

The Ultimate Offline Guide to Backpacking Europe

Welcome to the ActiveBackpacker.com ultimate offline guide to Backpacking Europe...

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What is Travel: My Thoughts On Why People Travel & Why I Travel



For some people, travel can be a weekend away to a new and exciting place. Yet for others, travel is purely visiting a country that is not your own. Claims abound that 'backpacking' is where the real travelling is to be done, whilst others are happy in the notion of a guided hotel tour or a 7 day trip on a cruise ship.

Many a grizzled veteran traveller will tout the potential clash of cultural experiences to be some of the more rewarding travel experiences, whilst much of the younger crowd on their first trip abroad will sing a merry tale of their socialising and drinking antics and all their new friends from around the world.

Is travelling a sign of maturity and the constant endeavour of humans to connect with the world around them, both emotionally and physically? Is it the innocent youth cracking the world like an oyster, surprising themselves with the pearl they find inside?

Travel means something different to everyone who experiences it, it's layered like an onion (thanks for that one, Shrek) – and not everyone loves onions. I think that onions should be a staple for every meal!

For me, travelling and backpacking is a combination of every aspect in 'normal' life that I find myself looking forward to, except that when I'm travelling I get to experience those things every single day.

Things like meeting new friends and hanging out with old ones, more time to explore and think and be creative, and of course giving me the opportunity to see other cultures and other ways of life. It gives me perspective, and it means that I can be thankful every day for being born into a place where I get to make all of those choices for myself.

Also, the chance to read more great novels and drink more local beers from all around the world is a decidedly positive bonus, I won't deny it.

Not everyone thinks of travel like I do, some people don't like it. They don't like leaving their comfort zone or this barrier that they've put up around themselves that is resistant to breaking the bubble of familiarity. And you know what, that's okay. It's their choice, and if they're happy then I'm happy.

Travelling will amaze you and you'll love it. It'll piss you off sometimes and you'll hate it. It'll astound you and mesmerise you and leave you full to the brim with stories and adventures and experiences. And just like a great movie, it will finish with you feeling better and wiser and worldlier than you did before you started it.
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All I ask is that if you're thinking of travelling but keep putting it off, don't. If you're thinking of doing something crazy like moving overseas for a few years to try something fun and different, but you delay doing it out of some fear of the unknown, then don't. It's your life, live it how you want to live it.

Shut that little voice of betrayal that says you cannot do it because it's new and unfamiliar and scary, because it's wrong.

Five Reasons To Get Off Your Butt And Travel Right Now

It's easy to go on the internet and read travel articles, backpacking blogs and look at amazing pictures from around the world of people having fun and experiencing other cultures. **We all do it.** I do it. I assume you do as well since you're reading this article – but if you are thinking about going on a serious trip (I'm talking longer than one month) but keep putting it off, then it's time to:

GET OFF YOUR BUTT AND TRAVEL RIGHT NOW!



Let me give you five excellent reasons why:

Spontaneity Is Food For The Soul

If there is one thing that I think everyone should do at least once a year (or once a month works too!) – it's be spontaneous!

Unless you plan a trip down to the minute detail (worst idea ever), there is always room to be spontaneous and that's what travel is all about. And the best bit? Consistent spontaneity will leave you feeling great, adventurous and ready for anything!

I remember backpacking on a 10 month trip around Europe and hitchhiked from France to Spain, camping along the way with a friend. It was spontaneous, it was fun and I still remember it fondly (along with the grapes we ate as we walked down the Costa Brava coast).

Work Can Always Wait

I think people get sucked into this little world where they feel that a company or a place won't be able to go on without them, or they feel that if they quit they are hitting some sort of "reset" button on their career.

This simply isn't true. I'm not some sort of extreme anti capitalist or anything, but showing die hard loyalty to a company that will have no problem axing you when times are tough does no-one any favours (except maybe the company). If you WANT to travel and see the world then the only one stopping you, is you.

"But I don't have enough money" I can hear some people saying. That's codswallop (I think this is the first time I've ever used codswallop in an article). Backpacking does NOT have to be expensive. You can camp. You can stay in hostels. You can CouchSurf. You can WWOOF. Places in Asia like Laos and Cambodia are beautiful AND ridiculously cheap to see and travel.

This sort of talk is just your subconscious throwing up obstacles to stop you leaving your comfort zone. It can be uncomfortable for most people going somewhere new for the first time, but that wears off quickly and you're left with rewarding experiences, new friends and memorable adventures.

Ultimately when it comes to work, I think more and more employers and young, dynamic companies are looking at life experience (which travelling is a large part of) more than simply what degrees you have on paper.



Life Experience & Fulfilment

Wheel out the cheese? You bet!

Cheesy comments are always appropriate when they're TRUE.

Travelling the world, for most people, will give a feeling of satisfaction that's difficult to get elsewhere. Lots of people travel – it doesn't mean you're particularly special in the realm of humanity for doing it, but your own experiences will FEEL special to you. And how we perceive ourselves is everything, from here stems confidence, patience and understanding.

Travel has also got to be the best way to combat racism, bigotry and a misunderstanding of other cultures. For some people it does the opposite, but for most, travel is the cure for a narrow mind.

Self Confidence

If there is one thing that backpacking does well, it's that it bequeaths the gift of confidence upon young impressionable souls. It can just be a subtle change, but dealing with the day-to-day things that every budget traveller must overcome cannot help but leave a positive mark.

Some people are born with an inner image that exudes self confidence, but for most of us **confidence is something earned through determination and a sense of achievement**, all of which travelling can provide.

You will find it easier to introduce yourself and learn more about other people, all of which are noteworthy traits.

Backpacking will satisfy even the most curious of minds, as the world around us provides a never ending well of knowledge that can be delved into.



Skill Sets Of The Worldly Kind

You will become better at dealing with people who are impatient, aggressive, annoying or narcissistic (you will find these people all around the world – so it's a useful skill to have).

You will become better at managing your money, budgeting and organising.

You will become better at dealing with unprepared events and circumstances.

You will stop stressing about the 'little things'. How much worry are they really worth anyway?

You will realise there is more to life than money (and will appreciate it more when you have some).

You will gain a fondness for the different beers of the world (well I did, anyway).

Do It. Right. Now.

So if you want to go on a backpacking trip, but keep putting it off, what are your reasons?

What obstacles are you throwing up to stop you doing what you want? Is it work? Is it money? Is it the fear of leaving your comfort zone?

Spontaneity, confidence, life experience and useful skills are all positive side effects of someone who backpacks often. Start feeling that positivity for yourself!

Tom's Super Guide To Planning A Trip Backpacking Through Europe

There is so much information out there on the internet, and I personally think a lot of it is complete junk. I want the resource articles on this website to be useful, informative, helpful, and most importantly, NOT junk!

With this guide I want you to have a few 'aha' moments or maybe a few 'that's a good idea' moments. I want this to be a valuable resource for other backpackers like myself, or for fledgling backpackers who may be about to start on their very own journey to Europe.

In this guide I'm going to share everything I wish I knew before heading off on my first adventure. Having backpacked Europe a number of times (and currently living there) I like to think I have a few good pointers that can help you get started.



A Simple Map of Europe

I thought it might be a good idea to start with a map of Europe. Any decent Europe backpacking guide would be remiss without actually showing you a map of Europe. So here it is!

Welcome to Europe. It's the world's 6th largest continent and consists of 47 countries (as well as other assorted dependencies, islands and territories). Phew. That's enough facts for now I think.

So, my first recommendation is to familiarize yourself with this continent! Not only will this build up the anticipation of the trip to come, it's also a great way to avoid homework and other dull activities. Might I also suggest getting a globe for your room (I have one that is also a lamp and lights up from the inside, it's AWESOME, so get one of those).

Arranging Your Passport and Visas

In the planning phase and whilst ticking off your 'backpacking in Europe checklist', please don't forget to organize your passport and the appropriate visas for the countries you are visiting (more on visas in a moment). Don't leave it to the last minute. Don't leave it to the last

minute. Let me repeat that. **Please don't leave it to the last minute!**

There is nothing worse than thinking you have more than enough time to sort and obtain your passport, only to realize the processing time (according to the post office clerk) 'may take 6-8 weeks, it really depends...', and you're sitting there thinking, 'but I leave in 4 weeks!'.

Then you're biting and gnashing your nails leading up to the flight date, only to receive it 3 days before you go. IT'S NEEDLESS STRESS, I tell you.

Let me tell you a quick story, when I had to renew my Australian passport, I ran into some troubles due to the fact that I had lost my previous passport (that's a tale we won't get into right now) and neither of my parents were born in Australia (my dad is English and my mother is Dutch).

So even though I have an Australian birth certificate and had previously had an Australian passport, there was some obscure government ruling that still applied to me where I had to prove extra things and obtain all sorts of paperwork from my parents because I was applying for a 'new passport' instead of 'renewing my passport'.

The point of this story is to make you go and arrange your passport immediately, because you just have no idea what complications may come up. Give yourself a good 3 months to sort it out, if not more. Enough said on the matter I think. Onwards!

Useful links:

[US Passport Site](#)

[Australian Passport Site](#)

I know I said I was done with passports, but one more final note of importance. If either of your parents are born in a European country, I highly suggest looking into getting a passport from their country. You may well be applicable for one, and it can make travelling Europe a LOT easier, especially if they are from a country within the EU (European Union).

The US and Australian government allow dual citizenship, so you are legally able to hold two passports (I know this is true, as I have two passports myself).

Visas For Europe

It helps knowing which countries you plan on visiting of course, and US and Australian citizens are often entitled to 30 or 60 days into various European countries without even requiring a visa. So if you are planning a short trip to one country, do a bit of research and see if a visa is even required. For most backpackers however, there is the Schengen Visa.

The Schengen Visa lets you into 25 European countries (including ALL of Western Europe), allowing you a total stay of 90 days in the applicable Schengen countries.

Here is a complete List of the Schengen Countries:

Austria, Belgium

Czech Republic, Denmark

Estonia, Finland

France, Germany

Greece, Hungary, Iceland

Italy, Latvia

Lithuania, Luxembourg

Malta, Netherlands

Norway, Poland

Portugal, Slovakia

Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

Let me say this however, there is one very popular tourist destination that is not currently on the Schengen Visa, and that is Croatia. So if you plan on going to Croatia, you need to look into whether or not you need to arrange a visa, as having the Schengen Visa will not help you. Citizens of the US, Canada or Australia are not required to have a visa and can stay in Croatia up to 90 days, for example.

But get this, I met a friend backpacking, and he was travelling on an Indian passport with a Schengen Visa. He met a few Australian guys, and they all decided to pop on over to Croatia together. They were on a ferry, and got to the passport checkpoint, and Croatian customs said to him:

'Oh, you are not allowed into Croatia. You are here illegally'.

So he had to stay on the ferry and go BACK out of Croatia, all because he didn't realize that his Schengen Visa didn't cover Croatia. So have a good peruse of the Schengen country list, and if you plan on visiting countries in Europe that are not on the list, you need to investigate whether your passport will allow you to enter that country with or without a visa. Don't end up stuck on a ferry!



A lake on one of the Dalmatian Islands in Croatia.

Money & Papers

Accessing Cash in Europe

You're going to need a way to access money overseas. I would recommend a card that has Visa or MasterCard access – with either one of those you will not have trouble getting money out anywhere in Europe.

A big problem is that a lot of banks will give you cards with this access, but will charge you ridiculous fees just to get money out.

- They will charge you foreign currency conversion fees.
- They will charge you cash advance fees.
- They will charge you international transaction fees.

It's pretty absurd and annoying. If you live in Australia, I have a perfect solution for you. I've been using this credit card for every trip I've been on since I was 18. I have no affiliation whatsoever with this company or this card, it's just a fantastic product for travelling so I'm recommending it here.

It's a 28 Degrees MasterCard, there is no annual fee, no cash advance fees and no foreign currency fees. I guess where they make money is that you get charged about 18-20% interest as soon as you withdraw the funds. HOWEVER, used sensibly, this card will save you a bucket load in conversion fees and cash advance fees. The card itself will convert currency at the global MasterCard rate (which is always going to be better than your local bank).

If you endeavour to logon and pay off your card via Internet Banking at least once every two weeks, it is one of the cheapest ways to travel and access money back home in my opinion.

It may be a credit card, but I'm not recommending it for you to spend money you don't have. It's purely a means of access for me, and not a way of drowning myself in debt, and I suggest you treat it the same way!

