



Extroverts have more fun. If you see four cute men on a bench, ask them to scoot over.



One carry-on-size bag?? Here's exactly what I traveled with for two months (photo taken in a Copenhagen hotel room).

Rick Steves' Europe Through the Back Door

An award in heaven should be given to those authors who update their good books every year until they are great books. Rick Steves's guidebook on intelligent travel in Europe has been around decades, but it gets better with each yearly edition. That's because for the past twenty years Steves has spent several months each year exploring new and reexploring odd corners of the continent. From this wealth of experience he delivers not only the best guide to Europe, but the best general guide to smart traveling anywhere. I spent a decade full-time traveling myself, and these days I go to Europe once a month; this book has directed me to many specific towns or regions that retain distinctive cultures, places which would otherwise have taken me years of visits to find. Among the techniques Steves offers is a sort of laser traveling (head directly from the airport to the quintessential regions, skip the rest) which only works because he knows where to send you. There are a thousand hard-earned tips on cheap travel, on getting comfortable with a different way of doing things, and, bless his soul, he updates the darn thing every year with the latest prices. I consume travel books by the barrelful, including *Lonely Planets*, *Rough Guides*, and so on; this is the one to study, the one you want to reread. It's not about London and Paris; it is not a guidebook. It's about how to make jokes in beginners' Italian, or attend a wedding on a Greek island. With Steves's guidance you can finally do that inexpensive grand tour of Europe you've always meant to do, or, better, bestow a roundtrip ticket and this book to a recent graduate and it'll be as good an education as they've had.

—KK

Rick Steves' Europe Through the Backdoor 2000

Rick Steves
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In many ways, spending more money only builds a thicker wall between you and what you came to see. Europe is a cultural carnival, and time after time, you'll find that its best acts are free and the best seats are the cheap ones.

Travel is addicting. It can make you a happier American, as well as a citizen of the world. Our Earth is home to nearly 6 billion equally important people. It's humbling to travel and find that people don't envy Americans. Europeans like us, but with all due respect, they wouldn't trade passports.

The Big Sleep: Arrive 30 minutes before your train leaves. Walk most of the length of the train but not to the last car. Choose a car that is going where you want to go, and find an empty compartment. Pull two seats out to make a bed, close the curtains, turn out the lights, and pretend you are sound asleep. It's amazing. At 21:00, everyone on that train is snoring away! The first 30 people to get on that car have room to sleep. Number 31 will go into any car with the lights on and people sitting up. The most convincing "sleepers" will be the last to be "woken up." (The real champs put a hand down their pants and smile peacefully.)

Museum Strategies

Eavesdrop. If you are especially interested in one piece of art, spend half an hour studying it and listening to each passing tour guide tell his or her story about David or the Mona Lisa or whatever. They each do their own research and come up with different information to share. Much of it is true. There's nothing wrong with this sort of tour freeload. Just don't stand in the front and ask a lot of questions.

For \$20, you can rent a couchette (bunk bed) on your overnight train. Top bunks give you a bit more room and safety — but BYOB.

Tips on Creative Communication

Be melodramatic. Exaggerate the local accent. In France, communicate more effectively (and have more fun) by sounding like Maurice Chevalier or Inspector Clouseau. The locals won't be insulted; they'll be impressed. Use whatever French you know. But even English, spoken with a sexy French accent, makes more sense to the French ear. In Italy, be melodramatic, exuberant, and wave those hands. Go ahead, try it: *Mama mia!* No. Do it again. *MAMA MIA!* You've got to be uninhibited. Self-consciousness kills communication.

Desperate Telephone Communication

Let me illustrate with a hypothetical telephone conversation. I'm calling a hotel in Barcelona from a phone booth in the train station. I just arrived, read my guidebook's list of budget accommodations, and I like Pedro's Hotel. Here's what happens:

Pedro answers, "Hotel Pedro, grabd-aboodogalaysk."

I ask, "Hotel Pedro?" (Question marks are created melodically.)

He affirms, already a bit impatient, "Si, Hotel Pedro."

I ask, "*Habla* Eng-leesh?"

He says, "No, dees ess Ehspain."

(Actually, he probably would speak a little English or would say "moment" and get someone who did. But we'll make this particularly challenging. Not only does he not speak English — he doesn't want to... for patriotic reasons.

Remembering not to overcommunicate, you don't need to tell him you're a tourist looking for a bed. Who else calls a hotel speaking in a foreign language? Also, you can assume he's got a room available. If he's full, he's very busy and he'd say "complete" or "no hotel" and hang up. If he's still talking to you, he wants your business. Now you must communicate just a few things, like how many beds you need and who you are.

I say, "OK." (OK is international for, "Roger, prepare for the next transmission.") "Two people" — he doesn't understand. I get fancy, "*Dos* people" — he still doesn't get it. Internationalize, "*Dos* pehr-son" — no comprende. "*Dos* hombre" — nope. Digging deep into my bag of international linguistic tricks, I say, "*Dos* Yankees."

"OK!" He understands, you want beds for two Americans. He says, "Si," and I say, "Very good" or "*Muy bueno*."

Now I need to tell him who I am. I say, "My name Ricardo (Ree-KAR-do)." In Italy I say, "My name Luigi." Your name really doesn't matter; you're communicating just a password so you can identify yourself when you walk through the door. Say anything to be understood.

He says, "OK."

You repeat slowly, "Hotel, *dos* Yankees, Ricardo, coming *pronto*, OK?"

He says, "OK."

You say, "*Gracias, ciao!*"

Twenty minutes later you walk up to the reception desk, and Pedro greets you with a robust, "Eh, Ricardo!"