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Being in Europe comes with many adjustments, but most assuredly it comes with breath-taking benefits. You can choose from an array of holiday destinations, such as the bright Grecian Island of Crete or the fountain-laden gardens of Malta’s capital, Valletta. These may suit your desire for an ageless summer if you need to shake off some grey weather. But if you see the cold as a good excuse for getting outside, check out our highlight on posh ski resorts around Europe. There you are sure to meet adrenaline at the top of perfectly powdered mountains, and with nice resort perks all within your panorama.

When navigating your way around, you may get caught up in a language barrier or a custom that, to the locals, is common sense. Take the sage advice of traveling life lessons to truly extract the worth of where you stand halfway across the world. If you long for a location a touch creepier than your normal venture among the living, the many catacombs of Europe await your visit, from Portugal to Czechia and Italy. A sprawling medieval fortress awaits your exploration in Carcasonne, France, and the quiet awe of Europe’s most magnificent cathedrals are as inviting as ever.

Some of us will likely spend our holidays in unconventional ways, away from our known families. Celebrating with your gathering of friends newly made overseas can be a unique way of celebrating. This might look like inviting your friendly neighbor over for a Thanksgiving meal. It is also an opportunity to take a long weekend to explore the Belgian cities of Bruges or Brussels, and take a rest at Belgium’s favorite brewery, Chimay.

Croatia and Slovakia have also returned to a less heightened pace after the tourist season, so you can have a more immersive experience. Visit a romantic Slovakian castle in fiery fall colors or walk historic Croatian streets where Game of Thrones was filmed. Enjoy magnificent fall festivals that give you the chance nearly every weekend to get out there and find your favorite. You will want to prepare yourself for your first (or tenth) European Christmas market and be aware that a festive mood will likely influence your need to visit as many as you can.

Whether this is your first or last holiday here in Europe, we want to make sure you have what you need in this edition to make it truly memorable. Wishing you safe and happy travels!
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Everyone has heard about the famous Oktoberfest in Germany, but there are many other fall festivals where you can have just as much fun and excitement across Europe. From dancing and feasting on local delights, to taking in experiential art, here is what you need to know about some of the best European festivals.

Ireland

The first stop is the Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival from Sept. 23 to 25 in Ireland. Celebrating Galway’s annual oyster harvest since 1954, this event is lauded as the “oldest oyster festival in the world.” Enjoy Galway’s best seafood as you listen to live music, gaze at street parades, view food and cooking demonstrations and watch representatives from more than 20 countries compete in the festival’s oyster opening competition.

Spain

After you’ve eaten all the oysters you can imagine, head on over to Spain for two festivals held in September of each year. La Bienal de Flamenco (The Best of Flamenco) festival is from Sept. 8 to Oct. 1 in Seville, Spain. Since 1980 and held biennially, the city of Seville lauds the “greatest Flamenco event in the world.” Revel in Flamenco’s best dancing, singing and guitar playing at the world’s biggest Flamenco festival.

For the second Spanish festival, make your way to Barcelona for La Mercè from September 23rd to 26th. Help honor Barcelona’s patron saint, La Mercè, with dancing, music, circus performances and street arts. It is believed that by placing the city in the hands of the Virgin La Mercè, she helped it to overcome a plague of locusts in 1687. It was then that she became the Patron Saint of Barcelona. Since 1871, there has been a festival in the city for her honor in the month of September. You will see human towers, dragons, giants and so much more with today’s festivals centered on Mediterranean culture as a whole.
From Ireland to Norway to the Netherlands and more, fall festivals all around Europe offer dancing, food, drinks, art and all the fun and excitement we’ve been missing.

**Hungary**

In dozens of venues across Budapest, Hungary, you can find the different parts of the Cafe Budapest Autumn Festival being held from Oct. 2 to 18. Formally known as the “Budapest Autumn Music Festival,” this festival began in 1992, and now encompasses a celebration of several different art forms such as photography, music concerts, cinema, computers, theater and dancing. This festival features both free and pay-in-advance events, so make sure to do your research beforehand to ensure you get to do everything you want to do.

End your fall festivities munching on an Eastern European favorite food, sausage, at the Csaba Sausage Festival from Oct. 22 to the 25 in Békéscsaba, Hungary. The first festival took place in 1997 after years of planning and prepping and has been a recurring tradition ever since. The festival is filled with music, dog shows, competitions, bounce houses and so much more. Bring your own traditional hand grinder and participate with four friends or family members in the “International Sausage Kneading Competition” where you compete against others in stuffing sausages. Children can get in the spirit too with the Youth Sausage Stuffing Competition.

**Germany**

As the sun goes down, the lights turn on monuments, buildings and landmarks all over Berlin at the Festival of Lights happening from Oct. 7 to 16. This year marks 18 years of celebration of the event with the theme of the year focusing on “sustainability,” with artists from Germany and the rest of the world contributing their ideas and art. Past events have drawn over two million visitors, so make sure to book your hotels early to guarantee yourself the best spots to see the lights in action.

**The Netherlands**

Shake your groove thing across hundreds of venues at the Amsterdam Dance Event from Oct. 19 through the 29 in the Netherlands. With hundreds of artists showcasing their work, there is something for all electronic dance music fans. This combination of a conference and festival lets you not only dance your heart out but also learn what is new in the world of electronic dance music (EDM). According to the Amsterdam Dance Event website, dance music “originated as a way of protest[ing] the mainstream, social injustice and oppression,” and since 1996, this festival has strived to be a global platform for EDM artists.

No matter if you want to gaze at lights, boogie down, chow on superb food or stuff a sausage, there is a fall festival in Europe for you.

**Norway**

Make your way over to Longyearbyen, Norway, for the Smak (Taste) Svalbard Festival from Oct. 5 to 9. Known as the “world’s northernmost food and drink festival,” you can enjoy learning all about the history of Svalbard through lectures and demonstrations while devouring the delicious local cuisine. You can also delight in watching film screenings and concerts, and be on the lookout for pop-up dinners.
History buffs will love visiting la Cité de Carcassonne, France. This medieval citadel has over 2,500 years of history and is surrounded by a double enclosure that stretches for 1.9 miles. It is the largest citadel with walls still completely intact. The imposing walls combined with 52 towers and four entrances make for quite the spectacle! Since 1997, this area has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is certainly worth a stop. When you look out over the fortification, you can almost see knights fighting a fire-breathing dragon on a tower. While you’re there letting your imagination run wild, check out some of the attractions.

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BUST OF LADY CARCAS
Legend tells of a princess whose husband was lost during a battle against Charlemagne. The brave princess fooled the conquering forces and saved her citadel. She bluffe about the circumstances of the citadel under siege and threw the last pig from the highest tower, indicating that the siege was failing because the princess was wasting livestock. Little did Charlemagne and his men know that this was their last pig. The men retreated and left the city in peace.

CASTLE OF THE COUNTS
Though this castle has been renovated and rebuilt time and time again, it remains the most popular attraction within the walls. The ground floor now holds a museum with exhibits of stone crosses, statues and other items from the city. Visit the courtyard and get a good look at the various architectural styles. Excavations still take place at the castle.

THÉÂTRE JEAN DESCHAMPS
This open-air theater is home to the annual performing arts festival. Each year, the stages come alive with music, dancing and dramas. Both national and international performers can be found on the stage and over 250,000 visitors attend this cultural event.

BASILICA OF SAINTS NAZARIUS AND CELSUS
Designed with Gothic-Romanesque architecture, this stunning minor basilica is Roman Catholic and a national monument. Original construction is thought to have been in the 6th century by Visigoths, though the centuries have dramatically changed the appearance. Construction on this masterpiece was not complete until the first half of the 20th century.

PORTES
There are four main entrances to la Cité de Carcassonne: Porte Narbonnaise, Saint-Nazaire, d’Aude and du Bourg. Each door was intentionally designed to serve a purpose, such as allowing access to the city of Narbonnaise or serving as a defensive system.
WELLS
Of the 22 wells that once provided water to the citadel’s inhabitants, the great well takes the cake. It is not only the biggest, but also the oldest, dating back to the 14th century. As with any medieval structure worth its salt, there is a legend that goes with the well, proclaiming that there is hidden treasure within from the Visigoths. Though no treasure has ever turned up, don’t give up hope!

OLD BRIDGE
This 14th-century medieval bridge was the only way for pedestrians to get from Bastide Saint Louis to Carcassonne until the 19th century. Work on the bridge began in the early 1300s and took approximately five years to complete. There are 12 semicircles in the bridge, each with a different opening diameter, ranging from 33 to 46 feet. This is an indication that the work was done at different intervals, as supplies were available. Though the bridge has been repaired many times, in 1820 the appearance altered the most. The chapel of Notre-Dame de la Santé can be found at the entrance to the bridge and is the only vestige of the oldest hospital in the city. The building has also undergone many alterations but is still a lovely example of 15th-century architecture.

