

Getting Started

One of the great joys of travel in Western Europe is that you can plan as much or as little as you want. Some people will have a must-see list of sights they will feel cheated if they miss. Others will go with the flow and let their moods and experiences shape their journey. Neither is the better way to go and many people will combine aspects of both. They'll have a realistic idea of what they can accomplish while still having the freedom to take a detour on a whim.

Planning also helps you figure out how much you'll spend and when is the best time to travel for the sort of trip you want.

WHEN TO GO

Any time can be the best time to visit Western Europe, depending on what you want to see and do. Summer lasts roughly from June to September and offers the best weather for outdoor pursuits in the northern half of Europe. In the southern half (Mediterranean coast, Iberian Peninsula, southern Italy and Greece), where the summers tend to be hotter, you can extend that period by one or even two months either way, when temperatures may also be more agreeable.

You won't be the only tourist in Western Europe during the summer months – all of France and Italy, for instance, go on holiday in August. Prices can be high, accommodation fully booked and the sights packed. You'll find much better deals – and far fewer crowds – in the shoulder seasons on either side of summer; in April and May, for instance, flowers are in bloom and the weather can be surprisingly mild, and nice weather can stretch past September into October.

On the other hand, if you're keen on winter sports, resorts in the Alps and the Pyrenees begin operating in late November and move into full swing after the New Year, closing down when the snow begins to melt in March or even April.

The Climate and When to Go sections in individual country chapters explain what to expect and when to expect it, and the climate charts (p1100) will help you compare the weather in different destinations. As a rule, spring and autumn tend to be wetter and windier than summer and winter. The temperate maritime climate along the Atlantic is relatively wet all year, with moderate extremes in temperature. The Mediterranean coast is hotter and drier, with most rainfall occurring during the mild winter. The continental climate in eastern Germany and the Alps tends to have much stronger extremes in weather between summer and winter.

When summer and winter are mentioned throughout this book we generally mean high (May to September) and low (October to April) tourist seasons.

You might want to time your trip to coincide with a major local festival or celebration – see the list in this chapter and those in the individual country chapters for details. Or if it's your first trip to Europe, you might want to list the European icons that have inspired your trip and make certain you see them.

COSTS & MONEY

One of the big questions when travelling is 'how much money will I need?' Luckily, in this day of the euro (€), travellers won't have to fiddle with changing money at every border crossing. However, this doesn't necessarily

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mean prices are comparable throughout Western Europe. Expect your money to be stretched in noneuro countries like Switzerland and the UK, and in capital cities. Backpackers eating street meals and sleeping in hostels can expect to pay from about €40 per day. Midrange travellers eating in cafés and sleeping in hotels should allow a daily budget starting from €100. Travellers opting for full-course restaurant meals and resort-style accommodation, expect to pay from €200 and right on up. Day passes on public transport average €4 in cities. Renting a car costs €25 to €70 per day. See the Transport in Western Europe chapter for more details.

Tips on stretching your money include picking up local magazines and newspapers and looking for coupons and discounts on attractions and dining out (most museums have a 'free' day once a week/month; many restaurants have 'fixed-price menus' that are half the usual price). Search the web for packages; these can be especially good for families, as can family admission rates. Look for discount cards sold by tourist offices.

A combination of credit or cash card and travellers cheques is recommended so you have something to fall back on if an ATM swallows your card or the banks are closed. Credit cards are widely accepted throughout Western Europe, and you'll find ATMs in all but the tiniest of villages. Travellers cheques (see p1107) are exchangeable in major cities at banks and *bureaux de change*. It's a good idea to travel with some local currency in cash; the equivalent of, say, US\$100 should usually be enough.

READING UP

Half the fun of going on a trip can be in the preparation. Certainly you should read a few books to both get you in the mood and get a grounding in what life is like in the places you're visiting. You'll also find no end of experiences and resources on the web.

Books

European travelogue classics include the *Provence* series by Peter Mayle and Frances Mayes' *Under the Tuscan Sun*, but you may well find that

half the other people you meet have read these as well. There are plenty of classics that intrepid travellers feel compelled to buy. James Joyce's *Ulysses* comes to mind, although you can have many a fun conversation in Dublin pubs asking people if they have ever finished it. And *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown is part travelogue, part fantasy and part exercise in bad writing.

You can do better. The country chapters in this book all have excellent recommendations. Additionally, here are some titles that can't help but get you starting a countdown for your trip. These titles are recommended by the authors of this book and will make great companions on any trip.

- *Bollocks to Alton Towers* (Jason Hazeley et al) A celebration of eccentric Britain and places like Eden Ostrich World and the Cumberland Pencil Museum.
- *The Great Beers of Belgium* (Michael Jackson) One of the world's best beer writers details all that Belgium has to offer.
- *Stasiland* (Anna Funder) A fascinating investigation into the secret police of East Germany with chilling accounts of their victims.
- *The World from Italy: Football, Food & Politics* (George Negus) Noted Aussie journalist spends a year on sabbatical in Italy.
- *A Moveable Feast* (Ernest Hemingway) A deeply personal and affectionate account of life as an expat in Paris in the 1920s.
- *Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe* (Bill Bryson) The best-selling author retraces his journey as a backpacker 20 years before. Things have changed, his back aches.
- *McCarthy's Bar* (Peter McCarthy) A truly funny and original writer ventures to the west of Ireland and drinks in every bar bearing his surname.
- *A Time of Gifts* (Patrick Leigh Fermor) This gifted writer paints a picture of 1933 Europe in words as he travels across it on foot.

Websites

The Internet is a rich resource for travellers. You can research your trip, hunt down bargain air fares, book hotels, check weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit. For a list of country-specific websites, see Tourist Information in each country chapter.

Airline Information (www.skyscanner.net) What budget airlines in Europe fly where, when and for how much.

Currency Conversions (www.xe.net/ucc) Exchange rates for hundreds of currencies worldwide.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Here you'll find succinct summaries on travelling to most places on earth, postcards from other travellers, and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Train Information (www.seat61.com) Tons of information about getting around Europe by train. Great descriptions of various journeys.

Travel Planning (www.travelpete.com) Big and fun site with travel information for Europe.

