

Enjoying Europe on a Budget

by Reid Bramblett

Americans have such a love affair with Europe that more than eight million cross the Atlantic every year to explore its cities, discover its countryside, delight in its food and wine, meet its people, trace their roots, and soak up the incomparable culture, history, art, and architecture.

This book can serve as your trusty guide so you can get the most out of Europe on a budget; it provides all the hints, advice, practical information, and historical background you'll need—whether your goal is to see all the Renaissance museums of Florence, ponder life from a sidewalk table of a Parisian cafe, bask in the baroque beauty of Prague, explore the hill towns of Andalusia, or hit the theaters of London's West End.

1 About the \$85-a-Day Premise

Times—and most definitely prices—have changed since Arthur Frommer himself published the first edition of this book, *Europe on \$5 a Day*, in 1957. This 46th edition of *Frommer's Europe from \$85 a Day* has been completely revised, yet it retains the ever-dependable Frommer's emphasis: *finding great value for your money*.

This guide is not about just barely scraping by, but about traveling comfortably on a reasonable budget. Spend too little and you suck all the fun out of travel; you shortchange yourself, your vacation, and your experiences. Spend too much and you insulate yourself from the local side of Europe.

Frommer's Europe from \$85 a Day takes you down the middle road, where the joys and experiences of Europe open wide to let you in. Doing Europe “from \$85 a day” means \$85 is the average starting amount per person you'll need to spend on *accommodations and meals*

only; transportation, sightseeing, shopping, souvenirs, entertainment, and other expenses are not included. Expect to use a little over half your \$85 each day on accommodations. Obviously, two people can travel within this budget more easily than one—\$90 for a double room and \$40 each for meals.

Of course, since our budget is *from* \$85 a day, we don't limit our hotel and restaurant recommendations to only the rock-bottom places. You'll also find moderately priced choices as well as more expensive options for those who'd like to splurge here and there—say on a romantic dinner in Paris or a room overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice.

This chapter and chapter 2, “Planning an Affordable Trip to Europe,” will show you how to squeeze the most out of your budget. Refer to the individual city chapters for specifics, such as when to go, where to stay, what to do, and how to save money once you arrive.

2 Frommer's Money-Saving Strategies

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON ACCOMMODATIONS

Most tourist offices, some travel agents, and often hotel reservation booths at airports or train stations provide listings of B&Bs, inns, rooms for rent in homes, farmhouses, and small hotels where a couple might spend only \$30 to \$80 for a double. Besides the more traditional options below, creative travel alternatives in which lodging costs nothing or next to nothing include home exchanges and educational vacations (see “Educational Travel,” in chapter 2).

BRINGING THE RATES DOWN

Keep prices low by traveling off season and off the beaten track. In cities, seek out local, not touristy, neighborhoods or those frequented largely by students (often around the train station). Small family-run B&Bs, inns, and pensions tend to be cheaper—not to mention friendlier—than larger hotels. Although you'll find more and more properties in Europe sporting the familiar names of American chains, they're almost always standardized business hotels with rates two to four times higher than what the same chain charges in the States.

Getting a good rate at any hotel is an exercise in trade-offs. You can get lower prices by looking for hotels away from the town center or opting for a smaller room, one without a private bathroom, or one without a TV

or other amenities. Ask to see several rooms—desk clerks will often try to move the most expensive or least appealing rooms first, so let them know you're a smart shopper who will stay only in a room you approve of and that's a fair price. Politely negotiate the rates—especially off season or if you sense the hotel has plenty of empty rooms—and you might pay around 25% less. Always ask about discounts for stays of 3 or more days, for stays over the weekend, or for students or seniors.

If you haven't reserved a room before leaving home, call around to a few hotels before you begin visiting them to gauge how full the city's inns seem to be. If there are plenty of extra rooms, you've got more bargaining leverage. If one proprietor isn't easily persuaded to give you a worthwhile deal, try elsewhere. If, however, hotels in town seem booked, bed down in the first reasonable place and hope for better bargaining luck next time. Pick your top few choices from the reviews in this book before you hit town (perhaps on the train ride in); when you arrive at the train station of a new town, buy a phone card from a newspaper stand (that's always where they're sold) and head over to the pay phones to start calling those hotel choices for an available room (or head to the station's room reservations desk if there is one). This way you get a

Tips A Note on Special Rates

In a couple of chapters you'll see that some hotels offer special rates “for Frommer's readers.” We don't solicit these rates or offer anything (like a guaranteed rosy write-up) in return, but hoteliers sometimes offer them, and we're only too happy to accept on your behalf! The hotel owners request that you please *make it clear on booking or arrival* (or both) that you're a Frommer's reader, in order to avoid confusion about those special rates. Note that the actual rates might have changed by the time you plan your trip, but the hotels will still offer our readers a discount.

Europe





jump on those who head out to search on foot.

OVERNIGHT TRAINS One of the great European deals is the **sleeping couchette**, where for only about \$20 (2nd class) you get a reserved bunk for the night in a shared sleeping compartment (sometimes sleeping two, but usually four to six people). When you wake up, you've gotten where you're going without wasting your daylight hours on a train, plus you've saved yourself a night's hotel charges—along with hotel comfort.

PACKAGE TOURS Airlines and tour operators offer package tours that, unlike fully escorted guided tours, book only air transportation and hotels and leave the sightseeing up to you. It's a good mix of the joys and freedom of independent travel at the (sometimes) cut rates of a tour. See "Escorted General-Interest Tours," in chapter 2, for more details.

RENTING Imagine living for a week in a studio apartment in London for \$500 to \$600, or in a cottage in France for \$450 to \$600. If you rent a room, an apartment, a cottage, or a farmhouse, you can live like a European, if only for a few days or weeks. In cities, you can often broker rental rooms and apartments through the tourist office or a private lodging service in the train station. Rooms for rent usually offer great rates (much cheaper than hotel rates) even for the single traveler staying just 1 night, although some might require a minimum stay of a few nights. Apartments start making economic sense when you have three or more people and are staying in town for a week or longer.