CHÂTEAU DE VILLEMAGNE
Wine is also a fascinating part of this area’s history. Just outside of Carcassonne, about thirty minutes away, you’ll find a 12th-century building known as the Château de Villemagne. This delightful piece of architecture was once the priory of the abbey of Lagrasse, but it is now the perfect place for a wine tasting. Your visit doesn’t only include tasty wines. Here you’ll learn about the history of the winery and see prehistoric objects and relics from the Roman empire discovered in the vineyards. See paintings and sculptures by local artists and enjoy some regional products, like foie gras, olive oil and cassoulet.

From the fascinating architecture to the intriguing legends, la Cité de Carcassonne is a history lover’s dream. Fall into a fantasy while you wander around within the walls and imagine what life was like when conquerors came calling. Rest assured that no sieges are likely to happen while you are in attendance.

“From the fascinating architecture to the intriguing legends, la Cité de Carcassonne is a history lover’s dream.”
Get a Degree
WHILE OVERSEAS

By Ruth Cuevas & Amanda Palumbo

Being stationed abroad doesn’t mean you have to put your education on hold. You can continue your studies through DOD contracted schools for servicemembers and their dependents with a variety of options to fit your lifestyle.

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• Lower Cost: Students on average pay less when achieving an online degree. While they’re paying for tuition costs and books, they’re avoiding fees like housing and transportation. Most universities will offer a military non-resident tuition waiver to avoid out-of-state tuition costs.

• Comfortable Learning Environment: Online students can also set up an environment that works best for their brain like comfy couches, music in the background and snacks readily on hand. You also get to avoid that one person in class that has an outrageous, argumentative opinion about every topic.

Not only can you continue your education but you could be eligible for financial aid and tuition assistance. Contact your installation’s education center for more details.
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Reflecting on your time as a traveler can reveal many things. You may realize that traveling has made you a better person, situationally, personally and intellectually. The life lessons you gain from indulging in a lifestyle of exploration are impactful.

As a young global traveler, there are lessons I am still learning and will continue to unveil, but I am confident in what I have gained from the traveling I have already done. These are just a few of the messages about life that traveling will teach you.

You’re responsible for your own safety. Always be alert to your surroundings. No one else will take care of your health and belongings like you can. Always plan accordingly to ensure your safety.

Learning or attempting to speak key phrases of a different language is appreciated by most locals. Depending on how friendly the locals are, many people are grateful when you at least attempt to speak their language.

Live simply in a chaotic world. With so much around us, it can be easy to forget to take a step back and live a simpler life based on necessities. Understanding much simpler lifestyles around the world is a refreshing eye-opener to take it back to basics.

Always be open to try new foods. Different cultures have curious foods that you may not have tasted before. If you are open-minded, then trying the food, despite your preconceived notions, can lead to a delicious new discovery!

Constantly research more about the world. When you travel often, it is almost instilled in you to crave more knowledge. Every country, city or village has a history so unique that you’ve never heard of anything like it before. Being eager to learn more expands your knowledge of civilizations you’ve never known.

Be confident. If you can navigate a foreign country, you can do almost anything. Nothing has brought my confidence level up more than being introduced to new people and places around the world. While it was once easy for me to sit in the back of the room, traveling has taught me to partake in activities, ask more questions and be confident that I am able to do anything around me.

Be patient. Whether it’s something as frustrating as crossing the language barrier, waiting for the check when most Europeans are lax about how long they stay at a restaurant or trying to cross the street in a busy city, patience will go a long way in situations that would aggravate many others.

Thanks to the art of travel, we can improve ourselves through what we learn along the way. The more we explore the world, the more we explore ourselves. Coming to greater realizations as we go about the world is what makes traveling so worth it.
“Humans have a fascination with abomination,” is a phrase one of my professors used to describe the irresistible pull some feel toward the macabre and unfamiliar. Catacombs, or underground vaults used as final resting places for the dead, are prime examples of our fascination with the creepy and slightly morbid. They are not for the weak of heart. The more famous catacombs include those in Paris and Rome; however, there are plenty scattered across the continent. With the haunting season upon us, here are seven bone-chilling catacombs in Europe to visit.

**Stephansdom Katakomben**  
*Vienna, Austria*  
The final resting place for more than 11,000 souls, the catacombs beneath St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna is more than 650 years old. The vaults have since been divided into smaller sections and are still in use. While bodies of the Habsburg nobility were interred in a separate crypt across town, the Stephansdom Katakomben are home to more than 60 jars of royal intestines and organs. The underground lair is only accessible through a guided tour.
Capuchin Monastery Catacombs
Palermo, Italy

The Catacombe dei Cappuccini, or Catacombs of Capuchin, is anything but your ordinary ossuary. Located beneath the seemingly benign monastery, more than 8,000 corpses and 1,200 mummies clad in their best attire reside along the walls, on shelves, in coffins or even in posed scenes. The oldest remains belong to Silvestro da Gubbio, a monk from the 16th century who was entombed so his soul could continue to pray and remain at the monastery. One of the last to take up residence was two-year-old Rosalia Lombardo, whose well-preserved body has deemed her “Sleeping Beauty.”

Hal Saflieni Hypogeum
Paola, Malta

This prehistoric burial ground dates back to 4,000 BC and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. The vaults are sectioned into three levels, with the bottom level dubbed the “Holy of Holies.” Ancient symbols, drawings and paintings in red clay pigment adorn the walls and ceiling of the hypogeum. Discovered in 1902, the catacombs are thought to have contained the remains of up to 7,000 people. Due to the delicate climate, the site only allows 80 visitors per day.

St. Michan’s Church
Dublin, Ireland

With a nondescript exterior, it’s hard to believe this unassuming house of worship dates back to 1095. It’s even more difficult to imagine it is also home to five burial vaults beneath the church. Made of limestone, the catacombs have proven to help naturally preserve the mummified remains—including those of a 400-year-old nun and possibly an 800-year-old crusader. However, whatever is preserving the bodies also speeds up the decay of coffins, which can cause the coffin to break open and reveal the remains. Unfortunately, the crypt was recently vandalized, which caused significant damage to the two aforementioned bodies.
Back in the States, the Thanksgiving holiday may have included watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and enduring shouting matches as the family cycled through countless football games. Plates overflowed with turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie, which usually resulted in a self-inflicted food coma. If you were really hardcore, you would set the alarm for 3 a.m. to battle your way through Black Friday.

Now that you’re stationed overseas, you’ve come to the realization that this Thanksgiving may not be as easily filled with all of your favorite holiday traditions, which means this is the perfect chance to create new Thanksgiving traditions. Swap football games and parades for once-in-a-lifetime strolls through ancient cities, enchanting castles, wine festivals and mesmerizing fall foliage. The great thing about traveling in Europe in late November is that it’s the low season, which means most tourists have left and the locals are back at work. This time of year is perfect to have family and friends from back home fly over to explore with you. Consider visiting these places during your Thanksgiving holiday.

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Favorite Places to Spend Thanksgiving in Europe

By Elizabeth Jones
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Southern Germany

The southern part of Germany is one of the most charming places in the country. Since cold weather hasn’t hit just yet, spend the holiday in the great outdoors hiking the Alps and embracing the colors of autumn throughout Alpine forests. Neuschwanstein Castle is found in this part of Germany and is one of the most remarkable sights to see year-round. However, during the Thanksgiving holiday, the castle is truly stunning as trees shimmer with pops of red, yellow and orange.

During this time of year, there are also endless wine festivals to choose from, where you can drink fine wines from Bavarian vintners. Thanksgiving also coincides with the first weekend of Advent, which means Christmas markets spring to life over the holiday weekend. These markets are a wonderful family event with something for everyone to enjoy during Thanksgiving. You can find all sorts of German delicacies from bratwursts, currywurst and “spätzle” (pasta made with fresh eggs) to many delicious warm desserts that are sure to satisfy your craving for comfort foods during this Thanksgiving holiday.

Bruges, Belgium

Travel back in time by visiting the medieval city of Bruges. In November, the city’s buildings will be covered in vines showcasing the bold autumn foliage. Take a boat ride down the canals found throughout the city and see the beautiful fall colors reflected in the water. Try some famous Belgian chocolate, either as a tasty candy bar or warm hot cocoa. Either way, you won’t be disappointed.