If 28 Degrees ever remove these great travelling features off the card, I will be removing this recommendation off my website.

If you don't live in Australia, you're going to need to do a little research of companies in your country and what they can offer you in terms of accessing cash abroad. If you can get it, you want something that will not charge you cash advance fees or foreign currency fees, give you an exchange rate based on a standard Visa or MasterCard rate, and preferably one that has no annual fees as well.

A bit hard to find? You betcha!

Papers & ID

You will need a passport of course; we've covered that off already. But apart from a passport, what are some other useful papers and ID cards to bring along with you on a backpacking trip to Europe?

I have two words for you: Student ID

If you have a valid Student ID card, then **DO NOT LEAVE IT AT HOME**. You will get discounts on everything in Europe, from museums to cinemas to train tickets. Bringing along your Student ID is an absolute must (I didn't have one on my last trip since I'm not a student anymore. **I hate missing out on all those student savings!**).

Other papers that will come in handy:

- If you have booked any flights, print out the tickets and confirmations and store them in a safe place. It saves you having to do it later at an Internet Café.
- Bring along a small book and write down the hotline number for losing your bank card. Put in the emergency travel insurance phone number as well (more on travel insurance in a moment). Put in your passport number. Then fill it with anything else you deem important!

A final note on papers and ID, it's always a good idea to leave behind photocopies of your passport and ID with family or friends back home. Trust me, losing your passport is an absolute pain, having a safe photocopy of it may well come in handy at some point.

Travel Insurance For Backpacking Europe

I've used a couple of different travel insurance companies, but have never needed to claim anything (thankfully). So I cannot really take you through the claims process and tell you exactly which company is amazing and perfect, because I haven't done it myself. I can tell you that if you lose something, report it to the police (and get a receipt for that) as soon as possible if you can. Having a police report for your losses will ALWAYS HELP in an insurance claim.

I can also tell you that you **should definitely get travel insurance and to do the following things:**



- Read the fine print.
- Ensure you are covered completely for emergency medical and transport.
- Check the excesses. How much will you need to pay if you actually make a claim? How much will they cover PER personal item lost? Will you need to specifically add your new Canon Camera or MacBook as a specifically covered item to ensure it is covered appropriately. You need to know the answers to these questions.
 - Check online for promotional codes to get possible discounts. I knocked 10% off my latest travel insurance purchase just by Googling a promotional code. Never hurts to try!

Shop around, get a few different quotes, read various reviews, ask friends and family.

"I had a friend in Croatia break and dislocate her wrist. She needed hospital treatment in Croatia,

emergency surgery in Germany, and then had to fly back to her home in Australia and get treated there – this would have cost her a pretty penny if she didn't have any decent travel insurance.”

Backpacking Europe Cost

So how much does it cost to backpack through Europe? Well, it's a pretty common question, and obviously, it can have a lot of different and varying answers. **Let me see if I can help you based on my own experience.**

If you are wanting to set a budget and get a rough idea of cost and how much money you will need to bring, there are a few things you need to know about your own trip. How long are you going for? Are you happy to stay in hostels in large mixed dormitories or do you want your own room? Are you happy with cooking your own meals, or do you want to eat out every night? Do you mind flying with the budget airlines and catching buses?

I pretty much pin down costs to four main categories: sleeping, eating, drinking, and transport. Those four things will set you back the most, I absolutely guarantee it. Since this site and this article is about backpacking specifically, I am going to make some assumptions about you:

You don't want to stay in five star hotels, you would love to eat out – but will do so sparingly and at local haunts (not at Michelin star restaurants), and you are more than happy to pre-drink and socialize at the hostel prior to going out on the town.

Am I right? I hope so, because that's what I'm about to base these cost estimates on!

On average, a bed in a hostel dorm will set you back about 20 Euros a night (will normally range from 15 – 30 Euros).

If you're happy eating and cooking at the hostel with food from the local fresh food or supermarket, you can definitely get by on 10 Euros a day for food. Bearing in mind this is on the cheaper end of things, no salmon steaks for you! If you would like to eat out every now and then, perhaps set yourself a budget of 20 Euros a day for food.

The cost of drinks is of course very dependent on the person, some people do not drink at all, and others (Australians seem to have a reputation for this) will drink a lot. Lucky for you, alcohol is relatively cheap in most European countries. Your budget on this, I will leave entirely up to you.

As for transport and tickets for museums and other assorted 'expenses' that will just show up (trust me, there will be a few of them) – it's always a good idea to budget for these as well. A decent museum will generally set you back 6 – 10 Euros. A flight within Europe booked in advance with EasyJet or RyanAir will cost you anywhere from 30 to 80 Euros. Buses will be cheaper than trains, but trains are a lot more comfortable to travel in, so keep that in mind.

All in all, as an average cost to backpack through Europe – I would say 80 Euros a day will get you by very comfortably with no problems whatsoever. If that seems expensive, bear in mind I've factored train tickets, flights, museum tickets etc into this equation. Of course you can do it MUCH cheaper than that, but if you can save your backpacking money with that figure in mind you'll be doing great. To do it cheaper, simply remove things that are expensive, it's as simple as that!

Backpacking Europe Routes

So what route should I take, where should I go, what should I DO, Tom?

This is the advice I give you. Sit down, and write down every country you want to visit in Europe. List them in order of importance, and listen up, list them in the order of importance **FOR YOU PERSONALLY**. Don't put them in an order that you feel is 'expected' of you and your trip to Europe.

If you harbor a secret love for German beer and beer is important to YOU, but your friend keeps telling you how amazing Italy was. Guess what? Germany goes above Italy in the order of importance. It doesn't matter if friends or family or even society might see your reasoning as 'trivial'. Who cares?

I'll probably say this throughout the article until I sound like a broken record, but when you backpack you backpack for yourself. You don't travel for anybody else but you. Keep this in mind at all times.

So using this new little list of European countries that are sorted in order of importance will help you come up with some excellent Europe backpacking trips. So how long are you going for? Using your 'countries in order of importance list', print out a map of Europe and start drawing squiggly black lines and writing things like '2 weeks in Germany' or 'at least 3 weeks in France'. This will help you formulate your thoughts, and already you will probably find you are developing a loose Europe backpacking route in your mind.

The other alternative is that you can just fly into London or Paris and wing it – (in Australian that means make it up as you go along). I did that on my first backpacking adventure when I was 18. I went for 10 months in total, and winging it was definitely fun.

Winging it does have its pros and cons.

Pro: You meet some awesome people who are going to this amazing town in Czech Republic that has the best beer and food hall ever. Of course you can go with them as you don't have any solid plans.

Con: You really want to get to Paris for a festival. Flights are extremely expensive, but you know for a fact that if you had booked in advance a few weeks ago it would have been more than half the price.

Let's do another one, and these ones come from my own personal backpack story bank:

Pro: We were hitchhiking outside a small French city heading towards Toulouse, we got picked up by a cool guy who was more than happy to give us a lift the whole way there. It turns out it's France Day, and Toulouse is going mental with celebrations. There is no possible way we are going to get accommodation, but through the course of 3 hours driving with this guy, we become friends, and he offers to take us out in Toulouse and give us a place to sleep for the night.

Con: We hitchhike into Perpignan, only getting a lift relatively late at night. There is only one hostel there and it is completely booked out. We have to stay up all night with our backpacks in the local town square trying not to fall asleep so some unsavory characters don't rob us blind.

Winging it opens yourself up to loads of new opportunities, but then again you may get caught out a few times as well. So that's why I'm now more of a fan of loosely based plans that are open for interpretation.

What I mean here is that I might already KNOW of a festival in Paris or Amsterdam that I want to get to, so I will book the flight in advance and lock in that date for flying from 'X' airport. Then I will leave my plans open and meander my way from point A to B going where I please with the knowledge that I need to reach that airport for that flight on that date.

If you plan on travelling in the peak season (which is during the summer months in Europe), then it's also a good idea to book in advance for hostels as well. Cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam are notorious for completely booking out (I've had to stay up all night at the Amsterdam train station once before because I didn't book in advance), so you are better off locking in your dates when planning to visit those cities.

So when planning your European backpacking route, think about how you want to travel.

Do you want to book everything in advance, or just roll with it and see where you end up? **There is no right or wrong way to do it**, just do whatever feels comfortable and exciting for you!

Backpacking Europe Itinerary (Samples)

Alright then, let me give you a real live sample itinerary for backpacking Europe. These are just for fun, and of course you can use them if you like, but trust me, you'll have way more fun picking your own countries to visit and making up your own travel plans.

My little sample itineraries won't tell you how long to stay in one place, that's completely up to you. Two days as a minimum in each spot (unless you're positive it's a stop-over) is always a good way to go. You might want to stay a lot longer in the capital cities where there is a lot to see.

Backpacking Itinerary 1: North Europe – Fly into and out of Amsterdam

Amsterdam: There is a lot more to Amsterdam than the Red Light District and the coffee shops, so make sure you have time to explore this amazing city of canals and all it has to offer.

Berlin: With its absolutely fascinating history, do a walking tour and try and see a few of the 183 museums available. And of course you'll have to walk the Berlin Wall and see some of the amazing artwork.

Dresden: This city turned out to be a favorite of mine in Germany. Make sure you stay in the 'new city' as this area is absolutely loaded with cafes, pubs and clubs and a real buzzing and vibrant atmosphere. The irony is the 'new city' is in reality the oldest part of Dresden, as the 'old city' was completely destroyed during World War II but was rebuilt faithfully according to old plans.

Nuremburg: A good city to see if you haven't been to Europe before. The old city is wondrous and so European, with a castle overlooking it atop the hill. I enjoyed the museum at the Castle, with suits of armor and old weaponry.

Prague: People often either hate or love Prague. Many people feel it has been completely overrun with tourists and 'stag' parties and the like – which they believe has destroyed the city. It's definitely worth seeing however, and it's always good to make your own opinions about places whilst backpacking. It has a big castle of course, and lots of other things to see.

Cesky Krumlov: This is quite an enchanting city, and there is a lot to do for backpackers. From water sports to the pub crawl down the river, you will meet lots of people and have heaps of fun.

Vienna: A fantastic city to explore, full of romantic history and brilliant architecture (and of course awesome night life). Lots of decent hostels and camp sites here too!



Salzburg: This city is where they filmed 'The Sound Of Music', and is also the birthplace of Mozart. Lots of Baroque architecture, all in all it's a very beautiful European city.

Munich: Most people will know it as the city of Oktoberfest. I had a blast in Munich when I was there (try the Augustiner beer, I think it's one of my favorite beers in the whole world, definitely better than Paulaner and the rest!)

Luxembourg: The old town of Luxembourg is a UNESCO heritage listed site, and Luxembourg itself is one of Europe's smallest countries. There are exceptional museums to visit, and lots of culture to experience, it has been named the European Capital of Culture twice now.

Paris: The city of love. It can be an amazing experience, but it's one of the more expensive locations for backpackers. The food and the wine are stellar, and there are some world class museums (The Louvre, Museum D'Orsay etc). Make sure you have a picnic as the sun sets in front of the Eiffel Tower; you'll get a dazzling light show (we did it a few days running, and it's a fantastic cheap night out). Don't worry; you certainly won't get bored in Paris.

Bruges: Seen the film In Bruges? This quirky little city in Belgium is so much fun to walk around. Get lost in the magical city of Bruges with all its cafes, pubs, museums and restaurants.

Amsterdam: And you're back in Amsterdam.

Here are another few quick itineraries you could consider doing.

Backpacking Itinerary 2: South Europe – France and Spain – Fly into and out of Paris

Paris, Lyon, Nice (possible side trips to: Monaco, Cannes and St Tropez), Marseille, Montpellier, Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid, San Sebastian, Bordeaux, and back to Paris.



Backpacking Itinerary 3: East Europe – Fly into and out of Prague

Prague, Bratislava, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Split (island hop through the Croatian Islands to Dubrovnik), Belgrade, Budapest, Krakow, Warsaw (then either back to Prague or head up to Latvia/Estonia).

But those were just for fun! As I said before, it's much better if you make up your own rough itinerary. There are so many amazing places to see in Europe, from Croatia to the Greek Islands to Slovenia and Italy – you certainly have a lot of options.

