

UC Santa Barbara

Volume 4 (2023)

Title

48 hours in... A Gaucho's Guide to Studying and Traveling in Europe

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3f38k53d>

Author

Meyers, Hannah

Publication Date

2023-10-01



48 hours in ...

A GAUCHO'S GUIDE TO
STUDYING AND TRAVELING
IN EUROPE

By Hannah Meyers



ABOUT ME

At Park Güell in Barcelona, one of only three days of the year that it's cloudy and rainy... what can you do?



HI, I'M HANNAH

I'm currently a fourth-year student at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I love street food, a cold beer, and a good deal. I spent the spring semester of my junior year studying abroad in the Netherlands. Like many exchange students in Europe, travel was a goal of mine. In the five-and-a-half months I spent abroad, I was able to visit ten other countries in Europe. These guides are a great way for me to reminisce, and I hope you find them fun and helpful in your own travels. This is entirely based on my own personal experience and represents only what I saw and felt. Please supplement these brief thoughts with your own research to make sure you have the best experience!

TRAVEL ISN'T TRAVEL IF EVERYTHING GOES RIGHT

This was my first time truly traveling throughout Europe, and things didn't go according to plan on my first or my tenth trip. But that's travel, and that's life. Be able to laugh at yourself, and don't take things too seriously when something inevitably goes wrong.

I created these forty-eight-hour travel guides to make it less overwhelming when you decide to run off to a new city for the weekend and don't know where to start. I'm sharing only the short glimpse I got of these incredible places I visited, and I hope you can experience them as well—plus even more. Safe travels!



Keep reading to find out where you can get this massive beer...

» Table of Contents

4-8 Brussels, Belgium

9-14 Barcelona, Spain

15-21 Lisbon, Portugal

22-27 Paris, France

28-32 Cologne, Germany

33-35 Vienna, Austria

36-40 Budapest, Hungary

41-44 Naples, Italy

» Table of Contents

45-46 Hostels 101

47 Transportation

48-50 Travel Tips

51-55 Utrecht, Netherlands

56 Visit in the Netherlands

57-59 Life in the Netherlands

60 Food in the Netherlands

61 Thank You

Welcome to

BRUSSELS

📍 Belgium



Grand-Place

My Experience

My trip to Brussels was my first time out and about in Europe after a mandated quarantine upon arrival in the Netherlands, as well as another one shortly after when I got COVID-19. After spending the first few weeks abroad in quarantine, to say we felt excited was an understatement, especially since the Netherlands was still in a semi-restricted lockdown at the time in early February.

My friends and I chose Brussels because it was close and easy, and we took the train from Utrecht Centraal to Brussels. Strategic schedule planning allowed us to leave early Friday morning and return Sunday night. We spent Friday in the medieval town of Ghent, where we waited for our other friend to arrive in Brussels later that night. We came, we drank, and we conquered; our bellies were full of beer, frites, and chocolate, and our hearts were happy with fun memories to start the semester.

Where to?

Stay

We stayed in Latroupe Grand Place hostel, which was only a ten-minute walk from the train station and a few minutes from Grand-Place. We filled a four-person room with an ensuite bathroom and comfortable bedding.

How to?

Get around

We walked around Brussels and found that we didn't need to use other modes of transportation because our hostel was close to Grand-Place and most attractions, including the train station. If you stay farther away from the city center, you might need to use public transportation.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Belgium is known for its waffles, chocolate, beer, and fries. These are some of the must-haves when visiting Brussels.

Waffles



There are two types of Belgian waffles, or gaufres: Liège waffles, (pictured) are doughier and encrusted with sugar to create a caramelized exterior. Brussels waffles are rectangular, light, and crispy. There are lots of places serving both for you to try!

Pommes Frites



Belgian fries—a classic. I was waiting to get a cone of fresh double-fried frites all weekend long. With a long list of sauces available, I went with the garlic sauce. It wasn't until later in the semester that I converted into a mayo lover!

Walking Chocolate Tour

There's no doubt that Belgian chocolate is some of the best chocolate in the world. With multiple chocolatiers dotting the city, I recommend taking a self-guided tour and trying one to two pieces at each chocolatier. You can buy singular pieces for €1-3, and you might get lucky with a free sample. Limit yourself to one piece per place; we got two to three pieces per shop and were burnt out from the richness and sugar after only three chocolatiers. With so many shops available, pace yourself to try them all and get ready for the sugar rush.

Chocolate Museum

Choco-Story Brussels is a small chocolate museum with exhibits walking you through the history of the cocoa and chocolate-making process. The self-guided tour includes watching a chocolate-making session and samples of dark, milk, and white chocolate. The chocolate maker speaks in French, but it's easy enough to follow along. At €9.50 for students under twenty-six, it's not a bad way to spend some time.

Elisabeth Chocolatier

This was our first stop. I got a raspberry dark chocolate ganache and champagne truffle, which were both amazing, as expected. This chocolatier offers the opportunity to taste chocolates you wouldn't normally try.

Neuhaus Chocolatier

Neuhaus is the creator of the Belgian praline. Their Irrésistibles—chocolate-covered nougats with filling—are the star of the show and are our favorites. I regretted not getting a box of chocolates from here before I left.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Brussels has a wide range of Belgian and international cuisine to show off, including many bars.

Baladi



We ducked into this Middle Eastern restaurant as a break from the rain and shared appetizers and drinks. The space was cozy and trendy with great food and some of the prettiest drinks I've ever seen.

I got the Chamsi drink with rum, coconut, mango, yuzu, hibiscus, and rose, which was incredible. The restaurant is also vegan/vegetarian friendly.

Poechenellekelder



This popular bar by the Manneken Pis offers a huge selection of Belgian beers that all come in their own unique glasses (as seen in the horn-shaped glass).

If you don't like beer, get a Kriek (pictured above). The fruity lambic beer tastes like juice, making it a good starter drink. I had it for the first time here and fell in love.

Le Choux de Bruxelles

This Belgian restaurant offers classic Belgian fare and thirty types of mussels. The three-course "Menu du Chou" that includes a choice of starter, main course, and dessert—all for €36—is well worth the price. The shrimp croquettes are great. For my main course, I had steak frites with a delicious Béarnaise sauce while two of my friends took on the challenge of finishing a bucket of mussels.

By the end of the meal, we could barely finish our apple tart and crème brûlée, but we left happy and satisfied. This was a wonderful choice for a Belgian meal with an extremely friendly staff (who made my friend what was possibly the strongest gin and tonic in history).



Things to Do

Only a half hour outside of Brussels, Ghent makes the perfect day trip.

GHENT, BELGIUM

Our first day in Brussels was spent in Ghent, a medieval town nearby. We dropped our bags off at the hostel before hopping back on the train. While it should have been only a half-hour train ride, we panicked and got on the wrong train. It was still headed to Ghent but was the "slow" train with more stops, which ended up being an hour-long trip instead. You win some, you lose some.

Ghent is a beautiful city known for its medieval architecture. The city center is a bit of a walk, about thirty-five minutes, from the train station, so we trudged through spotty rain to make it to a market that ended up being closed.

We then escaped the pouring rain by diving into a restaurant for lunch, where I learned that beer is cheaper than water in Europe—notably in countries known for their beer like Belgium. We continued our day walking around before stumbling upon a grand medieval castle, as one does, before sitting down for a large beer. We made friends with a Dutch couple sitting at our table, losing track of time until I realized that our train back to Brussels was in twenty-five minutes. After a failed attempt to get a bus ticket due to broken ticketing machines, we resorted to running to the train station, drunk from the beer, in our heavy parkas and boots, trying to make up the time lost at the ticket machine. We made it, out of breath, with two minutes to spare. The moral of this story is to keep track of time and give yourself room to deal with any complications that might arise.



Like the Netherlands, Ghent also has canals running through the city.

Ghent, Belgium

With a medieval castle and huge boot of beer, it's hard to want to miss Ghent.

Gravensteen Castle

This twelfth-century castle was the best attraction I visited in Belgium. For €7 (for students aged nineteen to twenty-five), it is a phenomenal deal well worth the money. The ticket includes a self-guided tour with an audio guide voiced by a comedian. The audio guide is funny and charming, offering the history of the castle in a humorous way—think sex jokes about the count. You can visit the inside and outside of the castle and walk through torture chambers, outdoor toilets, and more.

A note for anyone with physical disabilities: The stairs up the towers are steep, winding, and enclosed.



This is the only castle in Flanders with a moat.



The top of the castle offers 360-degree views of the stunning medieval city below.

De Dulle Griet

This bar, De Dulle Griet, is famous for its boot of beer; this monstrosity is only €12. To assure the safety of the boot glasses, you trade in one of your own boots or shoes when you order. Your boot then goes to shoe jail in a basket hanging above everyone, only to be returned once you're done with your drink. I had a death grip on mine the whole time to make sure I didn't drop it. Even if you don't get the boot, the bar is still a fun place to grab a Belgian beer.



Cuberdon



This Ghent specialty is a cone-shaped candy with a crusty exterior and a chewy, almost juicy, inside. The original candy is purple and raspberry flavored, but there are others to try as well. It wasn't my personal favorite, as the taste was reminiscent of cough syrup, but I recommend trying a piece or two for a taste of Belgian culture.