Prague, Czechia

Prague is a must-visit for everyone exploring Europe. However, the prime time to visit this extraordinary city is in the fall. The narrow streets are significantly less crowded of tourists, making it easier to explore the city. The best views of Prague can be seen at the top of Castle Hill, where you can look down upon the autumn glow painting the city with radiant auburn and bronze colors. A trip to Prague isn’t complete without indulging in a warm “Trdelník,” a cinnamon sugar-dipped, breaded pastry that is stuffed with your choice of Nutella, whipped cream, fruit or even ice cream.
**Dubrovnik, Croatia**

Spend your holiday in the Pearl of the Adriatic. During this time of year, you won’t have to battle the crazy number of tourists Dubrovnik hosts during the sizzling summer months, giving you the chance to have a more intimate experience with the city. It may be too cold to jump in the water of the many beaches Dubrovnik has to offer, but you can still soak up sunny days as you walk beside the famous city walls, visit all the “Game of Thrones” sites, indulge in fantastic seafood and learn about the city’s history.

**Mallorca, Spain**

The island of Mallorca is home to countless beaches, mountain ranges and picturesque Spanish towns. You may even get a hint of Thanksgiving as you eat all the tapas this island has to offer. Tapas are an array of foods to be shared as an appetizer or meal amongst family and friends. Very few countries combine food and camaraderie like Spain does with their tapas.

**Lofoten Islands, Norway**

Visiting Norway promises breathtaking scenery no matter the time of the year. The Lofoten Islands are harder to reach than most places in Norway but are definitely worth the journey. The area is filled with striking beauty thanks to jagged cliffs, deep blue waters and quaint fishing villages. Visiting in the fall gives you a higher chance of witnessing one of nature’s greatest creations, the Northern Lights.

Indulging in all of the traditional foods back home, the intensity of Black Friday shopping and the ongoing football games may be limited this time around, but it doesn’t have to put a damper on your holiday. Thanksgiving is a time to be shared with loved ones reflecting on all that you’re thankful for. No matter where you spend it, you won’t be disappointed in the variety of fall destinations Europe has to offer. That alone is something to be very thankful for.
The Greek islands (also known as the Cyclades) are picturesque, bucket list-worthy destinations. With beautiful beaches, blue and white buildings everywhere and the islander pace of life, it’s no surprise why islands like Santorini, Mykonos, Crete or Paros are often travelers’ first taste of Greece. But let’s dig a little deeper into what Greece’s capital city of Athens and the Peloponnese peninsula have to offer travelers. Full of ancient history, culture and a delicious culinary scene, there are more than enough reasons to book a trip to Greece’s mainland.

Although spring and summer are the best times to visit Greece, we visited in mid-November to run the Athens marathon. While we had a few bouts of rain, the mild yet sunny days were perfect for exploring Athens and road tripping the Peloponnese peninsula—not to mention it was not high tourist season anymore, which meant more space and time to truly enjoy the sites.

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Greece’s capital city is sprawling, energetic and full of life. While the city is sprinkled with ancient history, it is not a place stuck in the past, with tons of restaurants, bars and lively squares. Plan for a half day or more at the Acropolis, an ancient citadel that sits high on a hill overlooking the city. The Acropolis is home to the Parthenon, arguably one of the most iconic sites in Greece, as well as the Temple of Athena Nike and the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. Lit up at night looking majestic and regal, the Acropolis also has the best view of the city where you can get a taste for how large it is and peek at the sea in the distance. You can reach the Acropolis on foot, especially if you want a bit of a workout walking up the hill, but there is also a newly installed elevator if you need an alternative. Be sure to also visit the Acropolis Museum where many of its ancient treasures are held.

Spending some time at the Ancient Agora, conveniently located near the Acropolis, should also be on your list. This space has a number of important sites, as it was the heart of ancient Athens, politically, socially and commercially. The Byzantine & Christian Museum, National Archaeological Museum and National Historical Museum are a few other must-sees. The Panathenaic Stadium is worth a visit too, as the first home of the modern Olympic games.

“Full of ancient history, culture and a delicious culinary scene, there are more than enough reasons to book a trip to Greece’s mainland.”
Food & Drinks
There is so much to love about Greek food. The freshness, bright flavors and contrasts of creamy tzatziki yogurt sauce with briny olives, crunchy cucumbers, tomatoes and greens sprinkled with salty feta. Pair those sides with souvlaki, marinated and grilled chicken, accompanied by a refreshing Mythos beer or Greek wine and you’ll be eating very well and feeling good.

Tips
Getting from the Athens airport into downtown was an easy metro ride, taking 30 to 45 minutes depending on the time of day.

Wear comfortable walking shoes, especially when visiting the ancient sites as the ground is often uneven and made of dirt or gravel.

If you’re driving around Greece, plan to pay for tolls. Keep any coins you have on hand to make the tolls easy.

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Nafplio
Less than a two-hour drive from Athens, this seaside town on the southwest coast of the peninsula is charming, beautiful and offers plenty of things to see. Make your way into Old Town along the harbor, where you will find quaint and well-kept hotels, restaurants and shops, nestled right next to the Aegean Sea. You can continue walking along coastline trail for more gorgeous views and a chance to swim in the sea. Continue your adventure by climbing the 999 stairs carved into the rock that Palamidi Castle sits on to learn about Nafplio’s long history.

Monemvasia
This car-free town is located about a four-hour drive from Athens and was built into the rock facing the sea. Prior to 1971 when a bridge was constructed to connect the island to the mainland, Monemvasia stood isolated—which is exactly why it became so valuable and an important place for its residents. Monemvasia means “single passage” and inhabitants would flee to the island where they could hide behind the massive rocks that protected them from invaders and incoming attacks. Today, you can meander your way through the Lower Town and Upper Town to see 13th-century Byzantine churches, 17th-century Venetian mansions and the beautiful restaurants, shops and accommodations in a gorgeous and peaceful setting.

Olympia
Those interested in the Olympic games should include a trip to Ancient Olympia, on the western side of the peninsula. While somewhat isolated from other places, witnessing the ruins is worth a stop. Be sure to run through the tunnel that athletes used to enter the games to imagine the cheering and yelling that took place on the starting line. In addition to the ruins, there are a couple of museums nearby housing important artifacts from the early Olympic games and history of the area and the games.

Connected to the mainland by the Isthmus of Corinth, the Peloponnese peninsula is home to history, myths and the beginnings of civilization. Here are just a few of the many spots worth visiting:

Try climbing the 999 stairs that lead to Palamidi Castle in Nafplio.

The harbor in Nafplio is where you will find quaint and well-kept hotels, restaurants and shops.
The Marathon

Although you might not be planning to train or run any marathons during your time in Europe, it’s important to mention the history of this historic race. The marathon came from the ancient legend of a Greek messenger running 40 kilometers from the town of Marathon to Athens to share the news of an important Greek victory. Today, the modern Athens marathon continues this tradition, having runners start in the town of Marathon, where supporters cheer and pass out olive branches to put in runners’ hats as a token of good fortune and victory.
In most situations, down-at-heel connotes an air of shabbiness, impoverishment and misfortune. But none of these adjectives applied to any of the sights I was lucky enough to see on a late-autumn tour through Apulia, the region that makes up the heel of Italy’s boot.

It’s true that Apulia, or Puglia as the region is known in Italian, ranks amongst the country’s poorest regions. And while rural, remote and dry are fitting descriptors for its inland areas covered with vast groves of olive trees, I found its cities and beaches tidy and alluring.

By late October, the peak tourist season had already ended and crowds were thin on the ground. This proved optimal for this solo traveler who enjoys off-season rates and plenty of elbow room. My five days in Apulia were filled with beauty, serendipity and weather warm enough to allow for one last dip in the sea before the onset of winter.

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Baroque Treasures
A highlight of any tour to Apulia includes the city of Lecce, often referred to as “Florence of the South” for its Baroque architecture. The university town and center for religious instruction acquired many of its handsomest buildings in the seventeenth century, a period of prosperity characterized by a boom in monumental construction and lavish ornamentation.

My day in Lecce began with the purchase of a “LecceEcclesiae” ticket, a pass granting me access to six sacred spaces including churches, a museum and a seminary at a set price of 9 euros. Amidst a blur of cupids and twisting columns, two stood out. The church of San Matteo awed with its riotous altar, and the Basilica of San Giovanni Battista al Rosario impressed me with its exuberant two-tiered façade embellished with oversize flower vases and statues.

Another highlight was the centrally located Piazza Saint Oronzo, where a column that once marked the end of the 230-mile Appian Way stands proud and the remains of a Roman amphitheater have been repurposed to provide today’s visitors with less bloodthirsty entertainment that was once enjoyed by their ancestors. Centrally located La Torre di Merlino was the perfect place for a coffee and pastry. Lecce certainly deserved more than the single day I’d allotted for my visit, but my schedule was tight.

