



Before You Go to Europe,
Just A Few Tips Regarding

What to Expect & Know About...

How many Euros should I bring to Italy? Will my credit card work? What type of clothes do you recommend? All of the questions are answered here and if we've left anything out - just let us know and we'll be happy to answer! *Buon Viaggi!*

Hotels & Accommodations

On your Story Land & Sea Tour, you will probably be staying in a four or five-star hotel – all truly in the centers of the towns and villages.

In Europe, you will find that the first floor is not the ground floor, as it is in America, but rather what we would call the second floor. Elevators are usually much smaller than in the States, so if you are claustrophobic, you may prefer to take the stairs. However, you should find your room in the deluxe hotels to be spacious and

comfortable, with high ceilings and large windows. And, to put you at ease, there should be at least one channel in English on the TV, such as CNN or the BBC.

You will generally find that extra towels, especially washcloths, can be in short supply, so you may want to pack a few just to have on hand. Also, don't be surprised to come back to your room at the end of your first day to find a white cloth spread out on the floor beside your bed. This may seem an odd custom, but it's merely so you have a place for your bare feet when you get out of bed.

Your deluxe hotel will serve a very nice breakfast in the mornings. You will probably want to arrange to meet your tour group so you can dine together. Generally, there will be eggs and bacon, pastries and croissants, fruit, juice, yogurt, and cereal. Coffee or tea may be brought to your table by a waiter unless otherwise specified.

When you leave your room at the beginning of each day, be sure not to leave valuables behind. Lock your luggage when unattended. If you do have valuables, such as money and jewelry, that need to be safeguarded, have them locked up by hotel management in advance of your departure for the day.

Your hotel will be situated in the city centre for easy access to most sites and other conveniences, but do remember that a certain amount of walking cannot be avoided.

The Money

Hands down, the best way to get cash in Europe is via the ATM. Memorize your Personal Identification Number (PIN) before leaving and plan on withdrawing euros (cash) for your purchases. Credit cards are the next best way to make purchases in Europe but not all locations accept them. Visa and MasterCard for sure are accepted with American Express a distant third and no one has ever heard of Discover.

A new product from Travelex called the Cash Passport is our best recommendation for the least amount of fees and a relatively easy way to get cash from ATMs as well as make purchases. There are very little to no fees associated with the Cash Passport. Find your nearest location at www.Travelex.com.

How much money to take with you? It's truly up to you. You know your habits and preferences and therefore we recommend using the ATM and/or credit card approach.

Should you get Euros before leaving the US? We recommend you visit your local bank and order about \$USD250-350 worth of Euros to take with you. This is just in case you get delayed somewhere in Europe while on route. Of course your credit card will work fine in most establishments.

VAT

About the VAT – Value Added Tax

Every year, tourists visiting Europe leave behind millions of dollars of refundable sales taxes. While for some, the headache of collecting the refund is not worth the few dollars at stake, if you do any serious shopping, it's hard cash — free and easy. The process isn't difficult; you just have to get the necessary documents from the retailer, carry your purchase with you, and track down the right folks at the airport, port, or border when you leave. These days you've got to check in early at the airport; this will give you something to do while you're hanging around. The standard European Union Value-Added Tax ranges from 15 to 25 percent per country, averaging about 20 percent overall. Rates change, so you'll want to check with merchants when you're there.

The Documents. When you make your purchase, have the merchant fill out the necessary refund document, called a "cheque." You'll need to present your passport. Make sure the paperwork is done before you leave the store so there's nothing important missing. If they leave any blanks for you to fill out, be sure you understand what goes where. Attach your receipt to the form and stash it in a safe place.

Know where to get your refund. If you buy merchandise in a European Union country and you're bringing the goods home with you, process your documents at your last stop in the EU, regardless of where you made your purchases. So if you buy sweaters in Denmark, pants in France, and shoes in Italy, and you're flying home from Greece, get your documents stamped in Athens. Be aware that if the currencies are different in the country where you made your purchase and where you process your refund you may have to pay an extra conversion fee.

Get your documents stamped. The customs export officer will stamp your documents after you present your purchased goods to verify that you are, indeed, exporting your purchase (try to keep the goods in your carry-on).

Collect the Cash. Once you get your form stamped by customs, you'll need to return it to the retailer or its representative at the airport, port, or border crossing. If the retailer handles VAT refunds directly, it's up to you to contact the merchant for your refund. You can mail the documents from home, or quicker, from your point of departure (using a stamped, addressed envelope you've prepared or one that's been provided by the merchant) — and then wait. It could take months, so be advised.

