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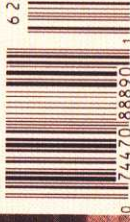
# Trips

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# 4

## LEUVEN, BELGIUM

On your way from the liberal bars in Amsterdam to the liberating beaches of the Riviera, plan a two-day trip to Leuven. Known as the Beer Capital of Belgium, the university town outside of Brussels hosts many of the country's estimated 325 fine libations. You'll make many friends during your stay, including Stella Artois, Trappist, Jupiler, Duvel and Maes. Get to know them in the 14th-century Gothic confines of the Old Market, where the 20-odd bars and their lighthearted connoisseurs will welcome you with open taps. Give the bartender a nod at either the Orient or the Peylkoker, then rejoice in the Kingdom of Beer.

When you stumble out on the cobblestone streets, add these spots to your itinerary (all within walking distance): the Brewery Artois and the Domestic Brewery Domus (tours by appointment); the Municipal Beer Museum in the spired town hall; The Shrink bar for stout beer and live music; the Smoldersplein stand for the best Belgian waffles in the world; Erasmus for a huge, cheap, tasty bowl of spaghetti; Sedes and Alma II for cafeteria meal-deals; The Frituur on Tiensestraat for mayonnaise-and-ketchup-topped fries (the fourth best in Belgium); the 13th-century Groot Begijnhof for a step back in time and, by all means, don't leave Leuven without trying the potent beer from the abbeys—the best brews in town.

—Kevin Cochran



### FRUGAL FLIGHTS

Just because it's the high season in Europe doesn't mean you have to blow a bundle getting there. By shopping around for the cheapest ticket, you can save hundreds of dollars—enough to pay for a few extra weeks abroad.

Some of the best bargains this summer are the nonstop charter flights from Los Angeles to Paris on Tuesdays (\$249) and Fridays (\$299). The charters also depart from Las Vegas, Oakland, Orlando, Boston and Miami. Call STA Travel (310/394-5126 or 800/777-0112) for more prices and information.

### GUIDEBOOKS

Though no doubt the best article you've ever laid eyes on, this 10-page nugget won't get you through a few months abroad. You need a good guidebook to save precious time and money.

Before making a purchase, get a rough idea about where you'll be. If you're only traveling through one region, buy a more detailed guide to that part of the continent. But if you plan to drain your Eurail for all its worth, look into the comprehensive Europe guides. The best options include:

**Let's Go!** The perennial favorites. Written by Harvard students, these guides are excellent for practical info—transportation, changing money, laundromat locations and cheap places to stay. The one drawback to Let's Go! books is that everyone and her brother are carrying these things, so all the spots they list are bombarded by Americans.

**Berkeley Guides:** The West Coast's answer to Let's Go!, the Berkeley Guides are hip, brash and extremely politically correct. A bit rougher and even more bargain-oriented than their Harvard counterparts, these books are an excellent source for getting off the beaten path and saving serious cash once you're there.

**Lonely Planet:** The expert on pretty much every other part of the world, Lonely Planet just started publishing Western Europe books five years ago. The company doesn't offer one "Europe" guide, but its *Western Europe*, *Mediterranean Europe*, *Central Europe* and *Scandinavian/Baltic Europe* books contain excellent advice, history and culture for independent travelers on a range of budgets.

**Rough Guides:** A British series designed to fit between the penny-pinching student guides and the "grown-up" guides. The books are great for culture and current events, but they're not as detailed or practical as the pinchers. Because they're British, they'll take you farther from the hordes of Americans than the U.S. books.

**Rick Steves:** *Europe Through the Back Door* is a good itinerary planner for travelers unconcerned with saving a penny at every turn. It's a budget guide, but not as "budget" as the student books.

# 5

## MALTA

What's the oldest freestanding manmade structure in the world? Stonehenge? Go back a few thousand years. The Pyramids?

Off by a millennium. The oldest freestanding manmade structure is, of course, the Temple of Hagar Qim in Malta.

Primarily known for a falcon statue in a Bogart movie, Malta is a tiny country 40 miles south of Sicily. Undiscovered by Americans, the island nation is inexpensive and chock-full of interesting sites and English pubs. Malta attractions include the impressive capital city of Valletta (a fortress that remains essentially unchanged since the 1500s), the ancient walled city of Mdina, colorful fishing harbors and, of course, Hagar Qim. Malta also offers quiet beaches and roaring discos.

Most travelers arrive in Malta from Sicily. High-speed catamarans run in the summer for about \$100 round trip. Once you're there, rely on the comprehensive bus system. The island is so small that the longest ride is only about an hour. Stay in Sliema at the Hibernia House, a former college dorm offering everything from bunk beds for \$10 to a private room with bathroom and kitchen for \$40.