Seaside Treasures
Each of the three beach towns in which I overnighted offered unique features. The southernmost, Otranto, wowed me with its cathedral perched high above town and the 15th-century Aragonese Castle, whose mighty walls were the site of a fest on the night of my stay. Gallipoli won me over with its old town sprawled over an island reached by means of a 16th-century bridge. But it was Polignano a Mare that surprised and delighted me the most. Its Cala Porto was a compact but perfectly formed pebble beach embraced on either side by towering limestone bluffs. On the outskirts of town stood a bronze statue of a man, his arms outstretched and his back to the azure sea. Italian tourists were eagerly snapping photos of Domenico Modugno, the hometown boy who made it big as a singer, his “Volare” known and loved by audiences around the world.

Bustling Bari
While Apulia’s capital city of Bari hadn’t ranked highly on my list of must-see places, I was flying back home from its airport, which made an overnight stay there the most practical option. Without particularly high expectations, I began my evening wander through its Old Town, where dozens of restaurants stretched along narrow pedestrian streets and tucked themselves into hidden squares. Eventually, I reached the Basilica di San Nicola, within whose spacious, soaring interior is found the relics of the saint who inspired Santa Claus. Emerging from the maze-like Old Town onto the broad and beautiful Corso Vittorio Emanuele and on to the bustling Corso Cavour, I was stirred by the sight of crowds of people old and young, strolling, shopping, sipping cocktails and enjoying the beautiful Sunday evening. And I was glad to be one of them.

Plan Your Trip
The driving distance between Naples and Bari is 170 miles and would take about three hours; those based in Vicenza would face a 500-mile, eight hour drive. From Germany, several airlines fly directly to Bari, including the budget carrier Eurowings. The costs of hotels and bed and breakfasts reflected rates you’d expect to pay during the shoulder season. Although I could have traveled further and seen more had I rented a car, I was pleased with the train service. It wasn’t frequent, but the tiny two-carriage trains from a forgotten era ran according to schedule, and when switching trains at the small, far-flung stations, the conductors would always watch carefully to make sure I caught the train to take me on the next leg of my journey.
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of Paris
When traveling in Europe, cathedral spires often seem as numerous as souvenir shops and restaurants. Notre Dame, the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter’s Basilica are on everyone’s bucket list. Here are four fascinating European cathedrals and chapels worth visiting.

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Sainte-Chapelle — Paris, France

Of course, you should see Notre Dame while in Paris, but do not miss this much smaller gem, Sainte-Chapelle. In fact, if you're not looking for it, you're quite likely to miss the nearby church, largely obscured at street-level by more recent structures. Completed in 1248, Sainte-Chapelle was commissioned by Louis IX as a shrine for purchased Christian relics. Among these was Christ's Crown of Thorns, which cost more than the chapel's construction. Today, these relics are on display at Notre Dame.

Sainte-Chapelle consists of an upper chapel where royalty worshipped and a lower chapel for servants. The lower chapel's centerpiece is the oldest mural in Paris, a rendering of the Annunciation dating back to the 13th century. The upper chapel is known for 15 dramatic, colorful stained glass windows illustrating more than 1,100 biblical scenes in astonishing detail. Two-thirds of the stained glass is original, surviving Paris' tumultuous history. Sunlight shining through the nearly floor-to-ceiling windows creates a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors and shapes.

Plan your trip for a clear, sunny day for the best show. Sainte-Chapelle and the La Conciergerie are the oldest remnants of Paris' first royal palace. Purchase a combined ticket and after touring the chapel, visit La Conciergerie to see where Marie Antoinette spent her final days awaiting execution. Sainte-Chapelle is located on Ile de la Cité and can be reached by metro, train or bus.

Rosslyn Chapel — Roslin, Scotland

Though Rosslyn Chapel was central to the plotline of “The Da Vinci Code,” its real history is as sensational as fiction. In 1446, William St. Clair, the third prince of Orkney, initiated construction of the Collegiate Chapel of St. Matthew (now called Rosslyn Chapel). Historians speculate that a grander structure had been planned, but construction halted shortly after St. Clair’s death in 1484.

During the Reformation, the chapel quickly deteriorated, as worship was forbidden. Restoration efforts in the 1700s proved futile, and the intrigue of this foliage-covered, dilapidated chapel inspired many literary works, including Sir Walter Scott’s “Lay of the Last Minstrel” and William Wordsworth’s “Composed at Roslin Chapel During a Storm.”

In 1842, Queen Victoria ordered that the sanctuary be restored, beginning a new chapter in the chapel’s saga. Today, it remains under the care of the St. Clair family and is open to the public, though renovation continues. The ornate Gothic façade offers a prelude of the incredible interior. Stepping into Rosslyn Chapel is an overwhelming experience—the lavish 3-dimensional stone carvings cover an expanse of 42 feet high and 69 feet long. Every nook and cranny appears to be painstakingly decorated to tell a story. Sculptures depict life in rural Scotland, stories from the Bible, pagan figures and Masonic symbols.

Many of Rosslyn Chapel’s carvings present unsolved mysteries. The meaning of the symbols represented in the “Musical Cubes” has yet to be unequivocally explained. Additionally, a window border depicts maize, a flora unknown in Europe until after Columbus’ voyage to America years after construction ceased. The greatest enigma involves the chapel’s most intricately carved column, supposedly created by an apprentice who drew inspiration from his dreams. The master mason was so envious of the superior craftsmanship that he killed the student.

You’ll find more curiosities and may even unravel a new puzzle during your visit. Rosslyn Chapel is located just outside of Edinburgh and can be reached by catching the Lothian Bus 15.
Braga Cathedral — Braga, Portugal

The Catedral de Santa Maria de Braga—also called Braga Cathedral, Sé Cathedral and the Cathedral of Braga—is Portugal’s oldest cathedral and Braga’s most opulent building. Work on the cathedral began in the 11th century by Braga’s bishop, Dom Pedro. Subsequent bishops added their own flair to the cathedral over the next several centuries.

The exterior of Braga Cathedral reflects Portuguese Romanesque architecture with two soaring towers and also has additions from the 15th to 18th centuries, including a portico (or galilee) and a coat of arms chiseled from stone. But the real showstopper is inside. The two organs, dating from the 18th century, are flamboyantly embellished with carved and gilded panels. Marceliano de Araújo’s decoration is so remarkable that the woodwork is considered among the most incredible in Europe.

A bit off the beaten path, Braga is 40 miles from Portugal’s second-largest city of Porto. You can reach Braga from Porto by train or taxi. Traveling by train is cheaper but takes longer. If you have travel buddies to share the expense, a taxi is affordable.

La Sagrada Familia
Barcelona, Spain

While La Sagrada Familia is no secret, the magnitude of this unusual and extravagant cathedral makes it a must-see. No trip to Barcelona would be complete without a visit to Antoni Gaudí’s magnum opus, a cathedral so elaborate that work continues today, more than 130 years after construction began.

Every design, angle, symbol and style choice for this unique place of worship was deliberately made to convey meaning and emotion. The four façades of the cathedral each bear a different story from the Bible. When complete, the cathedral will boast 14 towers. The bright white walls and towering windows, which are still being transitioned to stained glass, create an open, welcoming ambiance despite the cavernous interior. The columns are designed as trees, creating a canopy over awestruck visitors.

Because of its popularity, admission lines are extremely long during tourist season. Plan your visit during the late fall and winter months and buy advance tickets online for priority entrance. To reach the cathedral, take the subway to the Sagrada Familia station; many bus lines also stop nearby.
HOW TO SPEND 48 HOURS IN
Chamonix, France

By Anna Leigh Bagiackas

The alpine resort town of Chamonix, France, has become an epicenter for climbers, skiers, hikers and outdoor enthusiasts. With glaciers, trails, ice tunnels and awe-inspiring peaks, you don’t need a week to check off some of these bucket-list items.
Must-Try Food and Drinks

While you might think that the mountainous views are what it’s all about in Chamonix, you are still in France, therefore food and drink are also a top priority. You are in Haute-Savoie cuisine territory, meaning meals are heartier and more reminiscent of what you’d find in Switzerland than in Paris. You will find various combinations of delicious melted French cheeses, potatoes and cured meats, such as fondue, raclette and “tartiflette,” which is made of potatoes, bacon and cheese. These are popular choices after a day on the slopes and these dishes will warm you from the inside out, as well as a glass of French wine. Try the “Fendant,” a local wine made from the region’s Chasselas grapes.

What to See

Whether you’re a thrill-seeking skier or prefer to catch views closer to solid ground, Chamonix has lots to offer you. Home to the very first winter Olympics in 1924, this French destination continues to welcome skiers, snowboarders, hikers, climbers and tourists from all over the world. While you could spend a weeklong vacation exploring via a pair of skis or snowboard, the many public transportation options allow you to see the best of the area in just 48 hours.