Clothing Recommendations

Lightweight cottons and linens are worn during the summer. Select a wardrobe that is adaptable and allows for layering. Men can wear jackets at dinner but they are not a requirement. You should include a sweater, a jacket and/or windbreaker, and of course comfortable walking shoes. The best way to experience this vacation is to walk! We recommend a walking regimen on a daily basis prior to leaving the US!

Gear that Will Come in Handy There are some items that are just a necessity on such a trip as this: Your digital camera, collapsible umbrella or some raingear and a bathing suit in your packing. Also, be sure to bring along comfortable, worn-in, walking shoes. Did we mention we walk a lot in this tour? If you have any mobility issues, don't worry. Your tour captain has been notified and will assist you in securing extra transfers via taxis and shuttles should you need them (at your own expense).

Getting Around

When needed, you will be met at your hotel in the morning by your tour bus, usually a large van or mini motor coach, and your local tour guide. You will rely on them primarily for transfers to your next destination, or day trips away from town. Otherwise, you will meet your local guide at a location within walking distance of your hotel. And, unless you are engaged in a group activity, you are free to get around as you wish. Do not allow yourself to get distracted by looking around. Keep a clever, watchful eye on traffic at all times.

It's a Walking Experience!

Yes, be prepared to do a good deal of walking throughout the trip – it truly is the only way to explore – so comfortable shoes are in order! Once you get to your destination by transport, you will still be walking a lot to see places. A little exercise routine prior to your trip is not a bad idea just to get in shape. It will only improve your overall experience.

As far as amenities go, you will usually find modern toilet facilities readily available in the large cities. However, as you get out into the countryside and smaller communities, amenities can be substandard. You may find a ceramic —hole in the ground to be the best toilet facility you can find, so be prepared for that event should it come. When you have to go, you have to go!

Safety

Security is always a key factor when traveling abroad, but especially so in a post-9/11 world. Everyone in your group should be conscious of the need for safety. Whether you are flying or traveling on the ground, do whatever you can to deflect attention away from yourself. Dress in clothes that do not scream —I am an American!! T-shirts and ball caps emblazoned with American logos are not recommended. White sneakers and Hawaiian shirts are also a bad idea. You want to be comfortable, but think European or Continental as much as possible. Shorts and flip flops are also not recommended. Aside from the factor of calling attention to yourself, most Europeans dress very nicely, so you will see few of them dressed in such a casual manner.

Always keep an eye out for anything that looks suspicious, and report it to your tour captain or the local authorities. Do not alarm your fellow travelers, but do keep an eye out for one another. In the highly unlikely event you should find yourself in a security situation, remain calm and do not call attention to yourself. Only take extreme measures as a very last resort. It's not a fun topic, but safety is paramount.

Our Story Land & Sea Guides

One of the great features of a Story Land & Sea Tour is the wealth of knowledge and experience you will get from your local tour guides, who work with your Tour Captain to make sure you have a great experience. These are people who live in the area and make their living by showing you around their city and country. They may even give you hints or tips about great places to eat or shop on your downtime. You will come to appreciate these people for the great professionals they are, and you will remember them fondly when you look back at your vacation photos. So, treat them with the courtesy and respect they deserve. They will do the same for you. And while all base tips are included in your tour, you may wish to go beyond that to show your individual appreciation.

Phones

Will your cell phone work in Europe? Maybe. If you have a GSM cell phone (GSM explained: Global System for Mobile Communications - is a type of cell phone and network used in Europe and most countries in the world.

Call your provider and ask. If not, then we suggest purchasing a European SIM card and replacing your SIM card contained in your current phone. However, there can be catches! Read on:

SIM CARDS

Some US cell phone companies use GSM (T-Mobile, AT&T), but many do not. You need a GSM phone in Europe. These are sometimes called "World Phones" because they can be used around the world. In the United Kingdom, a cell phone is called a "mobile phone" for use in the US or Canada - you can use that same phone if it is unlocked and works on European frequencies - this is very important and is explained here:

How to Choose Your GSM Cell Phone (http://www.slowtrav.com/europe/cell_phones.htm#choose)

Most cell phone providers in the US and Canada lock their cell phones (also in the United Kingdom). This means that you cannot change the SIM card. They do this so that you will not get an inexpensive phone from them and then change your cell service. If you plan to use your GSM cell phone in Europe, with a European SIM card, be sure your phone is unlocked. Either buy an unlocked phone from here (http://www.slowtrav.com/europe/cell_phones.htm), or ask your cell provider to unlock the phone or get the phone unlocked another way. Each company has a different policy for unlocking a phone you bought through them. Remove your US/Canada SIM card and put in a European SIM card. You can purchase a European SIM card in Europe or online from one of these companies listed above.

