

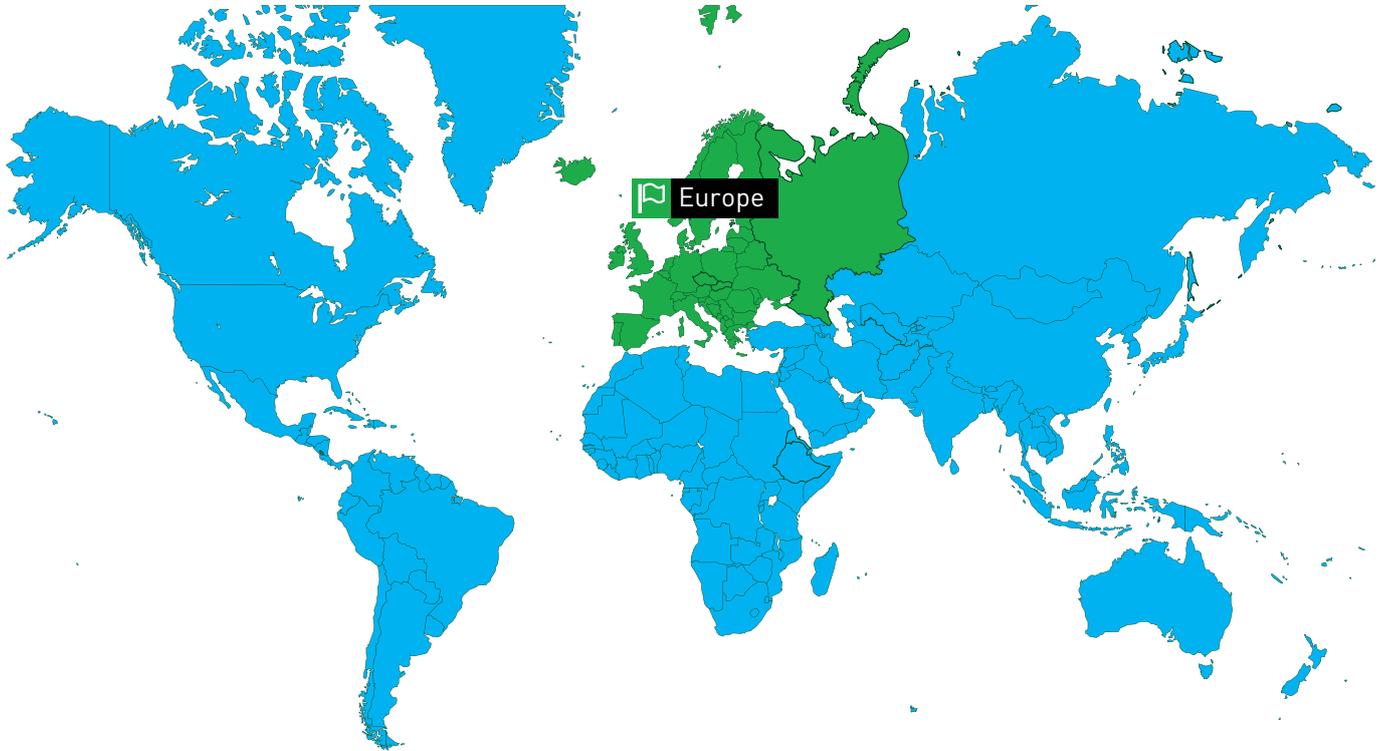


choice
TRAVEL

Destination Guide: Europe

What to know before you go
Essential preparation and planning tips
Accommodation and transport

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Who is CHOICE? Set up by consumers for consumers, **CHOICE** is the **consumer advocate** that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

OVERVIEW

Best time to go, culture, language, health, safety, laws, watchouts, scams, emergency contacts and more.

Travel-size tips

- › There are no direct flights between Australia and Europe. Most Australians [fly to Europe](#) via Asia or the Middle East.
- › Australian tourists don't need a [visa to visit](#) most countries in Europe for up to 90 days.
- › You'll need an [international permit](#) to drive in some European countries.
- › [Electrical plug](#) types vary throughout Europe, so you may need a universal adaptor.
- › The [euro is not the only currency](#). Many countries still use their own currencies and won't accept euros.
- › Always check [smartraveller.gov.au](#) for the latest advice and safety alerts on the region you're travelling to.

Best time to go

Most parts of Europe are open for tourism all

year round so there really is no right or wrong time to go. The climate varies greatly from the north of the continent to the south. Depending on when you're planning your holiday, check the [average temperature and rainfall](#) in the region you're travelling to.

- › Summer is the peak season when most Europeans take long holidays. Prices are likely to be higher and bookings harder to come by, particularly during school holidays.
- › If you don't like crowds, consider the shoulder seasons when you'll find cheaper flights and accommodation, and fewer people. If you're lucky, you'll catch some nice weather in spring or autumn.
- › Weather can affect roads and public transport, particularly in northern Europe where the winters can be severe, and in the UK, where the infrastructure can't always cope with extreme weather.
- › Remember that the further north you travel in Europe, the fewer daylight hours you'll have for sightseeing in winter (and the more hours you'll have in summer).

- › Winters are mild in southern Europe, so the off-season can be a great time to find a bargain, however many hotels and resorts may be closed.
- › Christmas and New Year is a peak season across all of Europe.
- › The ski season varies throughout Europe. Check [skiresort.info](https://www.skiresort.info) for the opening and closing dates of ski fields and resorts.

Health and safety

- › For the latest country-specific advice on the risk of natural disasters, conflicts, terrorism and disease outbreaks, check [smartraveller.gov.au](https://www.smartraveller.gov.au).
- › Most parts of Western Europe have a high standard of medical care. The quality of care in some Eastern and Southern European countries may not be as high, and there may be a greater risk of contracting water-borne diseases and travellers' diarrhoea.
- › Australia has [reciprocal health care](#) agreements with the UK, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Belgium, Malta, Slovenia and Norway. This means Australians can access the public health systems of these countries in an emergency. If you're travelling to one of these countries, remember to pack your Medicare card. You'll need it, along with your passport, to prove your eligibility.
- › A reciprocal health care agreement doesn't mean you'll receive free medical care. You'll still pay the same amount as locals do for treatment and medicine, and you won't be eligible for ongoing care.