MUST-SEE MOVIES

- *A Lisbon Story* Directed by Wim Wenders, this fascinating quasi documentary is about a day in the life of a movie soundman wandering the streets, trying to salvage a film that's been abandoned by the director.
- *All About My Mother* (p931) Pedàl Almodovar's heart-warming film about life, love and transvestites, in which a woman searches for the secret to her past in Barcelona.
- *Amélie* (p288) An utterly charming Parisian fairytale.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Pack less than you want as you'll buy more along the way. Besides it's Western Europe and you can buy anything you forget there. Also make darn sure that your bag is easy and comfortable to haul about, whether it's a backpack or has a shoulder strap. If you're under 30 and use something with wheels, you've just defined 'daggy' and/or 'dork'. Otherwise, consider the following:

- sandals or thongs (flip-flops) for when the weather is great
- raincoat, waterproof jacket or umbrella – it will rain
- sewing kit – all that beer and chocolate lead to burst seams
- padlock – for hostel lockers
- good pair of earplugs
- alarm clock – so you don't miss the morning train
- menu phrasebook – so you don't just order boring stuff or get an offal surprise
- favourite brand of sunscreen
- favourite brand of mosquito repellent
- map – so you can show new friends where you come from
- extra duffel bag to deploy when you buy more than you planned

Check out the website www.americangirlsareeasy.com. Written by two American women, the motto says it all: 'How to find a man in Europe and leave him there.'

- *The Icicle Thief* This farce sends up classic film *The Bicycle Thief* as it skewers modern Italian life in Rome and elsewhere.
- *Good Bye Lenin!* (p424) Sweet comedy where Berliners pretend the wall never fell.
- *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* Excellent but forgotten James Bond caper with Blofeld hiding out in the Alps above Interlaken.
- *Roman Holiday* Director William Wyler sends Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn on a fun-filled romp.
- *The Third Man* (p67) Just try to get the theme song from this Orson Welles classic, shot and set in post-war Vienna, out of your head.
- *Trainspotting* (p146) Scrappy Scottish heroin junkie eventually chooses life. Great soundtrack and gritty London scenes.
- *Turks Fruit* (p846) Directed by Paul Verhoeven, this is one of the Netherlands' most famous flicks. A Bohemian sculptor learns about life in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

TOP FIVE FESTIVALS

Europe has no shortage of festivals that are worth a trip. Many are outlined in the country chapters. Here's five that you won't want to miss.

Cannes Film Festival (p394) The famous, not-so-famous and the merely topless converge on the Mediterranean for a year's worth of movies in only a week.

Edinburgh International Festival (p247) Three weeks of innovative and fantastic drama, comedy, dance, music and more from around the globe.

Notting Hill Carnival (p165) Over 100 languages are spoken in London's schools and at this massive multicultural street fair you'll see why.

Oktoberfest (p477) Germany's biggest beerfest takes over Munich.

San Fermin (aka 'Running of the Bulls'; p987) Huge male bovines and the people who want to be close to them invade Pamplona.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

As a visitor, you have a responsibility to the local people and to the environment. When it comes to the environment, the key rules are to preserve

natural resources and to leave the countryside as you find it. Those Alpine flowers look much better on the mountainside than squashed in your pocket (and many species are protected anyway).

- Wherever you are, littering is irresponsible and offensive. Mountain areas have fragile ecosystems, so stick to prepared paths whenever possible, and always carry your rubbish away with you.
- Do not use detergents or toothpaste (even if they are listed as biodegradable) in or close to any watercourses.
- If you just gotta go when you're out in the wilderness somewhere, bury human waste in holes at least 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse.
- It's always good to know a few handy phrases, such as 'please', 'thank you' and 'where is...?' in the local language – you'll be addressed more cordially and the locals really do appreciate your efforts.
- Recycling is an important issue, especially in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, and you will be encouraged to follow suit. Look for bins with multiple receptacles.
- Traffic congestion on the roads is a major problem, so visitors will do themselves and residents a favour if they forgo driving and use public transport.

CONDUCT IN EUROPE

Although dress standards are fairly informal in northern Europe, your clothes may well have some bearing on how you're treated in southern Europe.

Dress casually, but keep your clothes clean, and ensure sufficient body cover (eg shoulders covered and wear trousers or a knee-length dress) if your sightseeing includes churches, monasteries, synagogues or mosques.

Some nightclubs and fancy restaurants may refuse entry to people wearing jeans or sneakers (trainers).

While nude bathing is usually restricted to certain beaches, topless bathing is very common in many parts of Europe. Nevertheless, women shouldn't immediately drop top. The basic rule is that if nobody else seems to be doing it, then you shouldn't either.

You'll soon notice that Europeans are heavily into shaking hands and even kissing when they greet one another. Don't worry about the latter with those you don't know well, but get into the habit of shaking hands with virtually everyone you meet. In many parts of Europe it's also customary to greet the proprietor when entering a shop, café or a quiet bar, and also to say goodbye when you leave.

Use common courtesy. It's very easy to be another 'ugly ____' (insert your nationality here) by talking louder than everyone else, taking flash photos where not allowed, yakking on a mobile phone in quiet places, putting your dirty shoes on train seats, proclaiming you're a Philistine with comments like 'we got a bigger one of those at home' etc.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

This 8000km-plus trek hits all the hot spots, providing a technicolour postcard selection to write home about. You could do it in one month – barely – but if you want to fully experience what Western Europe has to offer, take two.

THE ULTIMATE EUROPEAN VACATION

One to Two Months

Have limited time but want to see a bit of everything? Start in **Dublin** (p652) and sample the vibrant pubs and traditional Irish craic. From Ireland, either take a ferry to **Liverpool** (p235) or a flight to **London** (p151) for some great theatre. From London, take the Eurostar train to **Paris** (p291).

From Paris, head north to **Antwerp** (p121) for some amazing beer, and then further north to **Amsterdam** (p850), not forgetting to ride a canal boat. Head east, stopping for a Rhine cruise, and spend a few days exploring (and surviving) the amazing nightlife of **Berlin** (p428). Next, **Vienna** (p59) beckons with its classical music riches. From here, head west to **Zürich** (p1070) and the Alps for awe-inspiring ski slopes and vistas.

Head south to the canals of **Venice** (p752) and through **Florence** (p769) in Tuscany to historic **Rome** (p716). Take a ferry to **Athens** (p561), and then explore an island with beaches such as **Rhodes** (p615). Head back to the south of France and Mediterranean towns like **Nice** (p389). Continue on to **Barcelona** (p963), before heading to the Moorish towns of the south like **Granada** (p1016). End your trip in laid-back **Lisbon** (p889), and enjoy a glass of local port wine to celebrate completing your grand journey!



MEDITERRANEAN JOURNEY

Two Months

Start in southern Spain with a hint of British flavour in **Gibraltar** (p1026), where you can view the only wild primates in Europe. Make your way up the eastern coast past the Moorish town of **Málaga** (p1020) and on to **Valencia** (p992), where you can take a ferry to the **Balearic Islands** (p999).