Welcome to

BARCELONA



Casa Batlló

My Experience

My trip to Barcelona started with a text from my best friend two days before departure, saying that she had accidentally booked our plane tickets for the wrong day. This is your lesson to check and double-check the dates and times for every ticket you buy. Budget airlines like Ryanair and easyJet aren't very forgiving about refunds. After ten minutes of despair, I turned on game mode and found us tickets on another flight out of Brussels only an hour after we were supposed to leave. Unfortunately, this mix-up cost about €150; again, triple-check your stuff. In the end, we made it to our 6 a.m. FlixBus to Brussels and our flight to Barcelona. Sidenote—Brussels can be an easier/cheaper airport to fly out of than Amsterdam, and FlixBuses there are cheap (~€8). This trip was the first leg of our spring break.

Another important lesson when traveling: pick your travel companions wisely. My friends and I booked early with girls who we ended up not getting along with at all. Who you travel with makes a huge impact on your experience so make sure you have the same goals when it comes to what you want to do, eat, and overall attitudes. The girls we went with did not care about trying local food and only ate pasta the entire time and their main goal was to go clubbing. While there's nothing inherently wrong with this, it is an important tradeoff to consider when deciding who to travel with. Additionally, the girls often brought back guys to the hostel and would hook up with them there, which we were all subjected to hear. Needless to say we split up in two groups and spent most of the week apart despite staying in the same place. While it was a little awkward, it was necessary to get what we wanted out of our trip. Don't sacrifice your own fun out of fear of awkwardness. Make sure you're on the same page with your companions about budget, diets, goals, etc because it can make or break your trip and/or friendship.

The Rundown —

Things to Know

Where to stay?

The girls we traveled with insisted on picking the absolute cheapest hostel they could find on Hostelworld—and we made the mistake of letting them. We slept in a twenty-two-person, mixed-gender room in Kabul Party Hostel with bright orange curtains dividing the beds. The showers had automatic shutoffs every thirty seconds, similar to public restroom sinks. And while I don't consider myself extremely high maintenance, this was not ideal. On the bright side, the hostel had free, albeit barren, breakfast and cheap sangria. It was also very easy to meet people. We befriended a group of American students on their spring break who were fun to go out with. I would personally recommend spending the extra few euros to have a nice hostel, but if you really don't mind this situation then go for it!

How to get around?

Barcelona is a big city, and we found the Metro to be the best way to get around quickly. We took a bus from the airport to a Metro station in the city, and then we took the Metro to our hostel. The ticket machines are easy to use with English translations, so just buy a few single tickets—or if you're there for longer, you can buy a ticket with a given amount of rides.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Barcelona is home to incredible tapas, paella, sangria, and everything good. Don't miss any of these classics.



Paella

We were in Barcelona for four days, and we ate paella for dinner on three of them (as seen in the picture to the left). That should tell you all you need to know about this glorious dish.

We had seafood and chicken paellas, which were all amazing. It's the best dish to share with friends, along with a few tapas for the table. Each place makes them slightly different, but they were all comforting, warm, and bursting with flavor. Get all the paella.

Tapas

A quintessential feature of Spanish cuisine is tapas—small plates made for sharing. We ate patatas bravas every day we were in Barcelona. Every place does its tapas slightly differently, so we were on a mission to find the best patatas bravas in the city. We settled on Taperia Princesa as the winner.

Some other tapas we had were tortilla (eggs and potatoes), calamari, and croquetas (deep-fried ragu with either ham or chicken). Try everything you can and see for yourself which place has the best patatas bravas!



Eat, Drink, Repeat



Jamón Ibérico

The crème de la crème of ham. Made exclusively from Iberian pigs with an acorn diet, Jamón Ibérico is amazing. The ham is nutty, fatty, and absolutely divine. It also comes with a hefty price tag, but it is much cheaper in Spain than anywhere else in the world, so make use of your time while there. Split among a table, the price isn't bad at all. These legs can sell for over €1,000, but you can have a taste for a reasonable price. Eat it with pan con tomate, some Manchego cheese, or just with some bread and aioli; you can't go wrong.

Sangria

This fruity drink is the best way to refresh yourself in the typically warm weather of Barcelona. Originally made with red wine, there are white and rosé variations. The cocktail is a blend of wine and fruit, and some recipes add other liquors or club soda. Share a pitcher with friends.



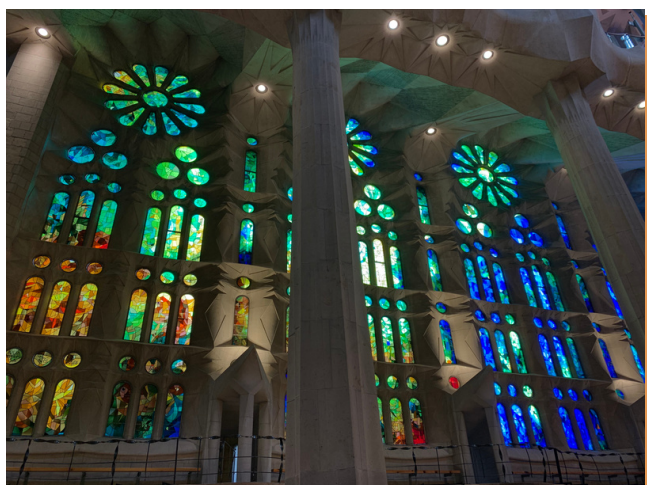
Churros and Chocolate

Regrettably, the place we got these at wasn't the best, but it was still a nice treat. We passed by a crowded churro shop on our way to dinner one night and swore to get it when we were done, but they closed by the time we walked back. If you see something good, just go for it.

Visit

Antoni Gaudí's Works

Antoni Gaudí's iconic architecture can be seen all over the city, making Barcelona a living museum of his work. Seven properties designed by him are UNESCO World Heritage sites. We took a free walking tour from our hostel to see the Gaudí's sites around town.



La Sagrada Família

Probably one of the most iconic churches in the world—Basilica de la Sagrada Família is truly stunning. Tickets are €26, and they come with an audioguide to walk you through the history of the Basílica. It's constantly evolving because it was never finished. You can't visit Barcelona without seeing this World Heritage site. It really is a jaw-dropping work of architecture, one that blew us all away.

Park Güell

The site wasn't sunny when we visited, but it was still a beautiful place to take photos and experience Gaudí's incredible architecture. The entrance price is €10, and you can spend time roaming the grounds; however, there is quite the hike up to reach it, as when I went many of the escalators were broken.



Visit



La Boqueria Market

Barcelona's oldest market features a labyrinth of stalls and food vendors. We went back multiple times for snacks, including a cone of jamón, smoothies, empanadas, fresh fruit, and more. Make your rounds through all the colorful stands to find the best deals and treats.

Montjuïc

The famous hill has great views at night with a beautiful castle on top. It's a pretty place to hang out and has other attractions, like museums, to visit. Take the cable car up to the top!



Parc de la Ciutadella

Enter the huge park through the Arc de Triomf. There are a ton of attractions in the park including a zoo, lake, and the Parliament building. Lay out on the green space to take a break from the bustling city.

Welcome to LISBON



Cascais

My Experience

Lisbon was my favorite destination: friendly people, great food, beautiful scenery, charming streets, and cheap prices. This was the second half of our spring break trip, and after spending the winter in the Netherlands, I was looking forward to some sun and the beaches that we did not get in Barcelona (it rained while I was there). I am also probably biased toward Lisbon because it fulfilled exactly what I needed: a break on the beach to tan and swim in the ocean. It felt the most like home in California with a very relaxed atmosphere. We all felt safe and didn't feel on edge about pickpocketing. I spent my last day in Lisbon exploring by myself, and I felt completely safe as a solo-traveling woman. There's no shortage of things to do, and Portugal is number one on my list of countries to return to.

We stayed at the Gspot hostel the first few nights, but I would not recommend it. It was cheap, and you got what you paid for. The room was quite literally a bunch of metal bunk beds shoved together with questionable blankets, and the crowd had a larger share of weirdos. Even the girl whose idea it was to book the hostel wanted to leave. Our other friends stayed at Rossio Hostel, which was much nicer, so I ended up switching there for the last night. There are plenty of nice hostels and cheap hotels in Lisbon, you don't need to settle for the Gspot. But if you really do just want a cheap option, then go for it.

While staying at the Rossio, my roommates were a Portuguese woman in her sixties and a flamboyant man in his fifties. When she learned that I was from Los Angeles, she immediately talked to me about Brad Pitt and referred to me as a "rich Beverly Hills girl" despite my constant denial. She was still a sweetheart—until in the middle of the night when she opened up all the windows letting in the cold air and the sound of the street below, and then she got in a screaming match with the man over keeping the windows open. Ultimately, a good reminder to roll with what you get and also to check your privilege while you're abroad.

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Pastéis de Nata

The famous Portuguese egg custard tarts are insanely good, and we had some every day from various bakeries and stands. The tart is a crisp pastry shell with a creamy and perfectly sweet filling.



Ginja

Ginja is a Portuguese liquor made from sour cherries. It's sweet and a beautiful deep red color. We had our first taste from an old lady in an alley at the suggestion of our tour guide. Ginja pairs well with chocolate!



Bifana Sandwich

The bifana is a classic Portuguese sandwich made with thin slices of marinated pork on a soft roll with peri peri sauce. Our guide suggested Casa das Bifanas, a small but bustling eatery that served the meal for only €5.



