

Live Out European Dreams

Pt. 2 Blending In

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Being European, I often think differently about vacationing than people around me here. I take about two months off a year, just like everybody in Europe does. Then I prefer to travel without set plans and see what fate brings into my way.

Many people say that I am lucky to have traveled so much. In the past 10 years I have pretty much traveled around to many parts of the globe.

To be honest, luck has little to do with it. This might be hard part for some people to understand, but it's all about making that first decision and getting away from the routine. I often travel by myself. I find that traveling alone, I am more open to my surroundings.

Both in hostels and cafes, is where I came across the most interesting and entertaining people. I still keep in touch with many of them and if I'm close by, I make sure to pay them a visit. During my recent trip to Europe, I visited three places. First was the most romantic and vibrant city of Rome. Next stop was my home city Budapest and last was a place that exceeded my expectations, the city of lights; Paris.

Arriving in Rome was like waking up from a long satisfying sleep. The smell of espresso awaited on every corner, mixed with fresh pastry. It made me feel excited and content at the same time. Maybe it's the amount of caffeine that they consume, but listening to Italians converse and see them using their hands to make their words more picturesque was an energy-boost in itself.

I wanted to admire everything that Rome had to offer, but I only had a two-day stay. I headed to the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel.

Normally, I would avoid guided tours, because of the controlled experience, (I prefer taking my time in galleries). This time however, I chose to do it for two reasons. With pre-booked tickets, I did not have to wait in the very long line to get in, but most importantly I was hungry for information regarding the famous paintings, sculptures and in general, the Vatican Museum.

Next, I went to see the Colosseum and the Pantheon before finally I sat down to eat something. My feet were sore, but my spirit was up. I could have sworn that the pasta I ate in this small restaurant was the best I ever had, only until the next day, when again I could have sworn that was actually the best meal.

Another thing I found fascinating in Italy was the fact that cafes and restaurants seated strangers together in order to avoid others waiting to sit down. It might sound strange to some cultures but around Italy it is common. This encounter with strangers allows for discovery of great new tips over pizza and Chianti.

My next destination was Budapest, Hungary. In Eastern Europe prices are still considerably lower than in the West, while still being just as eventful and hip. Eastern Europe only became a tourist destination after the communists fell out of power.

Since 1990 citizens of Hungary



The Danube River runs through Budapest. Dividing it into Buda, the greener and modern side. Pest is crowded with museums, theaters, cafes and plenty of restaurants.

have been allowed to come in and out of the country. The cost of living used to be much less expensive than the Western part of Europe, but in recent years it started to balance out due to the European Union. Budapest is one of the few places that take my breath away every time I experience it.

The city of Budapest really consists of two cities, Buda and Pest divided by the river Danube. Buda is the green and modern side contrasting the old town, Pest. The Buda hills offer great outdoor activities like mountain-biking, running or hiking, while Pest is crowded with museums, theaters, clubs, cafes and shops.

Getting around is easiest and most affordable by public transport. Buses, trams and subways run around the clock. Tickets are not expensive to start with; but even if one doesn't buy them, nobody really checks it.

One thing I really love about Europe is that there is always great variety of things to do. Culture is affordable and therefore greatly enjoyed by Europeans. Most of my Hungarian friends and family visit two to three museums and see at least one theater performance a month.

During my stay in March, I visited the Museum of Fine Arts to see one of the biggest Van Gogh Exhibitions for three Euros and saw "The Producers" from the third row in a local theater for 15 Euros (about \$20) with Hungary's greatest performers.

Typically cafes and bars are packed around 6 p.m. with locals who stop by on their way home from work or school for socializing and winding down after a stressful day. Clubbing is similar in many ways to how we do things in L.A., but different in other ways. I went from one place to the next enjoying different scenes and type of music all night long. Clubs don't close before 4 a.m. and buses take party people around town non-stop, so nobody has to worry about drinking and driving.

I flew back to the U.S. from Paris. (I like to arrive to one city and depart from another in order to experience more.) To be honest, I never really wanted to go to France. The more

French I have met, the less I wanted to go there. But I found a really cheap ticket out of Paris, so I had to take it. It is rare that I have to say that I was wrong about something, but in this case I was. I fell in love with Paris the moment I set my eyes on the Notre-Dame and the bank of the Seine covered with street vendors, painters or other artists.


I chose bicycle to explore the city through the most random and chaotic way: by bicycle. I decided

on not following maps and allow myself to get lost in order to truly feel freedom. I saw breath-taking architectures on every corner where I turned, regardless whether it was a tiny street or a major avenue, like the Via Rivoli. Later, I was talked into a picnic at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

The park was packed with people; people like me, but in many ways so different. I was surrounded with every color and every language one can imagine.

One thing was common, we were all there to soak up the sun, smell the grass, and share bread and wine with strangers. As the sun went down, the streetlights were turned on and put Paris in a whole different perspective. I was sad to leave, but sure that one day I will return and spend more time in Europe.

All in all, I spent \$600, missed ten days of work, saw Rome, Paris and Budapest. I think I made a good deal.



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