena's Piazza del Campo.

**Samothraki World Music Festival** (see p410; Samothraki, Greece; August) A wild, week-long rave on the Aegean island of Samothraki.

### CONDUCT IN MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE

Most Mediterranean countries are fundamentally conservative and attach a great deal of importance to appearance, so your clothes may well have a bearing on how you're treated, especially in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. By all means dress casually, but keep your clothes clean and ensure sufficient body cover (trousers or a knee-length dress) if your sightseeing includes churches, monasteries, mosques or synagogues. Also keep in mind that in most Muslim countries, Westerners in shorts or sleeveless shirts are virtually in their underwear in the eyes of traditional locals.

On the beach, nude bathing is generally limited to particular areas, but topless bathing is common in many areas. Nevertheless, if nobody else seems to be doing it, you shouldn't do it either.

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Given that the Mediterranean is the world's biggest tourist destination, it's no surprise to know that the environment is suffering. The strain that 220 million annual visitors place on the region's resources is considerable. Water resources are thinning and desertification continues; bushfires, 95% of which are caused by human activity, are becoming more frequent; and sewage facilities fail to keep up with waste production.

As a visitor you won't be able to stop any of these things, but you can do your bit by following these common-sense rules:

- Save plastic wherever possible – for example, refill plastic bottles from public drinking fountains rather than buying fresh every time.
- Use public transport. Pollution, much of it caused by car emissions, is a major issue. If possible, avoid vehicles with two-stroke engines (jet-skis, scooters etc), which are heavy polluters.
- Stay in locally owned establishments, rather than international chain hotels, and eat locally produced food (it'll taste better anyway).
- When hiking, stick to marked trails and always carry your rubbish away with you.
- Never throw cigarette butts away, and only light fires in fireplaces provided at picnic areas and camping grounds.
- Leave wildflowers where they are. Many are protected species and they look much better in the countryside than squashed inside your pocket.
- Be sensitive to local customs and social norms (see Conduct in Mediterranean Europe, p29).

If you want to go further and actually donate to a charity, we'd recommend one of the new wave of 'carbon-offset' organisations. These work by allowing donors to offset harmful plane (and car) emissions by contributing to, among other things, tree-planting programmes. The **Carbon Neutral Company** ([www.carbonneutral.com](http://www.carbonneutral.com)) allows you to calculate how much carbon dioxide your flight (or drive) will produce and how you can counter these emissions. For example, to offset the 0.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide produced on a London–Rome flight you need only spend UK£4 on one of various conservation projects.

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# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### CROSS THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

One Month/  
Spain, Morocco & Portugal

A fascinating fusion of styles, Spanish and Portuguese architecture owes as much to the influence of Moroccan Moors as it does to the scorching sun.

Kick off in **Salamanca** (p722), a student city with two cathedrals and style to sell. Head east, stopping in **Segovia** (p724) to admire the Roman aqueduct en route to **Madrid** (p703). Overdose on culture and clubbing before moving on to **Toledo** (p729), famous for its remarkable cathedral. Continuing south the Mezquita in **Córdoba** (p783), the 10th-century Alcázar in **Seville** (p778) and the Alhambra in **Granada** (p786) form a trio of must-see Moorish marvels.

At **Málaga** (p790) jump on a ferry for **Melilla** (p581) then make for **Fès** (p597), where you'll get lost in the massive medina. Push on to **Marrakesh** (p592), Morocco's red centre. Watch the sun set on the blood-red walls before hitting the road for cosmopolitan **Casablanca** (p587). Pause in the capital **Rabat** (p583) before returning to Spain via **Tangier** (p571) and **Gibraltar** (p796).

Recharge on the sandy beaches of **Lagos** (p639) before heading up to **Lisbon** (p623), Portugal's laid-back capital. To the north, **Tomar** (p645) is a good base for visiting **Fátima** (p646), one of Europe's largest religious shrines.



From Spain's rugged heartland to the souqs of Morocco's Imperial cities, from the sandy beaches of the Portuguese Algarve to Madrid's clubs and cafés, this tour stretches 1890km over two continents. You could cover everything in three weeks but give yourself a month for a more comfortable ride.

**PAST GLORIES, PRESENT TREASURES****One Month/Italy & Greece**

Enjoy the classical world's greatest hits while encountering ancient ruins, stunning art, spectacular coastlines and a far-from-extinct volcano.

Explore beguiling **Venice** (p462), Italy's lagoon city, then head to **Verona** (p460) and catch an opera at the Arena, before turning south towards **Florence** (p479), the Renaissance capital. The city's attractions are legion but drag yourself away to visit **Pisa** (p487) and **Siena** (p488), an enchanting Gothic city.

The road now leads to **Rome** (p426), as all eventually do. You'll only have time for the highlights, but the lively streets are entertainment enough.

On to **Naples** (p496), guaranteed to wake you from travel-induced torpor. The ruins of **Pompeii** (p502), with Mt Vesuvius looming in the background, are a must-see. Southwards, the Amalfi Coast incorporates beautiful **Positano** (p505) and **Amalfi** (p506).

On the Adriatic coast admire the barmy baroque architecture at **Lecco** (p509) before catching a ferry at **Brindisi** (p508). Head on to **Olympia** (p362), venue of the first Olympic Games, then southeast to **Mystras** (p360), famed for its Byzantine palaces and monasteries. Turn north towards pretty **Nafplio** (p358) before visiting mythical **Mycenae** (p359) and **Ancient Corinth** (p358).

Spend a few days exploring **Athens** (p343), a chaotic mix of the ancient and modern, where the Parthenon dominates the cityscape.

Now it's decision time: if you're after more ruins head north; if you want some beach time, grab a ferry. The first option takes in **Delphi** (p362), home of the ancient oracle, and the monasteries of **Meteora** (p363). The ferry leads to the **Cyclades** (p370). Party animals head to **Mykonos** (p370), **Ios** (p376) or **Santorini** (p378); for a quieter time try **Paros** (p372) or **Naxos** (p374).

**Taking in some of the Western world's most famous treasures, this modern Grand Tour starts in northern Italy and finishes 2145km away in the Aegean. To do it full justice you'll want at least a month but it can easily be broken down into shorter, week-long segments.**

**ROADS LESS TRAVELLED****TURKISH DELIGHTS****Two Weeks/Istanbul to Göreme**

An intriguing mix of East and West, Turkey is a modern secular state with a Muslim past, a country where mosques stand next to churches, and headscarves are as likely as halter tops. It boasts a spectacular landscape and super beaches.

Nowhere are Turkey's contradictions more visible than in **Istanbul** (p815), a bubbling cauldron of a city, whose highlights include the Topkapı Palace, Aya Sofya and the Blue Mosque. Further round the Aegean coast **Çanakkale** (p826) is a popular base for visiting nearby **Gallipoli** (p826), scene of vicious WWI fighting, and the legendary town of **Troy** (p827).

Following the coast around to the southeast, you arrive at **Selçuk** (p829), 3km from the monumental Roman ruins at **Ephesus** (p829). Hardcore classicists might also visit the remains of the Mausoleum, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, at **Bodrum** (p832); sun-seekers would do better pushing on to the magnificent 20km-long beach at **Patara** (p836).

Tanned up, spend a pleasant hour hanging out in **Kaş** (p837) before heading on to **Antalya** (p838), a modern town with an interesting Ottoman core. At this point head inland. A six-hour bus ride away, **Konya** (p846) boasts some fine Seljuk architecture and gave birth to the 13th-century whirling dervishes. Further northeast, the eerie, rocky landscape around **Göreme** (p847) is one of Turkey's most incredible sights.



