European Travel Itinerary

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From Paris' art and cuisine to Copenhagen's relaxed lifestyle, GoEuro's 5 country tour of Europe offers the most cultural variety in the shortest amount of time. After walking up the Arc de Triomphe in Paris relax and enjoy some fine Belgian beer in one of Brussels' world-famous drinking establishments. Travelers can view van Gogh and Rembrandt's finest paintings in Amsterdam before relaxing on the beach in Hamburg. Finally, Copenhagen will provide an introduction to Scandinavian culture and customs.

**Destinations:**

France

Belgium

Netherlands

Germany

**Itinerary:**

Europe is always changing, and it’s essential to plan and travel with the most up-to-date information. Study before you go. Guidebooks, maps, travel apps, and websites are all key resources in getting started.

While information is what keeps you afloat, too much can sink the ship. So winnow down your resources to what best suits your travel needs and interests. WWII buffs research battle sites, wine lovers brainstorm a wish list of wineries, and Macgregor’s locate their clan’s castles in Scotland.

A word of warning as you hatch your plans: Understand what shapes the information that shapes your travel dreams. Information you seek out yourself is likely to be impartial, whereas information that comes at you is propelled by business. Many printed publications and websites are supported by advertisers who have products and services to sell; their information is often useful, but it’s not necessarily unbiased. And don’t believe everything you read. The power of the printed or pixelated word is scary. Many sources are peppered with information that is flat-out wrong. (Incredibly enough, even my books may have an error.) Some “writers” succumb to the temptation to write travelogues based on hearsay, travel brochures, other books, public-relations junkets, and wishful thinking. A writer met at the airport by an official from the national tourist board learns tips that are handy only for others who are met at the airport by an official from the national tourist board.

Too many people are penny-wise and pound-foolish when it comes to information. I see them every year, stranded on street corners in Paris, hemorrhaging money. It’s cascading off of them in €100 notes. Tourists with too little (or too dated) information run out of money, fly home early, and hate the French. Don’t let this be you: Choose a recently updated guidebook that’s right for your trip, and use it.

For my run-down on guidebook series that cover Europe, see my tips for comparing guidebooks.

When you pick up your guidebook, choose a map or two for planning purposes. The Michelin Map Europe 705 provides an excellent overall view of Europe. Many guidebook publishers (including Rough Guides, Lonely Planet, and my series) make maps or combination map-guidebooks. For example, my European planning maps are designed to be used with my guidebooks.

Once your trip is underway, more detailed maps — including digital ones — are key to a good trip; see my tips on selecting maps for navigating Europe.

Just about every European city has a centrally located tourist information office loaded with maps and advice. This is my essential first stop upon arrival in any town, but you don’t need to wait until you get to Europe to access their information. Each European country has its own official tourism website — often a great place to begin researching your trip. Many of these sites are packed with practical information, suggested itineraries, city guides, interactive maps, colorful photos, and free downloadable brochures describing walking tours and more. In addition, nearly every European country has a national tourism board, often with an office in the US that you can email or call with specific questions.

I’m a big fan of local websites and blogs loaded with insider tips. Not only do they fill you in on the latest happenings and hot spots, but they help you feel like a native in no time.

Any major city has a host of online resources dedicated to arts, culture, food, and drink. For instance, AOK is a great city guide to Copenhagen, with helpful information on restaurants, nightlife, and neighborhoods. Secrets of Paris, by American-born travel journalist Heather Stimmler-Hall, has a calendar of events, hotel reviews, and a monthly newsletter with dining recommendations and information on exhibits and other Parisian happenings.

One of my favorite resources is Matt Barrett’s Athens Survival Guide. Matt, who splits his time between North Carolina and Greece, splashes through his adopted hometown like a kid in a wading pool, enthusiastically sharing his discoveries and observations on his generous site. Matt covers emerging neighborhoods that few visitors venture into, and offers offbeat angles on the city and recommendations for vibrant, untouristy restaurants.

To plan a trip, I once relied on travel agents, other travel writers, and the word-of-mouth advice of friends. Those sources are still valid today — but my circle of “friends” has increased exponentially. With the advent of websites and apps such as Yelp and TripAdvisor, the opinions of everyday travelers are changing the travel industry.

Consumer-generated reviews can be useful throughout your planning process, allowing you to browse destinations and get a consensus of opinion about everything from hotels and restaurants to sights and nightlife. But the reviews also have some limitations and drawbacks. I’ve found that the most helpful ideas usually come from the categories for tours, sightseeing experiences, and entertainment.

Turning a wish list into a day-by-day itinerary for your European vacation isn’t just smart, it’s fun. Filling in the blanks between the flight out and the flight home is one of the more pleasurable parts of trip planning. It’s armchair travel that turns into real travel.

I never start a trip without having every day planned out. Your reaction to an itinerary may be, “Hey, won’t my spontaneity and freedom suffer?” Not necessarily. Although I always begin a trip with a well-thought-out plan, I maintain my flexibility and make changes as needed. An itinerary forces you to see the consequences of any spontaneous change you make while in Europe. For instance, if you spend two extra days in the sunny Alps, you’ll see that you won’t make it to the Greek Islands. With the help of an itinerary, you can lay out your goals, maximize their potential, and avoid regrettable changes.

Your itinerary depends on several factors, including weather, crowds, geography, timeline, and travel style (are you antsy to see as much as you can, or do you like settling into a place for a few days?) Take the following considerations into account as you build your European itinerary.