Renting villas, cottages, farmhouses, and the like is a much trickier business, with a wide range of rates—and quality. It can be a downright budget option (usually, again, for groups of three or four renting for a few weeks), or it can be a hedonistic

splurge on an overpriced historic castle. Shop around. Contact local tourist offices before leaving home; they might have lists or catalogs of available properties. Or read through travel magazines and newspaper supplements for ads.

Or you can try **Barclay International** (☎ 800/845-6636; www.barclayweb.com), which since 1963 has represented properties across Europe, including some 3,000 apartments and 5,000 villas, many off the beaten path. Book as early as possible. Or take the guesswork out of the process by booking with 30-year-old **Untours** (☎ 888/868-6871; www.untours.com), which sets you up with plane tickets, a rental car, an apartment in any of a dozen European countries for 1 to 2 weeks, plus a local contact who will help you settle in and is available by phone to dispense advice during your stay. A wee bit pricier than going it alone, perhaps, but many readers report that it's worth it.

HOSTELS One of the least expensive ways to keep a roof over your head and meet other travelers is a stay in a hostel. Although more and more families and intrepid seniors are appearing in the common rooms lately (only those in Bavaria still enforce an under-26 age limit), hostels are still primarily student stomping grounds. In fact, in summer especially, they fill up early each morning, often with high school and college students partying their way through Europe. If that's not your scene, you might want to look elsewhere.

Hostels charge around \$10 to \$35 per night for what's usually a bunk in a dormlike room (often sex-segregated) that sleeps anywhere from 4 to 50 people or more and a single big bathroom down the hall, college dorm-style. Happily, the recent trend at hostels has been away from gymnasium-sized dorms and toward smaller shared units of four to six, often with a bathroom attached to each.

There are usually lockers for your bags, and you often must bring your

Tips City-Specific Savings

For city-specific savings on all these topics, see the “Getting the Best Deal” boxes throughout this guide.

own sleep-sack (basically a sheet folded in half and sewn up the side to make a very thin sleeping bag) or buy one on-site. For many, you need an **HI membership card** (see below)—at some, the card is required for you to stay there; at others, it gets you a discount; and at some private hostels, the card doesn't matter at all.

There's usually a lockout from morning to mid-afternoon and a curfew of around 10pm to 1am—which can seriously cramp your evening plans, especially since many hostels are at the edge of town, meaning you have to finish dinner rather early to catch that long bus or metro ride back out.

Membership in **Hostelling International**, 8401 Colesville Rd., Suite 600, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (☎ 301/495-1240; www.hiusa.org), an affiliate of the International Youth Hostel Federation (IYH), is free for those under 18, \$28 per year for people 18 to 54, \$18 for those 55 and older, or \$250 for a lifetime membership. HI sells the annual *International Guide—Europe* for \$13.95. But in the days of the Internet, the official website of **Hostelling International** (www.hihostels.com) and that of independent **www.hostels.com** are free, more up to date, and far more useful than any book in print.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON DINING

Some hotels include dinner or breakfast in their rates or offer them as extras. For dinner, this is sometimes a fine meal at a good price, but you can almost always eat just as cheaply—and find considerably more variety—by dining at local restaurants. **Hotel breakfasts**—with the exception of the cholesterol-laden minifeasts of the

British Isles—are invariably overpriced. A “continental breakfast” means a roll with jam and coffee or tea, occasionally with some sliced ham, cheese, or fruit to justify the \$4 to \$20 price. Many hotels include breakfast in the rates, but if there's any way you can get out of paying for it, do so. You can pick up the same food at the corner café or bar for \$2 to \$4.

When it comes to **choosing your restaurant**, a local bistro, trattoria, taverna, or pub is not only cheaper than a fancier restaurant, but also offers you the opportunity to rub elbows with Europeans. Ask locals you meet for recommendations of places *they* like, not places they think you as a visitor would like. Pick restaurants that are packed with locals, not those abandoned or filled only with tourists. At any restaurant, the **house table wine** will usually be just fine, if not excellent, and cheap. Similarly, **beer** is plentiful, cheap, and excellent on the British Isles and in central and eastern countries (Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic, and so on).

The **fixed-price menu** (or tourist menu) is a budget option that gets you a semi- to full meal at a cheaper price—but a much more limited selection—than if you ordered each dish from the full menu. The best deals include wine (a glass or quarter carafe) or beer, coffee, and dessert along with choices for first and second courses.

If you love fine food but not huge bills, consider patronizing **top restaurants at lunch**. Outstanding places often serve the same or similar dishes at both meals, but with lunch prices two-thirds to one-half of dinner prices. Plus, lunch reservations are easier to come by.

In Britain and Ireland, indulge in afternoon tea, in Spain do a tapas bar crawl, and in Italy nibble during the evening *passaggiata* (stroll)—all inexpensive popular customs that'll cut your appetite for a huge meal later. Wherever you eat, be sure to check the menu and ask your waiter to see if a **service charge** is automatically included; don't tip twice by accident.

In the **bars and cafes** of many European countries, the price on any item consumed while you stand at the bar is lower (sometimes by as much as half) than the price you'd pay sitting at a table, and three times lower than the price charged at the outdoor tables.