**There's something for everyone on this two-week, 1100km tour of Turkey's delights. Bazaars, battlefields (ancient and modern) and some of the Med's most beautiful beaches line the land that the ancients knew as Asia Minor.**

**HUG THE ADRIATIC COAST** Three Weeks/Croatia, Montenegro & Albania

Crystalline waters, craggy inlets and pastel fishing ports have made Croatia's coastline a summer favourite. Follow the coast south through Montenegro and Albania and you'll discover any number of beautiful beaches, many untouched by the heavy hand of tourism.

Start with a day or two in **Pula** (p139), exploring Croatia's Istrian peninsula. From here, head south, pausing at **Zadar** (p146) en route to **Split** (p150). Check out Diocletian's Palace and take day trips to **Solin** (p155), the country's top archaeological site, and **Hvar Island** (p156). No Croatian itinerary would be complete without a visit to **Dubrovnik** (p161), Byron's 'pearl of the Adriatic'. If you have time pop over to the national park on **Mijet Island** (p160).

From Dubrovnik, cross into Montenegro. Admire **Kotor** (p559) at the head of southern Europe's deepest fjord, before taking a break on the beaches of **Budva** (p558) and **Ulcinj** (p557).

From **Shkodra** (p66) it's 116km to the Albanian capital **Tirana** (p59), a bustling city of street markets and bulky architecture. Take a trip to alluring **Berat** (p70) and continue on to **Vlora** (p72) and its beautiful bay. The last stretch takes you down the gloriously isolated coast, past the immaculate sandy beaches of **Dhërmi** and **Drymades** (p73) to **Saranda** (p74), a favourite Albanian holiday resort.

Three weeks is long enough to travel the 1080km trail that leads from northern Croatia down the Dalmatian coast, past southern Europe's deepest fjord and on to the Albanian resort of Saranda. With more time you could venture into the area's mountainous interior.

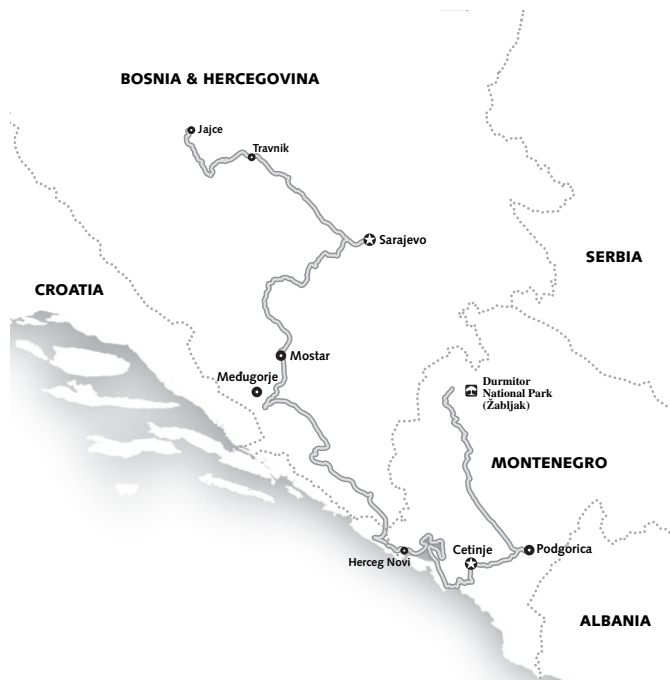
**BEAT A BALKAN PATH** Two Weeks/Bosnia & Herzegovina & Montenegro

Closed to everyone but war journalists for much of the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro are reappearing on travellers' itineraries. You can extend your journey in Montenegro by including the coastal towns covered in the 'Hug the Adriatic Coast' itinerary.

The obvious place to start is **Sarajevo** (p90), Bosnia and Herzegovina's hip capital. Just over a decade ago the city was on the brink of destruction, but it has regained its infectious vibe and is now a traveller favourite. After a few days tear yourself away and head up to **Travnik** (p107) and its atmospheric medieval castle. Nearby **Jajce** (p108) boasts its own catacombs, citadel and waterfall.

From Jajce double back to Sarajevo and continue south to **Mostar** (p100) whose iconic Stari Most bridge stages a spectacular diving competition every July. An easy day trip away, **Medugorje** (p105) is Bosnia and Herzegovina's version of Lourdes: a religious site with a commercial flavour.

First stop in Montenegro is the attractive walled town of **Herceg Novi** (p562), worth a passing look en route to **Cetinje** (p561), Montenegro's former capital. A curious mix of the stately and rural, Cetinje is more appealing than the country's current capital, **Podgorica** (p555), which you'll pass through on your way up to Žabljak in the magnificent **Durmitor National Park** (p562).



Escape the hordes in two of the region's smaller countries. This two-week, 500km-itinerary takes you from Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina's lively capital, to the stunning mountains of Montenegro's Durmitor National Park.

## TAILORED TRIPS

### FOLLOW THE FOOD TRAIL

To whet your appetite start with a few days in **Paris** (p207), dining at neighbourhood bistros and lingering over streetside coffees. Warmed up and ready to go, make for Burgundy and serious wine country. Stop off at **Dijon** (p276), at the **Côte d'Or Vineyards** (p279) and at **Lyon** (p281), a cultural and gastronomic centre *par excellence*. Last stop in France is **Marseille** (p296) whose bouillabaisse has been a staple of Provence fishing folk for centuries.



From Marseille hop over the border to **Bologna** (p473), considered by many to be Italy's finest food town. Home of bolognese sauce (known to Italians as *ragù*), it gifted the world tortellini and lasagne. Italy also means pizza, and pizza means **Naples** (p496). It was here in 1889 that the *margherita* (tomato, mozzarella and basil) was invented and pizza was propelled to the gastronomic big league.

Jumping across the water to Spain, the first port of call is **Valencia** (p762), where paella was originally cooked. Over in the Basque seaside town of **San Sebastián** (p752), you'll be spoiled for choice as you stumble from one tapas bar to the next.

### THRILLS, SPILLS AND BUNGEE JUMPING – A SPORTS TOUR

Mediterranean Europe's varied landscape provides sports-minded travellers a wealth of opportunities. The region is not usually considered a surfing hotspot, but Portugal's **Guincho beach** (p636) offers decent surf, as does **Sagres** (p640). In Spain, **Tarifa** (p795) is considered Europe's windsurfing capital.

From Spain leap over to Italy, where Tuscany's rolling landscape is made for cycling, and the wine for drinking. Various companies in **Florence** (p479) offer bike hire and guided rides. For something more strenuous head up to **Cortina d'Ampezzo** (p478) in the northern Dolomites. The area, with its network of well-marked trails, is a favourite of Italy's hiking-and-biking set.



If you prefer jumping off mountains to walking up them, get over to **Bovec** (p681) in Slovenia where you can try paragliding, bungee jumping, rafting and canyoning.

South of Slovenia, Croatia is one of the Med's top diving destinations. Cave diving is a speciality, but there are also wrecks to be explored. Check out, for example, the Austrian steamship in the sea off **Rovinj** (p137).

For something more sedate, head to **Fethiye** (p835), Turkey's sailing capital. Party animals can sign up for a booze-cruise, while serious sailors can charter a yacht.