Port Wine

Port wine is a sweet but strong red wine, usually served with dessert. Our waiter gave me a heavy pour, double what the actual serving was supposed to be. Needless to say, we were sitting happy.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Lisbon had some of the best and cheapest food we had, in addition to the most memorable. Be sure to hit these eateries when you visit.

The Best Kept Secret

Lisbon's little secret (not-so-secret) is its hub of clandestine Chinese restaurants scattered throughout the city. These restaurants are housed in apartment buildings, sidestepping some regulations. The spot that we went to is not much of a secret at all as it's the first result in a Google search, but it was good and still fun to walk up the building's stairs to reach the restaurant. One of my friends was from Hong Kong and communicated with the workers, who didn't speak much English. Reminiscent of a Chinese restaurant in America, they had all the Westernized dishes and more. We split a few plates including orange chicken, pork dumplings, fried rice, fried squid, and stir-fried potatoes. The hub is quite a catch, as it satisfies a fix for Asian food and is unique to Lisbon.

Address: Rua da Guia 9



Close...



Closer...



Made it



Pan fried dumplings!

Eat, Drink, Repeat

A Hidden Gem

In search of an authentic Portuguese restaurant, my friends and I originally wandered up to a place, only to be waved off by the owner as the restaurant was too crowded. While we were deciding how to move forward with dinner, a pair of girls came down the street asking us if we were looking for food. They told us to go up the block to a restaurant that they claimed was even better than the one we were standing in front of, going on about the great meal they had just finished. It sounded good to us, so away we went.

There were a few other Portuguese couples and groups inside, but there was plenty of room for us in the cozy restaurant. The spot is small and dotted with blue cloth-covered tables. Our group was happily greeted by a kind old man who ran the entire front of house, while an old woman cooked away in the kitchen.

The menu is filled with a variety of fresh, home-cooked Portuguese meals. The Pastéis de Bacalhau—fried codfish cakes—are a must. It's a classic snack to have in Portugal, and these were by far the best. The bread that is brought to the table is delicious but not free. It's a minimal charge, though, and it's so worth the snack. Everything you order here will be good. The portions are large enough to share and extremely cheap. We had such a good time that we ate here twice. Between the two dinners, I had steak one night and pork chops the other. Both came with salad, rice, and fries, making it a hearty meal.

Restaurante Cerqueira
CC de Sant'Ana 49, 1150-301
Lisboa, Portugal



Inside



Pastéis de Bacalhau

A Hidden Gem

The first night, two of our friends wanted to try a glass of the famous Portuguese Vinho Verde. The owner does not speak a lot of English, so our order got lost in translation and instead of two glasses, we ended up with two LITERS of vinho verde. The look on our faces when an enormous old plastic bottle filled with wine landed on our table was priceless. All five of us ended up drunk that night trying to put it away, making it probably the best mistranslation to ever happen. And the whole thing ended up being only €7. Another fateful mistranslation happened the second time we ate there, as we decided to venture for their desserts. We tried to order two, but after some head shaking we got the understanding that the ones we asked for weren't available. He brought out two other desserts instead and they were amazing. The best end to a meal we could have. Always trust the process and let the experts tell you what to get.

The owner is so friendly and is truly an angel. He's quite popular with everyone; there is a wall covered with children's drawings of him and the restaurant, and there were two dinner parties happening the second night. This place is a hidden gem and deserves your business. Quality food, excellent service, and just an overall wonderful time. This restaurant holds some of my favorite memories from being abroad and will always have a special place in my heart.



So much vino!



So much food!



Us with the owner

Visit



Walking Tour

The best way to get to know a city quickly is to take a walking tour. We signed up for a free one online, and it was a great experience. It makes a city way less overwhelming, and the guides have great recommendations for food and know the city's history. Our guide led us through the Bairro Alto, the old Aflama neighborhood, and got us treats like ginja and pastéis de nata. Even though they're free, you should tip your guide!

Cascais Beach

Take the train to Cascais for a beach day. The water is beautiful and warm, and there are shops and restaurants nearby. The train is only a few euros and roughly an hour-long ride. This was the long-awaited beach day for spring break, and it did not disappoint.



Belém Tower

The Belém Tower is accessible via a cheap train ride, which is around forty minutes long. The UNESCO World Heritage site is a sixteenth-century testament to Portuguese exploration and is a central piece of Lisbon, as it was once used to defend the city. It's closed on Mondays, which is when we went, but you can go inside when it's open.

Visit

Sintra / Pena Palace

Trains to Sintra from Lisbon are very cheap, and the ride is only about an hour long. Sintra itself is beautiful and not to be missed if you're visiting Lisbon. It's home to multiple historic palaces, castles, and villas.

We had brunch at Garagem Café, which was our first time having an American-style breakfast with eggs benedict and bagels. The restaurant has a beautiful view overlooking the mountains. We then walked through the town, which contains lots of restaurants, shops, and more. We trekked up the hill to visit the Quinta da Regaleira which is a neo-Gothic mansion famous for its gardens and well. We didn't stay long, though, so we could try to visit Pena Palace.

We first tried to get an Uber to take us from the mansion to the palace, but they kept canceling on us. After much discussion and a good saleswoman at the corner, we ended up taking a tuk-tuk to reach the palace.



The driver stopped the ride part way through to take pictures of us with the castle in the background.



Pena Palace

Our tuk-tuk was €16 per person (five people), and it was a fantastic decision. Our driver was so fun and pointed out attractions around us as he sped through the winding street up the mountain. He dropped us at the palace where we took a self-guided tour around. The palace is absolutely stunning and has incredible views of the surrounding areas.

Our driver picked us up when we finished, and we were on our way. We were running late and asked if we would be able to make it in time to catch our train. He got us there in half the time it was supposed to take. We were flying down the mountain in a little cart, an experience jolting enough to be equivalent to the Indiana Jones ride at Disneyland. But he got us there with time to spare, and it is forever a great memory.

Welcome to **PARIS**



Eiffel Tower

My Experience

We visited Paris for a long weekend to give ourselves a bit more time to see it all. I took French for three years, but it didn't even matter because one of our friends was French and had us covered in the language department. Paris is one of the most-visited cities in the world, and all of its attractions are very well known. I don't know how much insight into Paris I can offer, other than advice on how to do it fairly cheaply with affordable restaurants and student discounts. Paris is definitely much more expensive and requires more planning than other cities I visited because the prices increase a lot.

We took the Thalys train from Amsterdam to Paris, which costs about €60 each way. You should definitely book the Thalys in advance because spots fill up and the prices can get expensive.

The same goes for hostels. We stayed at Les Piaules in Belleville; it was a nice hostel, but at €50 a night it was by far the most we paid for a hostel—and this was in April before the high season. Hotels can be very pricey as well, and Airbnbs will need to be booked in advance. The hostel was very nice, though, with clean facilities, a bar, and a nice rooftop area with a view of the Eiffel Tower.

The Metro is the best way to get around the sprawling city and is easy to figure out. Simply just walking around and getting lost in the streets is one of the best ways to explore a city—you never know what you'll find.

People absolutely love Paris and for good reason: it's a beautiful city with lots to do. Despite the city being so expensive overall, many things can be found for very cheap, especially in comparison to the U.S. prices for the same thing. Enjoy cheap fresh-baked goods every morning while you can and the best wine and cheese for a fraction of the cost. Enjoy!

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Macarons

A classic specialty, macarons are not my personal favorite as I tend to think they're too sweet, but the flavors here were wonderful, and the pastries were delicate. Pierre Hermé is better than Ladurée, in my opinion.

Boulangeries / Pâtisseries

There are a million boulangeries and pâtisseries around Paris, so it's too hard to keep track of them and everyone has their favorites. Pick one that looks good and try it! I had the best éclair of my life (the pistachio one pictured to the right) and think of it often. Just pick up some pastries for breakfast every morning, and be sure to get a baguette de tradition and a croissant, of course.



Crêpes

The crêpe pictured was probably the worst one I've tried in my life, so please do yourself a favor and get one fresh and cheap from a street stand. This was at a cafe by the Louvre Museum—which is pretty much asking to rip you off—but my friend wanted a drink and photos, and I ended up getting the crêpe. Learn from my losses.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Tried and True



The first sign to greet you as you emerge from the depths of the Metro Station Pigalle is Bouillon Pigalle. It's hard to miss the almost-constant line wrapped around the building, reminiscent of a Disney park. At first glance, the line can be jarring, but it is worth the wait. They reach their three-hundred-plus capacity with a mix of both French and tourist diners.

The menu contains typical French cuisine at a shockingly low price. Entrees consist of classics including escargot and onion soup among a wide variety of choices priced from €2.50-€4.60. The onion soup was everything it should be: rich, comforting and cheesy. The main courses range from steak frites and boeuf bourguignon to other classic dishes—simple but delicious. A carafe of sauvignon blanc was our drink of choice. Bouillon Pigalle also features its own house sparkling wine, which is amazing. The monster of a profiterole is more than enough to share, so you don't need one per person as we did.

At €24, this meal was a rare find in one of the world's most expensive cities. Don't let the long lines scare you away from a good meal, but rather relish in the experience and have fun with it. Bustling and lively, Bouillon Pigalle is charming and characterized by its ability to provide a delicious meal at an attractive price to everyone in Paris.