So no matter where you're visiting in Europe, you'll still need [travel insurance](#).

- › Tap water is safe to drink in most European countries, with the exception of Albania, Andorra, Belarus, Montenegro, Russia and Ukraine, and outside of the major cities in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Spain. (Tip: In some countries, the tap water has a foul taste so ordering bottled water is the norm in restaurants and cafes.)
- › Medications that are legal in Australia may be restricted in some European countries (for example, codeine is considered a narcotic in Greece.) Check with the embassy of the country (or countries) you're travelling to (or transiting through), particularly if you're taking pain killers, sleeping pills, cold and flu drugs or ADHD medications. No matter where you travel, always carry medication in its original packaging, along with the original prescription or a note from your doctor.
- › Crime rates and scam risks vary from country to country in Europe. See our article about [tourist traps](#) for tips on avoiding common scams, or search forums such as Tripadvisor to read warnings



from other travellers.

- › Always keep your belongings close and consider using a money belt to avoid pickpockets or bag snatchers.
- › Certain areas of cities may be best avoided at night. Ask a local, such as your accommodation provider, for advice.
- › Bank card skimming and credit card fraud is a problem in Europe, as it is in Australia. Keep an eye on your statement and let your bank know if you see any unexplained transactions.
- › Be careful using free Wi-Fi hotspots. Follow [these tips](#) to keep your device safe from hackers, and avoid doing internet banking on untrusted connections.

More about using [credit cards and ATMs](#) in Europe.

Do I need [vaccinations](#) to travel to Europe?

Emergency contacts

Most of Europe

All emergencies: 112

UK and Ireland

All emergencies: 999 (112 will redirect you to the 999 service)

Russia, Ukraine, Belarus

Ambulance: 03

Fire/rescue: 01

Police: 02

Switzerland

Ambulance: 144

Fire/rescue: 118

Police: 117



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ambulance: 124

Fire/rescue: 123

Police: 122

Macedonia, Montenegro

Ambulance: 94

Fire/rescue: 93

Police: 92

Bulgaria

Ambulance: 150

Fire/rescue: 160

Police: 166

Albania

Ambulance: 17

Fire/rescue: 18

Police: 19

Gibraltar

Ambulance: 199

Fire/rescue: 190

Police: 199

- › Operators may not speak English, so try to have an interpreter with you, such as an employee from your hotel. Alternatively, ask in a clear voice if there is an English-speaking operator available.

- › In a medical emergency, it's best to contact your travel insurer as soon as possible.

Consular assistance

To find your closest Australian embassy, high commission or consulate, go to

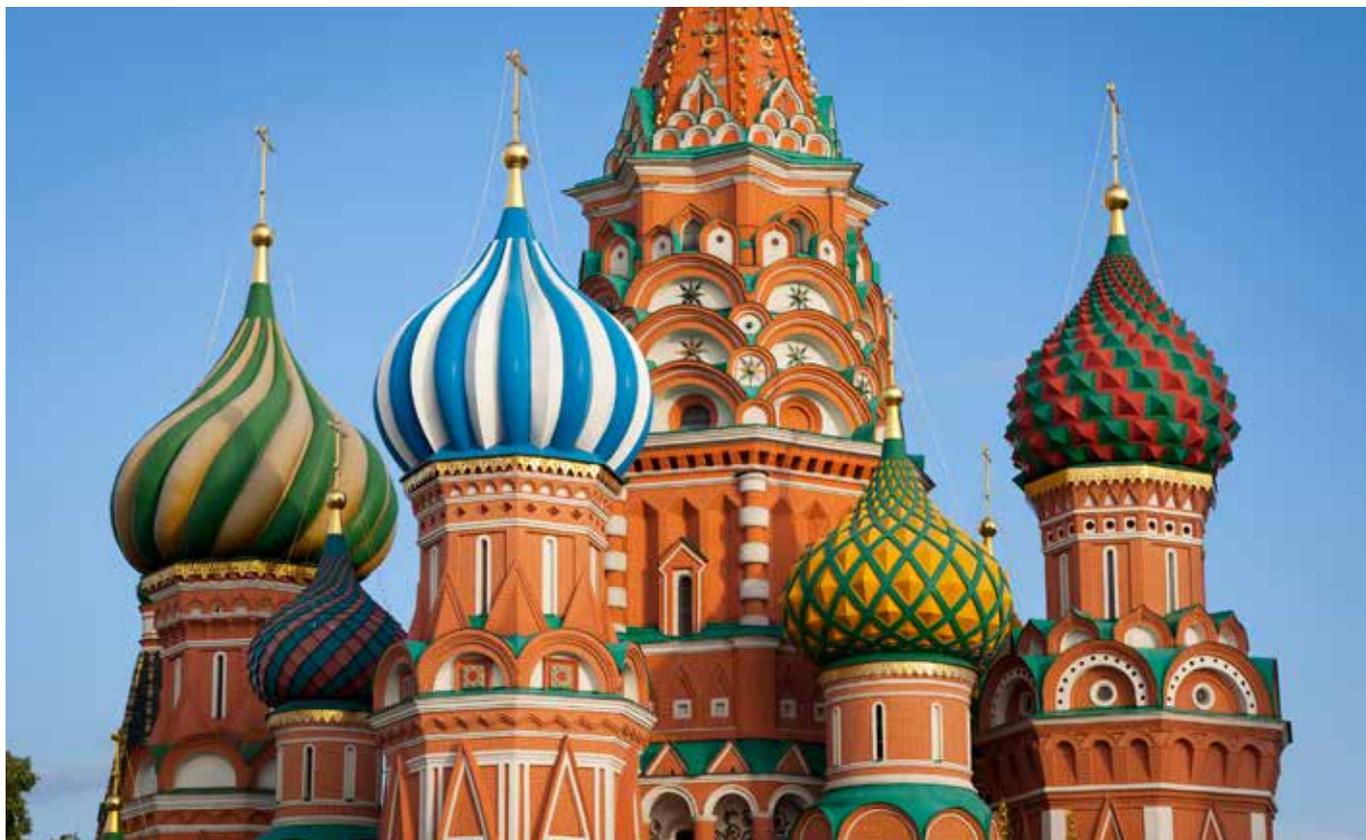
dfat.gov.au/about-us/our-locations/missions/.

