

Seven Secrets for Successful Travel

Independent travel in Europe - Seven Secrets for Success One: Do not try to see and do too much.

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One: Do not try to see and do too much.

You may end up actually seeing very little. I think it is better to see more of fewer countries/regions and see them properly. You may not want to stay in one location for your whole trip. However if you choose carefully it may be possible to do several day trips from one central location. If you do decide to tour, consider spending at least two nights in some of your destinations. It can be quite tiring being on the move every day, packing and unpacking.

Two: Decide on mode of transport.

Driving will give you more flexibility but can be daunting at times and is not recommended if you mainly wish to visit cities. You may decide to take your own car if you live in Europe. If you fly you can hire a car. Beware of extra charges for additional drivers, insurance excesses, airport charges, out of hour's charges etc. I always book a hire car through a UK company, with no excess.

If you use a budget airline try to only book direct flights. If you book a two leg journey, the budget airlines will not assist you, as they only operate a point to point service. Public transport is pretty good in most of Europe. There are also several budget airlines you can use between countries e.g. Ryan air and Easy jet.

Three: Be aware of security of possessions.

Use a money belt, hotel safe etc. Do not have all your money/cards in one purse or wallet. If you lose it you are in trouble. This happened to me when I was in Milan: I was travelling alone and was left penniless. My credit card company did transfer funds to me but it took 24 hours! I had to borrow 10 Euros from the hotel receptionist. Make sure you have travel insurance and if there is an incident get a written report from the local police station, to enable you to make a claim.

Four: Try to learn at least a few words of the language.

This will be greatly appreciated. My French is what you might describe as school girl (that was 25 years ago) but I do try when in France. Often I receive the reply in English but at least I tried. I always apologise if I cannot speak the language. I don't assume that the person I am talking to should speak English, I ask in their language if they speak English. As I do have a Scottish accent, I try to speak more slowly and clearly than usual, certainly not raising my voice.

Five: Don't be too structured.

You should allow some time just to wander around, enjoy a leisurely lunch. You do have to plan an itinerary, or you can just waste a lot of time, but it doesn't have to be written in stone! Allow yourself the opportunity to be spontaneous.

Six: Don't just stick to tourist traps.

Try to visit some authentic local restaurants, markets, villages, etc. where you will meet local people, rather than just other tourists. Surely part of the reason for going abroad is to experience at least a little of the local flavor, not just spend all your time with other tourists.

Seven: Book your accommodation in advance.

This may mean that you miss out on a charming establishment you come across in your travels, (you could always stay there on your another trip). However it will mean that you don't waste precious time going from hotel to hotel trying to find a room, having to arrive early enough at your next destination to look for accommodation. I am not even convinced that you save money by last minute searches.

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