For those coming for the views, your first adventure should be the gondola ride up to the 3,842-meter Aiguille du Midi peak. This is Europe’s highest lift station and offers a close-up view of Mont Blanc, Western Europe’s highest peak. While there, check out “Step Into The Void,” a glass room with 1,000 meters of free air below for a safe, yet heart-pumping experience. From there, you can hike to the Montenvers Train Station and the 7-kilometer Mer de Glace, France’s longest glacier. If a hike isn’t your idea of vacation, you can also take a train ride to the glacier, where you can walk through ice tunnels followed by a bite to eat at Restaurant Le Panoramique Mer de Glace. As the glacier decreases in size each year, it is hard to avoid contemplating the environment around you. For another bucket-list gondola ride, take the Skyway Monte Bianco cable car trip that crosses the border into Italy, landing at Helbronner Point. Other unique rides include the cog rail Tramway du Mont-Blanc and Le Brevent Gondola for the best views of Mont Blanc, where you can also dine with amazing scenery at the mountain restaurant.

For the best visual experience, get up early and catch one of the first cable cars to avoid the clouds rolling in, typical in the afternoon. In the non-winter months, catch some speed (or go for the slower, more leisurely ride) down the Chamonix Luge Alpine Coaster and watch paragliders take flight in this hub of mountain flying. For those wanting to enjoy views from below, you can walk or hike along the Arve River between Chamonix and Les Praz.
Forget the overcrowded streets of bustling cities and get ready for an adventure that takes you into the lesser-traveled country of Slovakia. There's certainly no shortage of activities here, from hiking in the glorious mountains to exploring romantic castles. Whether you keep your vacation strictly outdoors or venture into some amazing villages, you're sure to find something to fall in love with in this country.
The mainly mountainous country in central Europe boasts some seriously incredible outdoor opportunities—the National Park of High Tatras is nothing short of breathtaking. This park is one of the oldest protected areas in Slovakia. It is home to the tallest mountain in the country, Gerlachovský štít, towering at 8,710 feet. You can also find over 100 glistening alpine lakes here. Note that hiking is limited from June 15 to Nov. 1, unless accompanied by a guide.

If you would prefer to see the immense beauty below the mountains, there's an opportunity for that as well. The Dubník Opal Mines are something truly amazing to behold. Opalescence, or the perfect play of colors, is on full display in these unique mines. They were operating in full swing from 1845 to 1880 and were run by a Viennese jeweler. Today, many people know the beauty of jewelry made with opals. Visit where these precious stones were once harvested from the Earth and marvel at the incredible history.

For some adult-only fun, Modra vineyards are the place to be. Here, you can get a taste of some of Slovakia’s finest wines. Head to the town of Modra, just outside of Bratislava in the Small Carpathian Mountains, where you will learn about the local wine culture and taste a variety of wines. The town has under 10,000 occupants and is the perfect place to wander around and look at various historical churches. Of course, you’ll need to tour a local wine cellar and relax in a peaceful garden while here as well.

If incredible architecture is more your speed, Slovakia is up to the challenge. Bojnice Castle is one of the oldest and most important monuments in the country. This castle towers over the town as a reminder of medieval times. It was built in the Romanesque style, but also has touches of both Gothic and Renaissance elements, creating a fairy-tale ambiance. Tour the Count’s Flat, Middle Castle, Palffy family tomb, French Park and the travertine cave during your visit.

Another architectural triumph in the country is St. Elizabeth’s Cathedral in Košice. This stunning Gothic-style cathedral is the largest church in Slovakia, covers 13,000 square feet and can house 5,000 worshippers. The altar features a double-spiral staircase, which can only be found in five churches throughout Europe. There are also beautiful frescoes and sculptures inside, as well as a tower that should certainly be climbed.

When you’re carefully concocting the perfect travel bucket list for Europe, be sure to keep Slovakia on your radar. The outdoor scenery here will draw you in and the architectural feats will only add to the charm of the surroundings. Whether you hike for days in the national parks or relax in a city setting, there is no wrong way to enjoy the fabulous country of Slovakia!
10 Reasons to Love
Tenerife

By Mary Del Rosario

The Canary Islands makes up a Spanish archipelago located near Morocco. The largest of these islands, Tenerife, is filled with beaches, natural volcanic landscapes, heavenly Spanish foods and, most importantly, sun. If you’re planning a warm getaway, these reasons will have you putting Tenerife at the top of your list.

1. You are spoiled for choice when it comes to golden sandy beaches to relax on.

2. Considered to be Europe’s Mardi Gras, the Carnival of Santa Cruz de Tenerife is a celebration not to miss.

3. You’ll be kissed by the sun’s rays all year long as there is an abundant amount of sunshine here—2,890 hours of sunshine annually to be exact.

4. Stargazing at Mount Teide is every astronomer’s dream come true.

5. For partygoers, Veronica’s Strip on Playa de las Américas is the place to be seen.
Los Gigantes Cliffs will humble you. It's also a great spot for adventure seekers.

There are plenty of attractions for kids, including Siam Park and Loro Parque Zoo.

Jaw-dropping views of the island can be seen at Masca Valley. Bring hiking boots!

The underwater creatures and coral are a colorfule sight when scuba diving or snorkeling.

Tapas, tapas and more tapas.
Which countries truly qualify as being a part of Scandinavia? While many reputable sources claim Denmark, Norway and Sweden make up the region, other sources of the same credibility claim those three plus Finland and Iceland are included. For the perfectionists out there that need to know the answer, unfortunately, the short answer is that there truly is no answer. Despite the undecided definition, you can still explore the best of the most common concept of Scandinavia—Denmark, Norway and Sweden!

Denmark

Copenhagen

Denmark’s capital is known for its abundance of shopping and dining opportunities. The Stroget, located in the historic district, is Europe’s longest pedestrian-only shopping zone. Here you’ll find your favorite top-of-the-line and budget-friendly brands scattered through the 1.1-kilometer-long shopping area, making it a true fashion lover’s paradise. Compared to the other Scandinavian capitals, Copenhagen is home to the most Michelin-starred restaurants, with 15 dispersed across the city. Copenhagen’s compelling culinary scene is one it takes great pride in by featuring a variety of high-profile restaurants, kitchens that cook with organic ingredients (most of which are grown in-house) and hole-in-the-wall restaurants owned by some of the world’s best sous chefs. A trip to Copenhagen wouldn’t be complete without strolling along the iconic Nyhavn waterfront filled with colorful houses, bars and restaurants. More than just a buzzing entertainment district, Nyhavn provides the perfect photo opportunity for all Instagram-loving tourists.

Tivoli Gardens

Pay a visit to the world’s second-oldest amusement park, which opened in 1834 and has transformed into a top tourist destination. With over 27 rides, 300 concerts a year and a wide array of global delicacies, a trip to Tivoli Gardens offers nothing short of a good time.

continued on page 44
As a military member or military family member, life can be unpredictable. Luckily, the security of your finances doesn’t have to be.

If you’re looking for the safest way to make purchases in Europe, it is always a good idea to use a credit card. If your card gets lost or stolen, a member services representative will be able to help you right away so that you can avoid fraudulent charges. Many financial institutions also make it easy to keep tabs on your card usage so you’ll know right away whether someone else is using your card; whether it’s via an SMS alert making you aware of potential suspicious activity, or through app options that allow you to set spending, category and location limits.

Plus, you’ll usually get better rates for foreign exchange fees with credit cards than by exchanging currency. In fact, some credit cards offer no foreign transaction fees at all.

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Last but not least, many new credit cards are contactless, which means they are virtually impossible to tamper with or clone. All you have to do is tap and pay!

To learn more about Service CU’s Everyday credit cards, visit servicecu.org/myeverydaycard.

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #19
Norway

Oslo

Home to a vast number of landmarks, museums and outdoor treasures, the capital of Norway is filled with plenty of sightseeing opportunities. View the inside of the Royal Palace, the 19th-century residence of Norway’s king and queen, with a guided tour. Be sure to uncover Norway’s Viking history at the Oslo Viking Ship Museum, which is filled with well-preserved wooden Viking ships dating back as far as the 9th century.

For outdoor enthusiasts, the city holds plenty of rustic parks, the magnificent Oslofjord’s waterways and islands that can be found a short distance from the city center, as well as the ski slopes and forests of Nordmarka.

Fjords

Claimed to be the symbol of Norway, over 1,000 fjords can be found throughout the country. Shaped by massive glaciers from many ice ages, fjords resemble a half-oval underwater valley boasting dramatic, picturesque scenery. The most popular destinations include the Lysefjord area, Hardangerfjord region, Aurlandsfjord, Nærøyfjord, Sognefjord area, Geirangerfjord area, Hjørundfjord, Romsdalsfjord and the Trollfjord. Many tourists kayak, hike or take a cruise to reach these breathtaking beauties. The Norwegian fjords are truly a stunning sight to behold.