# Snapshots

## CURRENT EVENTS

### Albania

Beating off heavyweight competition from Philip Roth, Ian McEwan and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ismail Kadare became the first author to win the prestigious Man Booker International Prize (2005). A former Nobel-prize nominee and political exile, Kadare has long been considered Albania's king of letters (for more see p56).

In June 2006 political differences were put on hold as deputies joined Prime Minister Sali Berisha in celebrating the signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the first formal step in the long EU-membership process.

### Bosnia & Hercegovina

Just a few days after Christian Schwarz-Schilling replaced Paddy Ashdown as Bosnia's High Representative, Bosnia and Hercegovina began formal membership talks with the EU, the last former-Yugoslav republic to do so. The negotiations, the prelude to a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, are expected to increase pressure for the capture of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, both wanted for war crimes.

### Croatia

Croatia's goal of EU membership by 2010 was given a boost by the capture of Ante Gotovina, the country's most wanted war-crimes suspect. The Croatian army general had been on the run for four years when he was arrested in Tenerife in December 2005, just two months after the EU had given the green-light to membership talks. The arrest was welcomed as proof of Croatia's willingness to comply with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), something on which the talks' success continues to depend.

### Cyprus

Relations between Cyprus' Greek controlled south and the Turkish north are likely to come under the international microscope as Cyprus becomes an issue in Turkey's bid for EU membership. In the first of what observers suspect will be many clashes between the two countries, the Greek-Cypriot government tried to block the start of Turkey's accession talks, claiming Ankara had continuously refused to open its ports and airports to Cyprus. Only when the EU warned Turkey that it would have to take action on the issue did Lefkosia relent and the talks commence.

On a lighter note, the EU gave the thumbs up to the island's coastal waters, declaring them the cleanest in the Med.

### France

France was plunged into a prolonged period of self-analysis after urban rioting swept the country in late 2005. Sparked off by the death of two teenagers in a poor Paris suburb, the violence, the worst since 1968, highlighted the issue of racial integration in France's multicultural society (for more see p203). As a belated response, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy introduced tough new immigration laws.

A second wave of protest hit in spring 2006 when thousands took to the streets of Paris to contest a proposed employment law. Forced into a U-turn,

A beautiful girl marries a snake while an artist slips towards madness. Folklore, reality and allegory combine in *Spring Flowers*, *Spring Frost*, Ismail Kadare's poetic and challenging analysis of post-communist Albania.

In April 2006, women in Pafos (Cyprus) linked 114,782 bras to create the world's longest bra-chain. At 111km it beat the existing record by 51km.



beleaguered Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin eventually dropped the unpopular legislation. De Villepin's reputation was further muddled when he was connected to a series of bogus corruption charges levelled against Sarkozy, his main political rival.

### Greece

In May 2006, a mid-air collision between Greek and Turkish fighter jets led to heightened tensions between the two countries. Both governments later played down the incident, which took place in disputed air space above the Aegean island of Karpathos.

Archaeologists got an unexpected gift in February 2006 when a 2300-year-old underground tomb, the biggest ever discovered in Greece, was unearthed near the ancient town of Pella. Ironically, a month later, the Greek parliament approved a controversial law legalising cremation. MPs hope the law, passed in the face of opposition from the powerful Greek Orthodox Church, will alleviate pressure on Athens' packed cemeteries.

### Italy

Italy's 2006 general election proved particularly ugly as incumbent Silvio Berlusconi battled it out with former EU President Romano Prodi. Prodi eventually claimed victory but by a margin so small that Berlusconi refused to publicly concede defeat. The election's great *coup de théâtre*, however, had little to do with politics. Less than 24 hours after voting had closed it was announced that Bernardo Provenzano, the supreme boss of the Sicilian mafia, had been captured after 43 years on the run.

Football has also been in the headlines. As World Cup delirium quietens following Italy's victory in the 2006 tournament, the nation's soccer bosses sweat out a corruption scandal that could see four top teams booted out of Serie A, Italy's premier league.

### Malta

More used to emigration than immigration, Malta is struggling to deal with the ever-increasing number of illegal immigrants landing on its shores. Predictably, the situation has provoked an anti-immigration backlash with local papers reporting arson attacks and extreme right-wing rallies.

The euro continues to make waves, even before it's been introduced. According to an EU survey, only 35% of islanders believe its introduction (currently set for January 2008) will have positive consequences.

### Montenegro

Montenegro became the world's newest country after 55.5% of its population voted to leave Serbia. The international community, including Serbia itself, has been quick to recognise the nascent nation, which now faces the onerous task of splitting common assets with its erstwhile partner. More concerned than most, members of the 5,900-strong Serbian navy begin to plan life in their newly landlocked country. For further details see the Montenegro Goes It Alone, p552.

### Morocco

In an attempt to promote a more tolerant version of Islam, the Moroccan government has appointed 50 female preachers. The *mourchidats*, as they're known, have been authorised to give basic religious instruction in mosques but not to lead Friday prayers.

On the sports front, Morocco's most famous athlete, Hicham El Guerrouj has hung up his spikes. Nicknamed 'King of the Mile', the 31-year-old bowed

out two years after his finest hour – winning the 1500m and 5000m gold at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

### Portugal

Portugal gained its first centre-right president since the 1974 coup when Anibal Cavaco Silva won the presidential elections in January 2006. A reform-minded economist, he pledged to help lead the country out of its economic slump. As president he holds no executive power, but Portugal's socialist government will nonetheless appreciate his support as it struggles to push through biting economic reforms.

Portugal's debut in the 2006 football World Cup provided a field day for commentators as they took on Angola, their former African colony. The match, however, supplied few highlights and no surprises as the Africans went down 1-0.

### Slovenia

When Slovenia revealed the design of its brand-new euro coins, no one was more surprised than neighbouring Austria. For etched onto the side of the €0.20 coin was the profile of a Lipizzaner stallion, the horse made famous by Vienna's Spanish Riding School. The 400-year-old horse has been the subject of tension between the two countries in the past, as both claim the breed as their own. This time, though, Austria kept its true thoughts to itself, commenting that Slovenia was free to put what it liked on its coins.

As of 1 January 2007 the tolar ceased to exist and Slovenes began to use the euro, their fourth currency since splitting from Yugoslavia in 1991.

### Spain

Regional autonomy is the talk of the town. As Catalonians voted for a revised regional constitution, premier José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero prepared for peace talks with ETA, the Basque terrorist group. Whatever the outcome of the talks, the issue is likely to ruffle feathers, something that Zapatero has already shown himself willing to do. Legalising same-sex marriages was never going to go unnoticed in Catholic Spain, and the Church was duly appalled when Spain became only the third European country (after Belgium and the Netherlands) to allow it.

Water, or the lack of it, has also become an issue as the country heads for what some claim will be the worst drought since 1947.

### Turkey

Egg consumption dropped by up to 95% in the wake of Turkey's short-lived bird-flu outbreak. In late 2005, news that the aggressive H5N1 strain had been found in a number of dead birds prompted fears of a mass epidemic. In the following months an estimated 20 people caught the virus but only four died, leading scientists to suggest that it had somehow mutated into a less deadly form.

Turkey's formal EU-accession talks finally got underway, after an objection by the Cypriot government was overcome at the last minute (see the Cyprus section), allowing officials to conclude negotiations on the first of 35 policy areas.