If your day is filled with sightseeing, lunch can be as quick as local cheeses and salamis, ripe fruit, a loaf of freshly baked bread, and a bottle of wine or mineral water eaten on the steps of the cathedral, on a park bench, or in your hotel room. **Picnic** ingredients in Europe, purchased from outdoor markets and tiny neighborhood shops, are ultrafresh and so cheap you usually won't spend more than \$5 to \$10 per person.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON SIGHTSEEING

You've heard that the best things in life are **free**. Well, some of the best things in sightseeing are, too. You can't get much better than strolling through Paris's Luxembourg Gardens or spending an afternoon in London's British Museum. And how about peeking into Rome's many churches or lounging on the Spanish Steps, exploring Barcelona's medieval quarter, hiking the Alps around Salzburg, or relaxing on a St-Tropez beach? The website **www.europeforfree.com** lists hundreds of free things to see and do across Europe. Or just stroll around town, drinking in the European ambience—city tourist offices often offer free booklets of walking tours for exploring the city on foot. Also note that Frommer's publishes

Memorable Walks in Paris and *Memorable Walks in London* (both \$12.99).

Visit the tourist offices and pump them for free maps, information, brochures, and museum lists—everything you need to plan your sightseeing. Find out if some museums offer free entry on a particular day or reduced admission after a certain hour, and go then (but be prepared for crowds—you're not the only one looking to save some money). Keep in mind that many European museums are closed on Monday (in Paris, it's Tues) and open just a half-day on Sunday, so check the schedule before you go.

Always inquire about **special passes** or **combination tickets** that include reduced admission to several or even all of a city's museums. Sometimes these passes even include reduced public transportation fares.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON SHOPPING

GETTING YOUR VAT REFUND

First the bad news: All European countries charge a **value-added tax (VAT)** of 15% to 33% on goods and services—it's like a sales tax that's already included in the price. Rates vary from country to country, although the goal in E.U. countries is to arrive at a uniform rate of about 18%.

Now the good news: Non-E.U. citizens are entitled to have some or all of the VAT refunded on purchases if they spend more than a certain amount *at any one store* (how much ranges from as low as \$80 in England—but some stores, like Harrods, require as much as £50/\$90—up to nearly \$200 in France and Italy). The actual amounts in each country—as well as lots of VAT-free shopping advice—are listed at the website of **Global Refund** (☎ 800/566-9828; www.globalrefund.com).

Ask the store for an official VAT receipt, and carry it with you. Many shops are now part of the "Tax-Free

for Tourists” network. (Look for the sticker in the window.) Stores participating in this network issue a check along with your invoice at the time of purchase.

You actually don't “redeem” the receipts you're carrying around until you are getting ready to leave the last E.U. country (which includes all of western Europe except Switzerland, Norway, and Iceland; and all of eastern Europe minus Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey—the latter three are up for membership) you visit on your trip. That means you should bring all your receipts for every E.U. country to the airport from which you depart; so if you're flying home from Paris, you can take your Italian, German, and French receipts to the Customs agent at Charles de Gaulle Airport.

Before you even check in for your flight, you must visit the local Customs office at the airport with the receipts and the items you purchased, in case the officer wishes to inspect your purchases (which rarely happens). The Customs agent will stamp your receipt and give you further directions—usually, after going through check-in and security, you head to another VAT refund desk inside the airport and deal with more paperwork there. In some cases, they give you a refund on the spot. More often, the stamped receipt is sent back to the store and your reimbursement is credited against your credit card or sent to you by check. Either way, it can take months.

CUSTOMS For U.S. Citizens Longtime travelers rejoice! In 2003, the personal exemption rule—how much you can bring back into the States without paying a duty on it—was doubled to \$800 worth of goods per person. This applies to returning U.S. citizens who have been away for at least 48 hours, and can be used once every 30 days. On the first \$1,000 worth of goods over \$800, you pay a flat 3% duty. Beyond that, it works on

an item-by-item basis. There are a few restrictions on amount: 1 liter of alcohol (you must be over 21), 200 cigarettes, and 100 cigars. Antiques more than 100 years old and works of fine art are exempt from the \$800 limit, as is anything you mail home. Once per day, you can mail yourself \$200 worth of goods duty-free; mark the package “For Personal Use.” You can also mail gifts to other people without paying duty as long as the recipient doesn't receive more than \$100 worth of gifts in a single day. Label each gift package “Unsolicited Gift.” Any package must state on the exterior a description of the contents and their values. You can't mail alcohol, perfume (it contains alcohol), or tobacco products worth more than \$5.

For more information on regulations, check out the **U.S. Customs and Border Protection website** (www.cbp.gov) or write to them at 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229, to request the free *Know Before You Go* pamphlet.

To prevent the spread of diseases, **you cannot bring into the States** any plants, fruits, vegetables, meats, or most other foodstuffs. This includes even cured meats like salami (no matter what the shopkeeper in Europe says). You may bring in the following: bakery goods, all but the softest cheeses (the rule is vague, but if the cheese is at all spreadable, don't risk confiscation), candies, roasted coffee beans and dried tea, fish, seeds for veggies and flowers (but not for trees), and mushrooms. Check out the **USDA's website** (www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/travel) for more info.

For British Citizens You can bring home almost as many goods as you like from any E.U. country as long as the goods are for your own use. You're likely to be questioned by Customs if you bring back more than 90 liters of wine, 3,200 cigarettes, or 200 cigars. If you're returning home from a non-E.U. country or if you buy your goods

in a duty-free shop, you're allowed to bring home 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, 2 liters of table wine, plus 1 liter of spirits or 2 liters of fortified wine. Get in touch with **Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Office**, New King's Beam House, 22 Upper Ground, London SE1 9PJ (☎ 020/7620-1313; www.hmce.gov.uk), or call their Advice Service (☎ 0845/010-9000) for more information.

For Canadian Citizens For a clear summary of Canadian rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by **Revenue Canada**, 2265 St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa K1G 4KE (☎ 800/959-2221 or 613/993-0534; www.cca-adrc.gc.ca). Canada allows citizens a C\$750 exemption if you've been out of the country for at least 7 days. You're allowed to bring back duty-free 200 cigarettes, 2.2 pounds of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, 50 cigars, and 1.5 liters of wine. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada from abroad at the rate of C\$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and aren't alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited Gift, Under C\$60 Value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of, for example, expensive foreign cameras that you already own. **Note:** The C\$500 exemption can be used only once a year and only after an absence of 7 days. For more information, call the **Automated Customs Service** (☎ 800/461-9999 toll-free within Canada, or 204/983-3500 outside Canada).