Backpacking Europe Packing List

When it comes to a Europe backpacking list, number one on the list for me is always a decent stockpile of clean underwear. I'm more than happy to wear the same shirt for a while, and I'll wear the same pants until I simply have to wash them due to the fact that they are covered in gross food stains. However I simply can't do without lots of clean jocks! That's just me though.

I'm going to assume that you know how to pack your own clothes, although I will stipulate that if you're going for longer than the summer months in Europe you will need a decent jacket. Winter backpacking in Europe will even require a beanie, a scarf and some gloves too!

Bring along a comfortable pair of pants for long train or bus trips. Don't forget your favorite pair of jeans. Ensure you have shoes that are comfortable when walking for long periods of time. Bring along a pair of flip-flops (in Australia we call them thongs, but this is often awkward for non Australians). I tend to use them in the showers – which is generally good practice especially in large hostels.

A decent money belt is also pretty useful. I know they're a bit cheesy, strapped around your waist the way they are. I don't wear mine all of the time when travelling, as a lot of hostels will have lockers. But it's a good way to keep all of your important items in one safe place (although if you have two different bank cards with you I suggest storing them in different places in case you lose one) especially on night buses or trains.

Here are a few more items that you may not have thought of bringing along that have proved extremely valuable for my trips:

- **A small torch** (excellent for leaving dormitory rooms early in the morning to catch that pesky flight and not waking everyone else up in the room).
- **Anti-fungal cream.** I know, I know, it's gross. But it can happen that you start getting some weird rash on your arm or leg. As soon as you see it, WHAM IT with the anti-fungal cream. Normally solves the problem.
- **BPA Free Water Bottle.** I found it pretty useful having my own decent water bottle. Most of the water throughout Europe is drinkable, and having your own sturdy bottle is definitely the way to go.
- **Journal.** If you enjoy recording your experiences, writing in a Journal regularly is a fantastic thing to do. Imagine how fun it will be in 20 years when you dig it up out of that musty old box that's been sitting in the back of the cupboard. Memories!

All in all, Europe isn't exactly 'behind the times', so if you do happen to forget to bring anything with you it will certainly be possible to buy it over there.

Please just **don't forget your passport** and your means of cash access.

For a more comprehensive article and information on the items you really should bring with you on a backpacking trip, checkout my backpacking essentials article.

Backpacking Europe Tours

There are two big boys of travel tours throughout Europe and they are **Contiki** and **Busabout**.

There are differences between what the two companies offer, which I will explain in more detail in a moment. I've done one small Busabout tour, which was on a boat that was island hopping in Croatia. It was fun, and I made a few great friends that I am still in touch with – but from what I saw and heard there, people have very mixed experiences.

It can be worth doing, and if you plan on travelling solo and are finding this a bit daunting, doing a guided tour like this can definitely ease you into the travelling experience.

Contiki and Busabout differ slightly in the sense that Contiki offer complete guided tours. They organize everything for you, from accommodation to itineraries to places to eat. It's a real hand holding guided travel experience, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, that's just what it is.

Busabout has similar guided tours, but they also offer something else which they call the 'Hop On Hop Off Loops'. These 'Loops' are more open ended and give you more freedom to stay in one place for longer. You choose when to go on to the next destination within the Loop and there are Busabout buses leaving on set days. The premise seems neat, and I have a friend, Sarah, who gave me her thoughts after using Busabout to travel Europe:

Sarah: *"I liked Busabout, but I didn't like all the guides – they were a little hit and miss. As someone who was travelling solo, it was great because I got to choose to mingle or not, and for me that was a safety net. I changed my itinerary twice to stay with friends, and sometimes I split up with them and made new friends. I did the north and south loops, and yeah there is heaps of flexibility, and you are best off booking your buses in advance, especially during peak season. It's not the cheapest way to travel but certainly not the most expensive, and it's very convenient."*

As you can see, she touted the main benefits as flexibility of travel and meeting new people and friends.

On a personal note, I tend not to do these types of tours, as I enjoy travelling by myself and leaving things a little more open ended than what these tours offer. Hostels are definitely a great place to meet new people as well, so don't feel you need to be on a Contiki or Busabout trip just to make friends! That's just me though, and I can certainly see the appeal for these tours as a solo traveler.

Contiki is also notorious for a lot of heavy drinking and a lot of time spent on the bus – many people claim it is not 'real' travelling. As for me, who cares? What IS real travelling? There are too many ways to define that, and everyone will define it a little differently.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again, you do not travel for anyone else but yourself. If Contiki or Busabout sounds like your sort of thing, then go nuts!

Travelling Advice Backpacking In Europe

First Time Backpacking Advice

Travelling Europe for your first time can be a little bit daunting, and I remember before I left for my first time, I wanted all the advice I could get.

Now this might sound a little silly, but just remember that wherever you go in the world, whatever new countries you visit, the people you meet are STILL people just like back home – you will meet amazing and fantastic people, people who will be more than happy to help you, and yes, some annoying and rude people too.

They might have a slightly different view on life (like the Spanish siesta, or the Dutchman's 'tell it how it is' attitude) – but there are going to be wonderful people in every country you visit. I remember visiting a new country when I first travelled, and having this sense that everyone and everything would be completely different. **It's a comforting fact when you discover that no matter where you are in the world, people still have hopes and dreams and want to meet new people – and in my opinion are mostly kind.**

I'm not sure where I was going with those last two paragraphs, but I hope I got what I was trying to say across. Some more advice I would give is:

- Have respect for other beliefs and cultures.
- Introduce yourself to everyone in the common room at every hostel (you will get used to answering and asking what I call 'The Big Five'. The Big Five is, 'What is your name? Where are you from? Where did you just come from? How long are you staying? Where are you going?')
- Keep a Journal or an online blog. It makes for fun reading in years to come and is a good way to formulate thoughts on things you have seen.

Backpacking Advice For Women

A lot of female backpackers I meet travel with a friend. Three or four can be a crowd, but backpacking in a pair can be very rewarding – and you can look out for each other and keep each other entertained.

When at a Hostel, if everyone goes out on the town it's important for you to stay with the group and not get lost, especially if you've had a few drinks. Most groups I've gone out with will always make sure people are not left behind and are being looked after. Don't leave your drink unattended at bars.

A lot of hostels I've stayed at will have female only dormitories, so if you are a solo traveler and feel more comfortable sleeping in a dorm with other females, this is certainly an option.

Always try to arrive in cities during the daytime, and if you ever feel you are being followed or threatened, duck into the closest shop and talk to the clerk or ask if you can use their phone to call the police.

Using simple common sense can go a long way to enhancing your backpacking experience. You will learn little lessons along the way, and before you know it you will be sharing travel tips and secrets with other backpackers.

I remember catching a bus from Paris to Barcelona once, and a girl on the bus was a little creeped out by one of the me on the bus. He kept asking her to have a drink with him and was giving her lots of unwanted attention. Because we were due to arrive in Barcelona early in the morning, she asked if it would be okay if we walked with her when we arrived.

This is a great way to handle a situation like that, talk to some other travelers and ASK for help. If it's your safety that feels threatened, there is no room for embarrassment.

Another point to make is to trust your instincts. You were born with instincts and most of the time they work pretty well, so trust them!

I had my girlfriend Trudy look over and contribute to this piece of the article, and it has her seal of approval.

Hostel Backpacking Advice

When you backpack Europe, two things are certain. You are going to LOVE some hostels, and you are going to HATE some hostels. It's a given. I've yet to meet a backpacker who either loved every hostel or hated every hostel. Staying in hostels can be a mixed bag (same as hotels too of course).

Some good advice would be to simply TALK to other backpackers. Where they just in Berlin, and you're about to go to Berlin? Where did they stay, what did they do that was good? And of course, be prepared to share your own experiences with other backpackers too.

The Backpacker Grapevine is an overflowing fruit of abundant information, so get involved and help yourself to it!

The reviews on the online backpacking websites (hostelworld.com or hostelbookers.com are the two biggest at the moment) are also generally a good indicator, but take the reviews with a grain of salt. Some people will be MUCH more picky than you might be, and will leave a bad review for a hostel that you would have found perfectly acceptable and perhaps have met some great people.

There are a couple of hostel 'types'. There are party hostels, where you may find it quite difficult to sleep if you don't plan on partying. There are more 'relaxing' hostels, where if you are looking to party you may get a little bit bored. It all depends on what you're after of course. You'll learn

to pick the party hostels and the quiet hostels online based on location and the reviews, but there's always room for surprises (that's what makes backpacking fun!).



A friendly game of beer pong in a hostel in Valencia, Spain.

Backpacking Europe Item and Gear Recommendations

Lonely Planet Guidebooks – These guys are the 300 pound gorilla in the room when it comes to guidebooks. They are pretty big for their breeches, BUT I do like their books and I'll tell you why. It's not really for hostel recommendations as they can be quickly dated and I get those from other travellers and online mostly, it's actually to get a feel for a new country that I may be visiting or about to visit.

Lonely planet books have great summaries and introductions for countries and are a good read when you're on the bus or train. **If you can pick one up at a cheap second-hand store that's always a good option as they can be pretty expensive brand new.** Just make sure it's not so dated that it still refers to currencies other than the Euro.

If you're travelling with a laptop or the like, and will have regular access to Wifi it's debatable whether you even need a traditional guidebook anymore with the feast of online resources that are available.

Kathmandu Backpacks – I brought a Kathmandu backpack when I was 18, and it's still going strong today. There is not a single thing wrong with it. I absolutely love it! So I'm a bit of a fan of that brand in particular when it comes to backpacks (it's an Australian brand though). I'll be honest here and say that I haven't tried any other brands, but the bonus and the point I'm making is that I've never needed to.

HostelWorld.com or HostelBookers.com?

These are the two big sites for booking hostels online. So which one should you choose to use?

I personally use HostelWorld.com, and I have been since I started backpacking in 2005. I've always found them reliable, never had an issue and they seem to have the most listings. I like how you can see your booking history and I like their dashboard and review system.



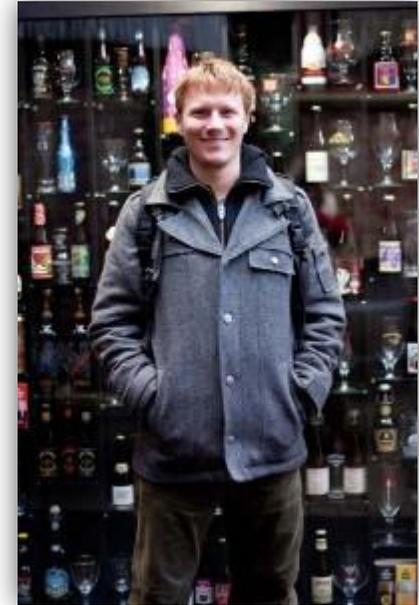
A friendly dog on the beach in San Sebastian, Spain.

The Average Cost of Backpacking Across Europe: An Indepth Look At My 2 Month Trip

I've written this article to be a comprehensive and complete look at mine and my girlfriend's expenses and how much our backpacking trip across Europe cost. Hopefully it will help other backpackers or those about to prepare a trip of their own figure out how much they need to save to visit the cultural continent of Europe.

It's a question I get a lot from friends and family, "So how much does it cost to actually backpack through Europe?" – the answer is obviously as subjective as you want it to be. Everyone travels differently, and people like to do various things – with some of those things being more expensive than others. This should give you a pretty good idea though.

The final figure will be an absolute complete sum that means it includes the flights over from Australia to London, and every single expense incurred on the trip – from chewing gum to train tickets and hostel beds. I've combed over my credit card statements and our cash passport card accounts to ensure I haven't missed anything.



Yes, I need a haircut.



Map Art from the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid.

A Quick Look At How We Backpacked Europe

Now, the first thing to point out is that there were two of us (duh), so whatever the final figure comes to – remember that's for two people. Dividing by 2 will still give you an accurate solo traveller figure.

We spent most of our accommodation in hostel beds (so we still had to book two separate beds) and there were no other couple benefits that came to mind in terms of budget savings. We still had to buy two train tickets, two museum/art gallery tickets etc. Hostel cooking is a slight

advantage with two, but if you use your brain and just rally up some fellow backpackers then split the grocery bill and make a big pot of food – it's exactly the same if not better (in fact we did that even as a couple anyway).

We enjoyed eating out, but definitely did not do it for every meal. There was lots of supermarket food and cooking at hostels. We only stayed in a hotel once on the whole trip, and that was in Paris for 5 nights. I'll give some more significant points for each place in the cost tables below – so you understand what we were doing in each place so you can see how the final cost figure came about.