### HISTORY

Long before history, the Mediterranean was home to the great figures of classical mythology. Zeus, king of the Greek gods, presided over Mt Olympus (see p367) while Achilles and company went to war in Troy (see p827); the

Ségolène Royal, France's main left-wing candidate for the 2007 presidential elections, was voted the world's sixth sexiest woman by the French edition of *FHM* magazine.

For an up-to-date look at the region's news, log onto [www.southeurope.news.com](http://www.southeurope.news.com). You'll find articles on everything from politics to finance, and fashion to sport.

Sirens seduced sailors off southern Italy, and the half-man, half-bull Minotaur raged in his Cretan labyrinth in Knossos (see p383).

Only with the emergence of the Greek Empire does myth merge into history. Successive centuries bore witness to the rise and fall of various power blocs of which the Roman Empire was the most spectacular example. Emerging in the 14th and 15th centuries, the Muslim Ottoman Empire dominated Turkey and much of the Balkans until the early 20th century.

The region's history is also one of exploration and colonisation. It was thanks to the discoveries of Columbus and Magellan, da Gama and Diaz that Spain and Portugal were able to build their massive 16th-century empires.

Revolution and civil war have plagued Mediterranean countries. Most famously, revolution destroyed the 18th-century French monarchy and paved the way for Napoleon and his imperial ambitions. More than a century later, the Spanish civil war led to the lengthy Franco dictatorship. Military-backed regimes also affected Portugal and Greece.

### Ancient Civilisations: Greece and Rome

More a confederation of rivals than a unified political entity, the Greek Empire was based on the city-state, or *polis*. Athens and, to a lesser extent, Sparta were the dominant powers, with colonies as far afield as southern Italy and Sicily.

But in times of danger, intercity rivalries were put on hold as the Persians discovered to their cost at the battles of Marathon (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC). A period of unprecedented enlightenment and prosperity, known as the Classical Age, followed. The Athenians in particular had never had it so good – Pericles commissioned the Parthenon (see p347), Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides established their literary reputations, and Socrates thought long and hard.

Alas, the good times were not to last and in 431 BC the Spartans, driven by a consuming jealousy of their rich Athenian neighbours, sparked off the Peloponnesian War. Athens was defeated in 404 BC, but the Spartans were themselves defeated shortly after by the Thebans. Theban rule was also short-lived as King Philip II of Macedonia stormed in from the north.

But more than Philip, it was his son who is remembered for his empire-building. Succeeding his father in 336 BC, Alexander the Great took only 13 years to conquer Asia Minor, Egypt, Persia and parts of India and Afghanistan. His death at the age of 33 ensured the break-up of the largest empire the world had ever seen as his generals divided the spoils between themselves.

Greek power was on the wane and by 146 BC both Greece and Macedonia had become Roman provinces.

Roman power had been steadily growing since the 3rd century BC and by 218 BC most of Italy south of the Alps was under Roman control. It was the Alps that provided the unexpected gateway for the Carthaginian-general Hannibal and his elephants to march into Italy during the second Punic War (218–202 BC). Ending in defeat for Carthage, the war whet the Romans' appetite for expansion and Spain, much of North Africa, and Greece rapidly fell to the rampant legionnaires.

Less than a hundred years later, Julius Caesar was at the helm, orchestrating victories in Gaul and Egypt. Caesar eventually became too powerful for his own good and on the Ides of March (15 March) 44 BC was stabbed to death. A power struggle ensued between Mark Antony and Octavian, Caesar's nominated heir. Octavian proved too strong for Antony who, together with his Egyptian lover Cleopatra, died in 31 BC.

Touching on history, philosophy, art and literature, Charles Freeman's highly accessible *Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean* is a great introduction to the region's classical past.

In 27 BC, Octavian became the first Roman emperor, ruling under the title of Augustus. Unlike many of his mad successors – Tiberius, Caligula and Nero – he ruled well. Great advances were made in engineering and architecture, and Rome's literary scene flourished in the hands of Virgil, Horace and Ovid.

By the end of the 3rd century the Empire was in decline. In an attempt to stop the rot, Emperor Diocletian divided it into two parts – the Eastern Empire and the Western Empire. His successor, and Rome's first Christian emperor, Constantine went further by founding Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in Byzantium as his Eastern capital.

However, Rome's days were numbered. In AD 476 German tribes entered the city, and the barbarian leader Odovacar proclaimed himself ruler of Italy. The Eastern Empire lasted a little longer hanging on until it was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire.

### Exploration

Links between the Mediterranean and the Far East go back to ancient times. The 5000-mile Silk Road, along which Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324) travelled in the late 13th century, was already an important trade route by Roman times. Connecting Asia Minor (Turkey) with China, it remained open until the disintegration of the Mongolian Empire in the late 14th century.

But it was to break Venice's monopoly of the lucrative spice trade that the Portuguese mariners took to the high seas in the late 15th century. Vasco da Gama (1469–1524) became the first European to reach India by sea, following the route Bartolomeu Diaz (c 1450–1500) had pioneered around the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. Portuguese traders lost little time in establishing control of the route.

Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) may have been Portuguese but it was the Spanish who financed his westward voyage to the Pacific, via the Strait that bears his name. Sailing from Spain in 1519, Magellan died in the Philippines, but one of his five ships eventually made it back to Spain, thus completing the first circumnavigation of the world.

Spanish money also sponsored Christopher Columbus (1451–1506). Genoan by birth, Columbus had long dreamed of sailing westwards to discover a new route to the Indies. His plan, however, failed and on 12 October 1492 he landed on a small island in what is now the Bahamas. He had discovered America.

### Revolution & Religion

Watching from Rome, the Catholic popes may have been delighted at the missionary zeal of the European colonialists, but they were far from happy at the religious doctrines seeping down from northern Europe. It was in response to the Protestant Reformation that the Church launched the violent 16th-century Counter Reformation. History, however, shows that although the Catholic masters of the day failed to eradicate Protestantism completely, it never seriously threatened their hold in the Mediterranean.

Not so Islam, which had been introduced into Spain as early as the eighth century. By AD 714 Muslim armies from Morocco had occupied virtually all of the Spanish Peninsula establishing a hold that they wouldn't fully relinquish for almost 800 years. But just as their control over Spain was on the wane, further east the seeds of Ottoman power were being sown in Turkey. Reaching the peak of its power in the 16th century, the Muslim Ottoman Empire was long a thorn in the side of Catholic dominion.

The moving story of a young American volunteer fighting in the Spanish Civil War, Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bells Toll* is a masterpiece of war literature.

Danis Tanovich's *No Man's Land* is a brilliant, bleak comedy set in the Bosnian War. The story centres on two soldiers, a Serb and a Bosnian, trapped together in a disputed trench.

But for all the bloodshed, the region's monarchies remained relatively unharmed until the late 18th century. The French revolution broke out in 1789 setting off a series of bloody events that culminated in Napoleon declaring himself Emperor of France in 1804.

In Spain it was the Fascist General Franco who emerged victorious from his country's Civil War (1936–39). A bitter affair that pitted the army, Church and Fascists against a factious left-wing coalition, it left up to 350,000 Spaniards dead and the country isolated. It wasn't until 1977, two year's after Franco's death, that the first post-dictatorship elections were held.

Across the border in Portugal, the military were busy arming their guns with flowers. In 1974, the so-called Revolution of the Carnations put paid to 48 years of military rule, as the army effectively led a peaceful mutiny against its dictatorial leaders. In the same year the Greek colonels were forced out of power after a brutal seven-year incumbency.