Back on the mainland, **Barcelona** (p963) is a beautiful Basque town, filled with the architecture of Gaudí. From here, head into France's **Provence region** (p380) and the town of **Marseille** (p380), where you can see the fortress that was the inspiration for the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. On to the **Côte d'Azur** (p388), and the playground for the rich and famous, **St Tropez** (p397). A quick stop in the capital of the French Riviera, **Nice** (p389), makes a good jumping-off point for other Riviera hot spots like **Cannes** (p394).

Take a ferry to **Corsica** (p403), where you'll experience the traditional lifestyle of quiet fishing villages. Hit the snowy peaks at **Calvi** (p405) and the groves of **Les Calanques** (p406), before hopping down to **Sardinia** (p809). From Sardinia, take a long ferry ride or a quick flight to **Sicily** (p800) to visit its colossal Greek temples and the famous volcano, **Mt Etna** (p806).

Catch a ferry to **Naples** (p786) on Italian mainland and take a trip to **Pompeii** (p792). Move east to **Brindisi** (p798) for a ferry to Greece, landing in **Patra** (p574). Head to **Athens** (p561) to wonder at its ancient treasures before getting a plane or ferry to islands such as **Crete** (p606) and **Mykonos** (p588). Retrace your steps back to Italy. Head north to **Rome** (p716), allowing time to wander amid its ruins and piazzas. Continue through Tuscany, stopping at **Pisa** (p777) to see the famous 'leaning tower'. Finish up along the Ligurian coast in the port city of **Genoa** (p740) via the coastal towns that make up the **Cinque Terre** (p742), where you can stroll along the Via dell'Amore.

Blue skies, azure waters and white beaches are among the colours you'll see on this approximately 4000km-long sun-drenched journey around the Mediterranean. Ancient ruins, grape-covered hillsides, foam-filled clubs and lots of tan lines are among the sights you'll see.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

Everyone goes to London, Paris and Rome, but take a detour off the beaten path and you'll experience places that really embody the character of their countries. Don't expect them to be tourist-free – nowhere worth-while truly is – but do expect to be surprised and charmed on this 6000km trip.

EUROPE'S OTHER PLACES One to Two Months

The far north of Ireland is rugged and uncrowded; base yourself in **Donegal** (p690). Head over to the often misunderstood yet very welcoming Northern Ireland – **Belfast** (p691) in particular. Traverse the single-track roads of the far north of Scotland around **Durness** (p263) with its bogs and brogue. Next head south to the gritty yet charming town of **Newcastle-upon-Tyne** (p228) in England and catch the ferry to the Netherlands. **Rotterdam** (p867) combines splendid modern architecture with convivial charm. Go east to the old East Germany where the cities of **Dresden** (p448) and **Leipzig** (p453) are creating a new future from their historic pasts. Linger in the hikeable **Harz Mountains** (p464) before you go far south to the temperate Swiss town of **Lugano** (p1066). Traverse Italy and the hidden gem of **Mantua** (p749) followed by beautiful Umbria and towns such as **Perugia** (p781). In the south, take time to wander frenetic **Naples** (p786) and the ruin-filled **Amalfi Coast** (p795) before pressing on to **Sicily** (p800) and its rich culture.

Fly or ferry to Greece and enjoy some of the less-visited islands such as **Naxos** (p600) or **Lesvos** (p624). Return to Italy and the spiffed-up town of **Turin** (p743). Crossing to France, **Carcassonne** (p401) has a rich medieval past and great food. Head across the Iberian Peninsula to the Basque city of **Bilbao** (p986) and the pilgrimage shrine of **Santiago de Compostela** (p990). Finally, return to France and the rural beauty of **Brittany** (p333).



TAILORED TRIPS

EUROPE ON A JAG

Cheap flights and fast trains mean that you can have a maximum adrenaline trip in a minimum amount of time – say two weeks or less. Start at party-central **Mallorca** (p1000) in Spain's Balearic Islands, then fly cheap to Spain's late night and early morning capital of **Madrid** (p933). From here hop a plane to **London** (p151), where you can save money on a room by never sleeping – there's that much to do (and the new drinking laws let you do it). Ride the new fast tracks through the tunnel to **Paris** (p291), where the pace may be a tad slower than London but both the food and drink are better. Take the TGV train to **Marseille** (p380) for its gritty nightlife and then over to Europe's capital of style, **Milan** (p745). Take a cheap flight to the buzzing avenues of **Vienna** (p59) and then get back in the air to **Munich** (p473) with its beer gardens and clubs. Zip on an ICE train to **Berlin** (p428), which is easily the apex of the adrenaline lifestyle. More ICes will zap you over to **Amsterdam** (p850), where though the pace is slower, the vibe is even wilder, and you can settle in and decide where to zip off to next.



WORLD HERITAGE WONDERS

Western Europe's World Heritage (Unesco) sites, both manmade and natural, often evoke an audible gasp from awestruck travellers. In Ireland, marvel at **Brú na Bóinne** (p663), neolithic tombs that predate Egypt's pyramids by more than six centuries. Step lightly over the geometric patterns of the **Giant's Causeway** (p697) in Northern Ireland. See how far the Roman Empire stretched in Britain at **Hadrian's Wall** (p231). Spend a day at the magnificent 13th-century **Cathédrale Notre Dame de Chartres** (p313) in France and admire one of the world's largest ensembles of medieval stained glass. Climb 366 steps for the breathtaking view from Bruges' famous **belfry** (p129) or check out the Netherlands' Kinderdijk region in summer to see all 19 **windmills** (p870) twirl simultaneously. Roam the ramparts in Switzerland's beautiful castle city, **Bellinzona** (p1064), or spend an afternoon wandering through the Old Town's **fortifications** (p833) in Luxembourg City. In Germany explore the **Roman ruins** (p508) in Trier. In Italy don't miss **Pompeii** (p792) and its eternally stoned patiers. Stroll through lavish gardens and the 1440-room Habsburg palace, **Schloss Schönbrunn** (p66), near Vienna. In Greece the ancient city of **Delphi** (p580) is a must-see. Finally, gape at the towering aqueducts in **Segovia** (p954) and **Tomar** (p911).



Snapshots

CURRENT EVENTS

Western Europe long thought of itself as the heart of Europe and in a way it was. This is where the hard political decisions were made after two world wars in one century to form the genesis of today's European Union. But as that Union has come to embrace much of the rest of Europe, what about the original core?