Both of us feel that we got to do lots of things that we wanted to do – by no means was this 'an epic budget backpacking adventure' – we didn't camp or sleep on the streets, we ate out a bit, we went to cafes/pubs, we went to museums and art galleries and we had lots of fun!

Let's get on with it, shall we?



A Parisian Cafe we enjoyed near Georges Pompidou.

Trip Statistics:

Total Trip Length: 73 days which = 2 Months and 12 days.

Countries Visited: England, The Netherlands, Germany, Slovenia, Croatia, France, Spain.

Cost of Flights from Australia to London (with AirAsia)

Flights – Gold Coast to London	\$AUD
Gold Coast to Kuala Lumpur	\$454.00
Hotel for Stopover in KL	\$41.60
Expenses in KL	\$68.94
Kuala Lumpur to London	\$607.67
Total Cost	\$1,172.21

That's right, those prices above are for TWO people. Those flights were crazy cheap, so we got a pretty great deal there. Unfortunately, Air Asia have now stopped their Europe routes, meaning you can no longer fly from Kuala Lumpur to London or Paris. This is a real blow for budget backpackers and travellers, as their flights were by far the cheapest option available (as you can see by how much it cost us to get to London!).

How Much Does It Cost To Backpack Europe: Country Expenses Breakdown

This table will take you through each country and list the amount of days spent, the total cost and the average cost per day. I'll list a few important points relevant to the costs below the table. Remember, these costs were for two people travelling as a couple.

City/Country	Days In	Cost \$AUD	Avg. Cost P/Day Couple	Avg. Cost P/Person P/Day
London, England	9	\$1,023.45	\$113.72	\$56.86
The Netherlands	8	\$388.72	\$48.59	\$24.30
Germany	12	\$2,258.50	\$188.21	\$94.11
Ljubljana, Slovenia	2	\$417.67	\$208.84	\$104.42
Croatia	13	\$2,374.70	\$182.67	\$91.34
Paris, France	5	\$1,438.33	\$287.67	\$143.84
Spain	21	\$3,102.10	\$147.72	\$73.86

Total Trip Expenses As Couple: \$11,003.47

Total Trip Expenses Per Person: \$5,501.735

Mean Average Per Day As Couple: \$168.20

Mean Average Per Day Per Person: \$84.10

London and **The Netherlands** had relatively low costs, due to the fact that we were staying with my family in both places. Free accommodation and some free food definitely helps the budget.

Germany is a good indicator of prices when hostel backpacking with lots of drinking, eating and exploring.

Ljubljana costs were quite high as we stopped through and had to organise our travel tickets and trip down to Croatia.

Croatia is also relatively high as we purchased a Busabout Croatian Islands trip – which was a boat trip through the Dalmatian Islands for 7 days. There was also quite a bit of drinking of the local brew and eating out at restaurants.

Paris is already quite expensive, but we decided to stay in a cheap hotel instead of a hostel for a change, and this was in conjunction with a few nights eating out and Trudy did a bit of shopping. So you can see the per day price inflate there.

Spain has got to be the best example of average costs when staying in hostels, doing lots of stuff, eating out a bit and having lots of fun. There was also lots of cooking in the hostels whilst in Spain which always helps the budget.

Cost of Flights Within Europe

Carrier	Flights From	Flights To	Cost \$AUD
EasyJet	London	Amsterdam	\$140.00
EasyJet	Zagreb	Paris	\$243.51
RyanAir	Porto	Eindhoven	\$135.30
RyanAir	Madrid	Eindhoven	\$207.06

European Flights Total: \$725.87

The flight prices in the table above are for two tickets, and it's the final prices (meaning it includes baggage & taxes etc). We didn't actually end up taking the flight from Porto to Eindhoven as we were having too much fun in San Sebastian, so that flight money was completely wasted. Ah well, that's travelling sometimes – you need to weigh up the pros and cons of booking in advance and how much it will actually cost you ultimately to get to that destination. We found based on where we were at that point in our trip, it was more beneficial to fly from Madrid instead of Porto in Portugal.



About to dig into a hearty Bavarian meal of meat/potatoes & beer. Yummmm.

Average Backpacking Europe Cost: The Totals Table in Australian Dollars

Total Expenses	Total Flights	TOTAL
\$11,003.47	\$1,172.21 + \$725.87	\$12,901.55

This means that our costs of backpacking through Europe can be broken down in the following ways:

At the **current exchange rate**, our trip cost **10,575.59 EUR** and **\$13,870.15 USD**.

Per person, our trip including all the expenses and flights cost **\$6,450.76 AUD** each. This equates to **5,286.19 EUR**.

This is an average of **\$176.73 AUD per day as a couple** and **\$88.37 per day per person**.

If you are saving for a backpacking trip, whether you're from the US or Australia, I would recommend aiming to save for about \$80 – \$100 per day of your trip.

Of course you can do it much cheaper than this, on my first trip through Europe and Asia with my best friend when I was 18, we did it extremely cheap – and I think I spent about \$6,000 – \$8,000 for about 10 months on the road. We did a lot of camping, WWOOF'ing and hitch hiking. This trip was quite different to that, still quite low budget but with more trains and hostels and eating out at local restaurants.

Hopefully this article gives you more of an idea of how much it costs to go backpacking in Europe so you can start saving for that next big adventure! Whatever you do, don't put it off 😊 Travelling and backpacking is always worth both the time and the money.

How To Travel Europe: The Best Way To Travel Around Europe For Cheap

Welcome to my post all about how to travel Europe on a budget, if you're like me, you would rather travel for longer and see more amazing things and meet more awesome people than just spend all of your money in a mere few weeks.

But to travel for longer means that you need to come up with more creative ways to keep those costs down.

Here are all of my tips when it comes to the best ways to travel around Europe without blowing away that budget.

When it comes to travel costs, accommodation is definitely right up there as something that will slowly but surely rid you of all of your hard earned travel savings. Check out my five hot tips.

How to Travel Europe Free

Couchsurfing – The big one, and probably the most well known is [Couchsurfing](#). It has the best website layout and a good community vibe; it's the one that I'm a member of.

Hospitality Club – Gives you access to a large community of friendly members and have a certain amount of security screening for hosts. The least pretty of the bunch, but who said non pretty sites weren't valuable? [Check it out here](#).

Global Freeloaders – Another site with a very 'give back what you take' attitude. You are expected to act as a host as well as a guest. It's very travel focused. [Check it out here](#).

Remember that you're not just using this person (host) for free accommodation, the whole idea is that it's about meeting new people, making new friends and networking on the traveler's grapevine. If you only want a free night but don't want to talk to anyone or socialize, then this is not for you.

All the sites are active and are worth signing up for if you think that this style of travel would interest you, it really is a fantastic way to meet new people and other travelers.

How to Work For Your Accommodation

WWOOF'ing – What Is WWOOF And How Do I Get Involved?

I've done a lot of WWOOF'ing in Europe, and I grew up with a best friend whose family actually hosted WWOOF'ers on their farm in Australia. I always thought the acronym stood for:

Willing Workers On Organic Farms

But now apparently (according to the official website) it stands for:

World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms – (I think they changed it on me).

Either way, WWOOF'ing is a great concept, and essentially allows you to work 4-6 hours of the day on a property in exchange for food and board. It allows you to spend time in some real local areas with nice local people, and it's a very different experience to staying in Hostels in the capital of that country, for example.

My best WWOOF'ing experience was when I worked with a friend on a property up in the Pyrenees in France, close to the border of Spain. The view and back drop of the place was simply stunning, with stony cliffs, lush forestry and even a waterfall and swimming hole nearby! The lady who was hosting us was delightful, and we were fed fresh food and delicious French rose wine. We still had to work of course, but a bit of hard

work can be an extremely satisfying feeling. After we were finished, she even helped me get a job at a vineyard grape picking nearby. And that was another whole great experience in itself!

You are generally expected to stay for 2 weeks at a minimum, so you cannot just show up for one night and then leave the next day – that would be considered very rude (unless you had a good reason for leaving abruptly).

WWOOF'ing is world-wide, and is a super network of farms and hosts willing to take you on. You will need to pay for registration and membership with the WWOOF'ing community, but trust me; this is no scam, so if it sounds like your sort of thing then go for it.

[Visit the official WWOOF'ing site here.](#)

House Sitting In Europe

House sitting for people who would like their house occupied whilst they are away for extended periods of time is certainly a viable option. Of course it is more for those with long term travel plans in mind, but it can be a great way to begin living in another country and get a feel for the local place and culture.

A good site for house sitting is: [MindMyHouse.com](#)

It does cost \$20.00 to sign up as a 'sitter' though, but has one of the more comprehensive listings for house sitting.

Paying For Budget Europe Accommodation

Hostels in Europe

Hostels are currently the biggest way to travel Europe cheaply. The cheapest way to do it is to stay in a large dormitory room. The advantage to hostels is you make loads of new friends of like minded backpackers, and often hostels will have kitchen facilities which can help to drastically reduce your food bill.

I've stayed in so many hostels I've lost count, but I can tell you that you will absolutely love some and hate others – just roll with it, it's all part of the game!

The two big hostel booking networks are:

[HostelBookers](#)

[HostelWorld](#)

AirBNB

[AirBNB](#) gives you the option to pay for someone else's apartment or a room in their house. Can offer a lot more comfort and privacy than hostel's, but can also save you a bundle compared to paying for hotels. Worth checking out if you don't plan on staying in any hostels, or want a break from the 15 bed dorms!



Camp In My Garden

This concept is what it appears, giving you the chance to [‘Camp In My Garden’](#), at the moment this idea and the gardens is heavily UK based, so it’s a great idea if you are backpacking with a tent and travelling through the United Kingdom.

How To Travel Around Europe For Cheap



Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is definitely do-able. On my first backpacking trip through Europe when I was 18 I hitchhiked a lot with a friend. We only met friendly people – and even got a lift in a sports car from a guy who ‘remembered the good old days of backpacking’. So it’s not all weirdo’s and scary characters.

We did meet a couple of strange people in our hitchhiking trip though, and my honest opinion is that a solo female traveler shouldn’t be hitchhiking, call me old fashioned if you like, but there it is. Being two males certainly made hitchhiking a much more comfortable affair; I’m not trying to dissuade anyone from doing it, just giving my views on the matter based on my own personal experience.

Mitfahrgelegenheit in Germany

WHAT the diggety is Mitfahrgelegenheit!?

Well, for those travelling Germany, there is a site called [Mitfahrgelegenheit](#), which is one of those obscenely long German words that essentially means ‘car-sharing opportunity’. And that’s exactly what it is.

It’s an inexpensive way to get around Germany, although you will need to brush up on your German skills or start using Google Translate as the site and most of its users operate in German.

For an example of pricing, getting a ride with a car from Berlin to Munich tends to range from about €25 to €30. So you can see it’s a lot cheaper than the train if you are passing through.

Train Travel Europe

Travelling via train is probably the most common and the easiest way to get around Europe. For non European citizens the best way to travel Europe by train would be to purchase a EuroRail pass, which will allow you to use the same ticket to train through multiple European countries. Check out these two sites:

[RailEurope](#)

[EURail](#)

I think RailEurope is generally cheaper than EURail (but do your own research) – however a global pass for 3 months will easily set you back over €500. So it's not exactly cheap, but it is EASY and makes the travel section of your trip a real breeze.

Train Travel Tip #1: There are discounts for those who are considered 'Youths' (under the age of 26)

Train Travel Tip #2: If you are only going to one or two countries, it can be a lot cheaper to just get a train pass for that individual country instead of a global pass – so always investigate your options to get the best deal.

Bus Travel In Europe

EuroLines

These guys handle most of the international bus trips, don't bother trying to use them from one city to another within the same country (I tried to organize a bus from Cologne to Munich for example, but had no luck with EuroLines).

They can be great for getting from one capital city to another, so include them when sourcing your cheapest option to get between cities.

BusAbout

This company arranges 'bus loops' that offer pre-paid routes through Europe via their own bus system. They offer drop offs at your hostel door and other various travel packages. It's a little more 'hand held' – but can be a good option for first time travellers.

Orange Ways

I received a tip that Orange Ways are a nice cheap bus option, especially around Eastern Europe. I haven't used them myself yet, but they might be worth checking out.