More recently, popular opposition led to the fall of communist rule in Albania – the 1992 elections signalling the end of 47 years of dictatorship. To the north nationalist-inspired violence led to the break-up of Yugoslavia.

## PEOPLE

Despite the recent resurgence of nationalism – witness the birth of new Balkan countries – the ethnic map of Mediterranean Europe presents a complex picture. Migration, both within the area and from outside, has led to the creation of hundreds of mixed communities – there are, for example, Albanians in Italy, Turks in Greece, and North Africans in Spain and France.

Throughout the Balkan Peninsula, but also elsewhere, there are numerous Roma communities. No official figures exist for their population, but

## IMMIGRATION

Europe needs more immigration, not less. The unlikely conclusion of an EU report, published in 2005, stated that without immigration falling birth rates and an ageing population would almost certainly lead to shortfalls in the European workforce.

This is hardly what EU governments want to hear as they struggle to balance calls for increased domestic security with the realities of illegal immigration. Immigration, legal or otherwise, is not a new issue in the Mediterranean, but recent events – nationwide rioting in France, extremist rallies in Malta, stampedes in Morocco – have kept it at the forefront of attention.

During the 1990s the fall of east Europe's communist regimes and the crises in the Balkans ensured a steady stream of illegal immigrants into Western Europe. Today, the international spotlight has shifted to the Med's southern crossing, from North Africa to Spain and Italy. In May 2006 Spanish border police intercepted some 1000 would-be immigrants en route to the Spanish Canary Islands. Most were sub-Saharan Africans travelling from Senegal, one of Africa's booming migrant transit points. To the northwest, boats continue to leave Libya and Tunisia bound for Italy. On board are people desperate enough to pay traffickers between US\$1000 and US\$2000 for passage. However much they pay, though, they get no guarantees – in the latest of numerous tragedies, 11 would-be immigrants drowned off the coast of Sicily.

In response to the ongoing crisis, the European Commission recently announced plans to use unmanned spy planes to patrol the EU's borders. At the same time, the French parliament approved laws making it harder for unskilled migrants to settle in France and abolished the right of illegal immigrants to gain citizenship after 10 years.

Public opinion is mixed on the subject, but with legislators unsure of the way forward and no end in sight to the widening poverty gap, the issue is likely to remain relevant for the foreseeable future.

estimates put it at around 12 million worldwide. Originally from India – the original Romany language is based on Hindi – the Roma arrived in Europe in the 14th century.

## RELIGION

In the face of Europe's increasing secularisation, religion (for which read Catholicism in much of the region) continues to play an important social, if not spiritual, role. Regular church attendance may be in freefall (about 34% in Italy compared to 70% after WWII), but still people want to get married in church and celebrate first communions. Many local festivities also have religious origins.

Catholic relations with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the major denomination in Greece and Montenegro, remain strained. Theologically speaking, the two are fairly close, but tensions have long been simmering over accusations of Catholic proselytising in traditional Orthodox areas.

Morocco, Turkey and Albania are the standard bearers for Islam in the region. As in the worldwide Muslim community, the overwhelming majority are Sunni.

Throughout the region there are also a number of Jewish and Protestant communities.

## ARTS

Mediterranean Europe is a dream destination for art lovers. With everything from 35,000-year-old Cro-Magnon cave paintings in France (see p275) to Picasso's *Guernica*, and from the Parthenon (see p347) in Athens to Bilbao's avant-garde Guggenheim Museum (see p756), you can't fail to be impressed. Of course, there's more to the arts than painting and building – there's also literature, music, theatre and cinema – but here we focus on the region's art and architecture.

## Art & Architecture

It was the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries that, more than any other period, marked the high point of European art. Financed by the Florentine Medici family and the Roman popes, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael et al worked to create a body of work that is still awesome today. The world's greatest collection of Renaissance art is in Florence's Galleria degli Uffizi (see p482).

It was to the region's classical roots that the Renaissance artists turned for inspiration. The wealth of Greek and Roman ruins across the region attest to the skill of their artists, architects and engineers. The Parthenon in Athens (see p347), for example, was designed with curved lines to counter optical illusions; the Roman Pantheon (see p432) is topped by the largest unreinforced concrete dome ever built. Roman art was largely derivative, based on earlier Greek styles, although in the dying days of the Empire, eastern influences began to creep in as the Byzantine hold tightened.

In Spain the influence of Islamic styles is all too evident. Córdoba's famous Mezquita (see p783) is one of many stunning examples of Moorish architecture. Over the water in Morocco, the *medersas* (religious schools) of Fès (see p598) are a visual feast.

For something completely different head north. Gaudí's Sagrada Família church (see p738) in Barcelona is an icon to the modernist spirit that swept through Spain and France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In much the same vein, Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum (see p756) and the Centre Georges Pompidou (see p215) in Paris stand out for their innovative design.

In *The Sign of the Cross*, Irish novelist Colm Toibin travels through the Catholic heartland of southern Europe, testing the Church's influence and his own lack of religious conviction.

Art history becomes high drama in *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, Ross King's gripping account of the painting of the Sistine Chapel.

France's contribution to European architecture dates back to the 11th century when the Normans' Christian zeal led to the construction of many Romanesque churches throughout France and southern Italy. Towards the end of the 12th century, churches began to get bigger and more dramatic. The Gothic architects revelled in huge pointed arches and ornate stained-glass windows. For confirmation, visit Notre Dame (see p214) in Paris or Seville's gigantic cathedral (see p778).

Equally as exuberant but considerably lighter on the eye, the baroque of offerings of the 17th century continue to dazzle. Many of the ornate sculptures that grace Rome's city centre were sculpted by baroque master Gianlorenzo Bernini.

## SPORT

Sport in Mediterranean Europe has come a long way since the first Olympic Games were celebrated in Olympia (see p362) in 776 BC. Nowadays, it's largely a matter of football (soccer). During the season (September to May) millions of fans flock to matches or, as is increasingly the case, watch their teams on satellite TV. The region's top leagues attract stars from all over the world and top players are feted as Hollywood stars. At the time of writing, Barcelona was reigning European club champion and Greece the unlikely holder of the European title.

There is, however, life after football. Cycling is big in Spain, France and Italy and the Tour de France is the world's premier race. Basketball is also followed, particularly in Croatia, Montenegro and Greece. On an international level, Greece are European champions.

Bullfighting continues to arouse passions, particularly in the southern Spanish region of Andalucia where some 70 bullrings play host to regular events; over the border in France up to 40 southern towns have bullrings.

In Turkey, oil wrestling is popular. To catch the annual championship head to Kyrkpınar, near Edirne (see p824) in June and July.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

The Mediterranean nations covered in this guide encompass more than 3 million sq km of land. In the west, Portugal marks the last stop on the European mainland, while 3000km to the east Turkey bridges the gap between Europe and Asia.

Famous for its low-lying sandy beaches, the region's coastline is, in fact, surprisingly varied. Head to Italy's Amalfi Coast (see p505) and you'll find spectacular cliffs plummeting into shimmering blue waters; further east, the 5790km-long Croatian coastline is studded with an infinite number of rocky inlets.

### MEDITERRANEAN GAMES

In summer 2009 the region's finest athletes will converge on the Italian coastal town of Pescara for the 16th Mediterranean Games.

The games, held every four years, were first staged in Alexandria in 1951, the brainchild of Muhammed Taher Paha, the then Chairman of the Egyptian Olympic Committee. Since then they've grown to become what organisers now call a 'mini-Olympics'. In the 2005 Almeria games, competitors from 21 African, Asian and European countries participated in events ranging from bowls to basketball, and karate to kayaking. After two weeks of competition, the medal table was dominated by Italy, France, Spain and Turkey.