24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61 (0)2 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135 or SMS +61 421 269 080

Making a complaint

Consumer protection laws vary from country to country in Europe, but in the EU there is unified legislation ensuring consumers receive fair treatment, products meet acceptable standards and consumers have a right of redress if something goes wrong.

- › If you have a complaint relating to a flight into or out of an EU country, follow [this advice](#) from the European Consumer Centres Network. They also have a [handy app](#) that translates the EU consumer rights from English to the local language when dealing with travel problems like cancelled flights.
- › For other complaints (if you've been unsuccessful coming to an agreement with the business or service provider already) find the appropriate EU ombudsman at ombudsman.europa.eu.
- › Outside of the EU, contact the country's consumer rights organisation or the official tourism board.
- › You can also seek advice from CHOICE's UK sister organisation, [which.co.uk](https://www.which.co.uk).
- › If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour operator, airline, or booking site, check online at [choice.com.au](https://www.choice.com.au) for the [usual procedures](#) for making a complaint or seeking compensation.



WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Visas, vaccinations, phone roaming, SIM cards, internet, power adapters, money, travel insurance, handy apps and more.

Visas and passports

Australian passport holders may or may not need a visa, depending on which country in Europe they're visiting and for how long.

Schengen countries

The Schengen area is made up of 26 European countries that share similar entry and visa laws. Australian passport holders can visit any countries within the Schengen area visa-free for up to 90 days over a 180-day period for the purpose of tourism. There's often very little or no border control between Schengen countries, but it's important for Australian travellers to get entry and exit stamps on their passport to prove that they aren't overstaying their 90-day limit. Travellers can even be fined for not having a stamp from their initial port of entry into the Schengen area.

Tip: You may be refused entry if you have less than three months' validity left on your passport beyond your intended date of departure from the Schengen area.

Non-Schengen countries

Non-Schengen countries, including the UK and Ireland, have their own rules. Many still allow Australians to visit without a visa, but some may require you to apply for a visa.

Tip: The Schengen area is not to be confused with the European Union (EU). Some non-EU countries are part of the Schengen area and some EU countries are not. If you want to visit Europe for more than 90 days, you can split your time between Schengen and non-Schengen countries, and consider using the UK as a base to maximise your time. See the [Savvy Backpacker guide to long-term travel in Europe](#) for tips.

Visa rules by country		
Country	Schengen	Rules for Australian tourists
Albania	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Andorra	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Austria	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Belarus	X	Visa required
Belgium	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Bosnia Herzegovina	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Bulgaria	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Croatia	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Cyprus	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Czech Republic	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Denmark	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Estonia	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Finland	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
France	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Germany	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Greece	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Hungary	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Iceland	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Ireland	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Italy	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Latvia	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Liechtenstein	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Lithuania	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Luxembourg	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Macedonia	X	No visa required for up to 90 days

Visa rules by country		
Country	Schengen	Rules for Australian tourists
Malta	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Moldova	X	No visa required for up to 90 days within a six-month period
Monaco	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Montenegro	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
The Netherlands	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Norway	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Poland	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Portugal	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Romania	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Russia	X	Visa required
San Marino	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Serbia	X	No visa required for up to 90 days
Slovakia	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Slovenia	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Spain	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Sweden	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Switzerland	✓	No visa required for up to 90 days within a 180-day period
Ukraine	X	Visa required
United Kingdom	X	No visa required for up to 180 days
Vatican City	X	No visa required for up to 90 days

Important: The above chart is a guide only. Visa rules can change so you should always check with the embassy of the country you're travelling to.

Entry requirements may vary from country to country, for example you may need to prove you have enough money to support yourself or you may be denied entry if you have a criminal history or have overstayed a visa in the past. Again, always check with the relevant embassy.

While most European countries are easy to gain entry to as a tourist, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus have strict visa rules. To be issued a Russian visa, you'll need a tourist confirmation letter from a travel agent or hotel detailing your itinerary for your entire stay in Russia. If you're visiting Europe for any reason other than for tourism (for example, to study or work) then it's likely you'll need a visa.

When does your passport expire?

Most countries require that you have a certain amount of validity left on your passport. For Schengen countries, you'll need three months' validity from your intended date of departure from the Schengen area. In many other countries, the minimum limit is six months' validity from your date of arrival.

Vaccinations

The risk of contracting a dangerous disease in Western Europe is comparable to the risk in Australia, however the risk of water-borne and diarrhoeal illnesses can be higher in parts of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Rabies is still a problem in some parts of continental Europe, as are some diseases spread by ticks and insects.

The Travel Doctor recommends you make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date. See their [Western Europe](#) and [Eastern Europe](#) fact sheets for more information on specific shots you might want to consider. Your vaccination needs will depend on your own health status, where you're travelling to, and when, so speak to a doctor with experience in travel health.

More about [health and safety in Europe](#).

Phone and internet

Global roaming and coverage

Phone coverage varies throughout Europe, but you should be able to stay connected in most places – unless you're climbing the French Alps or camping in rural Romania, for example. Your Australian phone will usually pick up on compatible European GSM networks, but as most travellers know, the cost of phone calls and internet access can be astronomical if you use your phone overseas.

Check with your telco for global roaming rates and tips on keeping costs low:

› [Telstra](#)

› [Vodafone](#)

› [Optus](#)

› [Virgin](#)

Tip: Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Likewise, switch off your voicemail and



ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).

Cheaper roaming

A Travel Pass from Telstra, a Travel Pack from Optus or a \$5-a-day roaming rate from Vodafone are all add-ons that you can use with your existing account while overseas. They're not particularly cheap, but they'll save you from any nasty bill surprises and can be a good option if you're only visiting Europe for a few days or weeks and you want to keep your own number.



Local SIM

If you're planning to spend more than a few weeks in Europe, or if you just want cheaper rates and don't mind having a different phone number while you're on holidays, consider buying a local pre-paid SIM once you arrive in Europe. Companies, rates and set-up will depend on which country you're in. You may be required to show ID to register, so the easiest way is to find an (English-speaking) phone store employee who can help you. Or better yet, most major airports will have shops or booths ready to help you get set up.