Remember that each country tends to have their own individual bus systems, so investigate which companies are running the more local routes. Buses are generally a lot cheaper than the train system.

How To Get Cheap Flights In Europe

This is my process for ensuring that I get the best priced flight available and the best deals for cheap air travel in Europe.

First start by getting a base idea of the flights, companies and prices operating on the route you wish to travel.

Use Kayak and Skyscanner to compare prices. Kayak will also compare AGAINST a bunch of other companies as well. This will give you a good general idea for the prices (but will open lots of windows on your computer, so be prepared!)

Next I check the two big budget airlines in Europe, which are **EasyJet** and **RyanAir**. But remember, these companies add on prices after the initial 'price flight', so you will pay for luggage etc. So always get the 'final price' from them by clicking through (but not paying, obviously!).

Also take a look at **Wizz Air** and **Transavia** – these are some other budget airlines I've discovered whilst living here in Europe.

Make sure the flight you are after is flying into the airport that you want, some cities have multiple airports, with one being an airport for 'budget' airlines, and another for normal airlines. EasyJet tends to operate in better airports than RyanAir for example – and it will cost you more to get into the city from a further away budget airport than the main airport for that city.

EasyJet uses London and Paris as its two big hubs for transport, so keep that in mind.

Hot Travel Tip:

Remember to factor in all of your costs. Will you need to get a train or bus into the centre of the city from the Airport? How much will this cost? Will it ultimately be cheaper just to get a train or bus all the way instead of flying once you tally up all of these extra flight costs? You need to be asking yourself all of these questions to ensure you get the best price available for your travelling.

The Best Backpacking Tips and Tricks for Europe: The Big List of Awesome

This article will aim to be a complete one stop shop for all of the tips and tricks you will ever need when it comes to backpacking in Europe.

From some general tips, to specific advice for beginners and women, tips for packing light, backpacking during winter and gear and safety tips too. I hope to cover off every tip I can think of that pertains to backpacking Europe within this article.

If you're about to start planning your backpacking trip to Europe, you might want to check out this article, as that will help you cover off the planning side of things.

Every backpacker has their own tips to share, and these are mine. If you are an avid backpacker like myself and you can add to this article, then please leave a comment at the bottom of this page or shoot me an email. I'll want to update and grow this article over time, until it is an unstoppable force of tips and information for backpackers world-wide.

I've separated the tips and tricks into segments which you can jump to using the same page links I've included below. Let's do this.

Backpacking Tips for Beginners

When you start backpacking for the first time, the whole process can be a little daunting, and you're certainly out of your comfort zone. Overcome it, and embrace it. Breaking out of your comfort zone is what backpacking is all about, but trust me, the rewards are more than worth it!

Carry around the emergency contact numbers for your: bank cards (in case you lose them), travel insurance, and the embassy. You probably won't need them, but just keep them on a slip of paper along with your passport.

If you've booked ahead, print out the address of the hostel before you arrive in a new city, or load it into your phone along with some directions. This can save you some time from having to visit the tourist office to get a map, especially if there is a line up!

Don't ever change money at the airport or on the street. The airport will give you horrendous rates and on the street you run the risk of receiving fake money or being ripped off.

Pickpockets do exist unfortunately, so never carry a wallet in your back pocket. I sometimes carry a wallet, but I always have it in my side pockets, and if I walk through a crowd I'll put my hands in my pockets. Also, don't place your wallet on a table whilst eating in busy areas.

I met a guy in Barcelona who lost the 500 Euros he only took out from the ATM a few hours before because a thief pretended to sell him a book, leant over to show him the book, and then swiped his wallet straight off the table.

It's always good to have a backup bank card to access money if necessary. I often travel with a bank card and a credit card (one that is travel fee friendly) in case I lose one or the other. Don't store them in the same place.

Don't keep all of your money in one spot. Always be segregating your cash, and only go out at night with what you think you will need.

Scan all of your important documents and then email them to yourself (I use [Gmail](#), and highly recommend it) and label them 'travelling'. Then if you lose them at least you can print out copies again which may come in handy. Ensure your email password is secure though (use a combination of letters, numbers and even capitals too!)

You will need a small 'day pack', which is a small backpack perfect for heading out during the day to carry water, maps and so on. A lot of backpacking backpacks will have a daypack included that can be clipped on and off.

If you're bringing electronic gear (camera, laptop, iPhone), remember you will need an adaptor as Europe runs on 220 volts. Also remember that the UK is a different voltage yet again to Europe, so it may even be best to get a 'universal' travel adaptor. I've seen them going for pretty cheap in the stores these days.

Any decent hostel will have a book exchange, where you can swap the book you've just finished for another – it's the backpacker's library. Write something fun and interesting in the front cover for the next traveler.

If you're in a hostel without lockers, and are carrying valuables like a phone or laptop, it can be worth it to carry a very light chain. When staying in large dormitories and heading out, lock your backpack up with combination locks and then use the chain to secure the backpack to your dorm bed. I will say though, that in all my travels, I haven't had a fellow backpacker steal anything from me in a hostel (except for a bit of food from the fridge). So doing this can be a little overzealous, but then again I don't travel with a new laptop.

Unfortunately theft in hostels CAN happen. I met a girl who had her iPhone stolen from her dorm room – and she had met everyone in the dorm room too, but no-one admitted to taking it!

Remember, other travellers and backpackers are your best guides for hostel recommendations, and cool things to see and do!



Locks symbolizing love on a bridge in Paris.

General Backpacking Travel Tips

When you are in a new city in Europe, there are often 'free walking tours'. Do them! You get a wealth of great information and tidbits that can help bring the city to life. Of course the tours are not exactly 'free', more like tip based only, but I always gave five to ten Euros and that was fine. They normally go for about 3 hours. The guides can be a little hit and miss sometimes, I had some amazing guides and others that were not so amazing, but overall it's definitely worth it.

If you have a student ID, then bring it along, in Europe especially there are lots of discounts to be had if you are a valid student.

Most travelers are friendly and want to meet people just like you do. Challenge yourself to introduce yourself to everyone in every hostel that you go to. You'll be surprised how many new friends you'll make.

Whenever I get into a taxi, I always ensure they turn the meter on as soon as the cab gets rolling. You don't want any surprises. Alternatively make sure you agree on a fare before you get into the taxi.

Don't bring along your expensive watch backpacking, just buy a cheap one from somewhere. You only use it to tell the time after all!

I did travel with my iPhone last time, and it was useful I will admit. Most European hostels have free WIFI, and it works great as an alarm as well for those early morning buses and trains. You can also use it to listen to MP3's too of course, so it saves you bringing any other sort of device.

For those photographers out there, switch your SD cards every few cities in case you lose the camera (and therefore the SD card inside). It's often a good idea to just store an SD card full of your favorite and best photos with your passport.

My girlfriend Trudy often says she would be more devastated to lose the SD card with her travel pictures than the camera itself (as it's insured). The SD cards are way more valuable to her!

Don't forget to add that expensive camera as a specific item to your travel insurance, as often they will only cover a certain amount for personal effects unless stipulated.

Read the fine print of any travel insurance you take out so you know exactly what you're covered for. Ultimately you will want full medical and emergency medical transport cover, that's why I get travel insurance at any rate.

EasyJet uses Paris and London as their big hubs for flying. If you are planning a long flight, then aim to do so from either of those points as you will have the most flexibility and choice of destinations.

Being under 26 years old will lend itself to lots of 'Youth' advantages with rail passes and the like.

If you're only heading to one or two countries in Europe for a quick trip, then it can often be cheaper to buy a country specific rail pass rather than the 'Eurorail' pass. When I backpacked Germany for a while, I got a German rail pass and it saved me a bunch.

If you happen to be travelling on a passport from a country within the EU, then bring it along to the big museums. You can often get in free of charge by showing your EU country passport. I travel Europe on my UK passport (thanks Dad!), but I kept forgetting to bring it with me to museums, I had to pay at The Louvre for example, which was quite annoying because it should have been free!

I heard great things about a craze called '[Geocaching](#)' from a fellow backpacker in Cologne. He loved it to bits and said it was a fantastic way to see the city and areas that locals know about. The premise sounded fun and interesting to me. I haven't got around to doing it yet myself, but check it out!

There is also a website called '[Spotted by Locals](#)' – which also has great articles on some specific things to do and see in various European cities that are a little different.

Check out '[Couch Surfing](#)', another cool concept which will allow you to meet some great locals and save some Euros at the same time.

You might also want to investigate '[AirBNB.com](https://www.airbnb.com)', it's often cheaper than hotels, so if you're after a few days of comfort and privacy out of large dorm rooms, it might be worth checking out.

Backpacking Tips For Women

When choosing your backpack, make sure it isn't too big, as it needs to sit correctly on your hips and align with your spine appropriately. I've met a few female backpackers that had backpacks that were sitting all wrong on them due to its size, and it was really affecting their trip.

Don't over pack. Ask yourself if you really need more than 2 pairs of shoes or more than one swimming costume. It all adds up!

Be confident, and always trust your intuition and instincts.

Don't be afraid to ask other backpackers or travelers for help if you need it.

My girlfriend Trudy would like to add:

"Those pair of boots might be gorgeous, but after 3 weeks they're going to be weighing your pack down so much... so think twice before packing them. In some countries there is very little range of hygiene products. If you do have a favorite brand of tampons or pads it might be a good idea to bring enough for the whole trip.

Also, if you're on the pill, don't forget that the changing time zones can affect its usefulness. Be smart and always use a condom if you're sleeping with somebody you've only just met."

Winter Backpacking Tips

If you're thinking of backpacking Europe in winter, then heads up, it's going to be a cold! You're going to need a scarf, a beanie, some gloves and a decent winter jacket. If you're starting your big trip in the summer months however, it might be worth it to just purchase these items when they're needed and winter comes around. This will save you some room in your backpack and ensure you have a nice, light pack for those summer months of travelling.



Bring along a quality rain jacket to keep you dry if you find yourself traipsing in the pouring rain. You can also get a cover for your backpack for the rain and snow. I remember backpacking with a friend, and at the time I didn't have a cover for my pack but he did, I was pretty jealous when it started hammering down with rain and my stuff got all wet whilst his stayed dry!

Layers are king. When travelling in winter, wear lots of layers. For example wear a long sleeved shirt, then a t-shirt, then a warm vest with a light jacket over the top, then your winter jacket. If you aren't warm enough, add more layers! You can also keep wearing the clothes that aren't directly against your skin – as they aren't getting dirty. If the weather does happen to get a little warmer, then you can simply take off some of the layers.

Winter is the best time in Europe to experience that café culture that is prevalent in almost every European country. There's nothing better than having a local tea or coffee in a snug café with cold snow falling outside.

If you're after snowboarding or skiing, then to put it very simply you choose the west or the east, or shall I say, expensive and not as expensive. Snow trips in the Alps in Austria or France, or in Italy or Norway is a lot more expensive than say, Poland or Romania. If you're on a budget, definitely head east.

I hear Zakopane in Poland has some pretty awesome slopes, and hostels in the city centre to boot.

This site isn't really about 'extreme survival, one man and his tent and his conquest of the Amazonian jungles and the Alaskan wilderness', that's not something that I know much about yet. So all my 'winter backpacking tips' are based on backpacking through Europe during the winter time and staying at hostels and the like, not covering the alps on foot with an ice pick and packet of old crisps. So if that's what you were hoping for, sorry!

Ultralight Backpacking Tips

Travelling with a light backpack can be extremely rewarding. You're not weighed down, and it can be quite liberating having so little possessions and seeing amazing sights.

So when it comes to backpacking light tips, the first tip I would give is to bring along some hand washing liquid for your clothes. I have often washed my shirts and underwear at hotels and campsites, dry them for one night and usually you're done. You're definitely going to need to do some washing on the go if you plan on packing light.

Let's be honest, lightweight backpacking is best done in the summer months, especially in Europe. Packing any clothing for colder months will instantly begin to weigh your pack down. Backpacking during summer is one of the simpler lightweight backpacking tips.

Get a decent pair of zip-off pants that can work as both long pants and shorts. The advantages here are obvious.

Only bring one pair of jeans (your favorite, most comfortable pair). Jeans can go AGES without being washed (as long as you don't spill food and drinks on them...which I always do).