22 Bd de Clichy, 75018 Paris, France



Eat, Drink, Repeat

Midnight in Paris

The restaurant Polidor is where Gil is taken to meet Ernest Hemingway in the movie Midnight in Paris. As one of my travel buddy's favorite movies, we naturally had to stop by. The historic eatery is one of the oldest bistros in Paris, and it is said to have been frequented by many famous writers.

In a city filled with expensive restaurants, Polidor has great prices for French classics. The boeuf bourguignon was delicious, and the duck confit was succulent.

For an affordable but good meal, this spot is worth the trip –especially with rich the history behind it.

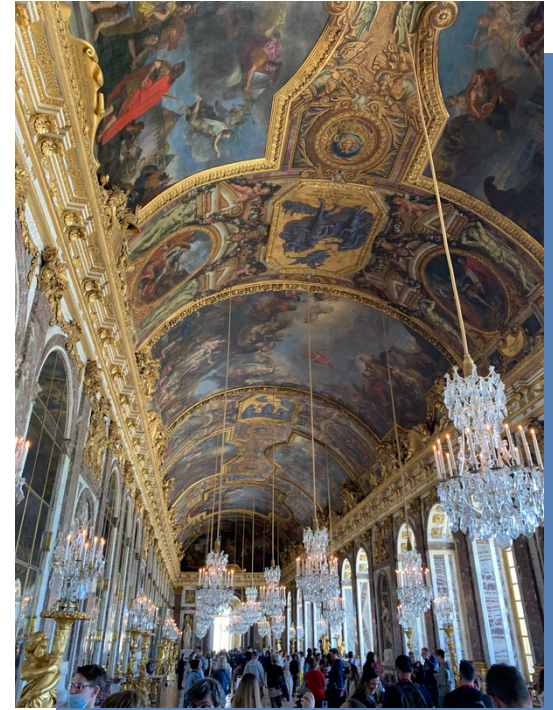
**41 Rue Monsieur le Prince, 75006
Paris, France**



Visit

Versailles

Obviously a must-see when in Paris, Versailles is grand and carries immense history. Château de Versailles entry is free for students, so make use of your student ID. Due to high demand, you need to buy your tickets online. You also have to buy separate entry into the gardens, which you purchase there. Take the RER train, but don't put your feet up on the seat (it'll get you a €50 fine). I learned that the hard way and didn't realize my "Désolés" weren't getting me anywhere until my friend was speaking French with the train person and pulled out a debit card. It was a careless way to lose €50.



Montmartre

The famed hill is home to the Sacré-Coeur, and the basilica offers great views of the city. Even though the area is quite touristy, it's a pretty place to check out with cute houses and a ton of artists ready to do a portrait of you. It's a bustling area with restaurants and cafés everywhere.

Visit

Louvre

The Louvre is another place with a wonderful student discount, so don't forget to take advantage of that! Iconic in its own right, I'm not sure what else I could say about the Louvre that other people haven't. Just don't eat near it, since it'll be a tourist trap.



The Seine

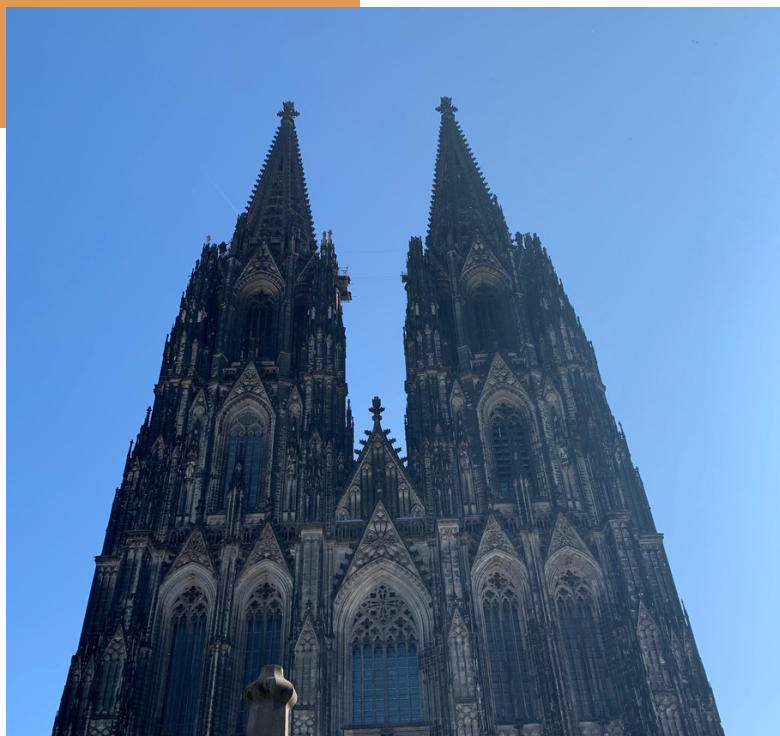
The banks along the Seine river in Paris are actually a World Heritage site because so many historical sites can be viewed from it. The Seine is beautiful when taking a nice stroll alongside it, taking a cruise, or bringing a bottle of wine and snacks to hang out at night.

Eiffel Tower

We all know what this is. The iconic landmark of Paris. Stop by a boulangerie and a grocery store to have a little picnic in front of the tower. Also, be sure to look out for the tower when it lights up and sparkles at night at the start of every hour. It ends at 11 p.m. though!



Welcome to **COLOGNE**



Cologne Cathedral

My Experience

Cologne, or Köln, was originally meant to be a quick and easy weekend-getaway trip while the Netherlands was still shedding its COVID-19 restrictions. Unfortunately, things go wrong and, again, you have to roll with it. A huge storm swept across the Netherlands and Germany, causing the train system to cancel all trains, so we stayed home. We probably would have just canceled Cologne and moved on, but we didn't book a refundable rate at the hostel, so we couldn't get our money back. The best we could do was just move our reservation to later, but the prices a month ahead were more expensive and we had to pay the additional difference. So, lesson learned, make your bookings refundable because you never know what will happen.

Life Happens

Life surprised us again as we tried to leave Cologne on a Sunday night to head back to Utrecht. Our train was late, and then it was delayed for a little bit. And then it was delayed for three hours. Our 7 p.m. train ended up leaving at 9:30 p.m., which meant that instead of arriving at 10 p.m., we arrived past midnight.

Naturally, we wanted to pass the time while waiting for the train, so we ventured down to the Früh Kölsch bar at the train station. We made friends with the bartender and had a few beers before it was finally time to go. We took a few bottles for the ride as well.

Partway through our train ride back to Utrecht while we were doing homework, the power went out. We took that as our sign to open the beers in our bags and quit the homework for the night, even after the power resumed. Life happens, just grab a drink and roll with it!

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Bratwurst

When in Germany, bratwurst is a must. Or get currywurst, sliced with German curry sauce on top. Either way, it makes the perfect snack, especially paired with some fries. Grab one from any of the many stands around the city.

Apple Strudel

This apple strudel from Peters Brauhaus was the best one I've ever had. Unfortunately, we were already stuffed from our extremely heavy and filling meals, so we struggled to fully enjoy it—but nevertheless, it was good. A perfectly flaky pastry with sweet apples, what's not to love?



American Breakfast

This is not remotely German, but we were craving brunch food and German breakfast doesn't necessarily satisfy that. St. Louis Breakfast is a very millennial, Instagrammable breakfast spot that offers amazing drinks and good food. The pancakes were great, and they hit the spot. I recommend getting the passion fruit mimosa.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Kölsch Breweries



Cologne is home to the iconic Kölsch beer. There are multiple breweries that specialize in it and that also have great food.

We went to Brauhaus FRÜH am Dom and Peters Brauhaus. Both are huge restaurants filled with people and waiters who are exclusively large and friendly middle-aged German men.

If there's a wait, you'll still be greeted with a glass of beer. The waiters carry a round tray filled with glasses and just keep bringing them to your table unless you explicitly tell them to stop.

Both places feature hearty German plates, including schnitzel, pork knuckle, sausage, and more. You can't really go wrong with any of it. If you're in Cologne, you can't miss these spots.



Visit

Cologne Museum

Stop by Farina 1709, which is the home of the original eau de cologne, notably worn by Napoleon. This is both a museum and shop, and the guided tour is quite interesting and worth it for less than €10. You're guided through the back of the shop and the history of the fragrance dating back three centuries. A highlight is testing your nose with the various scents that go into fragrances. You also receive a mini sample of the eau de cologne.



Photo by Claudius Therme

Thermal Baths

Relax at Claudius Therme spa that features various thermal baths and saunas. It is accessible by public transportation and fairly cheap for a spa, with a four-hour pass running for €23. There are multiple indoor and outdoor pools with lounge chairs to sunbathe and relax in. The baths are all covered, and you wear a swimsuit in the spa area. It's a great way to kill some time and take a break from all the craziness of school and travel.

Visit

Chocolate Museum

This was the second chocolate museum we went to (the first in Brussels), and it was definitely unnecessary. But if you've never been to a chocolate museum, then it's worth checking out. This one is sponsored by Lindt and is much bigger and more industrial than the Brussels one. A bonus is that they have a chocolate café with a ton of treats and a great view of the river.