Remember: If you buy a SIM in one European country,

you'll be charged global roaming rates as soon as you cross the border into another country. If you're travelling through many European countries, consider a travel SIM.

Travel SIM

Pre-paid travel SIMs can be bought from some Australian travel stores, phone stores and post offices, or ordered online before you leave the country. Rates won't be as cheap as a local SIM, but they can be a smart option if you're travelling to multiple countries and don't want to pay even higher global roaming rates or buy a local SIM every time.

Remember: Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

[Beat global roaming bill shock](#) – our guide to unlocking your phone and changing your global roaming settings.

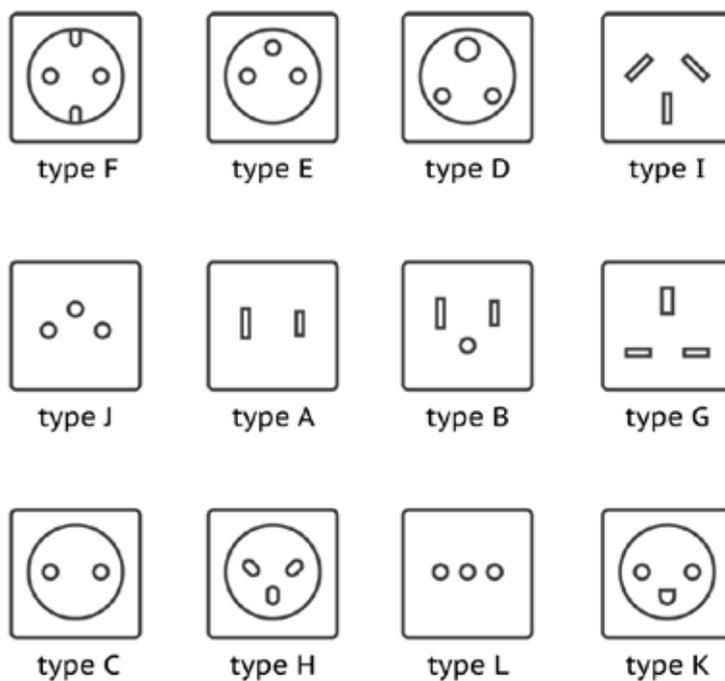
Wi-Fi

Free Wi-Fi is plentiful in some areas and unheard of in others. Sometimes you'll be expected to pay, and in rural areas it often simply won't be available. Generally in the cities you'll find free Wi-Fi in all hotels and most franchises such as Starbucks and McDonald's. To search for free hotspots, try wificafespots.com or download an app such as [wefi](#) or Wi-Fi Finder ([Apple](#) or [Android](#)).

Tip: Wi-Fi is pronounced "wee-fee" or "vee-fee" in much of non English-speaking Europe. In Germany it's called W-LAN (pronounced "vay-lahn").

If you really want to stay connected, consider a portable pocket Wi-Fi device, a dongle or a data SIM. Or look for a local mobile plan with generous data allowance so you can tether your phone to your other device(s). The best place to find what you need is at the airport when you first arrive in Europe.

Power plugs



Power plugs by country			
Country	Voltage	Frequency	Plug type
Australia	230V	50Hz	I
Albania	230V	50Hz	C/F
Andorra	230V	50Hz	C/F
Austria	230V	50Hz	C/F
Belarus	220V	50Hz	C/F
Belgium	230V	50Hz	E
Bosnia Herzegovnia	230V	50Hz	C/F
Bulgaria	230V	50Hz	C/F
Croatia	230V	50Hz	C/F
Cyprus	230V	50Hz	G/F
Czech Republic	230V	50Hz	E
Denmark	230V	50Hz	C/E/K
Estonia	230V	50Hz	C/F

Power plugs by country			
Country	Voltage	Frequency	Plug type
Finland	230V	50Hz	C/F
France	230V	50Hz	E
Germany	230V	50Hz	C/F
Greece	230V	50Hz	C/F
Greenland	230V	50Hz	C/K
Hungary	230V	50Hz	C/F
Iceland	230V	50Hz	C/F
Ireland	230V	50Hz	G
Italy	230V	50Hz	C/F/L
Latvia	230V	50Hz	C/F
Liechtenstein	230V	50Hz	J
Lithuania	230V	50Hz	C/F
Luxembourg	230V	50Hz	C/F
Macedonia	220V	50Hz	C/F
Malta	230V	50Hz	G
Moldova	230V	50Hz	C/F
Monaco	230V	50Hz	C/D/E/F
Montenegro	230V	50Hz	F
The Netherlands	230V	50Hz	C/F
Norway	230V	50Hz	C/F
Poland	230V	50Hz	C/E
Portugal	230V	50Hz	C/F
Romania	230V	50Hz	C/F
Russia	220V	50Hz	C/F
San Marino	230V	50Hz	F/L
Serbia	230V	50Hz	C/F

Power plugs by country			
Country	Voltage	Frequency	Plug type
Slovakia	230V	50Hz	E
Slovenia	230V	50Hz	C/F
Spain	230V	50Hz	C/F
Sweden	230V	50Hz	C/F
Switzerland	230V	50Hz	J
Ukraine	230V	50Hz	C/F
United Kingdom	230V	50Hz	G
Vatican City	230V	50Hz	F/L

The electricity in European countries runs at the same (or very similar) voltage and frequency as Australia, so you can use your Australian appliances in Europe without fear of frying them.

Australian type I electrical plugs are incompatible with any sockets in Europe, so you'll need an adaptor. The type C plug - with two rounded prongs - is the most common in Europe. It's referred to as the 'Europlug', but as you can see from the chart above, plugs and sockets do vary from country to country.

- Type C plugs are compatible with types E, F, J, K and N, so the Europlug really is the only adaptor you'll need for most of Europe.
- If you're travelling to the UK, Ireland or Malta, you'll

need a type G adaptor.

- If you're travelling to Switzerland or Liechtenstein you'll need a type J adaptor.

Tip: Consider a universal adaptor if you're travelling to a number of different countries or if you're stopping over in Asia or the Middle East.

Money

Not all countries in Europe use the euro - in fact not all countries in the European Union use it. The euro is legal tender in 19 out of the 28 EU countries. These are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia,



Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. Some non-EU countries and territories also use the

euro in agreement with the EU. These include: Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City, Kosovo and Montenegro.

