

Marc's Euro Trip Guide - Keeping it Simple

Alright - here are my thoughts on all the cities and some neat things to do / check out. I won't be any help with any of the chain hotels. First time I went was after college so had no loyalty, then I went with my parents and they found the places we stayed (mostly smaller, good value hotels). Print this "guide of Marc" out and take it with you. Have a blast man.

Marc

Paris

- Double decker bus tour is a pretty relaxing easy way to see the city. I'm not a big fan of bus tours, but something like that is a lot easier than walking / training yourself --- especially if you're on a time crunch.
- Definitely do the Louvre. If you're into art, allot at least 4 hours. If you're not, still will take at least 2 to get through the main parts.
- If you like Impressionist art (monet, manet, degas, van gogh, etc) - check out the Musée d'orsay. I didn't go here but really wish I would've
- If you like statues - check out the Rodin museum (only need an hour or two here, pretty open / relaxing museum)
- Eiffel Tower - don't need to go up, IMO.
- Notre Dame - I'm catholic, so very neat for me LOL. Worth seeing, but don't necessarily have to go in
- Walk down Champs Elysee. Like the 5th avenue of NYC, only cooler
- Eat some beignets (french doughnuts) like we did in New Orleans - just that these are the originals
- Eat pastries every day. They're amazing there
- Ile de St Louis is a neat little spot in the middle of the Seine River. Fun for a drink (not a must do)
- Versailles was awesome, but it's a day trip. Not worth it for the time you'll be in Paris, but up to you.
- Not any help for you re: where to eat or where to stay. We stayed at a little hotel near Gare du Nord (North of the city). It was a fine spot near the train, but downtown would probably be better.
- Research a few food spots if you want to really eat good food in Paris. There are a ton of tourist traps that really aren't worth the money, so while I don't have any specifics, I'd be sure to ask the concierge or something for a rec.

Amsterdam

- Check out the Van Gogh museum for sure. My favorite museum by far. Anne Frank house is a must just for the historical value (try to get there early - can be a huge line).
- We stayed at Hotel Nadia near Anne Frank house. It was a pretty good location. I'd recommend NOT staying in the red light district, but just visiting it. Just one rule: NO PHOTOS. Pimps will literally break your camera if they see you.
- Heineken brew tour was pretty fun. It's 2 hours, but an entertaining break from the day. And you get some damn good Heineken for free afterward (well, "free" given that you bought a ticket)
- Cannibus college - museum on, well, cannibus. Pretty interesting if you're into knowing more about the weed.

- One restaurant we went to was called "Mozders". It was amazing, good priced, Dutch food. I'd recommend it for sure.
- Also ate at a really good Indian food spot (hottest lamb vindaloo I've ever had) and another good restaurant. Will look them up for you when I'm back in Evanston and send them over. Remind me in case I forget...
- Most of the above accomplished in a day

Venice

- Walk all around the city. It's really small and pretty. Extremely easy to get lost in the winding streets!
- Naturally, take a canal tour / gondola ride
- In general, all over Italy, just take some time to buy local meats and cheese, buy some bottles of wine, and maybe some fruits, and then just chill and enjoy them all.
- We stumbled into one restaurant called "Anima Bella". Very small, cozy, romantic (but still homy) and amazing Italian food.
- San Marco Square - cool to visit and check out
- Would recommend staying near one of the two bridges if you have the option. But that city is so small, you can't go wrong anywhere.

Barcelona

- View the Gaudi architecture spots (Sagrada Familia, Guell Park, Casa Mila, Casa Batillo). All are awesome
- Walk up Las Ramblas (a famous street). Just a ton of street performers and entertaining people watching.
- Went to a very touristy, but awesome bar called "Bar Dow Jones". The drink prices vary based on what everyone else is ordering. And every so many \$\$ spent, the prices "crash" and you can buy really cheap drinks. Fun experience.
- Don't have much advice for you regarding where to stay. We stayed near a beach (disgusting beach, IMO), but had a pretty bad experience b/c of a shitty hostel.

