

Some General Tips for Traveling to Europe

Passports, Visas, and Travel Authorizations:

To travel to Europe, Americans need a valid passport that will not expire for at least three months after our travel dates (or the day you leave Europe to return home). However, the [U.S. Department of State recommends](#) having at least six months of validity remaining on your passport.

Before travel, take a photo or make a photocopy of your passport so you have the information from it in a separate, secure location in case you lose your passport. It's also a good idea to provide a copy to your roommate, a travel partner, or a relative not on the trip, as an extra backup.

Americans do not need a visa or travel authorization to travel to Europe in 2024. The European Union had previously announced that Americans would need a travel authorization to travel to Europe in 2024, but that requirement has officially been delayed until 2025.

Foreign Travel Information and Advisories:

The [U.S. Department of State's website](#) is a valuable resource for Americans traveling to other countries. Among the information provided are travel requirements and advisories for each country. The Department of State currently has a Level 2 advisory (issued in July 2023) to "exercise increased caution" for travelers to the [Netherlands](#), [Belgium](#), and [Germany](#), based on an ongoing threat from terrorism. [Poland](#) currently has a Level 1 advisory to "exercise normal precautions."

Flights:

Flights from the U.S. to Europe are often overnight (or "red-eye" flights) that depart late in the day and arrive in Europe the next day. So if you wish to arrive in Amsterdam on July 6, you will likely need to look for flights that depart on July 5. Return flights back to the U.S. from Europe often depart and arrive on the same day. (It will be a very long day!)

If you plan to arrive in Amsterdam and fly home from a different city (such as Munich or Krakow), you can search for "multi-city" fares on websites, which are usually cheaper than buying two one-way flights.

If you have any layovers in Europe or in another foreign country (including Canada), allow extra time to pass through customs during your layover. You will also need to pass through customs when you reach your destination airport in Europe.

Luggage and Packing:

- Lugging a big, heavy suitcase is a burden, and trying to fit it on small European elevators or on a bus or train can be hard. Look for ways to pack efficiently so you can bring a smaller bag or less luggage to make travel easier for you.
- Dri-fit clothes roll up small, take up little room in suitcases, dry out fast, and are great for staying cool on those hot summer days (which it probably will be during our trip in July).
- Have two pairs of shoes, especially if you plan on hitting the water rides, but also in case of rain. If you get soaked you'll need some time for your shoes to dry out. Pack your smaller shoes and wear your bigger shoes on your flights.
- If you have old shirts, shorts, socks, or undergarments that you don't mind wearing and then throwing away during the trip, that can free up space in your suitcase for souvenirs collected during the trip.
- Rolling up clothes or packing smart is key. This video shows how to pack clothes so they take up very little room: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSmv_X_YeLY
- Here is a video with great points for how to pack for Europe, and what not to do: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoS8Meaeifl>
- Rick Steves offers [more tips for packing light](#).

Adapters and Converters for Electronics:

Wall outlets are different in Europe, using differently shaped plugs. You'll need an adapter to plug your U.S. electronics into wall outlets in Europe. They are easy to get at places like Walmart or Amazon. Look for ones that say "for Europe." Some adapters come with several different adapters to use throughout the world. In The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Poland, outlets use two round plugs (outlet types C, E, and F; the U.S. uses types A and B).

Voltages in Europe can be different than in the U.S., and any electronics or appliances you bring might need a voltage (or "power") converter as well. However, most converters include adapters, so you might not need a separate adapter. (American electronics typically run on 110 volts, while in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Poland, the standard voltage is 230 volts. However, some modern electronics might be marked as "dual voltage" and work in both the U.S. and Europe.)

Rick Steves offers [more info here](#).

Foreign Currency:

You can often get euros or other foreign currency from your bank before you leave. However, your ATM cards will likely work in Europe to get cash at ATMs if you need it. (Check with your bank to make sure before you leave for your trip.) Euros are used in The Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, but zloty is the currency in Poland.