It's safe to say that almost every country in Western Europe is in some form of crisis right now, whether it is political, cultural, economic or something else. But of course this being Europe, crisis is merely a concept. Bad as things get, you can still have a good meal washed down with a fine drink and think about your next weekend jaunt to a beautiful place.

After almost 10 years of Tony Blair, Britain is wondering when he will go and whether he and George Bush really are the best of friends. Meanwhile there's new extended drinking hours, which could turn pub life on its head. Across the sea, Ireland has become a magnet for foreigners and the once homogeneous culture is for the first time confronting immigration rather than emigration issues. France is grappling with social upheaval brought on by disenfranchised youth of all races.

Germany got its first woman chancellor in 2005 and is obsessed with an economy stuck in neutral. Italy couldn't shake its wacky former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi even after he lost an election. Greece is wondering where the gloss went after the 2004 Olympics, and Spain is wondering if the cease-fire announced by Basque terrorist groups will really put an end to this deadly chapter.

Together, the Western Europe countries are casting a seemingly welcoming yet wary eye on the many new members of the EU in the east. How many people will seize the chance to move west, where scores are already out of work? And the European Constitution seems dead in the water after it couldn't pass in France and other countries.

Meanwhile there's even greater concerns: what will all those new antismoking laws do to a night out, and just who will win the Euro Cup football championship in 2008, held in Austria and Switzerland?

And amidst it all, travel to Western Europe has never been more popular. For a place so often overrun with outsiders snapping pics and talking too loud, it's amazingly welcoming and accommodating. Perhaps this is because Western Europeans are such good travellers themselves. Everybody is talking about their weekend trip on a bargain airline and the new high-speed train lines that open every year. Further – literally – if there's one thing Europeans are sacrosanct about right now, it's their long annual holidays.

HISTORY

'In the beginning, there was no Europe,' writes Professor Norman Davies in *Europe: A History*. In the beginning, all that existed was an unpopulated peninsula attached to the western edge of the world's largest landmass (Asia). But after humanoid settlers arrived between 850,000 and 700,000 BC, Europe's temperate climate and unthreatening environment would make it the cradle of agriculture and the birthplace of great civilisations such as Greece and Rome.

Greece (first emerging around 2000 BC) was renowned for its philosophers (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates) and democratic principles. Rome –

boasting brilliant politicians, and writers like Cicero, Ovid and Virgil – spread its influence by military might. At its peak, the Roman Empire stretched from England to the Sahara and from Spain to Persia.

By the 4th century AD, both empires were in terminal decline. Greece had been swallowed by Macedonia's Alexander the Great, then by Rome itself in AD 146. Although Roman emperors in Constantinople hung on for another 1000 years, the empire's western half was toppled by Germanic tribes in 476.

This marked the start of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. In 788 conquering king Charlemagne grandly named his lands the 'Holy Roman Empire'. After this territory passed into the hands of Austrian Habsburgs in the 13th century, it became the continent's dominant political power. Elsewhere, an alliance of Christian nations repeatedly sent troops to reclaim the Holy Land from Islamic control. These unsuccessful 'Crusades' (1096–1291) unfortunately set the stage for centuries of skirmishes with the neighbouring Ottoman Empire as it took control of Asia Minor and parts of the Balkans from 1453 onwards.

Europe's grand reawakening also began in the mid-15th century, and the subsequent Renaissance, Reformation and French Revolution ushered in enormous social upheaval.

The Renaissance fomented mainly artistic expression and ideas (see p38). The Reformation was a question of religion. Challenging Catholic 'corruption' in 1517, German theologian Martin Luther established a breakaway branch of Christianity, Protestantism. Struggles between Catholics and Protestants flared during the Thirty Years' War (1618–48).

The French Revolution in 1789 was about political power, specifically the populace's attempt to wrest it from the monarchy. But in the ensuing vacuum, plucky general Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) crowned himself emperor. Napoleon's efforts to colonise all of Europe ended in defeat by the British at Waterloo in 1815, but the civil laws he introduced in France in 1804 would spread the revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality across the globe.

Having vanquished Napoleon, Britain became a major world player itself. With the invention of the steam engine, railways and factories, it unleashed the Industrial Revolution. Needing markets for goods, it and other European powers accelerated their colonisation of countries around the world, a process that had begun in the 16th century.

Meanwhile, the death throes of the Habsburg Empire (now called the Austro-Hungarian Empire) were about to rock the entire continent. Serbia was accused of backing the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in 1914 and the battle between the two states developed into WWI. Crippled by a huge bill for reparations imposed at the war's end in 1918, Austria's humbled ally, Germany, proved susceptible to politician Adolf Hitler's nationalist rhetoric during the 1930s. Other nations watched as Nazi Germany annexed Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, but its invasion of Poland in 1939 sparked WWII. During the final liberation of Europe in 1945, Allied troops from Britain, France, the USA and the USSR uncovered the full extent of the genocide that had occurred in Hitler's concentration camps for Jews, Roma (gypsies) and other 'degenerates'.

The Allies carved out spheres of influence on the continent, and Germany was divided to avoid its rising up again militarily. Differences in ideology between the Western powers and the communist USSR soon led to a stand-off. The USSR closed off its assigned sectors – East Germany, East Berlin and much of Eastern Europe – behind the figurative Iron Curtain.

Of the top 10 most visited countries in the world, five are in Western Europe (in order: France, Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany).

During the infamous Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella tried to unite their country politically behind a Catholic national identity. Jews, Muslims and Protestants were systematically exiled or persecuted or both.

Thomas Crapper is widely credited with inventing the flush toilet, however many plumbing historians would eliminate his honour and instead make Englishman Sir John Harrington flush with pride for his efforts in 1596.

This 'Cold War' lasted until 1989, when the Berlin Wall finally fell. Germany was unified in 1990 and one year later the USSR was dissolved. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria grasped multi-party democracy.

The end of the Cold War brought a sense of peace to Europe and allowed for great expansion of the European Union. Formed in 1951 as a trade alliance in Western Europe, the EU now has 25 members, including newcomers in the east. The west however still sets the course: this is where the common currency, the euro, was launched in 2002.

PEOPLE

The population of the 15 countries covered in this book is about 370 million. That figure is not expected to increase greatly in the coming years as collectively, the population of Western Europe is not growing. This is primarily due to low birth rates in places like Italy where it is common for married couples to only have one – very spoilt – child. Germany and France also have low birth rates and governments have responded with various tax incentives to inspire procreation – a romantic notion for sure. Only Ireland shows signs of significant population growth over the next few decades.