Other answers to your questions:

- What was your itinerary like? **First trip, number of days in each city in parenthesis: Granda (2) --> rental car --> Nerja (2) --> train; miserable --> Barcelona (3) --> flight --> Paris (2) --> flight --> Venice (1) --> Train --> Florence / Cinque Terra (2) --> Train --> Athens (2) --> Boat --> Mykonos (3) --> Boat --> Athens (1) --> Flight --> Prague (3) --> Flight --> Amsterdam (2) --> Home. **Second trip: Rome (5) --> flight --> Nice, train to Juan les Pins (4) --> flight --> Bruges (3) --> train --> Amsterdam (1.5) --> Home.****
- How many days in each city?
- How did you commute between cities - best way? **Here's my advice for your itinerary: Paris -> Train --> Amsterdam --> Flight --> Venice --> Train/ear --> Rome --> Flight --> Barcelona --> Train?? --> Madrid**
- How did you visit city attractions? Tour Bus or on your own? **Would recommend a tour bus for Paris, some sort of guide for a day in Rome, and maybe a guide for a day in Barcelona and/or Madrid. Bus in Barcelona would probably work well, as there are a lot of places just to see. In general though, I'm not a big fan of guided tours b/c I get antsy and don't remember any of it. Would rather stroll around on my own and be able to detour as much as I want. Don't see as much of the history that way, but I find it more enjoyable.**

- Which & where were the hotels you stayed in? Were they city center or did you stay away from the city center? Names (Hilton/Marriott) would be helpful so it saves us time on research :-)
Would recommend near the city center for most of those cities. Subway is pretty solid in Paris and Rome. Don't remember about Barcelona. Amsterdam we never tried it (pretty easy to walk places)
- How much did you spend on intercity travel and food? Approx. For the most part, can eat pretty solid meals for 30 euro (and less for lunch). Each city you're going to though has some amazing food options, so might want to find one really good spot each place and splurge a little. The places I recommended above are generally between 20 and 40 euro per person for the meal. Inner city travel --- trains aren't that cheap. Express tickets to cost somewhere between 60 and 90 euro pp. Flights are fairly comparable if you take the discount carriers (ryan air, easy jet, etc). Just research the baggage allowances for those airlines because they really screw you over (only 1 carry on; 25 euro for each kg over the allotment you go, etc). So in all 80 -100 euro per day per person should do.
- Other advice?
 - Watch out for pick pockets in crowded streets
 - For the most part, tipping isn't necessary. Could leave your change, or maybe a few bucks at a nicer place. But def'n not the standard 15% in US. I think to be safe, we tipped somewhere around 10% at the nicer spots, and left a euro or two at the cheaper spots.
 - Don't try to do everything I recommended (or that you read in the guide books). Pick a few things to do each day and then carve out a little time for chilling out and just walking around.
 - If you want to make sure to hit all those cities, then the split of days seems pretty reasonable.
 - Have a freaking great time and be sure to share the wealth of any great finds with me when you get back!
 - One big thing: Savor at least one delicious meal-e`-de- Grandue`ir in Paris, Venice and Rome. Eat out the best steak, Italian or such meal to live the life. Totally worth it..

Rome

Lodging - let me know if you don't have a place to stay yet and I can recommend a few areas that are nice. Piazza Navona or Campo dei Fiori areas would be my recommended spots to stay. We did an apartment rent-by-owner that worked out really nicely. Can get you the info if you want. Shit's expensive there.

Sights:

I'd recommend some sort of city tour for at least 1 day. I'm not a big fan of tours, but there's just so much history there that the tours are worth it. We had a pretty good guide - my parents loved him. Happy to get you his info if you want.

Vatican: Again, having a guide is nice because the lines can get pretty ridiculously long. If you're budget conscious, then just go early in the day to get in line for either the vatican museums (Sistine Chapel is in there) or to visit St. Peter's.