### MEDITERRANEAN FACT FILE

The world's third-largest sea after the South China Sea and the Caribbean, the Mediterranean covers an area of 2,510,000 sq km, measuring 3900km at its longest point and 1600km at the widest. Almost entirely landlocked, it's connected to the Atlantic Ocean by the Strait of Gibraltar; to the Black Sea in the east by the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus; and to the Red Sea by the Suez Canal. Because of these limited oceanic connections tidal activity is minimal.

Within the Mediterranean there are nine smaller seas, of which the most important are the Tyrrhenian (running down the west coast of Italy); the Adriatic (between Italy, Croatia and Montenegro); the Ionian (between Italy, Greece and Albania); and the Aegean (between Greece and Turkey).

A characteristic feature is the huge number of islands that litter the seascape. Greece alone has about 2000, many of which are little more than rocks and seagulls. The biggest islands are, from east to west: Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Menorca, Mallorca and Ibiza.

Away from the coast, much of the region's interior is mountainous. The Alps stretch from southern France across the north of Italy and east into Austria. In Slovenia, the Dinaric Alps branch southeast off the main range and continue down the Balkans into Greece where they become the Pindos Mountains. Other notable ranges include the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, the Pyrenees in Spain, and the Italian Apennines.

Although under threat from acid rain and summer fires, great forests still cover large swathes of the Balkans. More than half of Slovenia and 40% of Albania are covered by forest, and Croatia boasts some wonderfully preserved oak forests.

The Mediterranean has a long history of volcanic activity. Most famously Mt Vesuvius buried Pompeii (see p502) in AD 79. Today, however, it's Mt Etna (see p516) on Sicily and Stromboli in the Aeolian Islands (see p514) that are more likely to blow.

Earthquakes are common throughout the region. Greece and Turkey both lie at the heart of one of the world's most seismically active areas and suffer frequent quakes. The worst earthquake in recent times hit in 1999 when three massive tremors, two in Turkey and one in Greece, left thousands of people dead. The seismic activity is caused by the convergence of the Eurasian, African and Arabian continental plates deep below the eastern Mediterranean.

### Wildlife

Much of the region's wildlife quietly goes about its business inland, away from the spotlight. Wolves and brown bears, chamois, deer and lynx are all present, although numbers are limited, and the Iberian lynx (indigenous to Spain and Portugal) is on the verge of extinction. Wild boars roam the woods of southern Europe and Morocco's Atlas Mountains, while various species of viper lie coiled in the region's rocky nooks. On some beaches in Turkey and Cyprus you might spot nesting turtles.

The Mediterranean skies are home to a rich assortment of bird life, particularly in spring and autumn as flocks of migrating birds pass through. Huge numbers of storks stop for a breather in Morocco as eagles and hawks swoop the skies. Vultures can be spotted in Croatia, France and Greece.

Dive underwater and you'll discover a thriving ecosystem. The Mediterranean comprises 1% of the earth's marine surface yet is home to 6% of its marine species. Fin whales and striped dolphins make up 80% of the sightings in the Pelagos Sanctuary, a 90,000 sq km protected area between southeast France, northwest Italy and northern Sardinia. White sharks have also been spotted in the Mediterranean, but attacks are almost unheard of.

At 3350m, Mt Etna is Europe's highest active volcano. In late 2002 eruptions forced officials to close nearby Catania airport.

Armed with Paul Sterry's *Complete Mediterranean Wildlife and Wild Flowers of the Mediterranean* by Marjorie Blamey and Christopher Grey-Wilson, you should be able to identify most of the region's flora and fauna.

## National Parks

Of the region's national parks the following are classified as Unesco World Heritage sites:

**Croatia** Plitvice Lakes National Park (p149)

**Italy** Aeolian Islands (p514)

**Slovenia** Škocjan Caves (p684)

## Environmental Issues

It's an uncomfortable truth, but of all the threats to the region's environment the greatest is posed by mass tourism, the Med's biggest money spinner. Each year some 220 million visitors pour into the region, placing an enormous strain on its already-stretched natural resources. And with tourism expected to increase – the Worldwide Fund For Nature (WWF) estimates that tourist numbers will reach 655 million by 2025 – the situation is unlikely to improve any time soon.

Water is an increasingly valuable commodity, particularly in Malta and Cyprus where consumption already outweighs regeneration rates. At the other end of the water cycle, sewage facilities are failing to keep up with waste production, and untreated water is being routinely dumped into the sea.

Pollution, both on land and sea, is an issue. Many of the region's major cities suffer from the choking effects of uncontrolled traffic, and while attempts are made to curb the flow of cars into city centres, they tend to be half-hearted at best.

On the high seas the situation is little better. The seaways are heavily used, with about 28% of the world's oil-tanker traffic passing through the Mediterranean, spilling, on average, 635,000 tonnes of crude oil a year. This, naturally, does little for the health of the maritime fauna, which is already suffering from overfishing. In some places fish stocks are down to 20% of their natural levels.

Other important issues are soil erosion – exacerbated by construction, climate change and industrial-scale farming – and desertification. In Spain alone, the effects of desertification are said to cost up to US\$200 million a year. Bushfires, 95% of which are said to be caused by human activity, are also common. Each year more than 50,000 fires consume up to 8000 hectares of land, destroying natural habitats and indigenous forests.

## FOOD & DRINK

There's no finer place to indulge your appetite than the Mediterranean. Since the Epicureans raised the pursuit of pleasure to a philosophy, food and its enjoyment of food has had a special place in Mediterranean hearts.

Few regions offer such a wealth of tastes. Dishes range from the spicy couscous concoctions of Morocco to Turkish kebabs, and from the best pizza you'll ever taste to seafood plucked straight off the boat. France and Italy produce the top wines in the world; Spain is famous for sherry and sangría, and Portugal for its port. For something stronger, Turkey (*raký*) and Greece (ouzo) specialise in super-strong aniseed spirits.

What follows is a brief, and very general, round-up of the region's cuisine. For specific tips see individual country chapters.

## Staples & Specialities

### BREAD

Bread is fundamental to the Mediterranean diet. Coming in all shapes and sizes – from the flat pitta bread used in Turkish kebabs to the long baguettes baked by the French *boulangers* – it's served as a matter of course at all meals

except breakfast. When eating out, you'll routinely be presented with (and charged for) a bread basket whether you ordered one or not.

### DESSERTS

Fruit is often served as dessert or incorporated into cakes and pastries. Honey, nuts and raisins are frequently used to sweeten North African desserts.

Ice cream is a perennial favourite, particularly in Italy where *gelato* is a national treasure.

### FRUIT & VEGETABLES

Mediterranean cooks know that the key to their cooking often lies in the quality of the fruit and veg. Fortunately, they're well supplied. Onions, aubergines, tomatoes, garlic, capsicums, mushrooms, artichokes and cucumbers, oranges, lemons, melons, apricots, dates and figs are all grown in the region.

To gauge the importance of these products, try to imagine Italian cuisine without the tomato or Greek cooking without the aubergine. Life simply wouldn't be the same without *ragù* (the meat-flavoured tomato sauce known outside Italy as bolognese) or moussaka (the ubiquitous Greek dish of aubergine, mince and béchamel sauce).