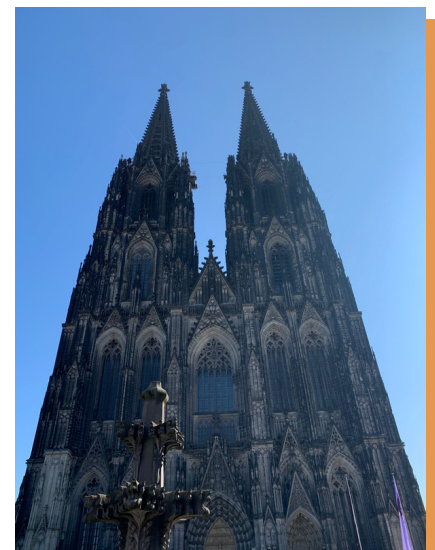


Rhine River

The Rhine river flows right through Cologne and is a popular spot to hang out at. We grabbed some beers and snacks from a convenience store and watched the sunset. It also has a beautiful view of the cathedral.

Cologne Cathedral

This UNESCO World Heritage site is renowned for its Gothic architecture. It is the largest Gothic church in Europe and one of the tallest as well. It closed early for an event right when we arrived to visit, so we unfortunately could not go inside. Be sure to check its hours, but definitely pay the cathedral a visit.



Welcome to **V I E N N A**



Austria



The Hofburg

My Experience

I met my friend in Vienna to kick off our two-week summer trip together. The resounding conclusion from my time in Vienna was that I wish I had spent more time there. I only spent one full day in the city, with the other half days cut due to travel. Vienna is incredibly rich in history, and there is no shortage of sites to see. But many cost more money in comparison to other cities, so I would like to go back with more time and money to spend. Regardless, there is stunning architecture all throughout the city, including the Vienna Opera house and many palaces.

Vienna is a large city and the metro is key to getting around. We stayed at the St. Christopher's Inns hostel, which is a chain that has outposts throughout Europe. The rooms were large and clean with a friendly hostel bar. Our hostel was within walking distance from the main train station where we took a train (RegioJet) from Vienna to Budapest for only €9. Prague, Vienna, and Budapest are all linked through cheap train rides, making it a great itinerary for a trip.

Something to note is that, unfortunately, Vienna was the city where my friend and I felt the most uncomfortable and perceived by men, who would approach us, stare at us, and make comments. Just be aware of the potential discomfort.

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Wiener Schnitzel

This classic Viennese dish is a hefty one. Pan-fried, breaded veal cutlet served in aggressively large portions and best with a squeeze of lemon. We ate at Schnitzelwirt on our first night, and our waitress was smart enough to not allow us to order a serving for each person. The photo to the left is of one single order of schnitzel that included two plate-sized pieces that we struggled to finish. If you can take on the challenge of one serving, go for it—but I recommend splitting it with a friend. The order was also only €8. Heavy? Yes, but wash it down with a foamy beer and enjoy. You're only in Vienna once.

Wurst

Grab a wurst, or sausage, from one of the many wurstelstands around the city. We had these as our breakfast twice in search of a quick snack. We had the Debreziner, which is spiced with paprika, and the Käsekrainer with cheese inside of it. We didn't know what we ordered either time, but both ended up being delicious.



Sachertorte

This Viennese specialty dates back to the nineteenth century for the imperial court: chocolate cake with apricot jam and dark chocolate glaze. We had a piece and can say that it is a great chocolate cake. The Hotel Sacher is said to have the original, but we just got ours from a random bakery.

PC: Hotel Sacher

Visit

Naschmarkt

Originally a produce market, Naschmarkt is now a great place to sit down for a full meal, have a drink, or grab a snack from one of the many stands. Standing since the sixteenth century, it is both full of history and offers some delicious eats, making it a great place to walk around. We had the best frozen yogurt and sorbet there and then sipped on spritzes to survive the summer heat. There are also many fabulous sit-down restaurants to try!



The Hofburg

The Hofburg was the palace of the imperial family during the Habsburg dynasty. The impressive residence was the center of an empire and deservedly so. The self-guided tour is well worth the money, spanning three different sections of the palace. The Silver Collection displays ornate silver and gold tableware, ceramics, and a massive gold centerpiece. Walk through the Imperial Apartments to see how the imperial family lived, and explore the Sisi Museum dedicated to the life of Empress Elizabeth. The Hofburg truly holds so much history and is absolutely fascinating to learn about—a must-see in Vienna.

Welcome to **BUDAPEST**



Danube River

My Experience

My friend and I met Budapest by walking up the steps from the Metro stop to a bustling street, with a beautiful building in front of us and the Danube River behind us. Budapest is a stunning city filled with incredible architecture, cheap food, and friendly locals. We stayed at the Flow Spaces hostel, which was only a block away from the subway stop. It's a clean hostel with communal bathrooms and nice bed spaces. We stayed for four days, and although that is not a long time to truly explore a city, it was the longest we had stayed in one place, and we felt that we could take a day to leave the city and see something else. We searched for easy day trips from Budapest that we could do without a car and settled on Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe. A popular summer retreat for Hungarians, but largely unknown by foreign tourists, we figured it would be a nice escape to see something pretty.

Lake Balaton ended up being one of the most memorable experiences from abroad. When traveling in Europe, many people, including us, tend to stick to visiting cities because they're the most accessible and have all the classic attractions. But there are so many incredible natural sites of beauty throughout Europe. While it can be hard to squeeze them in or access them sometimes, it's well worth the trip when possible. Being able to escape the hot city for a relaxing day by the lake was a real treat, and it felt fairly unique as it wasn't a spot that everyone goes to.

Budapest was a great city to traverse around, but in the summer it does get hot. We went in mid-May and we were sweating every day. Overall, it's a fantastic city to travel around as a young person on a budget.

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Central Market Hall

The Central Market Hall, or the Great Market Hall, was right by our hostel, making it a no-brainer to visit. The market is a beautiful neo-Gothic building built in 1897 and is the largest market in the city, bustling with vendors selling produce, spices, and prepared foods. Paprika, Hungary's favorite spice, is a popular souvenir that's sold all over the market. We ate at Fakanál restaurant, a cafeteria-style eatery. We had a sampler platter of a few classic Hungarian dishes. Not the best cuisine in Budapest, but good to grab a bite when at the market. There are lots of additional options available at the market.

Budapest has a wide variety of international cuisine, unlike some other European cities. We were five months into being abroad and took the opportunity to try some Asian food and more, rather than sticking exclusively to Hungarian food.

Bistro Dash Cafe

A wonderful Turkish restaurant with delicious food, friendly staff, and cheap prices.

Manna

Restaurant

The first time we were in a Korean restaurant in Europe—it satisfied our cravings.

Taipei Wok

Don't judge a book by its cover. It's so cheap and the fried rice fed us for multiple meals.



Gelarto Rosa

This gelato shop is extremely popular. It had a long line but moved fast. They have classic flavors like raspberry and Oreo as well as unique flavors like pumpkin seed and white chocolate lavender. Shaped into a rose, the gelato is both beautiful and delicious. The strawberry elderflower was amazing!

Visit

Lake Balaton

Lake Balaton is the largest lake in Hungary and a popular summer destination for those in Central Europe. Hungary uses their own currency (the forint) instead of euros, but it equated to only a few dollars. The train ride from Budapest to Balatonfüred is roughly two hours long but has beautiful views of the countryside and lake. The lake itself is absolutely stunning: there are no words for how blue the water was, and it felt like a fairytale with swans floating on the water's surface. We found a spot on a grassy lawn with little wood docks for people to tan on.



We loved swimming in the beautiful lake—until we saw a water snake that made us promptly run out of the water as fast as we could. We were too scared to go back in after that encounter, but after some frantic research, we found that snakes are really rare to see in the lake. Hopefully, your experience will be the norm. We spent all day at the lake and ate lunch and dinner there, the latter of which we ate at Halászkert Étterem. The prices were slightly more than we were used to (still cheaper than Santa Barbara), but the portions were enormous. We capped off the day with lavender ice cream from one of the many ice cream shops and watched the sunset over the lake. I'll forever remember this day for its beauty and breath of fresh air away from the city.

Visit

Fisherman's Bastion

We walked across the bridge over the Danube river and took a bus to reach Fisherman's Bastion. Arguably one of the most popular photo spots in Budapest, the terrace and towers offer incredible panoramic views of the city and river. Matthias Church is nearby with its uniquely colorful roof.



Széchenyi Thermal Bath

The most famous thermal bath in Europe and built over a century ago, the spot is as beautiful and fun as the pictures look. It is absolutely massive with dozens more pools inside the buildings. The baths all have different temperatures ranging from cold to hot. Admission is about \$25 and very worth it. We spent over four hours at the bathhouse just floating between the various pools inside and outside and laying out in the sun.

Visit

Ruin Bars

Budapest is known for its ruin bars—bars that popped up in abandoned buildings. They have funky decorations and cool vibes that make them a fun nightlife destination.



The Danube

Walk along the beautiful river for some great views and a place to relax. If you walk south from the Parliament Building, you'll see the "Shoes on the Danube Bank," a memorial for the Jewish people killed during World War II.