Campo dei Fiori: Fun, open area to hang out at. Lot of restaurants there, all of which are decent. The little shops all around there are neat. They had a market most mornings with amazing fruit and stuff to buy

Piazza Navona: Big art center of Rome. Fun to walk around there a bit one day

Piazza del Popolo: I thought this place was pretty gorgeous. Huge symmetric buildings and right below Villa Borghese (neat gardens to stroll around if you have the time). Also a lot of restaurants here, but pretty expensive

Trastevere: Artsy, not quite as built up as the rest of Rome. I wandered around here for an afternoon and just walked through all the little nooks and crannies they call "streets". Had a few markets that were fun to check out.

Then all the rest you can find in guide books. Coliseum, Pantheon, Forum, Spanish Steps, etc.

Janiculum Hill gave some pretty neat views of the city

Jogging on the Tiber river is a good way to see some sights

Food options:

Buy wine at stores. It's like 5 euro for a good bottle. House wines at restaurants are usually only a few euros too (for a carafe) and tasted great to me.

Go to a deli at some point and buy some meats and cheeses. I've done that once each time I've been in Rome and it's been my favorite meal each time.

Trattoria der Pallaro: Near Campo dei Fiori. Hole-in-the-wall spot. It's a fixed menu for 25 euro and you eat whatever they're serving that day. Every dish was amazing and they stuffed the shit out of us. If no one is too picky of an eater, it was an awesome experience

Trattoria Cavalier Gino: Tried to go here, but got shut out. Need a reservation. Real small, unmarked place that looked incredible. I just have a feeling this place will rock

La Zozzone: Sandwich spot near Piazza Navona. Pretty awesome lunch option

Other

We used Rome Cabs to get to the airport from our hotel. They were great. Comes out about even with the trains if you're traveling with 3 people, and is much more convenient.

The "must-see's"

The Colosseum will be the #1 must see there and you could probably spend a few hours walking around and taking pictures there. I'd couple this with going to see the Forum and the ruins around the Forum since they're real close to each other. You could easily spend the better part of a day walking around the Forum and the Colosseum

The Vatican and Vatican Museum: You'll need to block out a whole day to see the Vatican and go through the Vatican Museums. The tour through there ends at the Sistine Chapel. The women will need to remember to wear something that covers shoulders and knees when you go through here. You could easily spend a whole day in just the museum part since there's so much to see, so that's why you should plan on spending the better part of a day here. You're technically not allowed to take pictures in the Sistine Chapel and there's usually people walking around in there yelling at you to not take pictures, but if you're sneaky about it you can get some good ones. You

can spend a pretty good amount of time in St. Peter's itself walking around in there and seeing all kinds of chapels and artwork (the Pieta is in here). The really cool stuff is kind of underground there in the catacombs and I think you may need to have a priest or someone take you down there as I'm not sure if it's open to the public. There's pope graves and where they think the actual burial spot of St. Peter is down there, but I'm not sure how to go about getting down there unless they have a separate tour for that. Father Carl was the one that took us down there. He also took us to the top of the dome and out on to the roof which was pretty cool too but I'm not sure if that's a separate tour either.

Trevi Fountain: This was one of the coolest places in Rome that I loved going to. Sweet fountain that's built in to the back of a building with lots of people around. I think it's better to visit this one at night - it looks a lot cooler at night. There's some good restaurants around this and some good places to get gelato around here too

The Pantheon: This was a pretty cool thing to see. It's a pretty wide open space in the building and you can just walk around and see some of the old temple and artwork inside. The hemisphere dome is really the thing to see here, so you can couple this with the Trevi Fountain since they're pretty close together.

Piazza Navona: This was probably my favorite place to hang out in the city. It's a wide open Piazza and one of the most famous ones in Rome. There's artists hanging out and performers hanging around here all day and night. There's plenty of good restaurants right off the piazza that you can eat dinner or grab lunch at. The Four Rivers fountain is in the middle of the piazza and is one of the coolest fountains in the city. This is where you may also see someone famous if they're in town - apparently that's where some celebrities like to hang out. When I was there, apparently we missed Woody from Toy Story hanging out there by an hour or so. This place is also pretty close to the Pantheon and Trevi Fountain - you could do all of them in an afternoon/evening.