### GRAINS & PULSES

Decidedly unglamorous, grains and pulses crop up in a surprising number of regional dishes. Lentils, chickpeas and beans adorn pastas, soups and salads, while couscous forms the bedrock of many Moroccan dishes. Rice is also surprisingly prevalent, used in traditional dishes like Spanish paella and Italian risotto.

### HERBS & SPICES

Freshly cut herbs are used in many Mediterranean dishes. Basil, bay laurel, parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme grow freely in the warm, southern-European climate and are found in all well-stocked kitchens.

In North Africa, spices introduced by the Arabs are widespread. Coriander and cumin, saffron, cinnamon, chilli and paprika crop up in numerous dishes.

### MEAT

Lamb is the preferred meat in Muslim countries. Turkish cooks shred it into pitta bread to make kebabs, while in Morocco it's stewed in earthenware pots for the national dish, tajine. You'll also find it roasted, often over an open fire.

In southern Europe, ham is a favourite. Cured using traditional techniques, it appears in various guises – in Spain ask for *jamón serrano*, in France for *jambon* and in Italy for *prosciutto*.

### OLIVES & OLIVE OIL

More than any other product, olive oil symbolises Mediterranean cooking. An indispensable staple, it's as varied as wine. The colour and consistency range from gloopy petrol green to a less-viscous golden yellow, depending on the type of olive used, the ripeness at which it was picked and how it was crushed. The region's biggest producers are Spain, Greece and Italy where thousands of hectares are given over to the grey-green olive tree.

### PASTA

Debate reigns as to whether Marco Polo bought pasta back from China or whether it was actually invented in Italy. Whatever its origins, it is today a mainstay of the Italian diet, served as a *primo* (first course) after the *antipasto*

A single golf course requires one million cubic metres of water a year – the equivalent to the consumption of a town with 12,000 inhabitants.

Spain boasts 480 beaches with the prestigious Blue Flag rating; Cyprus and Greece topped the tables in the EU's 2005 bathing-water report.

Patience Grey's *Honey from a Weed: Fasting and Feasting in Tuscany, Catalonia, the Cyclades and Apulia* is a beautifully written ode to Mediterranean cooking. Enjoy her unusual recipes and learn what to do with wild plants.

In Italy some 40,000 companies produce up to 90,000 tonnes of ice cream annually.

(starter) and before the *secondo* (second, or main course). A reliable choice wherever you are, it's dished up with a mouthwatering array of sauces, the best of which are disarmingly simple. There's nothing complicated about adding cherry tomatoes, fresh basil, garlic and olive oil to spaghetti.

### SEAFOOD

The Med has been fished for thousands of years, and although overfishing is a problem it supplies a dazzling array of edible treasures: fresh prawns, mussels, clams, octopus and squid are all mainstays popping up in sauces and salads or simply fried or grilled. Cod is another favourite, particularly in Portugal where *bacalhau* (dried salt cod) has been a staple since the 16th century.

### Drinks

#### TEA & COFFEE

If you're used to milky English tea in a mug you'll have a shock in Turkey where tea (*çay*) is served teeth-rottingly sweet in tiny glasses. Fruit teas are popular throughout the region and mint tea, known as 'Morocco whisky', is ubiquitous in the North African kingdom.

Coffee is drunk in huge quantities. When you order one you'll usually get a short black espresso (for which read almost pure caffeine) unless you specify otherwise. See individual country chapters for details of the many coffee combinations available – long coffee, short coffee, coffee with milk, milk with coffee, cappuccino, cold cappuccino and so on.

#### WATER

In many countries, tap water is safe to drink but, if in doubt, bottled water is readily available throughout the region.

#### WINES & SPIRITS

Despite increased competition from around the world, Mediterranean Europe remains the centre of the wine world. The world's two biggest producers, France and Italy, have long been famous for their heavy hitters – Burgundy, Barolo, Chianti and Champagne among them – but there are many other national wines worth trying – retsina in Greece, for example, or Cypriot *komandaria*. Throughout the Mediterranean, wine drinking is not the preserve of the well-heeled or well-informed but a fundamental part of many people's everyday diet. Most restaurants, bars and cafés serve decent local wines, often costing little more than mineral water.

If wine doesn't appeal what about a spot of sherry (*jerez*) or sangría in Spain, or a port in Portugal? In Greece it's difficult to avoid the aniseed-based ouzo; Turks prefer their own firewater, *raký*.

Although Islam forbids the drinking of alcohol, it's widely available in Morocco and Turkey.

### Where to Eat & Drink

Eating out is a way of life on the Med, and whatever your tastes you'll find somewhere to suit your style (and budget). You can do glamour in super-expensive designer bistros, or casual in beachside tavernas; you can feast in family-run restaurants or snack from roadside kiosks. There are any number of swish cafés for an elegant aperitif or beachside bars for a boisterous beer.

Of course, meal prices will vary enormously. Common sense dictates that joints right by the seafront in popular resorts are going to charge more than the places hidden away in the quieter backstreets. Restaurants with waiters touting on the streets should generally be avoided, as should

places with multilingual menus or, worse still, with fading photos of sorry-looking food.

If you're on a tight budget look out for self-service canteens in city department stores or roadside kiosks, the best of which serve delicious local specialities. Kebabs or pizzas can taste just as good eaten out of paper as they can served on a plate. Self-catering is also an option. Dive into a local market/deli, pick some bread, cheese and a slice or two of salami; add some juicy olives and a bottle of local wine and you've got the recipe for the perfect picnic.

### Vegetarians & Vegans

Vegetarianism is not as widespread in southern climes as it is in northern Europe, and vegetarians and vegans might have a hard time of it in Portugal and some of the eastern European countries. Elsewhere, restaurants generally offer one or two vegetarian dishes or, at the very least a selection of vegetable starters, side dishes and/or salads.

#### WHAT'S GOOD IN...

- Albania – Roast lamb and seafood are staples. In Tirana, *fêrgesé Tirané* is a traditional dish of offal, eggs and tomatoes cooked in an earthenware pot.
- Bosnia and Hercegovina – Meat stews are a mainstay. Try *dinstana teletina sa povræem* for a filling veal and vegetable casserole.
- Croatia – Istria is known for its *tartufe* (truffles); further south the Dalmatian speciality *brodet* (a broth of mixed fish and rice) is a perennial favourite.
- Cyprus – Order *meze* for a taster of *koupepia* (stuffed vine leaves), *seftalia* (local sausage), *yemitsa* (vegetables stuffed with rice and mince) and much more besides.
- France – Classic dishes include *cassoulet*, a casserole of beans, pork sausage and goose conserve, and the Provence fish stew *bouillabaisse*. Burgundy, Bordeaux, Champagne or Chablis are the great wines.
- Greece – Vegetarians will enjoy the *horiatiki salata* (Greek salad), a mix of cucumbers, olives, red onions, tomatoes and feta cheese. Retsina, the national wine, might take more getting used to.
- Italy – Aficionados swear by pizza *margherita* with its tomato, mozzarella and basil topping. Local tipples include Tuscan Chianti and the king of Italian wines, Barolo.
- Malta – The national speciality is *fenek* (rabbit), served fried or baked in a casserole. Wash it down with a bottle of local Pinot Grigio.
- Montenegro – Grilled meat and cheese are common. A classic is *kajmak* (salted cream turned to cheese).
- Morocco – Couscous and *tajine* (meat and vegetable stew cooked in an earthenware dish) are ubiquitous. As is mint tea, the 'Moroccan whisky'.
- Portugal – Seafood is the nation's favourite. Sit down to *caldeirada* (seafood stew) or any number of *bacalhau* (dried salt cod) dishes.
- Slovenia – Meat appears in many guises: *klobasa* (sausage), *zrezek* (cutlet/steak), *golaž* (goulash) and *paprikaš* (piquant chicken or beef 'stew') are all popular.
- Spain – Paella is the national dish but foodies go mad for tapas, the small savoury dishes served at many bars. On the drinks list you'll find *jerez* (sherry), *cava* (sparkling wine) and *sangría* (wine punch).
- Turkey – Down a quick *raký* (a fiery aniseed liqueur) before tucking into a *durum döner kebab* (sliced lamb packed into pitta bread).