All other countries in Europe use their own currencies. Check [xe.com](https://www.xe.com) for the latest exchange rates.

Tip: The euro doesn't necessarily have the same buying power wherever you go. Prices still fluctuate between euro countries. For example, €10 will get you a lot further in Slovakia or Greece than it will in Finland or Austria, where the cost of living is much higher.

Important: Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

Credit cards

MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted in Europe, American Express is less common. Always have some cash spare, as credit cards may not be accepted in smaller shops, taxis and in rural areas. Remember you'll be charged a foreign transaction fee by your bank when paying with a credit card, and the vendor may add a surcharge too. Talk to your bank about the best card to use overseas - some offer credit cards for travellers with no, or low, fees.

ATMs

ATMs are widely available in Europe and almost all will accept foreign cards and offer instructions in

English. Thanks to EU regulations, the fees for using ATMs in EU countries are fairly reasonable. Of course, your own bank will probably still charge you foreign transaction/conversion fees as well.

ATM tips:

- Look for official bank ATMs and try to avoid cash machines labelled Travelex, Euronet, Moneybox, Cardpoint, and Cashzone. These independent ATMs have higher fees and can offer up a confusing choice of conversion options which could cost you more.
- If an ATM offers you the choice of paying in Australian dollars or local currency, always choose the local currency. Likewise, if asked to "lock in" or "guarantee" your conversion rate, choose "proceed without conversion".
- ATMs aren't called ATMs in Europe. Ask for a "distributeur" in France, a "cashpoint" in the UK and Ireland, and a "bankomat" almost everywhere else.
- Westpac customers can avoid withdrawal fees by using Global ATM Alliance partner banks (a 3% foreign transaction fee still applies):
 - Barclay's Bank in the UK, Portugal and Gibraltar
 - Deutsche Bank in Germany, Spain and Poland
 - BNP Paribas in France and Italy

Money changers

You'll find money exchange counters at airports and in most tourist areas, hotels, banks and some post offices. You're unlikely to get a good rate changing cash before you leave Australia, but if it makes you feel safer to have a few euros (or pounds, krone etc) in your pocket when you land, go ahead. Otherwise, the airport ATMs are usually your best bet.

To exchange cash on the ground, look



for the usual Forex or Travelex exchange booths, use a bank, or try a postal bank in a post office (you'll often find the best rates here).

Travellers' cheques

Travellers' cheques aren't as popular as they used to be. They're becoming harder and harder to cash, and the fees are often much higher than for using credit or debit cards. If you like to use travellers' cheques for the money security, consider a [travel money card](#) or cash passport. They can be pre-loaded with foreign currencies, cancelled at any time if lost, and used just like a credit or debit card (although the fees may be higher).

Tip: Carry at least two cards and more than one currency (euros, pounds etc). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.

VAT (value-added tax) applies to goods and services in most European countries. This tax should be included in the advertised price. Foreign tourists can reclaim the tax paid on some goods, depending on the country and the circumstances. You'll usually need to shop in specific stores that can give you the right paperwork (look for signs reading 'Tax Free'), then use the paperwork to apply for a refund at the airport. See [this guide](#) for more information.

Tipping practices vary from country to country. Generally a tip at a hotel

or restaurant is appreciated, but not compulsory. It's best to tip in cash rather than as an add-on to your credit payment - that way the server is sure to receive it. See [cntraveler.com](#) for a country-by-country guide to tipping etiquette.

For more advice on overseas spending, see our [travel money guide](#).

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential no matter which country you're visiting. Buy your insurance at the same time as you book your trip, that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

Australia has [reciprocal health care agreements](#) with the UK, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Belgium, Malta, Slovenia and Norway but these are not a substitute for travel insurance.





To choose the best cover, see CHOICE's [travel insurance reviews and comparisons](#).

Tips:

- › If you're planning on skiing, bungee-jumping or doing anything else potentially bone-breaking, make sure your insurance covers it. Most policies won't, so you'll probably need to purchase extra cover.
- › If you're planning on driving, check what your travel insurance policy covers so you don't end up paying for the same insurance with the car hire company.
- › Remember, anything that happens to you [while under the influence](#) of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance.
- › Keep a print-out of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- › Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.

Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

Tip: If possible, choose apps that work offline so they won't chew up your [mobile data](#) or stop working when you're in remote places.

- › Travel apps can provide you with maps, booking services, itineraries, recommendations and more. Try [Triposo](#) or [App crawlr](#) for other recommended apps based on your travel plans.
- › The [European Consumer Centres Network](#) provides a handy app (scroll to the bottom of the page) that translates the EU consumer rights from English to the local language when dealing with travel problems like cancelled flights.
- › [Currency conversion apps](#) help you work out costs in Australian dollars.
- › [Translation apps](#) help with communication - some even include speech recognition.

› [Taxi.eu](https://www.taxi.eu) is the main taxi-ordering app. [Uber](https://www.uber.com) is also active in more than 30 European cities.

› Moovit ([Apple](https://www.moovit.com) / [Android](https://www.moovit.com)) is a public transport planner app covering more than 500 cities worldwide.

Tip: To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu and select a city.

Websites

› www.visiteurope.com for general advice and inspiration

› [ricksteves.com](https://www.ricksteves.com) for in-depth travel tips for US travellers, but much is relevant to Australians.

› [seat61.com](https://www.seat61.com) for detailed information on rail, bus and ferry travel worldwide.

› [rome2rio.com](https://www.rome2rio.com) for working out how to get from A to B by any means of transport, anywhere in the world.

› [smartraveller.gov.au](https://www.smartraveller.gov.au) for the Australian government's latest advice on the safety of the region you're travelling in.

› [xe.com](https://www.xe.com) for the latest currency exchange rates.

› [wikitravel.org/en/Europe](https://www.wikitravel.org/en/Europe) for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).



ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights to Europe, airport guides, key destinations, transport, car hire, accommodation, tours and more.