Museums/Buildings

There are a ton of beautiful buildings and wonderful museums to visit in Budapest. The Parliament Building is grand and right along the riverbank. St. Stephen's Basilica is an ornate church right by Gelarto Rosa. And don't forget to check out the Hungarian National Gallery and the Budapest History Museum.



Welcome to NAPLES



My Experience

"Welcome to Naples/Napoli" is a bit misleading, as our trip wasn't centered around Naples. Naples was rather a landing base for us between Corfu and home in the Netherlands because it was the cheapest flight out of Corfu and the cheapest way to get home—so we decided to throw in a couple of days in Naples.

Naples doesn't have the best reputation in terms of cleanliness and safety and is often overlooked by foreign tourists in Italy when compared to Florence, Rome, Milan, etc. But in the little time we spent there, we found it to be charming and authentic and wished we'd spent more time in the city.

We used our days in Naples as a launching pad for trips to attractions around us, spending a day in Pompeii and a day at the Amalfi Coast. Naples is a great home base for Southern Italy, and it worked great to be able to experience the Amalfi Coast without the price tag attached to it.

I would definitely recommend spending longer in Naples and actually experiencing the city itself and not just its nearby attractions. The city is unapologetically itself and doesn't feel like it's trying to please any tourists.

Home to absolutely incredible food, I truly wish we had stayed longer, as there were so many Southern Italian/Napoli specialties that we didn't get around to trying, like the fried pizza or sfogliatella. If I could do it again, I'd stay longer and eat more.

Eat, Drink, Repeat



Pizza

The home of Neapolitan pizza lies at L'Antica Pizzeria da Michele in Naples. We were told it would be a thirty-minute wait to be seated inside, but it was actually a two-hour wait. If you really just want to eat –get takeout, it's much faster. But you only eat at the original pizza place once, and it was well worth it.

There are only three pizzas on the menu –Margherita, Margherita Extra, and Marinara. We opted for the classic Margherita and Marinara. The best part –they were only €5 each.

Gelato

The best gelato I have ever had and we only experienced two days of it. Mennella Il Gelato has a few locations in Naples, and the gelato was absolutely incredible. The lemon gelato was bright and refreshingly tart, while the stracciatella was unbelievably creamy. There are so many more flavors to try from; Mennella Il is a must-have when in Naples.



Pasta

After eating my first meal in Naples, I immediately regretted not visiting Italy further. Even the most simple pasta was executed flawlessly. We visited Trattoria da Nennella, which was bursting with laughter from big family gatherings, broken plates, and live music. It was an infectious vibe that you wanted to be a part of. We sipped on Aperol Spritzes out of plastic cups from a cart outside while waiting for a table. Once inside, you'll be met with fresh bread and a traditional menu of perfected dishes.

Visit

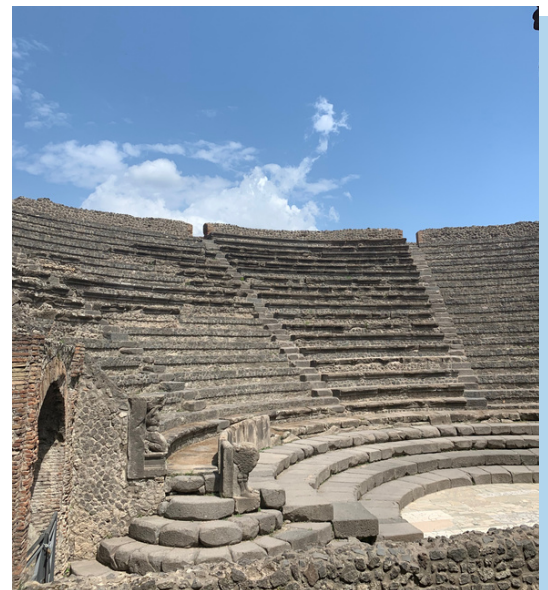
We stayed at the **Ostello Bello Napoli** hostel, and I recommend it. It's close to a central Metro station and shopping district, making it easy to get around. It was overall a nice and social hostel. The lounges have a bar and games where we met a ton of great people eager to make friends. Spacious rooms and clean bathrooms complete the hostel experience!



Pompeii

This UNESCO World Heritage site is not to be missed. The ancient Roman city was buried when Mount Vesuvius erupted almost two thousand years ago, but many buildings were preserved and are still intact today. Houses, an amphitheater, artwork, and preserved bodies are only some of the remains you can see throughout the huge park.

Pompeii is only a half-hour train ride from Naples, but that train gets busy. It is not seated ticketing and more closely resembles the metro with everyone squeezing on at each stop. In the summer, it gets especially hot with so many bodies crammed in. Regardless, the ride is quick and cheap (~€4). Pompeii offers student discounts (€3/ticket) and is an incredible piece of history well worth the visit.



Visit

Amalfi Coast

We took the train to Vietri sul Mare, one of the many coastal towns on the Amalfi Coast and the easiest to get to from Naples. This train has reserved seating, so the hour-long ride was comfortable and air-conditioned. Tickets are about €5-7 each way. The town itself is small and walkable with lots of shops and restaurants. Vietri sul Mare in particular is known for its ceramics. The streets are lined with tile artwork and shops selling beautiful Italian ceramics. I bought a tile and plate: a fraction of what I would have liked to buy, but realistically what I could fit in my bag.



Grab lunch at the family-run Ristorante 34 da Lucia. I had the best gnocchi of my life while tables around us had massive platters of fresh seafood. The waiter-recommended ricotta pear dessert was incredible. We walked down the hill on the side of the road to reach the beach and go swimming along the famous Italian coastline. For dinner, we ate at Il Principe e la Civetta, featuring the best tiramisu. Everyone we encountered was nothing but jovial and friendly. We spent the whole day eating, swimming, and exploring. The UNESCO site is one of the most famous coastlines in the world, and it doesn't need to be unattainable. Take a trip for a well-deserved vacation.

HOSTELS 101

Hostel experiences are definitely a unique, but key, part of traveling through Europe on a budget. Not as commonly found in the U.S., my first hostel experience was abroad, and yours will most likely be as well. Here's some general information about hostels to put your mind at ease and know what to expect!

What is a hostel?

While some may offer private rooms at a cheaper rate than hotels, most hostels are characterized by shared dorms where multiple people share the same room with bunk beds and either an attached or communal bathroom. While this may seem off-putting, its cheap rates and social atmosphere make it a popular option for young travelers on a budget.

Why should I stay in a hostel?

The main incentive is price. Hotels can cost upward of €100+, while hostels are usually priced between €10–30 a night. Also, most hostels are centrally located in cities and close to attractions and transportation. They are usually very social, with many having bars on site in addition to hosting tours and/or nightly activities. This is especially great for solo travelers who want to meet people.

How do I find/ book one?

HostelWorld.com is a great resource for finding and booking hostels. Read the reviews of the hostel thoroughly to see what people have to say. It can be worth it to pay a few extra dollars to have a nicer hostel, as some party hostels have fairly low standards. Nonetheless, browse to find one you like. You can book through Hostel World, or see if the hostel offers discounted rates when you book directly—I did both.



HOSTELWORLD

hostelworld.com

What's it like staying in a hostel?

Picking a Room

Hostel rooms range in size and type. I stayed in rooms ranging from four to twenty-two people. Some hostels have female or male-only dorms as well as mixed-gender rooms. Sometimes single-gender rooms can be slightly more expensive. I was always with friends, but if doing a solo trip, I would advise single, young women to stay in a female-only room for extra peace of mind. Bathrooms are dependent on the hostel, and there will either be an attached bathroom or a communal bathroom—similar to college dorms.

What's in the Room?

Rooms contain bunk beds. I grew up going to sleepaway camp, so the setup didn't phase me. Upon check-in, you'll be assigned a bed number—so you know which one is yours. Beds usually have privacy curtains, a reading light, and outlets in addition to a storage room (either as a locker or under-the-bed storage). Some are more bare-boned and it's just the bed.

Things to Bring

1) Lock

Use it to keep your belongings safe in the storage lockers available.

2) Shower shoes

Buy some cheap flip flops to walk to and use in the bathrooms.

3) Bath towel

This really depends. Some hostels give you towels while others charge a small fee (€1-3). That being said, a towel does take up room in your luggage, so if you have the space go for it; but if not, it's okay.

4) Earplugs

This depends on your sleep habits. You will inevitably encounter snorers in the hostels (or maybe you're the snorer). Either way, if you're a light sleeper or struggle with falling asleep, these are handy to have.

General Etiquette

Be respectful! Don't be the person that makes everyone else lose sleep. Be conscientious of the noise you make and how you come off to people. Hostels are a mixed bag; you can meet some really amazing people and new friends, and you can meet some really odd characters. Overall, just do your part to be a good roommate—even if it's only for a night.

PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES

Getting Around Europe

Planes



Europe has two budget airlines that are frequently used: Ryanair and easyJet. Flights are much cheaper than airlines in the U.S., making all destinations much more accessible. Flights can be as cheap as €20, and the more expensive ones were around €100. The downside to these cheap flights is that you can only bring a personal item with you. A standard carry-on bag that you put in overhead compartments costs extra, sometimes the same price as your actual ticket. So pack light for weekend trips and save the suitcase for longer trips.