If you're mostly going to be staying in hostels whilst backpacking through Europe and want to keep things light, then don't bring a towel or travel sheets. They don't weigh much if you get a micro fiber towel BUT every hostel I've ever stayed at in Europe has had towels and sheets available, so it's just another thing you don't have to pack. Be aware though that many hostels will charge you a few Euros for linens and towels.

Shoes can start to weigh a bag down quickly when you add more than one pair. I normally bring a pair of flip flops and one pair of casual shoes that are also comfortable when walking for long distances, it's easy to add more and more things but you need to refrain if you want to keep your backpack nice and light!



Backpacking Gear Tips

Bring along a pair of flip-flops (or thongs for you Australians), they are perfect for showering (best not to put your bare feet into communal showers if you can avoid it) and for walking around the hostel. Say 'NO' to athlete's foot.

Travel sheets can save you a bit of money in Europe, as it's common for hostels to charge you for linens and towels. You can also bring along a micro fiber towel (just don't use it at the beach – sand and sticks cling to those things like nothing else).

I do think a money belt is worth getting, as they're great for overnight trains or buses where you may be sleeping and not watching your bags. Never keep all your cash in one place though, whether it's your money belt or wallet or backpack.

I've found a small and simple torch to be quite useful for late nights in or early mornings in hostels. It's polite to NOT switch on the bright lights at 4am in the morning when you're getting up for that RyanAir flight and trying to get your stuff together and out the door. It's also great for camping of course, if that's also your agenda.

If you are looking at purchasing a backpack off the internet, I would first suggest finding the EXACT model that you want in a shop and learning how to set it right on your back. Tell them you'll think about it and go and purchase that same model online (I would only do this if it's quite a significant savings). Either way, don't buy the backpack online without seeing one physically, or you may end up with a sore back and shoulders.

If you're planning on buying some heavy duty walking boots or shoes for backpacking, then break them in first BEFORE leaving your home country. There's nothing worse than having sore feet the first few weeks of your travels.

If earplugs work for you, then definitely bring them along. I never wear them, because I rarely have trouble sleeping. But for those that are light sleepers, then you'll want them for those 10-20 bed dorm rooms!

Backpacking Packing Tips

I like to roll my clothes up nice and tight when I pack. I find you definitely fit more in, and it's a nice feeling when everything is compact. Backpackers like us shouldn't be worried about wrinkles or creases in our clothes!

Think about the positioning of clothes and items. I like to put underwear and socks in the very top pocket of the backpack. Why? Because then I always have easy access to clean socks and underwear, without having to dig through my pack – they are the things you are changing every day (mostly).

If you bring along a jacket and you're heading to Europe in the summer months, pack it at the bottom of the pack, as you're less likely to need it. Put your favorite shirts at the top, in easy reach. You get the idea.

If you're packing just prior to a flight, remember the rules for what you can and cannot carry in your daypack onto the plane. No liquids over 100ml is always a good rule of thumb, and make sure that Swiss Army Knife is packed snugly into your main bag. Hair gel and deodorant, don't forget to put it in your check in luggage, or you'll have to throw it away as you go through security.

Just recently a friend of mine flew with RyanAir, she was just flying over to visit us in Rotterdam from London, so it was going to be a nice short flight. Unfortunately she borrowed a little suitcase from a friend (who had advised her she always takes it as carry-on luggage). It so happened that the suitcase was slightly larger than their standard carry-on size, so she had to pay 40 Pounds just to check it in.

So double check your flights rules and regulations for carry-on luggage and that sort of thing, you don't want to get caught out where you are forced to pay a stupid sum just to check in a bag that you thought would be perfectly suitable for carry-on.

Another tip is to make sure you've got all of your entertainment needs (books, magazines and MP3 players) in your day pack and not in your main pack. When you have a 12 plus hour bus trip, the last thing you want is to realize you've left your book and MP3 player in the front pocket of your bag that is currently stored underneath the moving bus.

It's normally a good idea to lock up your backpack using combination locks when checking in for a flight or bus trip, this will obviously help with potential theft, but will also help validate your insurance claim (as you attempted to lock and take proper care of your belongings).

Backpacking Safety Tips

Try and arrive into new cities during the day, as sometimes the areas around the main bus and train stations can be a little dodgy. I've never had a problem arriving a bit later, but it will make you feel a little more secure if you've got daylight ahead of you to get yourself organized. If you're arriving in a new place after midnight, it might even be worth it to just hop in a taxi straight to the hostel.

Pickpockets and thieves do exist, so don't carry all of your valuables around on your person (leave it locked at hostel – more on this in a bit!) A good tip is to have pants that have a zip pocket for your wallet or cash. Don't wear a bum bag (Australian) or a fanny pack (American). Apart from looking silly and marking you immediately as a tourist, they also make it exceptionally easy for thieves to simply cut the strap on the back and run off with it. A money belt hidden underneath your clothes is a better option than a bum bag or fanny pack.

Most pickpockets will operate in busy tourist areas and the local public transport systems. Barcelona and Paris are notorious for pickpockets for example. I have never been robbed or pickpocketed whilst backpacking (I have just heard some stories from other backpackers), so don't fear that it's extremely common and will happen to you, just be a little bit wary of where you are and your surroundings.

Lock your passport in the hostel lockers. If there are no lockers at the hostel, you can ask reception to look after it for you, or if you have a zip pocket or a secure way of carrying it, take it with you when you go out. In this vein of thought, I would often put my passport and cash underneath my pillow when I go to sleep if there is nowhere to lock it up securely. However, most decent hostels these days will have lockers available, so don't stress too much about it.

So there we have it, a nice big list of backpacking Europe tips. Hope this helps!



10 Backpacking Essentials: A Hot List of the Top Ten Essentials For Backpacking Europe

Now, let me just say one thing, this list is obviously my personal opinion. I am limited to 10 essentials for backpacking Europe, and I'm not allowed to go over this (although I may be sneaky and list a few other 'recommendations' at the bottom of the page).

These are the things I personally consider to be absolutely essential if you are planning on backpacking through Europe.

Now for the sake of this list, I'm not going to be including clothes here, I'm sure you can figure out what clothes you would like to bring based on what time of the year you're heading over to Europe. I won't be little you by listing things like 'underwear', 'socks' and 't-shirts'.

Let the list begin!

1. The Right Backpack For Europe (Not The Wrong One)

I list this here, because it's important that you actually get the RIGHT backpack for your trip, not just any old backpack. One day soon you will stay at a hostel that is 15-20 minutes walk from the train station. Why would you waste Euros getting public transport or a taxi when you can simply walk there? This is much more difficult to do if you have a suitcase with wheels, and it's also difficult to do with a backpack that doesn't sit right on your body shape and frame.

You will need to know a few things. How long is your trip going to be? Are you going in summer months, or for a full year? Do you want something ultra light, or something that can carry a heavier load? Get an idea in your head of what you want out of your backpack, and then you'll have a better idea of the sort of model that you will want.

Tips to get help you get a cheap backpack:

- Wait for the store to have a mega sale. I know for example that the Kathmandu stores in Australia have 'super sales' like three times a year. That's where I got my backpack, and I haven't had one problem with it in five years. Backpacks are often discounted 40% and more during these sales. I have absolutely no idea why anyone pays full retail price at that store.
- Another thing you could do is go and try on a few backpacks, get help with the fitting of it and learn how it operates, then say you're still deciding if it's the one you want. Then go home, get on the Internet and order the exact model online for a much cheaper price. It's a little bit sneaky, but if you're on a bit of a budget, I condone it.

2. Backpacking Money Belt – Because Every Backpacker Has One

Yes, it's another big 'must-have' item in the backpacking world, the old money belt. I'll be the first to tell you that I don't wear mine all of the time whilst backpacking, but I do consider it an essential backpacking item and I'll tell you why.

You're about to get on a busy train from Paris to Barcelona. This is going to be a long train ride, so you settle in and get comfortable. You have your passport and cash tucked securely into your day pack, which you slip underneath the seat near your feet. Hours pass and you fall asleep..... You awake, and are thirsty. You reach down to grab your water from your bag, and it's gone...

I use the money belt when I'm physically travelling and it's likely I'll stop paying attention to bags at my feet or above my head, or maybe it's an overnight train or bus and I'm going to go to sleep. The money belt is perfect in this situation, as you can secure your passport, cash and bank cards against your body underneath your clothes.

In a hostel with lockers, I'll normally just lock it away and not take it out with me, but on long bus and train trips it shows its uses. In my opinion there is no need to get fancy with it, just something simple made of canvas or silk is fine.

3. A Simple Flashlight to Earn Backpacker Karma

Don't most hostels in Europe have lights though, Tom? Why, yes they do, you intrepid traveller you. But when you're in a 15 bed dormitory and you're getting up at 4.30 in the morning after a big night out to get an early flight (it was much cheaper than the ones leaving at 10am), your fellow backpackers are really going to appreciate it if you DON'T turn on the giant light in the room and wake them up.

Behold ye simple flashlight! Suddenly it's filled with uses, one of them generating backpacker karma to follow you forever more. Treat your fellow backpackers as you wish to be treated, and the fun times will follow.

All joking aside though, I do find a good quality yet simple button on/off flashlight pretty handy in a whole variety of situations. It's also good for camping too of course, if that's on the agenda (definitely worth doing in the summer months!).

4. Concentrated Travel Detergent To Wash Smelly Underwear

It's a reality of backpacking that you may need to wash some socks and jocks and hang them off your dorm bed – unless you want to keep wearing them, over and over again.....

Either way, some concentrated travel wash is great for hand washing some clothes to keep you going until your next big 'proper wash' (at the expensive Laundromats, no thanks!). You can also just use a bar of soap if you're on a budget, but concentrated travel wash is just so much cooler.

5. Anti-Fungal Cream For Possible (probable) Skin Thingies

No-one likes to think that the world can be a dirty place where you could get Athlete's foot or ring worm, but unfortunately it is true. If you start getting a weird rash or itchy skin and it doesn't look like a bite, then whip out the old anti-fungal cream and it should be clearing up in no time.

Of course, if the problem persists, go see a doctor. Unfortunately we can't rely on anti-fungal cream for every ailment.

6. Combination Padlock – Because No-One Likes Keys

It's always a good idea to lock your backpack before train trips, bus rides and whilst staying at large hostels with no lockers (although that's pretty rare in Europe these days). Three small combination padlocks is normally enough to secure any large backpack, you just lock the two zips together at the backpack entry points.

If you're stuck for ideas on a combination choice, just use the last three or four numbers of your OLD mobile number. See, I'm full of ideas!

7. A Journal To Record Your Adventures

Record the little things, and years down the track you will be pleasantly surprised. I'm always thinking things like, 'Oh wow, I really have to remember that amazing fact!', and guess what, the next day I've completely forgotten! It happens all the time (or maybe it's just my bad memory?), but writing those small experiences and facts into a Journal every night is a fantastic habit, and will be the perfect thing for your grandchildren to read (if you're not still backpacking, that is).

Don't forget to bring a pen, and make it easily accessible too (my girlfriend is an artist and always has her pencil case buried in her backpack – it's no good when you need to fill in those pesky arrival cards on the plane).

8. Camera For Those Who Love Photography (And For Those Who Don't)

Yes, I know many fellow backpackers would disagree with this one. But remember, this is my personal opinion list (feel free to disagree with me in the comments – I love a mass debate [get it?]).

There's nothing more fun than getting back home and having a whole bunch of cool and awesome pictures to show everyone. It's also the perfect opportunity to develop your photography skills (if you've ever thought about doing that).

Remember, lots of photos can go from looking average to fantastic thanks to Photoshop, so there are lots of chances to snap a winner that you can blow up and put on the wall. Free art!

Plus, everyone loves showing off on Facebook, let's be honest.

Hot Tip: Don't forget more than one SD card. You will want to switch them as you travel, the only thing worse than losing your camera is losing the SD card inside it with all your photos of Paris or Budapest.

My girlfriend and I use a Canon 450D at the moment, and we also have a Panasonic Lumix DMC (one of those shockproof/underwater proof cameras) and it's great fun when we go swimming!

For those on a tighter budget, these last two on the backpacking essentials list are for you. All the hostels you visit will have sheets and towels, but often they will charge you for the privilege of using their luxurious fabrics (normally it's about 2 Euros).

9. Backpacking Travel Sheet

A simple cotton travel sheet can save you a bit of money whilst backpacking Europe. Instead of opting for those hostel sheets, just whip out your own travel sheet and you're good to go. You'll want something that also has a section to cover a pillow (most will).