Flights

Flight time from Australia: 19+ hours

- › There are no direct flights from Australia to Europe. Australian travellers usually fly via Asia or the Middle East.
- › Many airlines have routes between Australia and Europe. Choosing the right flight can depend on price, travel time, the airline's service reputation, and the location of your stopover point, if you want to take a side trip.
- › To compare airlines, read customer reviews on [airlinequality.com](https://www.airlinequality.com) and [airlinerratings.com](https://www.airlinerratings.com), or compare aircraft stats like seat dimensions and on-board amenities at [seatguru.com](https://www.seatguru.com).
- › If you're booking your flights online, see our guide to using [airline booking sites](#) and avoiding [booking traps](#).

Warning: If you are flying via the UAE, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei or any other country with strict drug laws, be sure to check that any medication you're carrying (such as strong painkillers, sleeping pills,

cold and flu tablets and ADHD medication) isn't illegal. In rare cases, airline passengers have been jailed when caught with medications that were classed as narcotics. If you're concerned, check with your airline or with the embassy of the country you'll be transiting through.

At the airport

If you're an Australian passport-holder arriving in a [Schengen country](#) and visiting as a tourist for less than 90 days within a 180-day period, then you won't need a visa. Many [non-Schengen](#) European countries (such as the UK and Ireland) also won't require you to have a visa, but some, including Russia, will. See [more about visas](#).

Passing through immigration and customs is usually quite straightforward in Europe, depending on which airport you arrive at, and at what time. In most of Europe's larger airports, Australians will need to join the 'non-EU passport holder' queue – which sometimes moves a lot slower than the queue for EU citizens.

You may be quizzed about the purpose of your visit and the contents of your luggage, or you may simply be approved and waved through.

Important: Make sure you get your passport stamped if you're entering a Schengen country. You'll need it as a record of the date that you entered the Schengen area, and you could even be fined or encounter problems with authorities if you don't have an entry stamp.



The following are guides to some of Europe's main airports:

London Heathrow Airport (LHR)

- › 32km west of CBD.
- › The **Heathrow Express** is the fastest way into central London. Departing from Terminals 1, 2, 3 and 5 (shuttle available from terminal 4), trains run every 15 minutes and take 15 minutes to reach Paddington station.
- › **Heathrow Connect** is a cheaper but slower train service departing from Terminals 1, 2 and 3 every 30 minutes and taking 25 minutes to reach Paddington.
- › The **London Underground** (or 'tube') is cheaper and slower still. Trains leave every ten minutes and take up to an hour to reach central London via the Piccadilly line. There are stations at Terminals 4 and 5, and a combined station for Terminals 1, 2 and 3.

- › **Buses and coaches** run to central London, other airports, some hotels, and stations on the national rail network.
- › Taxis leave from outside every terminal. Minicabs or private drivers can be pre-booked via minicabit.com or greentomatocars.com.
- › **Car hire** companies Hertz, Avis, Europcar, National, Alamo, Enterprise, Budget and Sixt all operate out of Heathrow.
- › Airport website: heathrowairport.com

London Gatwick Airport (LGW)

- › 45km south of CBD.
- › Trains leave from the South Terminal and can be reached from the North Terminal by free shuttle.
- › The **Gatwick Express** is the fastest way into central London. It leaves every 15 minutes and takes 30 minutes to reach Victoria station.



- › [Thameslink](#) runs to London Bridge, St Pancras International and Luton Airport.
 - › [Southern](#) runs to London Victoria via Clapham Junction and East Croydon.
 - › [Other train services](#) can take you to destinations outside of London, including Brighton, Southampton and Reading.
 - › Most buses leave from the South Terminal forecourt. Some also pick up passengers at the North Terminal.
 - › [Easybus](#) runs to Earls Court/West Brompton, London Victoria coach station and Waterloo train station.
 - › [National Express](#) runs to many locations including central London, Heathrow and Brighton.
 - › Taxis are available from both terminals. [Drivers](#) can be booked in advance.
 - › Car hire companies operating out of Gatwick include Hertz, Avis, Europcar, Sixt, National, Alamo, Enterprise and Budget.
 - › Airport website: gatwickairport.com
- Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG)**
- › 30km north of CBD.
 - › Taxis leave from outside all terminals. Expect a 15% surcharge if you're travelling at night, on a Sunday or on a public holiday. Check [here](#) for estimated fares.
 - › The airport has two train stations, one at Terminal 2, and another between Terminals 1 and 3 (with a free shuttle service). The [RER B train](#) links to central Paris and its suburbs.
 - › A range of [bus services](#) run to central Paris and surrounds, including a night bus and an express 'Magical Shuttle' to Disneyland Paris.
 - › A free rail shuttle connects all terminals.
 - › Car hire is available from Terminals 1 and 2. See the [airport website](#) for a list of operators, their location and their opening hours.
 - › Airport website: aeroportsdeparis.fr

Frankfurt Airport (FRA)

- 12km south of CBD.
- Taxis leave from outside both terminals. Journey time to central Frankfurt is 20-30 minutes.
- The airport has a regional and a long-distance train station, with services departing to central Frankfurt and its suburbs, as well as to other cities in Germany and Europe. See the [airport website](#) for information on timetables and ticketing.
- The [Lufthansa Airport Buses](#) run from Terminal 1 to a range of destinations. [Local buses](#) depart from outside both terminals.
- Car hire is available from both terminals. See the [airport website](#) for a list of operators, their location and their opening hours.
- [Car share](#) is available from Terminal 1.
- Airport website: frankfurt-airport.com

Amsterdam Schipol Airport (AMS)

- 20km south-west of CBD.
- Taxis leave from outside the terminal. The journey to central Amsterdam takes around 15 minutes.
- [Trains](#) leave from below the terminal. Services to central Amsterdam leave every 10 to 15 minutes (between 6:00am and 12:30am) and take 15 to 20 minutes.
- [International trains](#) depart from Schipol to various cities in Europe.
- A range of [bus services](#) leave from outside the terminal.
- [Car hire](#) desks are located at Schipol Plaza, directly behind Arrivals 3.
- Airport website: schiphol.nl

Key destinations and their airports

UK and Ireland	
Airport	Airport code
London Heathrow	LHR
London Gatwick	LGW
London Luton	LTN
Edinburgh Airport	EDI
Dublin Airport	DUB
France	
Airport	Airport code
Charles de Gaulle Airport - Paris	CDG
Paris Orly Airport	ORY