In fact Western Europe could well lose 20% of its population by 2050 if present trends continue. This adds yet another twist to the debate over immigration. Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and nearby parts of Asia are all growing rapidly and there are millions who would move to Western Europe given the chance.

RELIGION

Ironically, although they weren't particularly fond of them at the outset and fed early believers to the lions, the Romans did much to spread Christianity. Not only did this minority religion go with the Roman Empire as it spread across Europe, eventually Rome performed an about face; in AD 313 Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made it Rome's official religion.

When the Roman Empire fell in the west, the church's existing independent hierarchy of popes often assumed state power. In 1054 the church split over a theological debate on the Roman Catholic Church, which spread through most of Western Europe, as well as the Eastern Orthodox, in Asia Minor. The Roman Catholic Church dominated political, artistic and cultural life in Europe for nearly 500 years until the Protestant Reformation in the 1520s. Inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther, parts of Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary and England broke away from Rome, adopting Protestant tenets that assumed a variety of subjects (Lutherans, Evangelicals, Episcopalians).

Today traditionally Catholic countries like France have a large Muslim minority thanks to immigration from former African colonies. However, Islam (emerging in Saudi Arabia in the 7th century) has had a permanent presence in Europe and North Africa since the 12th century. That is due largely to military conquest, particularly of Spain and the Balkans.

ARTS

Western Europe and art are synonymous. All forms of creative work have a rich heritage here and, with the help of state support not found elsewhere (even after budget cuts), thrive today. For details about the vast array of trends and styles see the relevant country chapters.

The Dutch on average are Europe's tallest people, the Greeks the shortest.

A favourite toast among Catalans is 'Eat well and shit hard'. Conversely there's a whole school of comedy in Germany based on breaking wind.

The Irish refer to strangers and friends alike as 'your man', as in 'Ask your man over there.' The English refer to someone as 'mate' for any manner of reasons, from kinship to threats.

Visual Arts

Today it's considered slightly politically incorrect to promote Europe as 'the cradle of Western civilisation', but the continent's legacy to the world unquestionably includes some renowned paintings, as well as a fascinating array of philosophies.

After the prolific creativity of ancient Greek and Roman culture, the continent went through a fallow period – a kind of communal artistic block – during the early Middle Ages. Times were hard, mere survival was difficult enough and the church, the leading patron of the arts, wanted religious icons not realism.

But then in the 15th century a sea change occurred and European art came storming back with the Renaissance. The movement began slowly in the Italian city-states of Florence and Venice, with the rediscovery of Greco-Roman culture. Then it spread further afield over the next several centuries.

Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti led the Italian Renaissance, spurred on by Jan Van Eyck and other Flemish masters who led the Northern Renaissance in art.

The baroque period that followed in the 17th century, defined by Rembrandt and Peter Paul Rubens' ornate portraits, was also influenced by classic ideals. During the 18th century, Romantic painters (such as Eugène Delacroix and Francisco de Goya) chose exultant political themes of liberty and great battles that eclipsed in reverence the old Christian allegories.

The late-19th-century impressionists (including Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet and Pierre Auguste Renoir) progressively moved away from realism, depicting ordinary people (instead of royalty) pursuing ordinary pursuits and using small disjointed brushstrokes to create an 'impression' of subject and light. Their work segued into that of their successors, like Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

Then in the 20th century came the Fauvists and the cubists. The Fauvists used colour to suggest figures and motion and are probably best represented by Henri Matisse. Among the cubists was one Pablo Picasso, who went on to become almost a one-man art movement, abandoning perspective and drawing heavily on African and other native art to forge a style of wholly modernist painting. Following generations stripped away more elements of reality. In the 1930s René Magritte, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Alberto Giacometti visually explored dream themes and the subconscious. Sculpture was escorted into modernity by Auguste Rodin and later by Constantin Brancusi.

Contemporary European art often rebels against the barriers of 'good taste', using shock and wit as tools for making statements on politics, sexuality and social issues. Artists such as Germany's Katharina Fritsch,

Ode to Joy, the choral finale to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, uses words by poet Friedrich Schiller to espouse universal brotherhood and has been adopted as the official EU anthem.

Over 50 years old, the Eurovision Song Contest is watched by at least 300 million TV viewers annually. ABBA is still its best-known winner (in 1974).

TEN CLASSIC EUROPEAN NOVELS

- *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy (1877)
- *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1838)
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)
- *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust (1913)
- *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann (1912)
- *The Outsider* by Albert Camus (1942)
- *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1605)
- *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (1925)
- *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert (1857)
- *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1904)

with her sculpture (*Rat-King*) of 13m-tall black rats, Britain's Jenny Saville with her immense nude portraits, and Mark Quinn, known for his self-portrait sculpture made of his own refrigerated blood, are just a few examples.

Literature

In the pantheon of European storytellers, the Greek epic poets (including Homer), dramatists (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) and philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) occupy revered positions. Rome's dominance of the continent impressed Latin as the voice of learning and literature (namely Virgil's *Aenid* and Plutarch's histories) until Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*), Miguel de Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) and Dante Alighieri (*La Divina Commedia*), among others, fashioned their native tongues into epics.

Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1450, which was to contribute to the spread of ideas during the Renaissance and the following Enlightenment (1650–1789), the so-called 'Age of Reason'. During this period, science and human logic for the first time took supremacy over religious belief as big-hitters like Voltaire (prorationalism) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (somewhat anti-) traded ideas across the divide.

The period building up to the Enlightenment was also a period of unbridled creativity in mathematics (Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Blaise Pascal), political theory (Niccolò Machiavelli) and theatre and poetry (William Shakespeare, Molière, John Milton).

With the advent of the machine age, the Romantics (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Aleksander Pushkin, Lord George Gordon Byron, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley) bemoaned the severed ties with nature and looked to ancient Greece for guidance. Henrik Ibsen and Charles Baudelaire were also eminent literary figures in the 19th century. Here too, at the front door of modernity, philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche dismantled the absolutes of morality and reality, and Sigmund Freud's theories opened a lid on the subconscious.

The modern age saw the rise of the novel, from the character-driven stories of George Eliot, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Thomas Mann to the literary experiments of James Joyce. In 1960s France, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were the two leading lights of the existentialist movement. Many contemporary writers (like VS Naipul, Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi) wrestle with such modern problems as straddling two cultures, escaping political persecution, and balancing love and desire.

Meanwhile, as always, the British have a thriving publishing industry, with profits led by JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* juggernaut.