Lofoten Islands

Sprinkled across the Norwegian Sea and high above the Arctic Circle are the glorious Lofoten Islands. Tremendous landscapes and spectacular characteristics can be found throughout this archipelago, including magnificent mountain peaks, arctic fjords and sheltered bays. Connected by bridges and tunnels, the primary islands of Austvågøy, Vestvågøy, Flakstadøy and Moskenesøy are separated from the mainland of Vestfjorden. Other than their beauty, the islands are famously known for their small fishing villages that offer visitors the chance to stay in a Rorbu, also known as an old fisherman’s cabin. Be sure to indulge in stockfish, a traditional cuisine made from spawning cod.

Sweden

Stockholm

Made up of 14 islands connected by many bridges, exploring the capital of Sweden is rather easy. A top spot to visit is the strikingly romantic neighborhood of Stockholm’s old town, Gamla Stan, which lures tourists with its vibrant atmosphere of well-kept 17th-century buildings that house shops and restaurants. If you have a love for interior design, up-and-coming fashion trends, attention-grabbing product packaging and bold prints, Stockholm is a dream come true. See these items displayed across the city’s stores, coffee shops, restaurants and museums, which will have you leaving Stockholm inspired and a bit more trendy.

Abisko

Battle the frigid winter nights to experience the item on everyone’s bucket list—witnessing the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights. Typically from October to March you can find the beautiful colors of green, red and purple dance across the sky. Abisko National Park is noted for being the best place to see nature’s most fascinating light show due to the area’s promising clear skies, regardless of the weather in surrounding places.
As a travel destination, our region, the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg, offers a huge variety of experiences. In the heart of Europe, SouthWest Germany is the country’s sunniest region. Think Nature; think Wellbeing; think Culture. And, of course, think Wining and Dining!

World-famous highlights include the beautiful Black Forest and the sophisticated spa resort of Baden-Baden, but there are also lesser-known treasures and ready-to-be-discovered small town gems. SouthWest Germany appeals to young and old alike, thanks to its combination of unspoiled nature, outdoor activities, unique historical palaces and castles and world-class natural spas. It also offers fun festivals, plus award-winning restaurants and wines.

In the pristine landscapes, you can relax and recharge your batteries at any time of the year. In spring, you can explore magnificent gardens in the Lake Constance region; in summer, the warm temperatures and long hours of sunshine are perfect for enjoying the beaches and cool, clean waters of numerous lakes. Fall brings color to the countryside, with leaves turning red and gold in vineyards and woods. In winter, the snow transforms landscapes into wonderlands, with the added romance of Christmas traditions, especially Christmas markets.

Discover the sunny side of Germany! More information can be found on tourism-bw.com or @visitbawu on Instagram.
Posh Ski Resorts of Europe

By Erica Fowler
If you’re seeking fresh powder in Europe, let us point you in the right direction. North American skiers will find some differences in the trail rankings. In Europe, pistes are categorized by a color-coded system shown in blue (easy), red (intermediate), and black (expert) trail signs. Many of the resort websites have fantastic slope maps and the status of their trails. Kids’ activity clubs or daycare options are sometimes available through larger hotels and may be included in the cost of your stay.
Courchevel, France
SEASON: DECEMBER 2022–APRIL 2023
Features:
Kids' club, multi-area ski passes, night skiing, ski schools, snow parks, alternative activities

If you aim to ski in France’s large Three Valleys region, Courchevel is at the center of the action. There are three ski areas and more than 200 accommodation options that often provide ski lift shuttles. Courchevel 1850 is the most luxurious for a temporary stay and it is so named to indicate its altitude in meters, like the rest of Courchevel’s neighborhoods. On the slopes, half of the trails are designated easy or intermediate if you don’t want to brave the toughest ones. The tallest lift of them all, the Cime de Caron cable car will take you to an altitude of 10,498 feet!

La Plagne, France
SEASON: DECEMBER 2022–APRIL 2023
Features:
Kids' club, multi-area ski passes, night skiing, ski schools, snow parks, alternative activities

La Plagne is just one of the doors to the sprawling slopes of the Paradiski area in the French Alps. The variety of activities is further enhanced with the Les Arcs ski resort, which also offers inclusive family-friendly options, including care, skiing lessons and unique snowy fun. Over 450 winter lodging accommodations are available, from Club Med or Hotel Club Plagne 2000, to something more intimate or even unusual, like an upcycled and cozy snow groomer.

The alternative winter activities include snowshoeing, dog sledding, bobsleigh, paragliding and ziplining. And if you have never tried a “snooc,” then this fun French invention is waiting for you to rent. All you have to do is sit... and hold on tight! It looks like a small stool atop a mini ski.

Club Med La Plagne 2100
Not only are lift passes and lessons included in your stay, you also receive breakfast, lunch, snack and dinner.
Zermatt, Switzerland
SEASON: NOVEMBER 2022–APRIL 2023

Features:
- Kids’ club
- Multi-area ski passes
- Night skiing
- Ski schools
- Snow parks
- Alternative activities

With a view as iconic as the Matterhorn, it is no wonder that skiers come from around the world to experience the altitude so high that a portion of the slopes on the glacier are available for skiers year-round. The mountainous range lies along the border with Italy, so you can even ski across the border through the Theodul Pass. The cable cars, gondolas, and train routes are always being expanded, but you can always take a helicopter to the top of ungroomed trails. Plan to visit the igloo village for a unique dining or overnight experience, as the whole place is lovingly carved out of packed snow with intricate designs, complete with a sauna, fondue and schnapps.

Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy
SEASON: NOVEMBER 2022–MAY 2023

Features:
- Multi-area ski passes
- Ski schools
- Snow parks
- Alternative activities

These slopes in the Italian Alps will be the stage for the 2026 Winter Olympics. Ski pass packages allow you to enjoy four neighboring resorts’ worth of slopes. Lodging in this alpine charmer features well-accommodated hotels such as Cristallo, a luxury resort and spa, or you may prefer the peaceful ambiance of sleeping under the stars in the Starlight 360°, which comes with a three-course dinner. If you’re looking for reservations with English-speaking ski school instructors, the Cortina Ski School has you covered.

Cristallo
Nestled within a UNESCO World Heritage site, Cristallo is linked to several ski circuits and host to an on-site spa.
St. Johann in Salzburg, Austria

SEASON: DECEMBER 2022–APRIL 2023

Features:
- Kids’ club
- Multi-area ski passes
- Ski schools
- Snow parks
- Alternative activities

St. Johann’s winter scene bustles with snow lovers zipping by on their more 470 miles of pistes in the Ski Amadé area. Activities abound in this area, such as horse-drawn sleigh rides, ice skating, dog sledding, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and the family-oriented ski area of Hahnbaum allows little skiers to ease into their newfound skills with ski schools and wide slopes. Luxury hotels like Alpina Family, Spa & Sporthotel additionally offer spa services, all-meal buffets and childcare for babies and children. If you’re looking for a country farmhouse or an apartment with walkable conveniences, they are also available right next to the slopes.

Zugspitze, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

SEASON: NOVEMBER 2022–MAY 2023

Features:
- Kids’ club
- Multi-area ski passes
- Ski schools
- Snow parks
- Alternative activities

The highest peak in Germany boasts a Bavarian ski resort that stays in full swing for half the year. Ski passes allow you to ski the Garmisch-Classic area. Multiple-day passes allow you to cross the border to Austria’s Tyrol ski region to continue the fun. For a good meal above the clouds, Panorama 2962 is built into the summit of Zugspitze with spectacular views of two countries at once. The town supplies a variety of overnight accommodations, but here is one of the five locations in Europe where there is an igloo village to admire from a hot tub. Another option, Edelweiss continues to be a full-featured, welcoming accommodation for the DoD community, and is located in Garmisch.
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Living in Europe, chances are this phrase has been uttered by you or to you. For the record, it’s true—they’re both amazing and magical. Strands of soft lights twinkle above small chalets selling everything from mugs of steaming glühwein to intricately carved wooden nativity sets. It sounds pretty close to perfect. But don’t let the festive sights and delicious smells fool you. There is an art to tackling these magnificent markets. Here are some essential tips to know before you go.

1. Come up with a plan of attack.

With so many markets to choose from, it’s easy to throw in the towel when you feel overwhelmed by the choices. Take a little time and plan your visit. While many markets are similar in the goods they sell, they usually have something unique or a special theme. If you’re traveling around Europe during the season, you’ll find each country has a slightly different take on the traditional Christmas market.