For Australian Citizens The duty-free allowance in Australia is A\$400 or, for those under 18, A\$200. Personal property mailed back from Europe should be marked "Australian Goods Returned" to avoid payment of duty. On returning to Australia, citizens can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125ml of alcohol. If you're returning with valuable goods you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure, available from Australian consulates or Customs offices, is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, contact **Australian Customs Services**, GPO Box 8, Sydney, NSW 2001 (☎ 1300-363-263 within Australia; 02-6275-6666 from overseas; www.customs.gov.au).

For New Zealand Citizens The duty-free allowance for New Zealand is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 years can bring in 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250 grams); plus 4.5 liters of wine or beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency doesn't carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs House**, 50 Anzac Ave., Box 29,

Tips But I Bought That Before I Left Home!

If you plan to travel with expensive items (especially foreign-made) you already own, like cameras, video or computer equipment, or valuable jewelry (particularly inadvisable), check with your home country's Customs office about filing a form of ownership. If it's undeclared beforehand, officials might assume you bought the item abroad and try to make you pay duty on it.

Auckland, NZ (☎ **0800-428-786** within New Zealand, 09-359-6655 from overseas; www.customs.govt.nz).

BARGAINING Bargaining may be more prevalent in parts of the world other than Europe, but it's still done in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and, to some degree, Italy. In other countries, store prices are pretty firm, but you'll have the opportunity to haggle in street markets anywhere.

These tips will help ease the process: Never appear too interested or too anxious; offer only half or even a third of the original asking price and slowly work your way up from there (the price should never jump up—it should inch up, so take the time to inch it properly); tantalize with cash and have the exact amount you want to pay ready in your pocket. Finally, don't take bargaining, the vendor, or yourself too seriously. The seller will act shocked, hurt, or angry, but isn't really; it's all just part of the ritual. And don't worry about taking advantage of the vendor; he'll only sell the item to you for the price he's willing to accept. Ideally, bargaining should be fun for both parties.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON EVENING ENTERTAINMENT

If you're interested in the **theater**, **bal-let**, or **opera**, ask at the tourist office if discount or last-minute tickets are available and where to get them (at the theater itself or a special outlet or booth, like the famous "tkts" half-price ticket booth on London's Leicester Sq.). Some theaters sell standing room or discount seats on the day of the performance, and students and seniors may qualify for special admission.

Nightclubs tend to be expensive, but you might be able to avoid a cover charge by sitting or standing at the bar rather than taking a table, or by arriving before a certain hour. If you decide to splurge, keep a lid on your alcohol intake; that's where the costs mount

astronomically. If you've arrived during a **public holiday** or **festival**, there might be abundant free entertainment, much of it in the streets. For more leads on stretching your entertainment dollar, check "Deals & Discounts" and "After Dark" in each city chapter.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL ON PHONE CALLS & E-MAIL

LOCAL CALLS In most European countries these days, public phones work with **prepaid phone cards**—many don't even take coins anymore—sold at newsstands, tobacconists, and post offices. These cards are put out by the phone company itself and are legit, not like the scams prevalent in the United States. Calls cost the same whether made with coins or cards. If you'll be in town a while, phone cards pay off in convenience. If you're in a country for just a few days, you probably won't use up an entire card (but good luck finding a coin-op phone in Paris or Athens anymore).

OVERSEAS CALLS If you can avoid it, never pay European rates for a transcontinental call; American rates are cheaper, so have friends and family call *you* at your hotel. AT&T, MCI, and Sprint all have local (usually) free numbers in each country that link you directly to an American operator, who can place a **collect call** or take your calling-card number. You'll find these local numbers under the "Telephone" entry in "Fast Facts" in every destination chapter of this book, or you can get a wallet card from the phone company.

Calling cards, not to be confused with phone cards, are like credit cards for phone calls and usually offer the easiest and cheapest way for you to call home. They're issued by major long-distance carriers such as AT&T, MCI, and Sprint. Since the rates and calling plans change regularly, shop around to find out which one is currently offering the best deal on Europe-to-the-U.S. rates.

Tips Number, Please: Calling Europe

To make a phone call from the United States to Europe, dial the **international access code, 011**; then the **country code** for the country you're calling; then (sometimes) the **city code** for the city you're calling (usually dropping the initial zero, which has conveniently been left off numbers in the list below); followed by the regular telephone number. For an operator-assisted call, dial **01**, then the country code, the city code, and the regular telephone number; an operator will then come on the line.

Following are codes for the countries and major cities in this guide. These are the codes you use to call from overseas or from another European country; if you're calling from within the country, see the "Country & City Codes" boxes within each destination chapter.

European phone systems are currently undergoing a prolonged confusing change. **Italy, France, Spain, Monaco, Copenhagen, and Portugal no longer use separate city codes:** The old codes are now built into all phone numbers, and (except for France) you must *always* dial that initial zero or nine (which was previously—and still is in most other countries—included before a city code only when dialing from another city within the country itself).