Germany	
Airport	Airport code
Frankfurt Airport	FRA
Berlin Tegel Airport	TXL
Berlin Schönefeld Airport	SXF
Munich Airport	MUC
Italy	
Airport	Airport code
Fiumicino Airport - Rome	FCO
Milano Malpensa Airport - Milan	MLP
Venice Marco Polo Airport	VCE
Spain	
Airport	Airport code
Madrid Barajas Airport	MAD
Barcelona El Prat Airport	BCN
Greece	
Airport	Airport code
Athens International Airport	ATH
Turkey	
Airport	Airport code
Istanbul Atatürk Airport	IST
Netherlands	
Airport	Airport code
Amsterdam Airport Schiphol	AMS
Switzerland	
Airport	Airport code
Zurich Airport	ZRH

Austria	
Airport	Airport code
Vienna International Airport	VIE
Denmark	
Airport	Airport code
Copenhagen Airport	CPH
Norway	
Airport	Airport code
Oslo Airport	OSL
Sweden	
Airport	Airport code
Stockholm Arlanda Airport	ARN
Finland	
Airport	Airport code
Helsinki Airport	HEL
Chzech Republic	
Airport	Airport code
Václav Havel Airport - Prague	PRG
Russia	
Airport	Airport code
Domodedovo International Airport – Moscow	DME
Sheremetyevo International Airport – Moscow	SVO
Pulkovo Airport – Saint Petersburg	LED

Getting around

Tip: Check if you need to pre-book any tickets.

Trains

One of the best ways to see Europe is from the comfort of a train carriage. The continent has an [extensive network](#) of slow-speed and high-speed trains connecting towns and cities and crossing international borders. Each country runs its own rail system and has its own processes for booking tickets, but the systems are mostly interconnected, so international rail travel is easy enough to organise.



For short-distance travel within a particular country, you can usually buy your ticket at the station. For long-distance and international journeys, it's usually best (or sometimes essential) to book in advance.

Tip: The German Railways website [bahn.de](#) is the best place to check timetables for train journeys all over Europe (it's zehr efficient!).

To buy tickets online, the standard way is to book via the rail website of the country/city you're travelling from.

Train booking websites by country

Country	Train site
UK	nationalrail.co.uk
Germany	bahn.de
France	voyages-sncf.com (see these tips on how to use the site, or simply use the less-complicated unofficial site capitainetrain.com)
Italy	trenitalia.com (see these tips on how to use the site.)
Spain	renfe.com (see these tips on how to use the site.) NB: The renfe site won't load for Australian Telstra Bigpond customers.
Switzerland	sbb.ch
Portugal	cp.pt
Netherlands	ns.nl
Belgium	b-rail.be
Luxembourg	cfl.lu
Austria	oebb.at
Denmark	dsb.dk
Sweden	sj.se (or bokatag.se)

Train booking websites by country	
Country	Train site
Norway	nsb.no
Finland	vr.fi
Czech Republic	cd.cz/eshop
Hungary	mav-start.hu
Romania	cfrcalatori.ro
Poland	intercity.pl

If you want to hunt down a bargain fare, [seat61.com](https://www.seat61.com) has a wealth of advice based on specific routes. This might mean booking via the website of your destination country rather than your departure country, booking on a certain date, or using a third-party booking site.

Most tickets won't allow you to hop on and off, so you'll need to book your journey in separate legs. The exception is the German [bahn.de](https://www.bahn.de) website, which allows you to book multi-leg tickets to, from or within Germany.

If a rail site won't accept your Australian credit card, or if you have a complicated itinerary and just want a simpler booking process, try a specialist site such as [raileurope.com](https://www.raileurope.com), [loco2.com](https://www.loco2.com) or the Australian travel agent [railbookers.com.au](https://www.railbookers.com.au).

If you plan to cover a lot of Europe by train, consider a [Eurail pass](https://www.eurail.com). They aren't cheap (you have to use them a lot to actually save money) but they do give you the freedom to hop on and off and really explore.

Tip: Eurail pass holders still need to book in advance to be sure of a seat.

If you're over 60 or under 26, you may be eligible for cheaper fares. However, many senior or youth fares

are simply a discounted version of the full-price ticket, so they often aren't as cheap as the advance-purchase discount fares available to everyone.

See [seat61.com](https://www.seat61.com) for more detailed advice on train travel in Europe, including recommended scenic trips, descriptions of train seats and carriages, advice on travelling with a wheelchair and much more.

Buses

Buses are rarely as comfortable or charismatic as trains, but they usually cost less – and of course they'll take you to many places that trains can't.



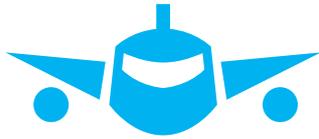
Bus tickets can usually be bought on the spot, except during peak times. To book in advance, search for fares on sites such as [eurolines.com](https://www.eurolines.com), [buseurope.eu](https://www.buseurope.eu) or [idbus.com](https://www.idbus.com), or if you know the name of the bus company operating the route, see if they have cheaper fares on their own site.

To compare the cost of bus, train and air travel, search at [goeuro.com](https://www.goeuro.com) (UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Switzerland).

Multi-trip bus passes give you a similar hop-on/hop-off freedom to Eurail passes, and for a much cheaper price. They're available from [eurolines.com](https://www.eurolines.com), [busabout.com](https://www.busabout.com), [europebuspass.com](https://www.europebuspass.com), [statravel.com](https://www.statravel.com), [au](https://www.au) and many more agencies.

Flights within Europe

If you don't have time to travel by land, a quick flight can zip you from one must-see city to another in a matter of hours, or even under an hour! Fares are often extremely low, thanks to competition from budget (though not always reliable) airlines such as [easyJet](#) and [Ryanair](#). Book via the airline's website, or compare fares through international booking sites such as [skyscanner.com](#) and [expedia.com](#). See our tips on using [airline booking websites](#).



Warning: Budget airlines often fly to secondary airports that may be a long way from your destination (they do this to save money on airport fees). For example, you might book cheap flights with Ryanair from London Stansted Airport to "Barcelona Girona Airport", only to find that Girona Airport is actually 115km from Barcelona.

Tip: If you're planning on taking a lot of flights in Europe and you prefer not to fly with budget airlines, consider a [Visit Europe Pass](#) from oneworld, or talk to a travel agent about similar multi-flight deals.