Coin Purse:

You can use a credit/debit card to go cash-free at many places, but it can still be useful to have cash on hand for smaller purchases. Europe uses a lot of coins for small denominations, so when spending cash it is easy to end up with a pocket of coins. A coin purse is an easy way to keep them contained without having coins scattered everywhere.

Debit/Credit Cards:

- Before travel, contact your bank or card issuer to find out whether there are any fees to use your debit or credit card in Europe.
- You might also need to put a travel notification on your account before traveling, so your bank knows that your overseas charges are legitimate.
- If your credit card has a PIN, find out what it is before your trip, if you don't already know. You may be asked for it at automated kiosks or other machines.
- If the PIN for your credit or debit card begins with a "0" you may need to change your PIN before your trip, as some European machines do not recognize PINs that begin with 0.
- When using a card, always select the foreign currency on conversion when asked.
- Plan to bring at least two cards to Europe with you in case you have trouble with one.
- Before travel, take photos or make copies of the front and back of the cards you are traveling with in case you lose one during travel and need to contact your bank.

Cell Phones:

If you wish to use your cell phone in Europe, check with your carrier before you leave home to ask whether they offer any plans for Europe or whether there are extra fees for using your phone there. You may also be able to buy a physical SIM (or digital eSIM) card for your phone at the airport or another location after you arrive in Europe, which will provide you with local service. Most hotels and some amusement parks will also have wifi. If you don't have a plan or a SIM card for Europe, you can use a wifi connection for data or to use some apps, like WhatsApp, to make calls.

Hotels:

- Hotel rooms and bathrooms (and elevators, if they exist) tend to be much smaller than in the U.S.
- Air conditioning is not as common in Europe as in the U.S. Some hotels will not have it. Even if they do, it may not be very strong or very cool.
- If a room has two twin beds, they will sometimes be pushed together. But they can often be pushed apart easily (or you can politely ask the hotel staff to separate them for you), if desired.
- Top sheets on beds are often not provided, only comforters or duvets.
- Some hotels may not provide washcloths.

- Often, you will have to put your room key in a slot by the door to turn on lights in the room. When you remove the key from the slot (for example, when you leave the room), the room lights will turn off.
- If there is a minibar in the hotel room, do NOT take anything from it or your room will be charged (usually a highly inflated amount) for the item.
- If leaving the hotel on your own or with a small group, take one of the hotel's business cards with you, which should have the hotel's address and phone number. If you get lost or need help while you're out, it will help you find your way back or to contact the hotel if needed.
- Breakfast is generally very good.
- Coffee is often stronger in Europe. For something more familiar, you can ask for "American coffee," or it is sometimes referred to as "long coffee."
- Before you check out, be sure to look in the safe, drawers, closets in your room to make sure you don't leave anything behind - especially your passport!
- When checking out, remember that the elevators are small and you may need to wait longer for one. (Many ACEers will likely be checking out and using the elevators at the same time!) Plan extra time.

Toilets:

Public toilets in Europe are often not free and require a small fee to use. Plan to carry some local coins with you if you need to use a restroom when exploring a European city. (Toilets in gated amusement parks are typically free, however.)

Water:

Drinking water in Europe can be "still" (like tap water) or "fizzy" (with bubbles, or "with gas"), which is like seltzer water. When buying bottled water or ordering water in a restaurant, be sure to ask for "still water" or "water with no gas" if you do not want fizzy water. Note that tap water is not usually served for free in Europe like it is in the U.S.

Restaurants:

When dining in a European restaurant, the pace tends to be slower than in U.S. restaurants. In general, your meal will not be rushed, and you will be considered a guest and welcome to remain at your table for as long as you wish to stay. Therefore, your server will typically not bring your check until you ask them for it. You might want to plan extra time for sit-down meals.

Tipping:

Tipping service workers is not as common in Europe as it is in the U.S., and it often isn't expected. Typically, service workers there are relatively well paid, compared to their American counterparts, and do not rely on tips for their wages. You might see that a service charge between 10% and 15% in a sit-down restaurant is already included in the bill. However, if there

isn't and you feel the service was great, you can give an additional cash tip of 5% to 10% at a restaurant. (Cash is best as tips on cards may go to the restaurant owner, not your server.) If a hotel porter carries your suitcase, a euro per bag is appropriate (or 5 to 10 zloty in Poland). For a taxi driver, you can round up or add an extra euro or two (5 to 10 zloty in Poland), depending on distance.