So bring along your travel sheet, and snug into it in the dorm at night, happy with the knowledge that all the other suckers paid for their linen!

10. Backpacking Micro Fiber Travel Towel

These towels dry super fast, and can be fantastically useful for hostels where they charge you for towels. Just don't put them on the ground or use them at the beach (I did that once), because the sand and dirt will stick to these things like glue.

It may feel a bit fuzzy and weird, but it will get the water off you quick smart and dry faster than an open bar at a wedding. If you keep them for use in the hostel and dry them by hanging them off your dorm bed, you will be right as rain!

Here's a few other items you may want to consider bringing along though:

Small Nail Clippers – Don't let those nails grow long and yellow!

MP3 Player – Music can be an awesome way to pass time on those long bus trips.

Alarm Clock – Not good at getting up early? Well there's your answer.

Mobile Phone – I take my iPhone with me these days (it is the future, guys), it's great because it can access the Hostel WIFI, and act as an MP3 player and an alarm clock too.

What Are Hostels Like In Europe And Loads Of Hot How To Hostel Tips

As a backpacker, I've stayed in my fair share of hostels whilst travelling Europe. I've written this article to help those who are about to backpack and for those who have never stayed in a hostel before.

Before you do it yourself, you often have absolutely no idea what to expect. Hopefully this should clear a few things up for you and let you feel a little more at ease with any hostelling adventures you have planned for the future.

What Are Hostels?

So what exactly are hostels, and why are hostels so cheap? These are excellent questions to start with. Basically a hostel is a building that contains multiple rooms that have bunk beds and other simple facilities.

As a backpacker, you can pay for a night in a hostel, and you will get a bed in a dormitory style room that you will share with other backpackers. Because the hostel will receive money from everyone staying in the same room, they can charge a lot less for a bed than at a hotel for example.

It's the perfect setup for any traveler or backpacker that wants to see Europe cheaply and on a budget. Hostels are extremely popular in Europe, and not only do you get a cheap place to sleep but you will also meet loads of awesome people and make heaps of great friends (I know I have and do!).

What Do Hostels Look Like And What Do They Provide?

Every hostel looks different, and many hostels try to give their hostel a theme or a real sense of style. And just as they look different, some hostels will provide more facilities than others.

I've stayed in huge hostels that have hundreds of rooms and their own bar, and I've stayed in other hostels that are more like a small house. Each has their own advantages and disadvantages.

Either way, there are a couple of things that you can almost guarantee will be at every hostel you stay in:

- A reception area where you can check-in and get your room key and get an introduction to the hostel.
- Rooms with beds – generally bunk beds – I always try to get the bottom one if I can!
- Towels and linens – normally you will have to hire them if you didn't bring your own travel sheet/towel).
- Communal toilets – most hostels will still segregate male and female toilets.

The GOOD hostels (in my opinion) will also include the following features:

- A 24 hour staffed reception.
- A kitchen with equipment for cooking and cutlery to eat with. The nice hostels will also have a 'free food' area where you can use things like pasta or rice left behind by other backpackers who didn't get a chance to finish their food and didn't want to take it with them.
- A book exchange where backpackers can leave behind their old books and trade them for new ones. It's the traveler's library – and I believe a must-have for any good hostel!
- Free Wi-Fi to access the internet via your phone or laptop. A free computer owned and operated by the hostel that backpackers can use is also a bonus and a common feature for the better hostels.
- Individual lockers in the room for each backpacker. This is pretty important as it means you can lock up your passport and cash so you don't have to bring it all with you on a night out.

- Featured and themed nights for guests. Some hostels will run fun little meet and greet type events and themed nights – it's a great chance to meet your fellow guests and make some new friends.

What To Bring To Hostels

There is not a lot that you HAVE to bring to hostels (apart from your own toiletries and clothes etc) – but there are some things that you can bring along to save yourself a bit of money.

Your own travel sheet and towel means you won't need to hire them from the hostel and will save you a couple of Euros at each place you stay.

An open mind and a friendly attitude. Yes, it sounds lame, but no-one likes a grumpy bum or someone with a narrow cultural focus. You will meet all sorts of people of all different nationalities from all around the world – there is no room for people with closed minds!

What To Expect And Know About Hostels

In my opinion, there are two different main categories of hostel. There are the big and commercial hostels and the funky lo-fi hostels – and then there is everything else that falls between these two types.

The commercial hostels have their advantages; they are normally great for partying and will organize lots of various events. On the flip-side, I love a good small and funky hostel, it's a much more relaxed atmosphere (think a few beers, a game of chess and great conversation).

In your travels, I have no doubt you will come across both these types of hostels, and then you can decide which one you like best!

If you've never stayed in a hostel before, you may be unsure of what to expect. Don't expect a hotel – you are not going to get your own private bathroom and a luxurious king bed. Hostels offer great value, but you do need to be prepared to share a sleeping area and bathroom with other backpackers.

If you're a light sleeper, you may need ear plugs, as people will often come in late and others will snore. That's just the reality of hostels – but if price and friendliness is a factor for travelling, then I would pick a hostel over a hotel everytime.

How To Apply For And Book Hostels

The two best sites for booking hostels are:

HostelBookers.com – currently has no 'booking fee' and claims to be cheaper than its competition.

HostelWorld.com – charges a booking fee, but offers more features like a 'MyWorld' section, a route planner and a great reviews system.

I would sign up for both of these and see which one you like best. I personally use HostelWorld and always have, but have also heard good things about HostelBookers too.

Once you're signed up and logged in, booking is just a matter of searching for the city you are going to be staying in along with the dates, and picking a hostel from the list.

My process for choosing a hostel is first and foremost to take recommendations from other backpackers I've met along the road, and then I will look at the ratings and reviews for the hostels available, and also factor in things like location (can I walk to all the things I want to see or will I need to use public transport?) and the amenities offered (is there a kitchen?).

Here's an example screenshot of searching for a hostel in Amsterdam using HostelWorld:

Hostels in Amsterdam, Netherlands

53 Results: Sat 03 Dec 2011 - Fri 16 Dec 2011

[View List](#) | [Map View](#) | [Hostel Reviews](#)

Sort By: Overall rating Per page: 40



Cocomama

Westeinde 18, 1017 ZP Amsterdam, Amsterdam

Cocomama: Amsterdam's First Boutique Hostel. Feel right at home at this brand new hostel in the heart of Amsterdam... [More Info >](#)

93% 233 Customer Ratings

Compare (0 of 5)

dorms
€26.00

privates
€38.00

[Book Now](#)



St Christopher's at The Winston

Warmoesstraat 129, Amsterdam

Most of our rooms and hallways were designed by local and international artists. Home to the city's one and only ... [More Info >](#)

85% 747 Customer Ratings

Compare (0 of 5)

dorms
€13.90

privates
€26.00

[Book Now](#)

See where I've arrowed in red how many customer ratings there have been. In this example, CocoMama has 93% with 233 customer ratings and St Christopher's at The Winston has 85% with 747 customer ratings.

The amount of ratings can also play its part, as 747 people saying the hostel is an 85% is just as good as 232 people saying a hostel is 93% in my opinion. There are always going to be fussy people who can bring a rating down.

When choosing between those two hostels in the example shown, I would pick based solely on location and price of their largest dorm room and disregard their difference in review/customer ratings as they are similar enough.

Ratings and reviews are not the be all and end all of a good hostel. I've stayed in lots of fantastic hostels that didn't have 90% ratings – as with anything you take all of that stuff with a grain of salt

How To Find Cheap Hostels In Europe

If you're only after the cheapest hostels, then here's a quick trick to always ensure you're getting the cheapest available hostel.

It's pretty simple, and I'm sure most people will figure it out themselves, but if you search hostels by city name and then sort the hostels by 'price', the cheapest will appear at the top of your search.

Check out the screen shots below:



The screenshot shows a search interface with a 'list view' button selected and a 'map view' button. A red arrow points to a 'Sort by' dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is open, showing several options: 'Shared room price (low to high)', 'Shared room price (high to low)', 'Private room price (low to high)', 'Private room price (high to low)', 'Rating', 'Property name', 'Property type (lowest first)', and 'Property type (highest first)'. The 'Shared room price (low to high)' option is highlighted in blue. To the right of the dropdown menu, there is a 'Prices below are per person' section with a dropdown menu set to 'Euros (EUR/€)'. Below this, there is a table with columns for 'Rating', 'Shared', and 'Private'. The table shows a rating of 9.4% and 683 reviews, with shared room prices of 9.90 EUR and private room prices of 14.00 EUR.

Rating	Shared	Private
9.4% 683 reviews	9.90 EUR	14.00 EUR



I would check what you're 'getting' for the cheapest hostel price however, if there is no kitchen for example, you can end up spending MORE because you won't have anywhere to cook your food. Of course a reasonable price is important, but I certainly do not consider that the only factor when choosing a good hostel to stay in.

There is one thing you won't be able to avoid, and that is the fact that all hostels will raise their prices during the summer months which constitutes the peak season for them.

How To Meet People And Make Friends In Hostels

There is nowhere better than a hostel in Europe for meeting other backpackers and making new friends.

Here is what I always do when I'm staying in hostels, and it seems to work great for meeting people.

Introduce yourself to everyone and say hello, almost everyone else you meet in a hostel will be backpackers, and most of them want to meet people and make friends on the road just like you do!

Drop into the common room or lounge room after doing the days sightseeing. It's generally an unspoken rule that most backpackers (especially solo or independent travellers) will drop in at the hostel hangout spot to meet and greet.

Use the kitchen facilities and cook in the hostel at least once during your stay. Not only will this save you money, but is also a great spot to meet some new people, share food and have a good time!

Organise a game of something. If you're into drinking games, board games, card games or chess – this can be a great way for everyone to introduce themselves and start the night off with a bang. I remember fondly many games of chess, beer pong and card games.

Suggest a night out. Most backpackers will want to check out the nightlife of each new city they are visiting. So you won't find it hard to get a group going for a night out on the town.

Remember, people are backpacking to see new things and meet new people – that's the whole point! So don't be shy, get out there!



How To Avoid Bed Bugs In Hostels And Other Annoyances

I get questions sometimes from friends and family about hostels, 'Aren't they dirty?', 'Aren't there bed bugs in hostels?' Most of it is a myth.

Sure, some hostels are not as good as others – and guess what? That applies to hotels too, and restaurants and everything else you do. That's just life. For backpackers, I believe a great hostel will always be so much better than a hotel.

As to bed bugs, a 5 star hotel can just as easily get bed bugs as the cheapest hostel in Asia. It all comes down to WHO checks in to the hostel, did they stay somewhere with bed bugs and they're bringing in eggs on their clothes and backpacks? It's never the hostels fault if they were to get bed bugs, but a good hostel would always act immediately to eradicate them if this were to happen.

Let me tell you something else – I might put this in bold for extra emphasis!

In all my travels of Europe and Asia, I have never stayed in a hostel that has had bed bugs. Not once!

It really is an unfounded misconception that hostels are not clean and are filled with bed bugs and backpackers drinking all day long. Many hostels pride themselves on their cleanliness.

So that's all for now, I trust you got something out of this article, and have a better understanding of what hostels are and how you can go about booking into some! Trust me, you won't regret staying in hostels whilst you backpack through Europe, the people you meet and the things you'll see will give you fond memories for many years to come.

Are Hostels Safe: A Few Tips For Staying In Hostels And Hostel Security

So are hostels safe to stay in? This is a common question, and the resounding answer in my opinion is YES – they are absolutely safe! I've stayed in a lot of hostels all throughout Europe, and I've never had a problem with my safety. Movies like Hostel I and II aren't doing anyone any favours (apart from being mildly comedic of course) when they're thinking about backpacking and whether to stay in hostels.

Let us discuss a few important points when it comes to general safety and some security tips you can follow to ensure you have a great time staying in hostels around Europe.

Hostel Safety

I've always found hostels to be a safe and friendly environment. They are often manned, runned and owned by other travelers just like yourself, or people who have travelled a lot in the past.

Here are some hostel safety tips:

- If you ever feel uncomfortable with someone or something that is happening, then ask the staff or other backpackers for help.
- Always trust your instincts.
- If you're going out for the night to party, then round up a group or go with a group from the hostel, and don't leave anyone behind. As backpackers, it's important to look after each other.
- General common sense is needed in a hostel, if you have that, then you'll be fine.