—Brad Boyle





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## PATARA, TURKEY

Despite Western myth, Santa Claus' home was not in the North Pole. In fact, it's reasonable to assume that St. Nick never even saw snow. He did have a beard

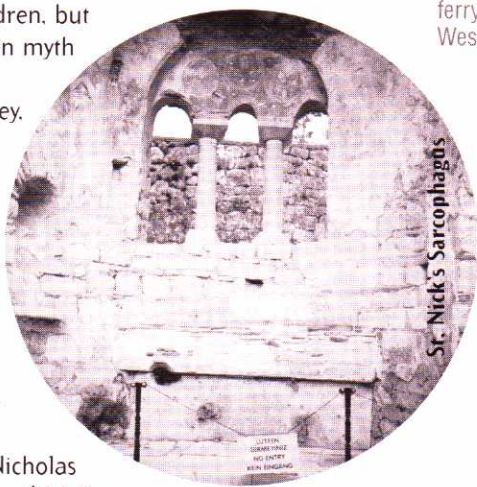
and allegedly gave presents to children, but that's where the similarities between myth and reality end.

St. Nick was born in Patara, Turkey, around 4 BC. Once the Roman seat of government in Lycia, an ancient Turkish civilization, Patara is now a sleepy coastal town with the finest beach on the Mediterranean—18 kilometers long with no development. The beach costs 50,000 Turkish lira (about \$1) to enter, and the fee includes the impressive Lycian ruins.

If you visit Patara, stay at the St. Nicholas Pension (where else?). It costs about \$11 for a double with a private bathroom, hot shower and screens on the windows. You'll find it at the only real intersection in town, to the left as you arrive.

A couple of hours up the coast lies Myra, where St. Nick lived his adult life and his sarcophagus lies in a church. His bones (really) are still farther up the coast in the Antalya Museum. For next to nothing you can reach these sites and just about anywhere else in Turkey by bus. Simply show up at the station (*otogar*) and announce your destination.

—Brad Boyle



## SOUTH OF SPAIN

Read Jennifer Adams' "Map to Morocco" article (pg. 34) and go there. Just a couple of hours from Spain by ferry, Morocco is easy to get to and much cheaper than Western Europe.

### TRAIN TIP

Eurail, the most popular pass on the planet, facilitates travel in 17 countries throughout Europe. You can purchase unlimited passes for 15-day, 21-day, one-month, two-month and three-month intervals, with discounts offered to travelers under 26 and groups of three or more. Eurail also offers a Flexipass, which cuts prices by limiting the number of travel days. For example, a 15-day pass allows travel for any 15 days within two months (the days need not be consecutive). This version costs \$812 for adults and \$588 for "children" under 26 (compared to \$1148 and \$798 for the unlimited two-month passes). You must buy all Eurail Passes in the States. Call your travel agent for more info.

# 16

## EVASION BEAUJOLAIS, FRANCE

In southern France, among mountains, vineyards and lakes, lies Evasion Beaujolais, a stone farmhouse where the three French passions of wine, food and cycling meet. Just a one-hour drive from Lyon, the inn is surrounded by 150 miles of biking trails, classed by degree of difficulty. (Mountain bikes rent for about \$16-\$33 a day.) The meals are delicious, the wine superb, and the rooms cost just \$10 a night per person. If there are six in your party, you can even rent one of the two chalets. Contact Evasion Beaujolais: 33/74-020684, or fax: 33/74-020329.

—Dee Dokus

Everything revolves around Salamanca's social and spiritual hub, the Plaza Mayor, which some consider Spain's most stunning. It's where evenings begin, with a meeting of friends under the huge clock, and also end, with the same group weaving its way home after a night on the town.

But Salamanca is more than just an endless party. The city features some of Spain's most historic and beautiful monuments, including Casa de las Conchas (with reliefs of conch shells on the walls), the old and new cathedrals and the ornate university wall. Nightly from Friday through Sunday, the buildings are lit up with floodlights, making evening strolls a brilliant experience.

Many people stop in Salamanca for a weekend, then wind up staying for a summer. With more than 200 Spanish-language schools, the city seduces students from Holland, Japan, Taiwan, France, Italy, Wales, England, the U.S. and every country in between.

To get to Salamanca, take the \$22 express bus from Madrid, or pay \$16 for the train. Head straight for the tourist office on Calle Rua (around the corner from Casa de las Conchas) and grab the pamphlet listing accurate prices for all of the city's hostels, pensiones and hotels.

—Alex Valdes



# 17

## SALAMANCA, SPAIN

Though definitely not an obscure blip on the Spanish land-

scape, the old university town of Salamanca is well worth a visit. Two-and-a-half hours west of Madrid, the city is filled with bars (locals say there are more than 3000) and young people. (Thirty-five percent of the city's 220,000 residents are students.) You'll find packed dance floors, cheap drinks and—maybe best of all—no cover charges at spots like Camelot, Cum Laude, Submarino and La Biblioteca. No place in Spain is wilder.



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