Cinque Terra: Not exactly Rome but if they have time to take a side trip, Cinque Terra is a must. It's five small villages on the Mediterranean coast and you can hike to each one. Best views and awesome villages and probably one of my favorite highlights from my trip.

Other things to see

Villa Borghese: This is a huge park in the city and you could also spend quite a bit of time here. It's kind of out of the way, but pretty cool to see anyways. It's kind of like Rome's Central Park so more for people that like nature I guess, but still pretty cool. There's a museum in there too (Galleria Borghese) that's also really good.

Spanish Steps: This is literally what they are - just a bunch of steps. Lots of people hang out on them and they're pretty cool I guess, but I wasn't overly impressed with them. They're cool to go to, but don't spend too much time there. They are right outside of the shopping district, so it's cool to walk around and see those shops (Dolce & Gabbana, Versace, Bennetton, etc.) and see the steps at the same time. I think these are fairly close to Villa Borghese, so you could couple that with these steps.

The Vittoriano: This is a huge white marble monument that looks like a wedding cake around Piazza Venezia (another cool and busy place). I think it was finally finished around the World War II era, and most Italians have very mixed feelings about it. It's got some pretty cool stuff in it for history buffs, but the best part about it is the views of the city once you're up there in the monument.

Basilica of St. John Lateran: Really cool church that is a must-see for people interested in church history. Awesome sculptures and artwork inside. Saw the Pope perform mass outdoors here and also saw the Black Eyed Peas perform mediocre music outdoors here too. Really close to here is something (Scala Sancta - Holy Steps) where you can actually walk the same area that Jesus carried the cross and was sentenced by Pontius Pilate

Campo dei Fiori: This is an area with lots of cafes and open markets that's pretty cool. At night it kind of turns in to the American hang out spot and there are a few cool bars around it

Trastevere: A kind of up and coming neighborhood that I used to live close to. Has some good cafes and shops around

Gianicolo: One of the hills surrounding the city and probably gives you the best views of the whole city - close to Trastevere

Castel St. Angelo: Literally a castle that's a museum now and is also Hadrian's tomb. Very neat bridge leading up to this place (Bridge of Angels I think) and is very close to Vatican City. Was most recently featured in the Angels & Demons movie. Could probably couple this with the Vatican.

Cinecitta: Roman movie studio for movie buffs. A lot of things were filmed here and they still have some of the sets up there - Gangs of New York and the HBO show Rome were filmed here and I think can still be seen if you take a tour

Soccer: AS Roma and Lazio are the main Roman soccer teams and should be playing right now I think. They could probably see if a game is going on the week they're out there and it will probably be played at Stadium Olimpico which is kind of outside of the city. AS Roma is the more popular team in the city - kind of like the Cubs and the White Sox - most people love AS Roma and Lazio kind of has a niche following.

Church of St. Ignacio (Ignatius): Another really cool church with some neat artwork and chapels inside. If I remember, some of the chapels has actual bones from old monks or something that makes it up.

Church of San Luigi dei Francesi: Another historical church with some cool Caravaggio paintings inside

Ostia: This is kind of the Roman seaside on the west outside of the city. You can go here and spend the day at the beach (have to pay to get access to the beach) and is kind of cool if it's not in the busy tourist season (summer)

La Zazzone: This was a sandwich shop that I liked going to when I was there and Palmer found it and went there too. Close to Piazza Navona and good for lunch

This was just kind of a mental spew of information that I could remember. There's a million places to get pizza and gelato around the city, so you can really just walk around and dip inside whenever you feel like it. There's also a ton of places to get drinks and wine at around the city, so I don't recall any specific ones that I loved going to because pretty much every single place serves wine. There's not a lot of beer selection around Rome (Peroni and Naturo Azzuro and the occasional Beck's) so they'll probably mainly be drinking wine is my guess.

Enjoy!!