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|
| Austria | 43 | Hungary | 36 |
| Salzburg | 662 | Budapest | 1 |
| Vienna | 1 | Ireland | 353 |
| Belgium | 32 | Dublin | 1 |
| Brussels | 2 | Italy | 39 |
| Czech Republic | 420 | Monaco | 377 |
| Prague | 2 | The Netherlands | 31 |
| Denmark | 45 | Amsterdam | 20 |
| England | 44 | Portugal | 351 |
| London | 20 | Scotland | 44 |
| France | 33 | Edinburgh | 131 |
| Germany | 49 | Spain | 34 |
| Berlin | 30 | Sweden | 46 |
| Munich | 89 | Stockholm | 8 |
| Greece | 30 | Switzerland | 41 |
| Athens | 1 | Bern | 31 |

Avoid making any calls from European hotels. They often charge exorbitant rates—especially for transatlantic calls, but even for a local call like ringing up a nearby restaurant for reservations—and they often add a "surcharge" on top of that, sometimes bringing the total anywhere from 200% to 400% above what the same call would cost from a pay phone. Strangely enough,

the small, inexpensive hotels are least likely to charge obscenely high rates, while the plusher, pricier inns are the ones that tend to hit you with those ridiculous charges.

Calling cards are the cheapest way to call home, but if you choose to travel without one, you have two choices. Since phone cards (above) come in a variety of increments, you

can buy a few of the more expensive versions and call abroad by feeding them into a pay phone, one after the other, as they get used up. Or go to a big-city post office where you can call home from a little booth on a toll phone, then pay when you're done.

E-MAIL Cybercafes have popped up all over Europe faster than you can say “*le e-mail*.” You can find one in most cities, check your e-mail, and send virtual postcards to your friends back home for around 10¢ to 30¢ per minute. Most also offer temporary mailboxes you can rent for the day,

week, or month if you'll be sticking around town for a while. Some countries (Spain, the Netherlands) also provide public Internet kiosks scattered about town (often in post offices), but the speed is usually excruciatingly slow.

The best guides to cybercafes on the Web are www.cybercaptive.com and www.cybercafe.com. For much more on this subject, see “The 21st-Century Traveler” in chapter 2, and for specifics, check the “Internet Access” entry in the “Fast Facts” section for each city chapter.

3 Getting Around Without Going Broke

BY TRAIN

The train is the primary way to go in Europe. European trains are less expensive than those in the United States and far more advanced in many ways, and the system is much more extensive, with over 100,000 miles of rails. Modern high-speed trains make the rails faster than planes for short journeys, and overnight trains get you where you're going without wasting valuable daylight hours—and you save money on lodging to boot.

If you plan on doing a lot of train travel, *Frommer's Europe by Rail* is the official guidebook of Rail Europe. The user-friendly guide will help you plan your train trip through Europe, detailing the reservation process and highlighting the scenic lines, the high-speed routes, and lodging, dining, and charming stops along the way. Detailed itineraries help you make the most of your time.

For specific routes and schedules, the 500-page *Thomas Cook European Timetable* is the definitive book listing all official European train routes and schedules. It's available in the United States for \$27.95 (plus \$4.50 shipping and handling) from Forsyth Travel Library, P.O. Box 2975, Shawnee Mission, KS 66201 (☎ **800/367-7984**);

at travel specialty stores; or online at www.thomascooktimetables.com.

You can get even more information about train travel in Europe, plus research schedules and fares (largely for major routes) online at **Rail Europe** (☎ **877/272-RAIL**; www.rail-europe.com). For more on using Europe's trains, including resources for finding each country's national railway website—which will include much more detailed schedule and fare info than Rail Europe, sometimes even in English!—check out www.europetrains.org.

SUPPLEMENTS & RESERVATIONS Europe has a rainbow of train classifications ranging from **local milk runs** that stop at every tiny station to **high-speed bullet trains** that cruise at 209kmph (130 mph) between major cities. Many high-speed trains throughout Europe, including the popular ES (Eurostar), EC (EuroCity), IC (InterCity), and EN (EuroNight), require you to pay a **supplement** of around \$5 to \$15 in addition to the regular ticket fare. It's included when you buy regular tickets and (on most trains) is covered by rail passes.

The few trains that charge rail pass holders additional supplements (includes seat reservations) are

Tips Class Consciousness

The difference between seats in **first class** and **second class** on European trains is minor—a matter of 1 or 2 inches of extra padding and maybe a bit more elbow room (and only four bunks per sleeping couchette rather than 2nd class's six). For up to 50% less, a second-class ticket still gets you there at the same time.

Artesia (between France and Italy), Cisalpino (between Switzerland and Italy), Thalys (between Amsterdam or Brussels and Paris), Eurostar Italia (between major Italian cities), and AVE (between Madrid and Seville). If you didn't buy the supplement at the ticket counter (usually a special window at one end of the ticket banks) before boarding, the conductor will sell you the supplement on the train—along with a fine.

Seat reservations are also required on some of the speediest of the high-speed runs—Eurostar (between London and Paris or Brussels through the Chunnel), France's TGV, Germany's ICE, Spain's AVE and EUROMED, Italy's ETR/Pendolino and Eurostar, Sweden's X2000, and any other train marked with an "R" on a printed train schedule. Reservations range from \$10 to \$50 or more (when a meal is included). You can almost always reserve a seat within a few hours of the train's departure, but to be on the safe side, you'll probably want to book a few days in advance.

You'll also need to **reserve a sleeping couchette**—compartments with bunk beds to sleep four (1st class) or six (2nd class); a bunk costs around \$20 and isn't terribly comfortable, but it does get you where you're going without wasting your vacation time. Lock the couchette door, keep your money belt on under your clothes, and don't flash valuables (you're sharing the couchettes with strangers).

With two exceptions, there's no need to buy individual train tickets or make seat reservations before you leave the States. However, on the

high-speed Artesia run (Paris to Turin in 5½ hr.), you must buy a supplement beforehand—on which you can get a substantial discount if you have a rail pass, but only if you buy the supplement in the States along with the pass. It's also wise to reserve a seat on the Chunnel's Eurostar, as England's frequent "bank holidays" (long weekends) book the train solid with Londoners taking a short vacation to Paris.