Trains



Trains are the best mode of transportation, in my opinion—they are the gift that keeps on giving. With trains connecting every major city (and much more), it's a great way to get around. You don't have to deal with the mess of getting to the airport and going through security or paying extra for your bag. You just arrive at the station and hop on. The seats are comfortable and usually have free Wi-Fi. The prices are also very affordable. For those looking to backpack around Europe for a few weeks, I suggest looking at an Interrail Pass, which allows you to have unlimited train travel within a certain time frame. It's a popular choice, and many of the people you find in hostels are Interrailing.

Automobiles



In the six months that I was abroad, I was only in a car a total of three times. Other than that, I never found myself needing a car since everything was accessible by walking or public transportation. Uber's availability depends on where you are, but there are traditional taxis everywhere. There are, however, some places that are more easily accessible by car. In those situations, you can use BlaBlaCar. It's an app where you can carpool with people going the same way—sort of a mix between Uber and hitchhiking.

Miscellaneous Travel Tips

HELPFUL ITEMS



Roomy Backpack

Bring a large backpack for weekend trips where you're only allowed a backpack on the plane.



Google Translate App

Download Google Translate. The camera feature is so helpful to be able to translate menus, signs, etc.



Student Discounts

Most attractions offer student discounts for either a discounted price or for free! Always ask for a student discount and have your student ID with you.



WhatsApp

Download WhatsApp—it's widely used in Europe to communicate with people that have different phones and country codes.



Crossbody Bag

Use a crossbody bag, money pouch, fanny pack, or something else that is close to your body to help prevent pickpocketing.



Cash

Don't carry a ton of cash on you in case you get pickpocketed, but it's always good to have cash for random food places, etc., as well as public bathrooms that cost money (~€0.70-€1).



Plug Adaptors

Buy outlet converters or plug adaptors. Europe has a different voltage and plug. Apple products have universal voltage, so you just need the plug adaptor to be able to use the outlets.



Portable Charger

When you're out exploring all day, it's good to have a backup charger in your day bag. I carried one around all the time, and it helped a ton—if not for me than for my friends.

Miscellaneous Travel Tips



Banking

When abroad, you can either opt to use your American credit/debit cards, or you can open a bank account in the country you're living in. For the Netherlands specifically, the process to get a Dutch bank account is rather long as you need to have your BSN number. By the time I got my BSN number, I was already two months into my time abroad, so there was no point. I had no issues using my bank cards abroad, but some banks charge foreign transaction fees for every purchase you make while abroad. It is definitely worth checking if those apply to your card; if so, potentially look into getting a travel card that doesn't have those fees.

You should also notify your bank that you will be abroad so they don't flag your overseas charge as fraud and freeze your account. Additionally, it's always good to keep cash on you. You can get cash at ATMs. Be aware that not every country in Europe uses the euro, and some have their own currencies (Hungary, Denmark, Czech Republic, etc.) Lastly, when you're paying with your card, some machines may give you the option to charge your card in U.S. dollars or the local currency—always choose the local currency. If you pick U.S. dollars, the machine will pick a rate that isn't favorable to you.



Language

Even though you can definitely get by only knowing English, it's always good to know a few words or phrases in the language of the country you're traveling in. Hello, please, and thank you are the best words to start with. Always be respectful, and there are zero reasons to expect others to speak perfect English or to be upset if they don't. There are incredible people everywhere, and a lot of kindness and fun doesn't have to be perfectly communicated in the same language. Reminder to know your place as a visitor!



Racism

As Asian American women, my best friend and I definitely experienced our fair share of out-of-pocket comments that aren't acceptable in the U.S., and some were just clearly racist. We were asked "where we were really from" even after saying California. The worst case was being told "nihao" by a man at a hostel in Italy. It felt that to be American was to be white and that we couldn't be from America since we weren't. This is definitely something to be aware of, as most countries in Europe are extremely ethnocentric. Luckily, we didn't experience anything overtly discriminatory, and I hope that no one has to experience that.

Miscellaneous Travel Tips

SAFETY



Pickpocketing

Pickpocketing is probably the most common thing to watch out for while abroad. I never personally experienced it and don't think it is really a huge worry with some common sense and protective measures. That being said, my friend got pickpocketed on the Paris metro when young girls took her wallet out of her tote bag. They gave it back without any money inside.

Protect yourself by:

- 1) Bringing a crossbody bag/fanny pack/shoulder bag you can keep close to you, ideally in front of you. Crossbody bags are ideal because they can't just be slipped off your shoulder.
- 2) Don't carry your phone in your back pocket; that's really easy to take.
- 3) Don't leave your purse or phone sitting on the table outside or anywhere it can be easily taken.
- 4) Be aware of your surroundings.

Don't worry too much. Try not to look like a frazzled tourist and you won't be bothered. Overall, just have your wits about you and you'll be fine! This is just something to be mindful of.



Common Scams

A common scam in big cities like Paris and Lisbon to look out for is when people will come up to you and offer you a bracelet or other good and try to physically put it on you. Don't engage or let them put anything on you because they will ask for money. Even if they say that it's free, it's not, and they won't let you leave without paying. Just try to avoid it.



Overall Safety

Try to be mindful if there are any not-so-great neighborhoods, so you don't accidentally find yourself somewhere not ideal. As a woman, there were definitely some places where my friends and I felt perceived by men and experienced catcalling or similar harassment. Be wary of walking alone at night, as you would in the U.S. I will say, for the Netherlands specifically, I always felt extremely safe, and even though the Netherlands has a reputation for sex, drugs, and alcohol, it is not a crazy unsafe place as some people make it out to be. It's the country I felt the safest in, especially in Utrecht.

Welcome to **UTRECHT**

 The Netherlands



My Experience

Utrecht is the city I lived in, my home base that I love and miss dearly. Utrecht is the fourth largest city in the Netherlands and right in the middle of the country, making it a central travel point. While I didn't think much of it when picking a program, I actually ended up liking the fact that we weren't in a capital city, as I felt that I really got to know Utrecht well enough to feel at home. While you can spend years in a city and never really know it—which is exciting—I liked that I was able to make Utrecht feel like home considering I only had a few months there to do so.

Arriving in the Netherlands by myself was the most humbling experience of my life, as I struggled to carry my two large suitcases, carry-on suitcase, and backpack from the airport onto the train, through the train station, onto a tram, and then on the ten-minute walk to the school. Try to pack less than that because it was not fun. I studied at University College Utrecht, a small liberal arts college. I think the school is in the perfect location, as it's a ten-minute bike ride to the city center, a few minutes away from the forest on the other side of campus, and close to Wilhelminapark, which is gorgeous in the spring.

Utrecht is a wonderful city, and although it's not on anyone's radar when visiting the Netherlands, I think it's a great place to visit. It's lively—but not overwhelming—charming, and beautiful. My school ended in early May, but we had housing until June, so I stayed to travel and enjoy Utrecht without school commitments. It was the best place to call home for half a year. If you're studying in the Netherlands/Utrecht, or just visiting, here are my recommendations.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Manneken Pis

Amazing fries and kippeling (fried fish).

Kaasbar

A revolving conveyor belt of cheese. The cheese comes prepared with various toppings (honey, sauces, fruit, etc.). Takes wine-and-cheese night to a new level.

Pizza Beppe

Neapolitan pizza place right next to UCU campus and our personal favorite.

Rum Club

Tiki bar setting, great cocktails—food not really worth it (bit pricey and small portions). Best to make reservations for weekend nights.

SONMAT

Good Korean fried chicken!

Saturday Market

There's a market in the city center by the Hoog Catharijne mall on Saturday mornings. Get produce, cheese, flowers, and food from the vendors!

Bakkerswinkel

Best scone I've ever had—get it with clotted cream and jam. It's an adorable bakery that also serves afternoon tea.

Street Food Club

Also owns the Rum Club. Instagram famous because the decor is great and the drinks are beautiful. The drinks are amazing and worth it, but same as its sister bar—food not so much.

De Pomp

A trendy restaurant in the Croeselaan neighborhood behind the train tracks that my group found doing neighborhood research for an urban geography project. They have great brunch and a nice patio outdoors. Very fairly priced.

Cerveceria Boulevard

Close to UCU campus, it's a small tapas bar with excellent pintxos and tapas. Their sangria is also great.

Eat, Drink, Repeat

Belgian Beer Cafe Olivier

This bar/ restaurant is inside a church. Thank Dutch secularism for the super unique experience. Their house trippel beer is great and so is their food.

Firma Pickles Burgers & Wine

Exactly what it sounds like—they serve gourmet burgers and pickles with a huge wine list that sommeliers can help you pick. I don't like red wine, but the waiter recommended a great one. Great food, great drinks, and a unique concept.

Theehuis Rhijnauwen

This gem is a cute pancake house in the forest quite literally on the river. I had my birthday brunch here! Don't be intimidated by the interesting combinations. The apple and speck (bacon) pancake is the best. The toppings are baked into the pancake itself. Stop by on a walk for a piece of pie and a cup of coffee.

Vlaamsch Broodhuys

A great bakery with good pastries.

Lebowski

A fun bar with good music and drink selection as well as a big outdoor patio.

Ice Cream

There are a few places around the city for ice cream/gelato.

LUCA IJssalon has the best gelato and is located in the city.

IJssalon Vorst is right by UCU and Wilhelminapark and is also great.

Anne & Max

A nice place to grab coffee or lunch and study.