Next option is to buy a Vodafone in upon arrival – your tour captain can assist you!

Electrical in Europe: Converters

Yes, you will need an electrical adapter/converter to use your American volt appliances. WalMart® or Target® feature affordable converters. Make sure you are getting the correct one for the part of Europe or destination you are visiting.

Restaurants & Dining

During your Story Land & Sea Tour you will have a certain number of meals that are provided for you, but there will be times when you are free to go wherever you like. On nights that a meal is not provided for you, you will be invited to go with your Tour Captain to a local restaurant. However, if you choose to go it alone, stay away from chain-type establishments. Instead, opt for the local experience. If you are uncertain, ask your hotel clerk to recommend a good place that's close by. Stick with a —ristorantell or —osterial for your evening meal.

Rest stops along the highway can have a nice choice of sandwiches and other fare. Some even have a wonderful selection of hot, home cooked meals. Don't be surprised, however, if you have to stand in rest stops or coffee shops along the way.

When visiting restroom establishments, you will sometimes find that the restroom is cared for by an attendant. They may sit outside the door with a plate or dish and expect to receive a small tip. A few small coins will do, but don't feel overly pressured to tip. If it feels appropriate to tip, please do so.

Keep all receipts. A Revenue Official may ask to see your receipt within feet of an eating establishment to make sure you've paid. You can potentially be fined if you cannot produce it.

Shopping

You will find local open-air markets to be some of the best places to shop for a bargain. For gentlemen, setting a little money aside for a hand-tailored suit can be a worthy investment, or ladies might like to have a pair of shoes designed especially for their feet and shipped home. Otherwise, it doesn't make a lot of sense to waste money on t-shirts, sunglasses, and other items that can easily be purchased at home. Spend the money on lodging and dining out instead. But if shopping for that special item is your thing, enjoy yourself. Just ask your Tour Captain to set some time aside for your shopping pleasure.

And Now the Weather

It's warm all over Europe in spring, summer and fall; it can be very hot in the south, especially inland. The high temperatures (measured in Europe in degrees Celsius) begin typically in May, often lasting until sometime in October. Winters in the north are cold, with rain and snow, but in the south the weather is warm all year, averaging 50°F (10°C) in winter. For the most part, it's drier than in North America, so high temperatures don't seem as bad because the humidity is lower. In the south, temperatures can stay in the 90s°F (30s°C) for days, but nights are most often comfortably cooler.

Mail in Europe

Your Tour Captain and the hotel concierge can assist with any items needing to be mailed or shipped.

Other Helpful Stuff

The customary gratuity to local guides and drivers is already included in your Story Land & Sea Tour. Additional gratuities should be extended on a voluntary, individual basis and not as a group. Personal Expenses such as phone calls, room service, alcoholic and bar beverages, laundry, airline excess luggage charges, visa fees and other optional incidental extras are not included and may be significant.

Itinerary Changes & Price Flexibility

Story Land & Sea Tours pledges to make every effort to operate all tours as advertised. Story Land & Sea Tours reserves the right to alter or curtail the itinerary, or substitute sightseeing, ports, hotels, and/or conveyances as deemed necessary. Any savings realized by these changes will be refunded to passengers. Any resultant added expense will be covered by Story Land & Sea Tours.

Travel Document Requirements

U.S. citizens will need a passport which will remain valid for 6 months after your return to the United States. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter Europe. Non-U.S. citizens should contact the country's embassy or consulate to determine if visas are required to enter Europe. NOTE: Be sure to check the expiration of your passport. New passports and visas may take several weeks to obtain.

European Climate Control

European air conditioning should be considered as a climate-control system; most have three settings for the fan, plus a "cool" setting. Very few of the European systems actually have a temperature setting. In general, the amount of cool air that is produced from a European air conditioning system is far less than what you may have in your living environment.

Luggage & Handling through Customs

Due to space limitations aboard motor coaches and airlines on certain flights, only one average-size piece of luggage per person, weighing up to 50 pounds, is allowed. Luggage exceeding these restrictions is at risk of being left behind, or, if permitted on board, may be subject to additional excess luggage charges. Regulations within most airports require that travelers handle their own luggage through customs.

Need to bring a second bag with you on tour that you would like portaged? There is a fee of \$USD119 per extra bag per person and must be paid in advance or by credit card while on tour.

With the above information under your belt, you should be on your way to a great experience in Europe. Of course, there will be many things you will discover on your own during your trip that may enhance the overall experience. If you feel you have something valuable to share with future tour groups, please let your Story Land & Sea representative know upon your return.