In Greek mythology Dionysus, or Bacchus as he's often known, was the god of wine. He was also the god of mystic ecstasy.

One thing to look out for is food that has been cooked with meat fat. That harmless and delicious looking tomato sauce might just have spent the past hour simmering with great chunks of meat in it. If you're at all suspicious, ask.

In some countries, particularly those like Greece where the definition of vegetarianism is somewhat vague, a good way of ensuring meat-free food is to say that you are fasting, a concept better understood by many locals.

### **Habits & Customs**

Old habits die hard and lunch remains the main meal of the day in most Mediterranean countries. Modern working practices are encroaching but it's still not unusual for workers to return home for lunch, and for shops and businesses to close for three or four hours in the early afternoon. At weekends and holidays, pastry shops do a flourishing trade in cakes, tarts and biscuits as people stop off to buy dessert for the family lunch.

Meals are taken considerably later in southern Europe than in more northerly areas. It's not uncommon to find people queuing for popular restaurants as late as 11pm. Nor is it uncommon to find kids eating out with their parents. Children are generally welcome everywhere and even if few places offer kids' menus, you can often ask for half portions.

**'Lunch remains the main meal of the day in most Mediterranean countries'**

# The Authors



## DUNCAN GARWOOD

**Destination, Getting Started, Snapshots, Itineraries, Directory, Transport, Italy**

Since enjoying a student holiday in the Greek islands, Duncan has been fascinated by the Mediterranean and its apparently idyllic lifestyle. Now, after 10 years living in Italy, he's discovered there's more to the region than great beaches and fine food. Born in the UK, he moved to Bari in 1997 and up to Rome in 1999. For the past five years Duncan spent much of his time running up and down the Italian peninsula, researching and writing for Lonely Planet. He's still drawn to the south, though, where he spends most summers trying to get in a bit of swimming between deadlines.

### My Favourite Trip

For once I take my own advice and set off in May, avoiding the summer crowds and high-season prices. I start with a day or two in the stunning Cinque Terre (p452) before pushing on to Genoa (p450). I enjoy the energy of big ports, guessing where the ships are headed and where they're coming from, and am happy investigating Genoa's historic centre. I then jump on a ferry to Corsica (p319) for a few days exploring the granite landscape and beautiful bays. Back on the French mainland, I eat bouillabaisse in Marseille (p296) en route to Avignon (p301). From here the road leads home, but not before a couple of days in Aix-en-Provence (p300) where I happily potter about not doing very much.



## 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 the Ganbara tapas bar in San Sebastián, the Reina Sofía temple of art in Madrid, and Calella, the prettiest town on the Costa Brava. Sarah has written about Spain for several Lonely Planet guides.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).





### 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 vineyards of southern France to the chestnut forests of Corsica. For this book he had the enviable job of writing the France chapter. He is a regular contributor to various film, music and travel publications and has won several awards for his writing, including the *Guardian* Young Travel Writer of the Year.



### JOE BINDLOSS

Cyprus

Joe Bindloss was born in Famagusta and spent his early years in Lefkosa. He's been writing for Lonely Planet for seven years, covering such diverse areas as Northeast India, Iceland and the Scottish Highlands. Joe has been coming to Cyprus in between trips to Asia, Africa, Australia and the US for decades, brought back by home-style 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 Turtle Beach in northern Cyprus in 32 years – a result of relaxing border restrictions between north and south.



### VERITY CAMPBELL

Turkey

After high school Verity visited Turkey and ending up staying for 18 months, learning the language and hitchhiking through the country. She crisscrossed Australia and Turkey for the next fifteen years until she convinced both husband and toddler they'd enjoy a year in Istanbul. Verity has worked for six years as a Lonely Planet author in various countries. As well as authoring the Turkey chapter for this book, she has coordinated and authored *Turkey and Istanbul*, previously worked on this chapter for *Mediterranean Europe* and *Europe on a Shoestring*, and written Turkey-related content for [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).



### TERRY CARTER

Greece

Terry's first visit to Greece was with a Greek Australian friend returning to his local village in Rhodes for an annual festival. He quickly learnt that even the coolest Greek guys only need a couple of ouzos for the inner *zeimbekiko* dancer to surface. While still preferring to play the Turkish *saz* to the bouzouki, he now has a clear understanding on how making Greek coffee differs from brewing Turkish coffee. When not dreaming of hiding away in Monemvasia with a few good books, Terry is a freelance writer and photographer based nowhere in particular.



### PETER DRAGICEVICH

Albania

Over the course of a dozen years working for newspapers and magazines in both his native New Zealand and Australia, Peter's covered everything from honeymooning in Verona to gay resorts in Fiji. He finally gave in to Kiwi wanderlust, giving up staff jobs to chase his typically antipodean diverse roots around much of 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* and, most importantly, the intriguing people that keep bringing him back.



### LARA DUNSTON

Greece

Lara has degrees in cinema, communications, international studies and screenwriting, and a career that's embraced writing, filmmaking, media education and now travel writing – motivated by journeys to 55 countries. Lara first visited Greece eight years ago and has made countless trips since – one with her frappé-loving mother in tow! While her idea of fun in Greece was basking on a beach in Symi or leaning over the edge of an infinity pool in Santorini, after this research trip she's fallen in love with the wildlife and wildflowers of northern and central Greece, and is now mad about the Mani.



### 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 daily 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 hasn't reached the top of Triglav, Steve considers at least part of his soul Slovenian and returns to the country as often as he can for a glimpse of the Julian Alps in the sun, a dribble of *bučno olje* and a dose of the dual.



### ANTHONY HAM

**Morocco**

Anthony's Moroccan love affair began too many years ago to remember, when he began dreaming of medieval medinas and the endless horizons of the Sahara. These contradictory passions continue to drive him on in search of the most intimate medina secrets, the most perfectly sculpted sand dunes and the contentment that always comes from drawing near around the Saharan 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 finds himself called back to Morocco on a regular basis.



### PATRICK HORTON

**Bosnia & Hercegovina, Montenegro**

Patrick's restless feet have taken him to the more arcane areas of the world, especially those with current or former communist leanings. North Korea, Cuba, the old USSR, the old Yugoslavia and Nicaragua come to mind. Donning his author disguise of sunnies, fedora and trench coat, Patrick prowled around Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia & Hercegovina to unearth the traveller hotspots. Patrick has been a contributing author and photographer for many Lonely Planet guides.



### 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 has returned almost annually to Italy since accidentally discovering it in 1998, and has been known to take seven-hour Italian train journeys to nowhere in particular for fun. After graduating from 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.



### 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.



### JEANNE OLIVER

**Croatia**

Jeanne arrived in Croatia in 1996 just as the country was getting back on its feet, and has been returning 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. She has also written articles for newspapers and magazines.



### 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.

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