TRAIN STATIONS Most European stations are brilliantly efficient and clean, if a bit chaotic at times. In stations, you'll find posters showing the track number and timetables for regularly scheduled runs that pass through (departures are often on a yellow poster, arrivals on white). In many stations you'll find automated ticket machines that can save you much standing-in-line time. Many stations also have tourist office outposts and hotel reservations desks, banks with ATMs, and newsstands where you can buy phone cards, bus and metro tickets, city maps, English-language newspapers, and local events magazines. The bathrooms often leave much to be desired; bring a packet of tissues with you as well as some spare change, as many require a nominal fee to get in.

RAIL PASSES One of the greatest values in European travel is the **rail pass**, a single ticket allowing you unlimited travel—or travel on a select number of days—within a set time period. If you plan on getting all over Europe by train, purchasing a rail pass will be much less expensive than buying individual tickets. Plus, a rail pass

gives you the freedom to hop on a train whenever you feel like it, and unless you need to reserve a couchette, there's no waiting in ticket lines. For more focused trips, you might want to look into national or regional passes, or just buy individual tickets as you go. Use Rail Europe (www.raileurope.com) and Europetrains.org (www.euopetrains.org) as resources to help you work out a rough trip plan and do some quick math to see whether a pass will save you money.

Passes Available in the United States

The granddaddy of passes is the **Eurailpass**, covering 17 countries (most of western Europe except the U.K.; see the “Eurail Countries” sidebar). The more modest but flexible **Selectpass** covers three to five contiguous countries for more focused trips. The passes include bonuses such as free or reduced prices on some ferries and river cruise boats, scenic buses, and certain private rail lines (for example, 25% off the Jungfrau train in Switzerland).

Rail passes are available in either **consecutive-day** or **flexipass** versions (in which you have 2 months to use, say, 10 or 15 days of train travel of your choosing as you go along). Consecutive-day passes are best for those taking the train very frequently (every few days), covering a lot of ground, and making many short train hops. Flexipasses are for folks who want to travel far and wide but plan on taking their time over a long trip and intend to stay in each city for a while. There are also **saverpasses** for families and small groups, and **rail/drive** passes that mix train days with car-rental days.

If you're **under age 26**, you can opt to buy a regular first-class pass or a second-class youth pass; if you're 26 or over, you're stuck with the first-class pass. Passes for **kids 4 to 11** are half price, and kids under 4 travel free.

The rates quoted below are for 2004:

- **Eurailpass:** Consecutive-day Eurailpass \$588 for 15 days, \$762 for 21 days, \$946 for 1 month, \$1,338 for 2 months, or \$1,654 for 3 months.
- **Eurailpass Flexi:** Good for 2 months of travel, within which you can travel by train for 10 days (consecutive or not) for \$694; or 15 days for \$914.
- **Eurailpass Saver:** Good for two to five people traveling together, costing \$498 per person for 15 days, \$648 for 21 days, \$804 for 1 month, \$1,138 for 2 months, or \$1,408 for 3 months.
- **Eurailpass Saver Flexi:** Good for two to five people traveling together, costing \$592 per person for 10 days within 2 months, or \$778 per person for 15 days within 2 months.
- **Eurailpass Youth:** The second-class rail pass for travelers under 26, costing \$414 for 15 days, \$534 for 21 days, \$664 for 1 month, \$938 for 2 months, or \$1,160 for 3 months.
- **Eurailpass Youth Flexi:** Only for travelers under 26, allowing for 10 days of travel within 2 months for \$488; or 15 days within 2 months for \$642.
- **Eurail Selectpass:** For the most tightly focused of trips, covering

Eurail Countries

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland all participate in the Eurail system.

Note: The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) isn't included.

three to five contiguous Eurail countries connected by rail or ship. It's valid for 2 months, and its cost varies according to the number of countries you plan to visit. A pass for three countries is \$356 for 5 days, \$394 for 6 days, \$470 for 8 days, and \$542 for 10 days. A four-country pass costs \$398 for 5 days, \$436 for 6 days, \$512 for 8 days, and \$584 for 10 days. A pass for five countries costs \$438 for 5 days, \$476 for 6 days, \$552 for 8 days, \$624 for 10 days, and \$794 for 15 days.

- **Eurail Selectpass Saver:** Same as the Eurail Selectpass (and slightly less expensive) but for two to five people traveling together. Per person, the three-country pass is \$304 for 5 days, \$336 for 6 days, \$400 for 8 days, and \$460 for 10 days. A pass for four countries is \$340 for 5 days, \$372 for 6 days, \$436 for 8 days, and \$496 for 10 days. A five-country pass is \$3,744 for 5 days, \$406 for 6 days, \$470 for 8 days, \$530 for 10 days, and \$674 for 15 days.
- **Eurail Selectpass Youth:** Good in second class only for travelers under 26. Cost varies according to the number of countries you plan to visit, but all passes are valid for 2 months. For three countries, it's \$249 for 5 days, \$276 for 6 days, \$329 for 8 days, and \$379 for 10 days. A four-country pass costs \$279 for 5 days, \$306 for 6 days, \$359 for 8 days, and \$409 for 10 days. A five-country pass is \$307 for 5 days, \$334 for 6 days, \$387 for 8 days, \$437 for 10 days, and \$556 for 15 days.
- **EurailDrive Pass:** This pass offers the best of both worlds, mixing train travel and rental cars (through Hertz or Avis) for less money than it would cost to do them separately (and one of the only ways to get around the high daily car-rental

rates in Europe when you rent for less than a week). You get 4 first-class rail days and 2 car days within a 2-month period. Prices (per person for one adult/two adults) vary with the class of the car: \$452/\$409 economy, \$481/\$423 compact, \$496/\$431 midsize, and \$531/\$447 small automatic (Hertz only). You can add up to 6 extra car days (\$49 each economy, \$64 compact, \$75 midsize, \$95 small automatic [Hertz only]). You have to reserve the first "car day" a week before leaving the States but can make the other reservations as you go (subject to availability). If there are more than two adults, the extra passengers get the car portion free but must buy the 4-day rail pass for about \$365.