SPORT

The running joke is that the English now regularly lose in sports they invented. This phenomenon is not just confined to cricket, where no other European country fields a national side, but extends to the continent's most popular pastime, football (soccer). England claims, perhaps tenuously, to be the birthplace of the 'beautiful game', because the rules were standardised here in the 19th century. However, England hasn't won a major tournament with a round football since 1966.

If 'football's coming home' is the fan's perennial catch cry, in 2006 it did, at least in the sense that the World Cup was held across Germany. There are major teams across Western Europe such as Manchester United and Arsenal in Britain, and AC Milan and Real Madrid in Spain. National

TOP SPORTS WEBSITES

For more information on Euro sports, check out the following:

- Union of European Football Associations (UEFA; www.uefa.com)
- Wimbledon (www.wimbledon.org)
- French Tennis Open (www.rolandgarros.org)
- Tour de France (www.letour.fr)
- Skiing & Snowboarding World Cups (www.fis-ski.com)

leagues play the same season from October to May. In 2008 the UEFA Cup, known as the Euro Cup, will be held in Austria and Switzerland. To the surprise of many, Greece is the defending champ from 2004.

Although the English also devised tennis, their players continually struggle – even on home turf at Wimbledon in London every June. Here, Swiss, Russians, Belgians and Americans dominate. The French Open, Roland Garros, is held in Paris at the end of May. At least the English have fared better in rugby in recent years, where other heavyweight European teams are France, Ireland and Wales.

In 2004 the Olympics returned to its historic home, Athens (where they were first held in 776 BC). In 2012 they will be held in London, which beat out Paris and New York for the honour.

Another huge draw is the annual Tour de France cycling race every July, newly competitive with the retirement of American Lance Armstrong.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

In between the Baltic Sea and the spine of the Alps lies the European Plain, one of the greatest uninterrupted expanses on earth, stretching from the Pyrenees and the Atlantic coast to the Ural Mountains in Russia. This arable region of grassland and dense forests drains into the Rhine, Danube and Main.

Belting the centre of Europe, the Alps were carved by the retreating glaciers as ice ages passed and stretch from France to the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe. Mont Blanc is Europe's tallest mountain at 4807m, followed by the Matterhorn at 4478m.

In the southern range is the Mediterranean area, with ready access to the sea and running along a volcanic range that was most active between 1628 BC (Thera) and AD 79 (Vesuvio), although Europe's largest live volcano, Mt Etna in Sicily, erupted most recently in 2001. The land is rocky and exhausted from mismanagement, although olive trees, cypresses and grape vines thrive.

Wildlife & Plants

With its dense populations and centuries of development, Western Europe is not a place to expect to find an abundance of unusual wildlife or undisturbed natural vistas.

The Mediterranean forests are a range of cultivated corks (providing three-quarters of the world's cork supply) and holm oaks, cedars and pines, as well as olive trees. The Mediterranean Sea has the world's second-highest percentage of native species, including the endangered monk seal. The Adriatic Sea shelters underwater pastures of the *Posidonia* seagrass, which is abundant with commercial fish.

Europudding: Under-whelming pan-European film or TV show, often financed by state grants

Eurotrash: Kitschy, sex-obsessed, trailer-trash TV show of deliberately doubtful taste

Euroseptic: Opponent, often rabid, of the EU and further integration

Lisbon's 1755 earthquake is about the largest ever recorded. It is thought that it would have registered 8.9 on today's Richter scale. Italy is also prone to earthquakes, especially in the volcanically active south.

Europe has experienced 17 ice ages through its geologic history.

The Carpathians are considered one of the last refuges of wilderness with healthy populations of brown bear, wolf and lynx. Imperial eagle and Ural owl, species that have all but disappeared elsewhere. The last population of Iberian lynx lives in the southwestern corner of Spain and Portugal.

The northern Atlantic Ocean and North Sea provide unique habitats for sharks, seals and migratory birds. Rich blankets of kelp, seagrass and cold-water coral reefs also inhabit the chilly waters.

Environmental Issues

Name all the big environmental problems related to heavily populated areas and Western Europe suffers from them. Air and water pollution from industry are high in many regions, and approximately over half of Europe has been deforested. Rivers have been dammed or straightened, resulting in destruction of wetlands, floodplains and forests, and in more loss of wildlife habitat. The once-abundant Mediterranean Sea has been overfished and its role as a popular tourist destination puts additional stress on limited resources, like fresh water and open space. Homes and hotels crowd more than half the Mediterranean coast, clawing over each other for a water view.

Global warming is taking a toll and is responsible for heatwaves that have caused a dramatic increase in wildfires along the Mediterranean. According to the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences, Switzerland's glaciers have retreated by up to 200m already this century, causing landslides and the creation of new lake accumulations in the valleys.

This said, most of Western Europe has embraced an environmental agenda. Recycling is found in almost every country – especially in Germany where it is taken to great and carefully sorted lengths. Water treatment plants are being built and have done much to improve the quality of rivers such as the Rhine. There's societal pressure as well, particularly in Britain where initiatives such as carbon replacement have become popular.

FOOD & DRINK

Europeans take great pride in their different regional cuisines and it's no exaggeration to call the best of them exemplary. When modern nutritionists want to encourage us to adopt a healthy diet, the word we hear is 'Mediterranean'. After all, the fresh vegetables, seafood, olive oil, garlic and red wine ritually consumed on the Med supposedly reduce heart-disease risk, help keep depression at bay and generally prolong life.

Even if you don't give a damn about your health, it's no sacrifice to eat like this, tucking into grilled sardines in Portugal, enjoying a fresh paella dish of seafood and rice in Spain, or snacking on vegetable, meat and seafood tapas. Surely sharing in the Spanish love of ham can't hurt too much either?

Pasta generally tastes better in Italy, its country of origin, where home-made noodles are dished up with deliciously creamy sauces or cooked with oodles of garlic and tomatoes that have frequently just been picked. Each region has its own distinctive pasta (from *ziti* in Naples to *orecchiette* in Apulia). They know the right way to make pizza and polenta here too, and rustic Italian cooking also boasts healthy and tasty ingredients like truffles and white beans.

When the subject moves on to French cuisine our nutritionists get confused. How can all the elaborate recipes, meat and rich cream sauces that define classic *haute cuisine* be good for the arteries? Yet the French have long dined on steak tartare, *coq au vin*, duck confit and goose-liver

pâté without apparent harm. Indeed, they relish a mind-boggling array of cheeses – from the Normandy region's famous Camembert to the Dordogne's blue-veined Roquefort – and have a penchant for sweet crepes. Yet still they manage to have a low rate of heart disease.