Souvenirs (Specifically Shirts)

In Europe, shirt sizes tend to be smaller than in the U.S. So if you buy a souvenir shirt in Europe, you should probably look for a larger size than you'd normally get.

Language:

Many Europeans in the service industry will know some English, especially in larger cities. However, it may be harder to find people who speak English in smaller towns or businesses. Try to learn some basic phrases in the local language (such as "hello," "goodbye," "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "Do you speak English?"). The more you know, the more it will help bridge the language barrier, and build good will. Some locals might be more friendly and willing to help you if they know that you're trying to speak their language (and not just assuming that they will speak yours).

You might also want to download a language app (such as Google Translate) to your phone, which can help you communicate and help you decipher foreign menus in restaurants.

Some useful phrases in different languages are listed below.

English	German	Polish	Dutch
Hello	Guten Tag!	Witam	Hallo
Goodbye	Tschuss	Do widzenia	Tot ziens
How do I get there?	Wie komme ich dorthin?	Jak się tam dostanę	Hoe kom ik daar
Thank you	Danke	Dziękuję	Bedankt
Good Evening	Guten Abend!	Dobry wieczór	Goedeavond
Excuse me	Entschuldigung	Przepraszam	Pardon
I'm sorry	Es tut mir leid	Przepraszam	Het spijt me
The bill please	Die rechnung	Rachunek proszę	De rekening graag
Where is the train station	Wo ist der bahnhof	Gdzie jest stacja kolejowa	Waar is het treinstation
Where is the bathroom	Wo ist die Toilette	Gdzie jest łazienka	Waar is het toilet

Medical Prescriptions

Make sure you have enough of any routine medications you take for your entire trip, plus a couple extra days in case of travel delays back home. It is best to keep medications in their

original, labeled container. Also, it is best to carry a copy of your prescription with your name, your doctor's (or prescriber's) name, and the name of the medication on it.

Medical Insurance:

Before you travel, find out whether your medical insurance will cover any medical needs or emergencies if they arise while traveling in Europe. If not, you should consider purchasing supplemental medical insurance for travelers.

Travel Insurance:

Consider purchasing travel insurance to cover unexpected incidents such as trip cancellation, travel delays or lost luggage.

Traveling with Minors:

If a child is traveling to Europe without both parents (or legal guardian) accompanying them, the responsible adult traveling with the child must obtain a child travel consent form signed by any parent or legal guardian not traveling. Contact your attorney to acquire one. [More info here.](#)

Alcohol

The drinking age in Europe is generally younger than in the U.S. In the Netherlands and Poland, the legal drinking age is 18. In Belgium and Germany, the legal drinking age is 16.

Cannabis

Netherlands:

Cannabis has been decriminalized in the Netherlands since 1976. Possession of small quantities of drugs is illegal in the Netherlands, but Dutch authorities do not prosecute the possession of small amounts for personal use and low volume sales via strictly regulated retailers. However, possession of more than 5 grams of cannabis or 5 cannabis plants does open you to prosecution.

Belgium:

While cannabis is not recreationally legal in Belgium, enforcement of the laws is lax. There are a number of cannabis social clubs throughout the country, some of which date back to 2006. These clubs are modeled after those in Spain and rely on loopholes to operate, making them more preferable for residents than visitors.

Germany:

Cannabis in Germany is illegal for recreational usage, but legal for certain limited medical contexts. Possession of minor amounts is not always prosecuted, but it depends on the state and the circumstances.

Poland:

Possession of most drugs for recreational use, including cannabis, is illegal in Poland. It was classified as a narcotic in 1951 but it was not until 1997 that possession and use of the drug became a crime. Since 2011, prosecutors have the discretion to drop the charges if the quantity of drugs seized is only a small amount.