- **Eurail SelectPass Drive:** This pass, like the EurailDrive Pass, offers combined train and rental car travel, but only for very focused trips: within any three to five adjoining Eurail countries. A flexi-pass, it includes 3 days of unlimited, first-class rail travel and 2 days of unlimited-mileage car rental (through Avis or Hertz) within a 2-month period. Prices (per person for one adult/two adults) are \$335/\$291 economy, \$365/\$305 compact, \$392/\$315 midsize, and \$429/\$331 small automatic. You can add up to 7 additional rail days for \$39 each and unlimited extra car days for \$49 to \$95 each, depending on the class of car.

There are also **national rail passes** of various kinds (flexi, consecutive, rail/drive, and so on) for each country, **dual country passes** ("France 'n Italy," or "Switzerland 'n Austria"), and **regional passes** like ScanRail (Scandinavia), BritRail (covering Great Britain—which Eurail and Europass don't), and the European East Pass (good in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland). Some types of

Tips A Train Discount

Remember that seniors, students, and youths can usually get discounts on European trains—in some countries just by asking, in others by buying a discount card good for a year (or whatever). Rail Europe or your travel agent can fill you in on all the details.

national passes you have to buy in the States, some you can get on either side of the Atlantic, and still others you must purchase in Europe itself.

For the Eurailpass and Eurorail Selectpass, you must scribble the date on the pass as you hop on the train; you don't have to wait in line at the ticket window. However, you will need to go to the ticket window if the train you want to take requires you to reserve a seat (such as the Pendolino, which, as a 1st-class train, doesn't accept the 2nd-class youth passes) or if you want a spot in a sleeper couchette. The Eurailpass gets you only a 33% discount on the TGV train through the Chunnel from London to Paris.

The passes above are available in the United States through **Rail Europe** (☎ 877/272-RAIL in the U.S., 800/361-RAIL in Canada; www.raileurope.com). No matter what everyone tells you, they *can* be bought in Europe as well (at the major train stations), but they are more expensive. Rail Europe can also give you information on the rail-and-drive versions of the passes.

Passes Available in the United Kingdom Many rail passes are available in the United Kingdom for travel in Britain and Europe.

The **InterRail Pass** is the most popular ticket for anyone who has lived in Europe at least 6 months. Its price depends on the trip duration and how many of the eight “zones” you pick (covering 28 countries—but, as with Eurail, none in the U.K.). The zones are: Zone A (Republic of Ireland), Zone B (Finland, Norway, Sweden), Zone C (Austria, Denmark,

Germany, Switzerland), Zone D (Czech and Slovak republics, Croatia, Hungary, Poland), Zone E (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands), Zone F (Morocco, Portugal, Spain), Zone G (Greece, Italy, Turkey, Slovenia), or Zone H (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Yugoslavia).

You can choose one zone (£182 for 12 days, £219 for 22 days), two zones (£275 for a month), three zones (£320 for a month), or all eight zones (£379 for a month). Folks under 26 pay a bit less. As with the Eurail, you'll likely have to pony up a supplement for high-speed trains across Europe. You can purchase the pass at the U.K.'s version of **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.co.uk/inter-rail).

Another good option for travelers 26 and under, **BIJ** tickets (Billet International de Jeunesse, French for “youth ticket”) cost 30% to 50% less than the standard one-way, second-class fare; are valid for a full month; and allow you to choose your own route to a final destination, stopping as many times as you like along the way. **Explorer** tickets are slightly more expensive but allow you to travel from London to your final destination along one route and back on another; you choose from a selection of predetermined circular routes (covering northern Europe, central and eastern Europe, or western Europe).

BIJ tickets are sold only in Europe, under the names of Wasteels and Eurotrain, but you can get further information on them at **Wasteels Travel** (www.wasteels.com). In London, you can get the tickets at the

Wasteels office at Victoria Station (☎ 020/7834-7066).

BY CAR

Getting around Europe by car might not be the pricey endeavor you imagine. True, rental and parking rates can be quite high, and gasoline costs as much as three times more than in the States. But once the math is done, three or more people traveling together can actually go cheaper by car than by train (even with rail passes).

In addition, driving is the best way to explore the rural and small-town sides of Europe, like France's Riviera, Italy's Tuscany, and southern Spain's Andalusia. You might want to mix-and-match train travel to get between cities and the occasional rental car to explore a region or two; if so, look into the rail/drive versions of rail passes (see "By Train," earlier in this chapter).

Never rent a car just to tool around a European city—the motorists and traffic patterns can drive anyone crazy, parking is difficult and expensive, and the public transportation is usually excellent anyway. Never leave anything of value in the car overnight and nothing visible any time you leave the car. (This applies doubly in Italy, triply in Seville.)

TAXES & INSURANCE When you reserve a car, be sure to ask if the price includes the E.U. **value-added tax (VAT)**, **personal accident insurance (PAI)**, **collision-damage waiver (CDW)**, and any other insurance options. If not, ask what these extras will cost, because at the end of your rental they can make a big difference in your bottom line. The CDW—which

at around \$10 to \$15 a day can buy you great peace of mind—and other insurance may be covered by your credit card if you use the card to pay for the rental; check with the card issuer to be sure and don't double-pay if you can avoid it! Remember that most CDWs come with an often-hefty deductible (\$500 or so), so while they can be a wallet-saver if the car is totaled, most bumps or scratches will still be paid for from your pocket.

If your credit card doesn't cover CDW, **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com) offers it for \$7 per day (plus a small plan fee). Many rental companies *require* you to buy or have CDW and theft-protection insurance to rent in Italy and Spain.