Ferries

With the boom in cheap flights, travelling by ferry in Europe isn't as common as it once was, but it's still the best way to cross channels and seas if you have a vehicle, or if you simply prefer to take the scenic route.

You can often buy tickets at the port, but if you're worried about missing out – particularly if you're travelling at a peak time, want a sleeping berth or need to take your vehicle on board – it's best to book ahead.

Once you know which ferry company runs the service



you need, it's worth shopping around for the cheapest deal. [ferrylines.com](#) is the most comprehensive European booking site, offering 1809 routes by 350 operators. For ferries from the UK, as well as some other routes in Europe, try [directferries.co.uk](#). For Greek island ferries, try [ferriesingreece.com](#). Or simply search on the ferry company's own website.

Tip: Train tickets can often be combined with ferry tickets (for example, London to Dublin can be booked as one fare via British Rail). Eurail passes also include some ferry services.

Cycling

Europe is one of the best places in the world to travel long distances by bicycle. The [EuroVelos](#) are a network of 14 signposted cycle routes, criss-crossing the continent for thousands of kilometres with bike-friendly accommodation and services along the way. The quality of these 'bicycle highways' varies from country to country, with the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Germany among the best, but in almost every part of Europe you'll find better and safer cycling infrastructure than in car-loving Australia.



Travel light with your own set of panniers and a map, or have a bike tour company organise your itinerary, transport your bags and even change your flat tyres for you.

Transport tip: [rome2rio.com](#) is a great resource for working out how to get from A to B by any means of transport, anywhere in the world.

Local transport

Getting around towns and cities is easily done on public transport, by taxi, by bicycle or on foot.

Obviously the taxi companies and their phone numbers change from country to country, but the taxi-ordering app [taxi.eu](#) covers more than 100 cities throughout Europe. The ever-expanding [Uber](#) network is also working its way into the European market, with more than 30 cities under its belt already.



Almost every city and town in Europe will have public transport information available online via a website or app. Just search for what you need, or add the appropriate apps to your phone before you go. Moovit ([Apple/Android](#)) is an international public transport planner app covering more than 500 cities worldwide.

Many European cities have bicycle share schemes. Some simply require a swipe of your credit card, but some others require you to apply for a membership card. Bike helmets aren't compulsory anywhere in Europe.

Car hire

Although Europe has some of the best public transport in the world, having your own car is a great way to get off the beaten track and travel on your own schedule. You'll find most of the major international car hire companies in Europe, as well as some local ones. If you're planning on picking up and dropping off in different locations, you're probably best off renting through one of the larger companies. International companies can also be easier to deal with if there's a dispute.



To compare car hire rates, use an international site such as [expedia.com](#) or [vroomvroomvroom.com](#), or a European site such as [autoeurope.com](#).

Tip: If you're planning to travel between countries,

explain your itinerary when you make your booking enquiry. Most companies allow their cars to be taken across borders, but some will refuse for insurance reasons and many will charge an additional fee. Some companies don't allow their cars on ferries, and some companies have restrictions on driving cars from Western Europe into Eastern Europe.

See our [car hire guide](#) for more tips.

Driving in Europe

Which side of the road?

In the UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta and Armenia, vehicles drive on the left-hand side of the road. In all other European countries, vehicles drive on the right.

Do I need an international driving permit?

Many European countries recognise Australian licences, but you'll need an [international driving permit](#) for Austria, Greece, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Turkey, Armenia,





Bulgaria, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania.

In some other countries it's recommended you carry an international permit, as it may be a requirement to rent a car. [See this advice from RACV.](#)

Road rules

Laws vary throughout Europe. The British AA has a list of [country-specific road rules](#) that you can check for the country (or countries) you'll be driving in.

- Drink-driving is illegal in all of Europe but the blood alcohol limit varies from .02% to .08%, depending on which country you're in.
- Almost all European countries prohibit the use of mobile phones, unless hands-free.
- Under EU law, a seat belt must be worn in any seat fitted with one.
- Rules about child seats vary, but the law is consistent across EU countries. [See this guide.](#)

➤ In France, all vehicles must carry a breathalyser. If you rent your car in France, it should be included.

➤ Some countries insist that cars carry a safety kit with a high-viz vest and reflective triangle for use at accident sites. Again, this should be included with your rental car.

Tolls and charges

There are plenty of toll roads across Europe (see [this map](#)), so consider an e-tag for your hire car.

Some European cities, such as London, Stockholm, Oslo and Bergen, impose a congestion charge to discourage driving in city centres.

Parking

Many European cities have pedestrianised city centres and discourage, or even ban, car traffic. The more central the area, the more expensive and hard to come by the parking will be. It's best to leave your car on the outskirts and see the city by foot, bicycle or public transport.

Accommodation and tours

Accommodation options in Europe are many and varied - from renting your own medieval castle to staying in B&Bs, holiday parks, hotels and hostels. And of course the price you'll pay will vary greatly depending on which country you're in and what time of year you're travelling.

During peak seasons (summer holidays and Christmas in particular) it's essential to book ahead. At other times, you may have more freedom to follow your nose.

You can book online through the usual sites such as [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) and [wotif.com](https://www.wotif.com), or try to get a better rate by contacting the hotel directly. Check [tripadvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com) for customer reviews before you book. If you're looking for a homestay or holiday house rental, [airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com) is widely used in many parts of Europe.

See our tips on [booking accommodation](#).

Tours can be arranged through a travel agent or online (try [contiki.com](https://www.contiki.com) or [intrepidtravel.com](https://www.intrepidtravel.com), or search for recommended tours on [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com) or [viator.com](https://www.viator.com)).

For the easiest option of all, consider a package deal from a travel agent such as [Flight Centre](#), which includes flights, transport, accommodation and sometimes even meals.

Self-drive holidays (or self-guided cycle holidays) give you the freedom to travel independently, but with your itinerary already set out for you and your bookings already made. Try [autotourseurope.com](https://www.autotourseurope.com) or [biketours.com](https://www.biketours.com) or search around for other recommended agents.

Consider waiting until you're in Europe to book day trips. If your schedule is flexible, you may want to check the weather forecast a few days in advance before committing to outdoor activities. You'll probably also find a greater choice of tours once you're in your destination than you would online. ■