The answer to this 'French paradox' lies not in the occasional foray into ratatouille (vegetable stew) or bouillabaisse (a seafood stew from Marseille), but in the national habit of enjoying a glass of red wine nightly. Quite right, too, with such excellent choices at their doorstep – from the busy Bordeaux and cocky Côte du Rhône reds to a bouquet of Loire Valley varietals.

Modern Germans might have learnt to cut back just a little on the wurst (sausages) and smoked pork of their traditional cuisine, but both dishes are still prominent. Just try to have only a couple of the addictive Nuremberg sausages.

Other European regions have their own specialties: the Swiss are known for fondue, *rösti*, chocolate and cheese. The Belgians are renowned for their cuisine in general, including mussels and chips, chocolate and hundreds of varieties of beer. Greece has a penchant for lamb (such as in the *gyros* skewer), tangy cheeses like feta or *haloumi*, yogurt, hummus, eggplant (aubergine) and olives, all followed by honey-sweet baklava for dessert.

British food probably has the worst 'meat and three veg' reputation, and in parts of the country it's still unfortunately deserved. However, the larger cities boast just about every ethnic cuisine, and London, in particular, is awash with world-class chefs. Here even old comfort food like bangers and mash or fish and chips are often given new twists (say, merguez sausages with mustard mash). If in doubt, order a curry. Its links to the Indian subcontinent mean this is something at which Britain excels.

Finally, of course, Europe is a brilliant spot for an alcoholic tittle, from the French wines and Belgian beers already mentioned to German *Weissbier* ('white' wheat beer), Italian reds and Greece's aniseed liquor ouzo. We'll leave you to explore that subject yourself.

Germany's favourite fast food is the *Doner*, spiced meat served in pita bread. It came to Germany with the scores of Turkish immigrants in the 1970s. The Dutch like raw herring on a stick.

In much of Spain if you show up at a restaurant before 11pm you'll find it almost empty. The real rush is near midnight. Meanwhile in the colder parts of Western Europe, you'd best be seated and ordering by 8pm.

In many Belgian bars you can choose from hundreds of beers, each served in its own unique glass with a little snack such as cheese. Spanish wine bars often serve dozens of snacks.

Over 350 cheeses are made in France (the three biggies are Camembert, Brie and Roquefort). Germany has almost as many varieties of sausages.

The Authors



RYAN VER BERKMOES

Coordinating Author, Destination,

Getting Started, Itineraries, Snapshot, Directory, Transport & Germany

Ryan Ver Berkmoes once lived in Germany. He spent three years in Frankfurt, during which time he edited a magazine until he got a chance for a new career with Lonely Planet. One of his first jobs was working on the Germany chapter of the 4th edition of this very book. Since then he's travelled the world as a writer for LP and others, but was more than happy to return to Germany for this book. Fortunately he won't have to worry about withdrawal from German beer as he lives in Portland, Oregon – one of the world's great beer cities.

The Coordinating Author's Favourite Trip

Tough call this one, as I love almost every part of Western Europe. Here are a few places that have captured my heart: Wales (p264), for its little villages and lonely hikes; London (p151), lived there and loved it; Paris (p291), for annual café time; Amsterdam (p850), because there's so much more than the hash joints beloved by amateurs; Maastricht (p877), a beautiful, fun town in the country of my ancestors; Bamberg (p484), another picturesque, lively place; the Alps in the Jungfrau Region (p1081), where you can kick back and watch avalanches; most places in Italy, especially Rome (p716), the pesto of Genoa (p740); and finally, the magnificent south of Spain with Granada (p1016) and Córdoba (p1013).



AARON ANDERSON

Austria

Aaron was first drawn to Austria when his Western Europe travels were temporarily suspended by an extended stopover in Mayrhofen, Tirol. He became so happy with the alpine lifestyle and serenity that he took on a part-time job wrenching on bikes to help make the experience last longer. A month quickly turned into a year of living it up and garnering an appreciation for everything Austrian. He is based in Boulder, Colorado, and enjoys Saturdays at home with his girlfriend (also a Lonely Planet author), and dog (not an LP author...yet), loves anything outdoors, wears a mohawk in the summertime, and isn't afraid to sport a handlebar moustache. When not travelling the world, he works part-time in a friend's microbrewery as a professional brewer.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the Internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



SARAH ANDREWS

Spain

An American now based in Barcelona, Sarah has been using travel writing as an excuse to get to know her adopted country since 2000. For this guide, she got to revisit some of her favourite spots in Spain, including the Ganbara tapas bar in San Sebastián, the Reina Sofia temple of art in Madrid, and Calella, the prettiest town on the Costa Brava. Sarah has written about Spain for several Lonely Planet guides.



OLIVER BERRY

France

Oliver graduated from University College London with a degree in English and now works as a writer and photographer in Cornwall and London. His first trip to France was at the tender age of two, and subsequent travels have carried him from the streets of Paris to the Alpine mountains and from the vineyards of southern France to the chestnut forests of Corsica. For this book he had the enviable job of updating the France chapter. He is a regular contributor to various film, music and travel publications and has won several awards for his writing, including the *Guardian* Young Travel Writer of the Year.



BECCA BLOND

Switzerland & Liechtenstein

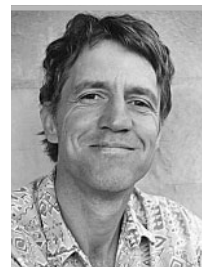
Becca and Switzerland became acquainted at an early age – she was born in Geneva. Although she moved to the States when she was a toddler, her American parents didn't let her forget the country. She has slightly embarrassing childhood memories of wearing traditional Swiss alpine dresses to holiday functions and fonder ones of trying to feed local goats during family vacations in the Swiss Alps. These early holidays inspired Becca's desire to travel. When she realised the monotony of a nine-to-five job was not something she could live with, she swapped newspaper reporting on rock stars and homicides for wandering the world for Lonely Planet. When not on the road she calls Boulder, Colorado home.



TERRY CARTER

Greece

Terry's first visit to Greece was with a Greek-Australian friend returning to his local village in Rhodes for their annual festival. He quickly learnt that even the coolest Greek guys only need a couple of ouzos for the inner *zeimbekiko* dancer to surface. While still preferring to play the Turkish *saz* to the bouzouki, he now has a clear understanding on how making Greek coffee differs from brewing Turkish coffee. When not dreaming of hiding away in Monemvasia with a few good books, Terry is a freelance writer and photographer based nowhere in particular.