Start by consulting our good friend Google. Most markets have websites that include the dates, hours, possible fees for entrance and often a map or list of vendors. If you’re planning on taking public transportation, consult a map of the area to ensure it’s within comfortable walking distance. If you’re driving, check the parking options nearby. Some garages have specific hours, so you’ll want to make sure your car doesn’t end up locked in overnight. Traveling with little ones or friends? Designate an area within the market to use as a meet-up spot in the event someone gets lost or separated from the group.
2. Public transportation is your friend.
Circling the parking lot for a spot isn’t a harbinger of holiday joy. Leave the driving to someone else and hop on the train. European Christmas markets are often located near a transportation hub in city centers, making them easily accessible. You can kick back, relax and enjoy the scenery without sitting in aggravating traffic. If you happen to imbibe in one or three glasses of glühwein or other alcoholic beverages, you’ve got a safe ride home.

3. Pack your patience.
Pre-pandemic, most Christmas markets (even the smaller ones) were crowded. The famed markets of Nuremberg and Dresden were often packed with wall-to-wall people. With many markets shuttered for the past two years, vendors and shoppers will be out in gusto this year. Be sure to pack your patience. There will be long lines, glühwein-induced shenanigans and disorganized chaos. If crowds aren’t your thing, visiting midweek during the early afternoon will likely be your best bet.

4. Make sure you’ve got a few euros on hand.
While more and more vendors are moving to cashless transactions, quite a few stick with the mantra of “cash is king.” Bringing euros with you (small bills and coins) will help alleviate any awkward payment situations. If you’ve chosen to drive, there are also places where you’ll need some cash to pay for parking. Don’t worry if you forget; most markets have ATMs.

5. Wear comfortable and warm attire.
European Christmas markets are an Instagrammer’s dream. It can be tempting to wear a super cute yet slightly impractical outfit for the perfect pic. Leave the fashionable, high-heeled boots at home and lace up the sensible ones instead. Many markets are constructed on top of cobblestone streets, which are notoriously uneven. The last thing you’ll want to do is faceplant while holding a mug of hot chocolate or mulled wine. You may want to consider wearing some comfy (stretchy) pants. Christmas markets are a foodie’s paradise, and trust me—you’ll want to sample all the things. Don’t forget to bundle up either. Whether there is sunshine, rain or snow, it’s still December and you don’t want catching a chill to force the end of a beautiful day at a Christmas market.

Strolling through a Christmas market during the holiday season is a rite of passage for anyone living in Europe. The festive revelry and atmosphere is a one-of-a-kind experience you won’t want to miss. With a bit of planning and patience, you’ll be battle-ready in no time.
As beautiful as Europe is, the cold and harsh winter leaves most of us depleted of much-needed Vitamin D. Thankfully, we’re geographically located in the ideal place to transport our pale, sun-deprived selves to places filled with warmth, salty air from the sea and plenty of sunshine to give our skin that healthy glow. To do that, jet off to these warm spots where the sun’s rays are welcome all year long.

continued on page 56
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Though the capital of Malta may be small, the amount of sunshine this city gets is anything but. Declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Valletta is a city filled with historic sights, beautiful culture and of course, sun.

To get a picture of the history of Valletta, stroll through the promenade of the beautifully secluded waterfront that houses the original stores from when the port was first in use. These stores, which have been converted into restaurants and shops, perfectly mesh old and new. Must-see sights also include Saint John’s Co-Cathedral, the Grand Harbor, the Upper Barrakka gardens and Military Ceremonies, Grand Master’s Palace and the National Museum of Fine Arts.

For the food-lovers, get your hands on Gbejniet—Maltese cheese, Pastizzi—a flaky pastry filled with ricotta cheese or mashed curried peas, Aljotta—fish soup and Timpana—baked macaroni. With a rich culture, historic buildings and amazing museums, it’s no surprise Valletta was named Europe’s capital of culture.

An ideal fusion of Mediterranean vibes and European elegance makes this underrated town in southern Spain one worth putting on your radar. Its beaches are peppered with kite surfers crisscrossing each other on the water, and an abundance of sunshine hitting your face is the optimal getaway for anyone who needs sun, surf and sand.

Though Tarifa is known for its watersports, the average beach bum can still find pleasure laying in the beach lounges or even taking a towel and laying out till you’ve achieved the right tinge of brown. The beaches to note down are Playa de Los Lances, Playa Chica, Playa La Caleta, Playa de Valdevaqueros and Playa Punta Paloma.

Apart from the beaches, visiting the quaint shops and scarfing down delicious Spanish food, there are also experiences not to be missed. Be sure to pay attention to the detail of the buildings, as elements of Moroccan beauty are influenced throughout the whole town. Those famous Moroccan doors you love? They can be found here. However, experiencing the real deal in Morocco is an easy ferry trip away, landing in Tangier, a striking Moroccan port.
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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #9
By Tamala Malerk

The air is getting chilly, and it seems harder to go outside—especially when there is nothing like staying in, putting on an oversized hoodie and keeping warm. Rather than risk the brisk cold air, why not “travel” all over Europe by partaking in some of the best comfort food from the relaxing atmosphere of your own kitchen?

**Käsekuchen**
* (German Cheesecake):
Everyone is familiar with the popular apple strudel and German chocolate cake, but did you know that Germany has its own take on cheesecake? What makes it “German” is its use of quark rather than cream cheese. Quark is an unaged cheese that is similar in texture to Greek yogurt but is less tart in flavor and provides a deliciously distinct flavor to this dessert.

**Mamaliga**
This easy-to-make cornmeal dish is one of the most traditional, well-known and delicious recipes from Moldova. Recipes vary depending on familial tradition, but its staple ingredients include cornmeal, water, salt and butter, and it is cooked on the stove. Serve it with cheese or sour cream for an authentic Moldovan experience.

**Palačinke**
This dish is thinner than a pancake but thicker than a French crepe. A staple across the Balkans, this flexible dish can be rolled or folded into a triangle and served either sweet style with Nutella, jams or sugar, or savory style with meats and cheeses.

**Sweet Pistachio Cream Brioche Rolls**
This Sicilian take on the classic cinnamon roll features pistachio cream (not paste) as one of its main ingredients. Simply spread melted pistachio cream and crushed pistachios over brioche roll dough (or premade brioche rolls for ease), and enjoy for breakfast, brunch or a snack.

**Uova in Purgatorio**
* (Eggs in Purgatory)
With origins from North Africa, this Italian adaptation of Shakshuka made with poached eggs in a hearty tomato sauce comes from Naples. The combination of tomato sauce, garlic, onion, red pepper flakes and eggs makes for a filling meal in these cooler months. For an even heartier dish, add Italian sausage or create your own spin to it using beans, basil, chickpeas, parsley or leafy greens.

**Irish Soda Bread**
If you are looking for something to help you sop up your Escudella i Carn d'Olla or Uova in Purgatorio, look no further than this soft and dense bread. It is made with buttermilk, baking soda, butter, sugar and flour, with an optional egg. This bread has a super crunchy exterior that you are sure to love. It also goes well with cheese or jam and butter.
While you are sipping on some German glühwein, Italian espresso, English tea or French hot chocolate, enjoy them with these recipes for the ultimate European comfort food tour.

**Walnut Stuffed Prunes**

What is comfort without some ease? If you are looking for something simple to make, with only three ingredients, this Ukrainian traditional dessert is for you. You only need prunes, walnuts and a can of condensed milk.

**Pommes Aligot**

Potatoes can be the ultimate comfort food with the best price, versatility and accessibility across Europe. And what makes potatoes better? Loads of gooey cheese and minced garlic, all melted inside this French mashed potato dish. While Pommes Aligot commonly calls for a cheese known as “tome fraiche,” it is difficult to find outside of France, so you can substitute it with a Gruyère or Swiss cheese.

**Pice ar y maen** *(Welsh Cakes):*

Similar to a scone, but usually smaller with different twists on flavors, Welsh cakes are a popular treat for the St. David’s Day holiday that you can enjoy year-round. This blend of simple ingredients is cooked on a griddle or cast-iron skillet.

**Pastitsio**

This Greek lasagna-style dish has its own flair with the use of a creamy béchamel sauce. Savor this dish made with a tube-shaped pasta such as bucatini (traditional), ziti or penne (more convenient to find) and beef, feta, tomato paste and egg whites. Serve it with a Greek salad and some baklava for a three-course Greek meal.

**Garash Cake**

Popular since the 19th century, this chocolate cake is one of the best desserts Bulgaria has to offer. Savor the layers of chocolate cream and a walnut crust.

**Oliebollen**

These Dutch donuts are a deep-fried delicacy. Crispy on the outside, with a velvety cake-like inside and an exterior dusted with powdered sugar, this dessert will really warm up your body and soul in these cooler times.