Hostel Security

Here's a few tips and tricks when it comes to hostel security:

- Always use the lockers (if available) for your passport and other valuables. Don't leave them lying around on your dorm bed. You can trust almost all other backpackers, but don't let that one backpacker out of a hundred ruin your trip by stealing something.
- If there are no lockers available in the hostel, you can lock up your backpack with some simple combination padlocks and carry your passport around on your person, or leave it locked up at reception. At night I sometimes would put my cash and passport underneath my pillow whilst I'm sleeping.
- Most hostels should have adequate security measures in terms of codes for getting in late at night and lockers too. Many hostels have a reception open 24 hours a day – so even if you do arrive late you won't have a problem getting in.



Things to Remember when Staying in Hostels

Hostels are generally populated with other travellers, just like you! So don't be afraid to introduce yourself and meet new people – I've made some great friends that I'm still in touch with by staying in hostels all around Europe.

Use the review pages on the hostel booking site that you're using to help you make a decision. Of course you cannot rely on those completely as they can be manufactured, but it's a great starting point. Don't forget to leave an honest review yourself to help other backpackers once you've finished your stay.

Hostels are not hotels. You may find that there are not as many amenities and comforts as in a hotel room, but on the plus side you are paying a fraction of the price. However, this rule does not ALWAYS apply – I've seen a hostel in Croatia that had a huge flat screen TV with a PlayStation 3 plugged into it and loads of DVD's to watch on a comfortable couch. A lot of hostels will surprise you with what they offer!

If you're coming in late and people are sleeping, try and make as little noise as possible. It's no fun being woken up at 4am in the morning when you have a train to catch at 7.30am.

Other backpackers are your best source of information when it comes to finding the best hostels to stay in. So take and give honest hostel recommendations without hesitation!

There are many misconceptions when it comes to staying in hostels. Many people seem to have this impression that hostels are dirty and full of only young people that want to drink and fornicate all day long. This just simply isn't the case.

Of course it is very dependent on which hostel you are staying in, as some hostels will have a party friendly attitude and are notorious in backpacker circles as a place to go for partying. If you are not after that atmosphere, then it's simple, don't stay in that hostel! There are also places that are quiet and homely, I've seen a whole slew of various hostels, and I can guarantee you that there I always one that will meet your needs – whatever it is they may be.

The Best Places to Visit in Europe: The Top 10 European Cities You Must See

I'll start by saying that obviously this list of the best places to visit in Europe is my personal opinion. I mean, everyone is going to have different favourite cities, but these are mine – and I hope you get something useful out of the list. I've visited them all, and had a great time in each and every one.

The term 'best city' is always going to be subjective, a lot of the fun had in cities is partly because of the people you meet there, and the nooks and crannies and pubs and cafes that you discover. But as far as I am concerned, you cannot go wrong if you visit any or all of those cities whilst backpacking across Europe. Let's do it!

London in England

London, baby! You can't really do a Europe backpacking trip without visiting London. This behemoth of a city offers everything. The free museums are absolutely stellar – make sure you get to the British Museum as it is well worth it. It's also a great spot to visit the theatre, and get involved in the indie or art scene. Vintage shopping Camden Town should also be on the agenda.

For those backpacking through on a budget, don't worry, the choice of inexpensive hostels (well, inexpensive for London that is) is large and varied, and you can get everywhere worth seeing via the famous 'Tube' system.

If history or partying is your thing, you definitely won't have a problem in London.



Of course the last time I was there was in the middle of the London riots, so that put a slight dampener on things. But London will always bounce back from such things – it always has and it always will! This is one of those must see cities in Europe, so get it on the itinerary.



Amsterdam in Holland

Amsterdam is such a beautiful city, I cannot think of any other way to put it. And please remember there is a LOT MORE to the city than The Red Light District and the Coffee Shops. There are loads of vibrant art galleries, pumping night clubs, beautiful parks and smooth gliding bicycles (and old rickety ones too!).

The atmosphere you get whilst traipsing around Amsterdam is second to none.

Of course the infamous Red Light District is a must see attraction, even if you don't plan on becoming a customer – but don't forget to leave that area and see what else Amsterdam has to offer. It really is one of the top cities to visit in Europe.

Paris in France

Ah Paris, the city of love, with its Eiffel Tower and its pyramid Louvre. If you're backpacking with your girlfriend then I think you'll be in a lot of trouble if you don't swing by Paris (I know I would have been). Either way, not visiting Paris would be a travel crime of insurmountable heights from which you would never recover.

The Paris Metro system is extremely easy to navigate, and will take you to all of the hot sights. Of course I did find food and drinks quite expensive but if you find the right little brasserie, café or restaurant it is oh so worth it. What I did was eat a lot from the supermarket, making DIY baguettes and such, and this really helped me keep the costs down so I could eat out a few times whilst I was there and get my fill of delicious Parisian food.

Paris is just delectable (although I will admit, grimy in parts) – but it is definitely one of the most romantic cities in Europe, and if romance isn't on your 'To-Do List', never fear because it has a wealth of other things to do to keep you busy and occupied.



Dresden in Germany

I found this little Germany city to be an absolute delight. I was told there that it has the most pubs and cafes per square foot in all of Europe (although someone else later claimed this was San Sebastian – these pesky backpacker rumors!).

If you're backpacking through, stay in the 'New Town' area as that's where Dresden is alive and grooving (most of the hostels will be in this area). Of course the Old Town is worth a visit and is definitely beautiful, but the heart and fun of Dresden will be found across the river in new town.

It was heavily bombed in World War II, and it has a rich history to delve into if that's your thing. If you're heading through Germany, then check out Dresden!

Munich in Germany

The heart of Oktoberfest, and the best place in the Bavaria region of Germany – and I love a delicious beer, and no-one does that better than Bavaria. Paulaner and Augustiner (my favourite) are the beer kings of Munich, but there is a lot on offer and you won't be disappointed. I had an absolute blast at one of the local Augustiner beer halls, the food was fantastic and the beer even better – don't go to the one right in the city centre though (that's for tourists), ask a German for some directions to a local hall.

There is also the 'Deutches Museum' which is one of the world's largest science and technology collection and definitely worth seeing. Let's be honest though, a lot of people just come to Munich for Oktoberfest.

Barcelona in Spain

Barcelona HAS to be on your Europe trip itinerary. HAS. TO. BE. It's such a cruisy city with a brilliant vibe, and is one of the best places to visit in Europe in summer. My opinion is that not seeing Barcelona is tantamount to failing a trip backpacking through Europe, although a word of advice, it's best to book ahead in peak season as the good hostels fill up fast.

A quick tip from me, it's worth staying in a hostel in the city centre, but one that ISN'T ON LAS RAMBLAS. There are a lot of places to party that aren't on Las Ramblas (it really is the Bane of Barcelona). Talk to your hostel workers to get more information on some great places to go, they should be able to help you out. Barcelona is without a doubt one of the top party cities in Europe.

Of course it has the beach too, that is a mere 10 to 15 minute walk from the city centre – and is not too bad for a beach that is basically right in the city (although I am Australian, so I'm a little bit biased when it comes to great beaches).

There are two things you have to do in Barcelona. First, is seeing Antoni Gaudi's amazing works, his most famous being the Sagrada Familia. It's a church, but it's unlike any other church in Europe. I'm not religious, but I found it truly awesome (go inside guys, it's worth it). The second thing to do in Barcelona is partying. You might need some time to recover after a few days in Barcelona.



Madrid in Spain

It's definitely worth visiting Madrid as well as Barcelona whilst you are in Spain. The Spanish love a good celebration and their siesta habits mean they often stay up late, eating tapas and partying the night away. I loved Madrid, and found it just as entertaining and interesting as Barcelona – DIFFERENT – but just as good. It's another one of those must see European cities (that's right, add it to the list!).

Madrid is a fantastic city to walk around, and there are three amazing museums there that create what is known as the 'Golden Triangle' – the El Prado, Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum. They all offer something a little different, but are more than worth seeing.

The locals are fanatical about their football team Real Madrid – so if you like sports and get a chance to watch them play, don't hesitate!



A lake in a big park in Madrid.

San Sebastian in Spain



Here we are in Spain again! This has got to be up there as one of the best cities in Europe, and is another European city to visit in summer. The old town is small and charming, the shopping is great for those on short holidays, and for backpackers the atmosphere is fun and superb.

There is a giant bay, where everyone can swim and relax on the golden sands – and there is a great surfing beach (called La Zurriola) east across river on the other side of town (which is close to the hostel I stayed at). It's an easy walk to the surfer beach from the bay and vice versa, so make sure you see both! This area of Spain known as the 'Basque' region is also the home of Pinxtos, which are similar to Tapas and are reasonably priced and tasty. So bar hop – grabbing some Pinxtos and a drink at each as you get ready to go out!

I found San Sebastian so relaxing, and had a great time there and met some fantastic people. I'm sure you will too!

Budapest in Hungary

Budapest was a beautiful place to visit, and actually consists of two parts, Buda and Pest. Buda is the hilly west side of the city, and Pest is flat and to the east and is more commercial.

There is a lot to see, from museums to concerts, it is a real hub of activity for Eastern Europe. When you're there, experience the bath culture, as Budapest is famous for its medicinal thermal water springs!

I remember being there close to winter time, a friend and myself would frequent a cozy little pub and drink warm mulled wine – delicious!

Krakow in Poland

This city was one of my favourites from my big Europe backpacking trip, a large and friendly younger crowd and awesome partying, as well as having access to numerous historical sites from the harrowing Auschwitz (I found it very full-on emotionally, but I still think everyone should see it) to the stately royal Castle Wawel.

Of course it's a lot more touristy since Poland was listed as part of the EU in 2004, but Krakow is a city that breathes life with good food and a vibrant atmosphere.

So there is my list of some of the best cities in Europe to visit, of course, you can visit whatever cities you like – but hopefully you can take some of these recommendations on board. No doubt as you travel, you will develop a love for a city or country, you may not even be able to put your finger on it, but something about the place will just 'click' for you.

The Useful Travel Links & Resources Page

Disclosure: Please note that some of the links below are affiliate links, and at no additional cost to you, I will earn a commission if you decide to make a purchase. Please understand that I have experience with all of these companies, and I recommend them because they are helpful and useful, not because of the small commissions I can make. If you do use my affiliate link, then I thank you warmly and from the bottom of my heart for supporting a small independent travel blog like mine.

Accommodation sites I use & recommend for Europe:

[Hostel World](#) – has the most comprehensive listings. It's the one that I use most.

[Hostel Bookers](#) – touts a 'no booking fee' advantage.

[Airbnb](#) – A fantastic way to get your own apartment at better rates than hotels, good when you need a break from hostels (and for couples).

Travelling Europe: The Budget Rail, Air & Bus Companies

[Rail Europe](#) – One of these Europe rail passes are incredibly useful (and great value for money if you do it right).

[EasyJet](#) – A solid budget option with many flights all around Europe.

[Ryan Air](#) – Generally a little cheaper than EasyJet (but it depends).

[Wizz Air](#) – Another budget airline to check out for cheap flights.

[Lufthansa](#) – German owned and operated budget airline in Europe.

[Busabout](#) – A business that runs nifty hop-on & hop-off bus routes and passes. Can be good for first time solo backpackers.

[Euro Lines](#) – The big bus company that operates all throughout Europe.

[Orange Ways](#) – A cheap bus company that operates mostly in Eastern Europe.

Gear & Equipment:

[REI](#) (US) – These guys are the recommended place to buy a backpack if you're based in the US. For Australians, I recommend Kathmandu products.

[Kathmandu](#) (AUS) - This is an Australian store. I have one of their packs and some of their clothes and it's all extremely high quality stuff. I've had my pack for years and it's as durable as the day I brought it, I have no affiliation with this company, I just like their backpacks!

Website Resources:

[Wordpress](#) – It's what my site runs on (self hosted Wordpress). Fantastic, completely free and highly recommended.

[Hostgator](#) – I use these guys to host my website, and recommend them if you're planning on starting a travel blog.

[Drop Box](#) – Good for storing documents on the cloud, like text documents and so on. It comes with a free 2GB of data – so not really great for photos but works for everything else.

This list is always growing, so head to the [Travel Resources](#) page on my blog for the latest and greatest links useful links when it comes to backpacking! As always, thanks for your wonderful support and happy travelling! If you have any questions you can always just drop me a line at tom@activebackpacker.com.

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