GEERT COLE

Belgium & Luxembourg

Geert's one of those few Belgians who was born without a brick in his stomach, as the local saying goes. An avid traveller since his late teens, he combed continents for years before discovering that only one nation on earth is founded on beer, chocolate and chips. It's good to be home! Back in Antwerp one time, Geert met partner, Leanne, whom he enticed with all the great things in life that Belgians accept as everyday. In return, Leanne offered Geert life amongst the wallabies in Australia. The pair now enjoys the best of both worlds with their two little daughters in tow.



LARA DUNSTON

Greece

Lara has degrees in cinema, communications, international studies and screenwriting, and a career that's embraced writing, filmmaking, media education and now travel writing – motivated by journeys to 55 countries. Lara first visited Greece eight years ago and has made countless trips since – one with her frappé-loving mother in tow! While her idea of fun in Greece was basking on a beach in Symi or leaning over the edge of an infinity pool in Santorini, after this research trip she's fallen in love with the wildlife and wildflowers of northern and central Greece, and is now mad about the Mani.



DUNCAN GARWOOD

Italy

After years of watching Italian football on TV, Duncan moved to the Adriatic port town of Bari in 1997. Two years later he moved to Rome, where he's been ever since. An Italian speaker and enthusiastic follower of the nation's convoluted politics, he's spent much of the past six years travelling up and down the peninsula for Lonely Planet. He's contributed to various LP Italy guides, including a guide to Piedmont, whose capital, Turin, he rates as one of Italy's great unsung destinations.



SARAH JOHNSTONE

Germany

Sarah Johnstone is a freelance journalist based in London. She hates author bios and wishes the editors would stop asking for them. Having studied German (and journalism) at university, worked for employers from news agency Reuters to business travel magazines, and done an MSc at the London School of Economics, she's spent the last few years dutifully traipsing back and forth across Europe for Lonely Planet.

**JOHN LEE****Britain**

Born in leafy St Albans, a swift train ride from London, John came to Canada's west coast to study in 1993 and never left. After taking a long-dreamed-of trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway, he became a full-time freelance travel writer. Now specialising in stories about Canada and the UK, his work has appeared in dozens of major newspapers and magazines around the world. He returns 'home' to Britain several times a year to feast on Marmite, Yorkie bars and cheese-and-onion crisps.

**ALEX LEVITON****Italy**

This is Alex's fourth time in Italy for Lonely Planet, leaving her usual haunt of Umbria to explore Rome and the south. She's now a big fan. Alex has returned almost annually to Italy since accidentally discovering it in 1998, and has been known to take seven-hour Italian train journeys to nowhere in particular for fun. After graduating UC Berkeley with a master's degree in journalism in 2002, she has split her time between Durham, North Carolina and San Francisco, California, with as much time as possible in Perugia, Italy.

**LEANNE LOGAN****Belgium**

Leanne's first taste of Belgium was a cone of mayonnaise-smothered *frites* (chips) which, at the grand age of 12, she was instructed to eat using a tiny wooden fork without getting her fingers dirty. Some ask. Many years later she left her job as a journalist in Australia to try that again. En route around Belgium and Luxembourg for Lonely Planet, she not only mastered the dextrous art of devouring chips but also developed an appetite for both beer and chocolate and love for a Flemish man. Fifteen years later and a dozen times around both countries, Leanne is introducing her half-Flemish daughters to all the fine things Belgium offers – including finger-licking *frites*.

**VIRGINIA MAXWELL****Spain**

Before taking to the road to write a host of guidebooks to the Middle East, Virginia worked as a publishing manager at Lonely Planet's head office in Melbourne, Australia. She travels with her partner Peter and young son Max, and is usually found somewhere between Istanbul and Cairo, only occasionally veering off course to investigate rewarding destinations such as Spain.

**CRAIG MCLACHLAN****Greece**

A Kiwi with a bad case of wanderlust, Craig enjoys nothing more than visiting the Greek Isles to down Mythos beer, *retsina* and to consume countless gyros. Describing himself as a 'freelance anything', Craig runs an outdoor activity company in Queenstown, New Zealand in the southern hemisphere summer, then heads north for the winter, working for Lonely Planet and leading tours to Greece and Switzerland. Other jobs have included pilot, hiking guide, interpreter and karate instructor. A self-confessed 'island-lover', Craig once walked the length of Japan (3200km) and says that the islands of Greece and Okinawa are his top spots for a holiday.

**JOSEPHINE QUINTERO****Portugal**

Josephine started travelling with a backpack and guitar in the late '60s. Further travels took her to Kuwait where she was held hostage during the Iraq invasion. Josephine moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía, Spain shortly thereafter, from where she has enjoyed exploring neighbouring Portugal, delighting in the differences between the two countries and enjoying her daily quota of *vinho verde* and custard tarts.

**MILES RODDIS****Andorra**

Living in Valencia, on Spain's Mediterranean coast, Miles loses count of the times he's nipped up to Andorra for a ski holiday or walking break – though never, ever to shop. Andorra marks the starting point for the 23-day Pyrenean Traverse described in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Spain*, a route he's twice trekked with enormous satisfaction. Miles has contributed to over 25 Lonely Planet titles, including guides, both general and walking, about Spain and France, Andorra's immediate neighbours.

**STUART SCHUFFMAN****Ireland**

Stuart's writing career began when he self-published *Broke-Ass Stuart's Guide to Living Cheaply in San Francisco*, which somehow snowballed into him writing about Ireland for Lonely Planet (something his doctor has subsequently called 'a two month bender'). Luckily for him, he has a penchant for Guinness, good whiskey and fried food, so he managed to fit in perfectly. He currently lives in beautiful San Francisco, and occasionally wakes up craving real Irish black-and-white pudding.

**SIMON SELLARS****The Netherlands**

Simon Sellars has been fascinated by the Netherlands ever since he was old enough to fashion his own Dutch oven. He wishes Dutch film director Paul Verhoeven would stop mucking about and make another dystopian sci-fi blockbuster – preferably starring Rutger Hauer.

**ANDREW STONE****Britain**

Brought up in southern England, and educated in part in Wales (where he attended journalism college), Andrew has tramped over much of the rest of the UK in his 30-something years. His favourite area remains Scotland, where he has been holidaying on student backpacking jaunts, boating and fishing trips, city breaks and walking holidays since the 1980s. His big hope is that one day someone comes up with a deterrent for the bloodthirsty Scottish midge that actually works. Andrew, who updated the Northern England, Wales and Scotland sections of the Britain chapter for this edition, has contributed to several Lonely Planet guides, including the previous two editions of Western Europe.