Frietwinkel

Another place to get great fries.

Visit in the Netherlands



Utrecht

Dom Tower

This tower is one of the top attractions in Utrecht and is centuries old. It was under construction while I was there, so it wasn't as pretty, but it was still worth a visit. On a clear day, you can supposedly see Rotterdam, as the Netherlands is so flat.

The view from Dom Tower



Oudegracht

Meaning "old canal," the Oudegracht runs through the city center and is the best place for a stroll. The canal is lined with restaurants, bars, and shops. It's a close walk to the train station and the Hoog Catharijne, which is a large indoor mall. The courtyard by the mall houses a Saturday market where you can get cheese, flowers, fish, and more. This canal is the heart of Utrecht.

Visit in the Netherlands



Utrecht

Amelisweerd

This nature reserve and forest is the best place to live out your cottage-core dreams. Only a few minutes away from the UCU and Utrecht University campuses, it's great for a pretty bike ride or a head-clearing walk. There are farms scattered throughout with pigs, horses, cows, and ponies. Our favorite part was hanging out in the pastures of sheep that you can pet. The farms also sell produce and dairy products in stands based on the honor system. There's a farm with homemade ice cream and fresh milk. Try to find the cheese vending machine in the forest. :)



Sheep!



A summer day at the river

In addition to the gorgeous forest and luscious green pastures, Ameliseerd is located on the Kromme Rijn river. In the summer, it's the best place to hang out: you can rent a little boat or go kayaking through the river. There's a spot where everyone goes swimming in the summer, and it is a fun place to drink and tan with other students. The water is questionably clean, but the Dutch have no problem jumping in. It's perfect on a sunny day to ride over to and relax by the river. The forest is probably one of the things that I miss most about Utrecht, as it was so peaceful, and I never had anything like this spot growing up in Los Angeles.

Visit in the Netherlands



Amsterdam

There are endless things to do in Amsterdam and, ironically, I feel like I know it the least despite having easy access to it. Here are a few things we loved, but a quick Google search will give you all the classic spots and highlights.

- **Albert Cuyp Market**- An outdoor market with lots of street food stands. We loved the Turkish wraps with potato, spinach, and feta. They also have fresh stroopwafels and every other Dutch snack!
- **Tony's Chocolony Super Store**- A whole store dedicated to the Dutch chocolate brand, and you can make your own custom chocolate bar.
- **Winkel 43**- Home of the best Dutch apple pie. It's usually crowded, so you might have to take it to-go and eat it on the street, but well worth it.
- **Waterkant**- A big bar right on the canal with lots of food and drinks.
- **Keukenhof**- The classic attraction for Dutch tulips.

Museums: There is a museum pass that you can buy for around €60. If you want to do the Anne Frank House, you need to book it two to three months in advance.

Gouda

The home of Gouda cheese! It's a small town, but it has all the cheese you could possibly want and is a cute place to walk around.

Den Haag

Visit Mauritshuis, which houses "Girl With A Pearl Earring" along with other Dutch Golden Age paintings. When it's warm enough, you can go to the pier and have a beach day.

Life in the Netherlands

Apps to Have

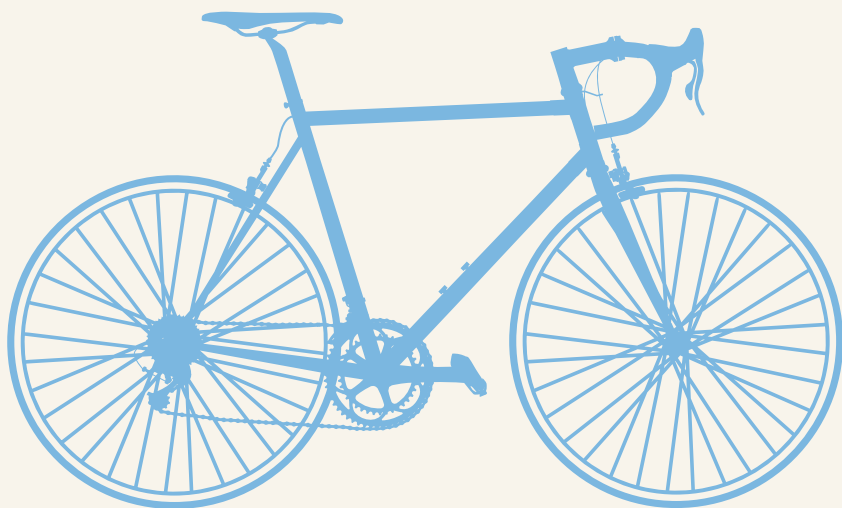
9292

Great for planning public transportation in the Netherlands. You can use it like Google Maps by plugging in your destination and starting point, and it will tell you how to get there via public transport with times for the buses, trams, trains, etc.

NS

Has all the information for the Dutch train system with all train times. E-tickets for international train routes also show up on the app.

Getting a Bike



Rent a bike through Swapfiets for a cheap monthly fee. It's much easier than buying and having to resell a bike at the end of your trip. The bikes are great and they can be repaired if anything is broken. Swapfiets bikes also tend not to be the target of bike theft since it is such a well-known company.

swapfiets.nl

Life in the Netherlands

Grocery Stores

There are three main grocery store chains in the Netherlands. Everyone has a different favorite, so try them all and see which one you like best.

PLUS

The most expensive of the bunch, this is closest to UCU campus. It was good for quick runs to the store, but other than that, nothing too redeeming about it.

Jumbo

My personal favorite, it's the cheapest store, accepts American cards, and their brand has great snacks.

Albert Heijn

This store only accepts Dutch cards, so bring cash if you don't have one; probably the most commonly found store.

Miscellaneous Stores

Etos/Kruidvat - Similar to CVS with toiletries and pharmacy items.

HEMA- Similar to Target. Depending on how big the store is, it has a wide variety of everyday items (bedding, decorations, kitchen items, toiletries, food, and more). They also have a good bakery section.

Action- Cheap household items.

Blokker- Good for appliances and other household items.

Coffeeshops

Coffeeshops in the Netherlands do not sell coffee. They sell marijuana (weed). If you want a cup of coffee, go to a café.

Health

Be sure to pack enough medication for the duration of time you're abroad. Also a random note—tampons don't have plastic applicators, so you have to manually insert them.

Life in the Netherlands

Cost of Living

The Netherlands is a very small, but very wealthy, country. The cost of living is more expensive than places in Southern and Eastern Europe, but in many aspects, it is still cheaper than the US. Here's a rough estimate of prices for various things I noted while I was abroad:

- Meals Out - €15-20
- Tram and Bus Rides - €1-3
- Train Rides - €10 one way to Amsterdam, €15 to The Hague
- Shampoo/Body Wash - €6
- Loaf of Bread - €1-2



Phone

Make sure your phone is unlocked so you can buy a new SIM card when you're abroad. It's much cheaper than paying international rates with your U.S. company. SIM cards are available for purchase at grocery stores and other places.



I just got the cheapest option, Lycamobile. At €15 a month for unlimited data, it was a good deal—except the EU roaming was spotty at best and completely stopped working halfway through my two-week trip at the end of the semester. I'd recommend picking a different brand.

Food in the Netherlands

The Dutch are not necessarily known for their **cuisine**. There are no real "Dutch" restaurants. But they do have a large variety of international cuisine, and what they might lack in overall cuisine, they make up for in snacks.

Groceries are much cheaper than in the U.S. and are also much more fresh, so things go bad quicker without all the preservatives. Without a car, you can only buy what you can carry on your bike basket or in your hands, so you will get used to going grocery shopping every few days rather than stocking up.

Stroopwafels

They are best fresh from a market but are also great in packs from the store. Stroopwafels are waffle cookies with a caramel syrup in the middle. Put them over a cup of coffee/tea to warm it up and let the stroop (syrup) get melty.

Poffertjes

Mini pancakes served with a heavy pad of butter and a generous dusting of powdered sugar.

Herring

I chickened out of trying the famous Dutch snack, but my friends tried it. Served with raw onions and pickles. You should be braver than me and try it at any market.

Kapsalon

Also the word for a hair salon, this is a Dutch fast food item that consists of fries, gyro meat, cheese, and some salad. Basically the Dutch version of Isla Vista's beloved buffalo chicken cheese fries. Best on a night out.

Bitterballen

Deep fried balls of gravy/ragu, these are a classic bar snack.

Hagelslag

These chocolate sprinkles are a classic Dutch breakfast or snack. They come in boxes for you to pour over buttered bread.

Kroket

A long, cylindrical version of bitterballen. Usually served with mayo in a white bread roll.

Frikandelbroodje

Sausages in buttery puff pastries that are available hot at grocery stores and at snack stands. Best with curry ketchup.

Thank you

Thank you for reading along, and I hope you found the guide even the slightest bit helpful. The biggest thank you goes to Ljiljana Coklin from the UCSB Writing Program for encouraging me to pursue this project and providing endless support over the course of the year as my faculty mentor. And thank you to Elisa Castillo for being my wonderful editor!

Thank you to my family for supporting me in going abroad, and thank you to all the wonderful friends and people I met along the way. Especially Alexandra Yen, whom I met abroad and who was the best travel buddy I could ask for. And thank you to UCSB EAP for working to allow students to go abroad and have these experiences and for being the best place to work now. Cheers!

-Hannah