**Escudella i Carn d’Olla** *(Soup and Stewed Meat)*

This traditional Catalan dish dates back to the 14th century. This combination of stew and soup features a combination of meats and vegetables. However, the star of this Spanish show is the “pilota,” a large spiced meatball.
Coq au Vin in Glühwein

By Karen Bradbury

The classic French dish known as Coq au Vin consists of chicken braised in wine and garlic, typically accompanied by mushrooms, onions and cubes of bacon. The wine most often used to create this rich and hearty dish is a red Burgundy wine. With the holidays approaching, reach instead for a ready-made mulled wine—preferably one that’s well-spiced but not too sweet—and your favorite holiday flavors will shine through in the tender chicken and its succulent sauce. Traditional recipes call for the use of one whole chicken, cut into pieces, but any part of the bird can be used. Chicken thighs are a tasty option for those who prefer darker meat. Breast meat will require less cooking time.
Start to finish: About three hours (20 minutes of prep, at least 1 hour to marinate the chicken and 1 to 1.5 hours of cooking time).

Serves: 4

One whole chicken or 4 large legs, including the thighs
3 small onions
2 cloves of garlic
2 large carrots
1 pound fresh whole mushrooms
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 to 1 bottle of mulled red wine
2 bay leaves
Salt and pepper

Take the chicken out of its packaging, pat dry and place in a large glass bowl. Do not remove the skin. Rub the pieces with a salt and pepper to season. Add pressed garlic and the bay leaves. Pour enough mulled wine over the chicken to cover it completely. Cover the bowl and marinate in the refrigerator for at least one hour.

Meanwhile, prepare the vegetables. Peel the carrots and cut into short slices. Peel the onions and cut into small chunks. Set aside.

Clean the mushrooms and cut them in half. Fry them in olive oil until the moisture has been released and the edges have turned golden brown. Set aside.

In a deep saucepan, melt the butter and add some olive oil. Take the chicken pieces out of the marinade and fry them on both sides until they turn a deep golden brown. Remove the chicken pieces from the saucepan and set them aside.

In the same saucepan, fry the chopped onions and carrots until tender.

Place the chicken back into the saucepan, add the mulled wine in which the dish was marinated, cover with a lid and allow the chicken to gently simmer on medium to low heat for an hour or so.

Once the liquid has reduced by half, it’s time to add the mushrooms. Allow the dish to simmer for another 20 minutes or so before serving. Garnish with fresh herbs such as parsley or thyme, if you have any on hand. Serve alongside a starch, such as buttery mashed potatoes or crusty bread.

(This recipe was adapted from the Bonta website.)
If you find yourself traveling through the beautiful rolling hills and quaint villages of Ireland, a unique symbol may have piqued your interest. Comprised of two hands, a heart and a crown, the Claddagh can be seen everywhere throughout the country. Just a glimpse through the windows of jewelry stores and souvenir shops will be enough to make you want to take this symbolic souvenir home with you. However, to appreciate the Claddagh, you have to appreciate its story first.

HOW TO WEAR IT

How you wear the Claddagh ring symbolizes your relationship status, so be cognizant of how you position the ring.

- If you are married, wear the ring on your left hand with the heart facing inward.
- If the ring is worn on your right hand with the heart facing outward, you still have your heart open. This position also indicates that you are single.
- If you’re in a relationship, wear the ring on your right hand with the heart facing inward.

WHERE TO BUY ONE

While you can buy the Claddagh in many jewelry stores, souvenir shops and even online, the following stores located in Galway, the birthplace of the ring, will not disappoint.

Claddagh Jewellers — Located on 25 Mainguard St., this jewelry store provides several varieties of Claddagh rings. Ranging from the classic to diamond and wedding bands, Claddagh Jewellers has a knowledgeable staff who will help you find the perfect ring.

Claddagh and Celtic Jewellery Company — This jewelry manufacturer on 1 Quay Lane, in the heart of the Latin Quarter, is known for making unique Irish jewelry. You will be impressed by their handmade craftsmanship, to include these rings.

McCarthys Jewellery Shop — Located on 8 Shop St., McCarthys Jewellery Shop is run by founder Peter McCarthy’s three daughters. This small boutique shop offers stylish, yet affordable Claddagh rings that will suit every taste.

To get a full history lesson on the Claddagh, immerse yourself in the “Legend of the Claddagh Ring” at the Galway visitor center, where you can learn all about the history of this ring. Admission is free and the movie explaining its history is shown every 20 minutes.

Just a glimpse through the windows of jewelry stores and souvenir shops will be enough to make you want to take this symbolic souvenir home with you.
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True Trappist beers are defined as those brewed within the walls of a Trappist monastery, under the control and responsibility of a community of monks who are involved throughout all steps of the brewing process and the marketing of the finished product. A large portion of the income generated by this activity is devoted to the needs of the community and social work.

In 1998, eight Trappist abbeys founded the International Trappist Association (ITA) to protect the Trappist name from misuse by commercial enterprises and establish specific criteria for the beer bearing its trademark and logo. Other products produced by monasteries such as jams, cheese, yeast and other goods can bear this logo as well. At present, the ITA unites 19 Trappist abbeys within Europe, along with one in Spencer, Massachusetts.

Chimay beer is brewed in the Scourmont Abbey, which was established by a small group of monks near the town of Chimay, Belgium, back in 1850. A farm, brewery and cheese-making operation soon followed. The abbey carries out much the same economic activities now as it did then, all the while respecting ethical values: the use of only natural and protected ingredients, respect for its workers and using income from sales generated toward social aid.
Chimay’s range of beers is not extensive: the Red is fruity, coppery and slightly sweet; the Blue is a dark ale with a strong aroma; the Triple, walks the balance between sweet and bitter and the Gold is known for its hoppy aroma and spices. The latest addition to the Chimay family is the Grand Réserve barrel-aged, which gains its nuances by fermentation in wooden barrels.

Although the brewing facilities aren’t accessible to the public, visitors are welcome to the Espace Chimay, a permanent exhibition revealing the secrets of the production of Chimay Trappist beers and cheeses. The display includes an animated model of the abbey, a peek into the brewer’s cupboard and a walk through the Abbey’s garden, church and cemetery. A visit concludes with a tasting of a 25 cl Chimay on tap at the nearby Poteaupré Inn, a guesthouse that has been welcoming visitors for more than one hundred years. In a lively atmosphere reminiscent of an English pub, gourmet dishes are served, several of which feature the Chimay ingredients themselves and all of which pair nicely with the beers on tap. Don’t miss “Chimay Gold,” a pure malt beer available only on tap until fairly recently, or another house specialty, Poteaupré cheese. The inn also offers seven traditionally appointed rooms for overnight guests.

Espace Chimay is located at Rue de Poteaupré 5, B-6464 Bourlers, Belgium. The brasserie is open daily except in the low season when it’s closed on Mondays. Fees are not advertised on their website so be sure to check directly with Espace Chimay.
Staff Picks

STRIPESEUROPE.COM

From community news to travel and PCS tips, StripesEurope.com has got you covered to conquer your tour in Europe!

In this edition, we asked some of our staff “Which of your European destinations would you move to, if there were no strings attached?” Check out what they have to say!

“My pick: The Netherlands! As a cycling, pedestrian, and public transit-friendly country, I was impressed. I had a wonderful time among friendly people, great food and a fascinating culture, and I would love to go back.”

—Erica Fowler
LEAD WRITER-EDITOR

“This one has become more and more easy over the years. It would most definitely be Italy! It seems to get harder and harder to return home after a vacation in the beautiful Tuscany Valley.”

—Sean Adams
SALES ASSOCIATE

“I would move to Switzerland in a heartbeat, particularly Zurich or Lucerne. Switzerland gets a bad ‘rep’ for being expensive but walking around and taking in the gorgeous scenery is free. I love learning about the history and just reveling in the culture and overall atmosphere of the country.”

—Tamala Malerk
WRITER-EDITOR

“I would move to Zurich, which unexpectedly, is a beach town! All of my Swiss friends (two out of two) told me to bring my swim trunks to Zurich. When I arrived, I found out why: the city has a beautiful and clean swimming canal where seemingly the whole population swims and tans and enjoys the summer. Sure, the pizzas are 26 euros each, but in return for high prices there are festivals and lake cruises and good coffees.”

—J.P. Lawrence
REPORTER/PHOTOGRAPHER

“Lisbon not only stole my heart, but it is also a place that surpassed all my expectations. Not only is the architecture and design culture one of a kind, the food scene on point, the people, and the landscape outside of the city… plus, everyone spoke English. The weather is a huge bonus too, seaside town with perfect weather all year… not a bad place to live out my days!”

—Leah Geier
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“[I find the program challenging and providing new skills for how I manage. I already see the value of the program as a tool to advance my career.”

— Ron Coddington, Port Engineer, Port of Palm Beach

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