RENTAL AGENCIES The main car-rental companies include **Avis** (☎ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com); **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700; www.budget.com); **Dollar**, known as **Europcar** in Europe (☎ 800/800-3665; www.dollarcar.com); **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com); and **National** (☎ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com).

However, the best prices on rentals in Europe are usually found at **Auto Europe** (☎ 888/223-5555; www.autoeurope.com), which acts as a sort of consolidator for rentals—you actually pick up your car at, say, the Avis or Hertz office in the destination, but you pay a rate below what those rental agencies charge the public. This company will also work out long-term leases for periods longer than 17 days; it saves you lots over a rental, plus you get a brand-new car and *full* insurance coverage, as

Tips Rent Before You Go

Many car-rental companies grant discounts if you reserve in advance (usually 48 hr.), and it's *always* cheaper to reserve from your home country. Weekly rentals are less expensive than day rates.

Tips **The Rules of the Road**

- Drive on the right, except in England, Scotland, and Ireland, where you drive on the left.
- Don't cruise in the left lane on a four-lane highway; in Europe it truly *is* only for passing . . . and sports cars opened up.
- If someone comes up behind your car and flashes their lights at you, it's a signal for you to slow and drive closer to the shoulder so they can pass you.
- Except for portions of the German Autobahn, most highways do indeed have speed limits of around 100kmph to 135kmph (60 mph–80 mph).
- Remember, everything's measured in kilometers (mileage and speed limits). For a rough conversion: 1km = 0.62 miles.
- Gas might *look* reasonably priced, but remember that the price is per liter (3.8 liters = 1 gal.), so multiply by four to estimate the per-gallon price.
- European drivers tend to be more aggressive than their American counterparts, so drive defensively and carefully—assume that the other drivers have a better idea of the local traffic laws and norms, and take your cues from them.

with **Europe By Car** (© 800/223-1516, in New York 212/581-3040; www.europebycar.com).

PERMITS & HIGHWAY STICKERS Although a valid U.S. state driver's license usually suffices, it's wise to carry an **International Driving Permit** (required in Poland, Hungary, and Spain), which costs \$10 from any AAA branch (www.aaa.com). (You don't have to be a member; bring a passport-size photo.)

Some countries, like Austria and Switzerland, require that cars on the national highways have special stickers. If you rent within the country, the car will already have one, but if you're crossing a border, check at the crossing station to see whether you need to purchase a sticker on the spot for a nominal fee.

BY BUS

Bus transportation is readily available throughout Europe; it occasionally is less expensive than train travel, but

not usually, and covers a more extensive area but can be slower and much less comfortable. European buses, like the trains, outshine their American counterparts, but they're perhaps best used only to pick up where the extensive train network leaves off in some rural areas.

BY PLANE

Over the past few years, air travel in Europe has gone from laughably expensive excess only enjoyed by businesspeople with huge expense accounts to the fastest, and often cheapest, way to bop around Europe. It's called the **no-frills airline** revolution, and not only has it caused more than a dozen new little airlines to crop up, each selling one-way tickets that crisscross Europe for well under \$100, but it has also forced the major European airlines to drastically lower their own inflated prices.

Europe's **no-frills airlines**, such as easyJet and Ryanair, were modeled on American upstarts like Southwest, but

have proven even more successful at the concept. By keeping their overheads down—using electronic ticketing, foregoing meal service, and servicing either major cities' secondary airports or smaller cities—these airlines are able to offer amazingly low fares. Now you can save time *and* money over long train hauls. Ryanair even frequently runs promotions during which it gives away tickets *for free*, and many other sales on one-way tickets where they cost £1.99 (a little more than \$3). Seriously, this happens all the time. Even when not on sale, their tickets cost only around \$10 to \$50, tops. And flights rarely take more than 2 hours—whereas the same train trip might take 2 days.

The system is still evolving, with new players appearing every year and a few failing or, more commonly, being gobbled up by the growing competition. The phenomenon started in London, and many companies are still based there (although they now also have smaller hubs across Europe). Plus, there are now no-frills outfits setting up shop in Brussels, across Germany, and even in Italy and Spain. So far, only France has had bad luck, with its few start-ups failing and disappearing.

The two Big Boys in the business are **easyJet** (☎ 44-870/600-0000; www.easyjet.com), which has hubs in London, Liverpool, Bristol, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Paris; and **Ryanair** (☎ 353-1/249-7851; www.ryanair.ie), which flies out of London, Glasgow, Dublin, Shannon, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Brussels, and Milan.

The current shortlist of the most dependable among the other choices includes: **Virgin Express** in Brussels (www.virgin-express.com), **Germanwings** (www.germanwings.com) and **Hapag-Lloyd Express** (www.hlx.com) in Germany, **Volare Web** (www.volareweb.com) and **Air One** (www.air-one.it) in Italy, **Sterling** (www.sterlingticket.com) and SAS's offshoot **Snowflake** (www.flysnowflake) in Scandinavia, and **Air Europa** (www.air-europa.com) and **Spanair** (www.spanair.es) in Spain.

Of less use to casual travelers, but a growing force among budget-savvy Brits, is **bmibaby** (www.bmibaby.com), which flies from several central English cities (East Midlands, Manchester, Teeside), plus from Cardiff in Wales.

Be aware, though, that the names might change because these small airlines are often economically vulnerable and can fail or merge with a big airline. Still, as quickly as one disappears, another takes off. Independent websites www.lowcostairlines.org and www.nofrillsair.com keep track of the industry. Another site, **Applefares.com**, will do a pricing metasearch of some two dozen low-cost European airlines, including some, but not all, of those listed above, plus other, smaller ones. That way, you can see the going rate for, say, a London-to-Rome ticket—though it's not a booking engine, but a search engine.

Lower airfares are also available throughout Europe on **charter flights** rather than on regularly scheduled ones. Look in local newspapers to find out about them. **Consolidators** cluster in cities like London and Athens.