

Planning your first trip to Europe – a lifelong learning class proposal

Course overview

More and more Americans are discovering the magic of travel to Europe. While information to help plan such a trip is widely available it can seem overwhelming to get down to the details of landing in a foreign country and figuring out how to get from point A to point B, where to put your head at night, where to eat and what to do once you're there. While there can be joy in spontaneous travel a well-planned trip allows travelers to reap the maximum reward from limited time overseas.

This course begins with how to plan an itinerary and budget for a trip, and covers logistics such as transportation, accommodation, money and sightseeing. Participants will learn how to best make use of the abundant information available online and to choose a guidebook that works best for their needs. They will learn how to avoid mistakes that can spoil the magic of the trip. They will learn skills to become self-sufficient and confident travelers – the key to a successful trip.

Objectives

At the end of this course, participants will:

- Identify their dreams, hopes and plans for an upcoming European vacation
- Learn how to create a budget for the trip, making the best use of their money
- Maximize their use of the internet and other resources to research, plan and implement the key elements of their vacation
- Know how to design an itinerary, select accommodations, arrange transportation and plan activities
- Be able to plan and execute a challenging, rewarding and unforgettable vacation in a fascinating and different culture

Course outline

1. So you want to go to Europe
 - a. Participant introductions, travel objectives
 - b. Class overview
 - c. Language and communications
 - d. Life in another culture – How to not be the Ugly American
 - e. Traveling companions
 - f. Web sites to get you started
 - i. How to use discussion boards
 - ii. Understanding reviews
2. Designing your itinerary
 - a. How to decide where to go
 - b. How much time to spend where
 - c. "Slow" travel vs. whirlwind
 - d. The guidebook round-up and run-down
 - e. Other details – passports/documents
3. Determining and living with your budget
 - a. The declining dollar
 - b. How much things cost
 - c. Where should you scrimp – and where shouldn't you?

- d. Currency exchange
- 4. Planes, trains and automobiles
 - a. Packing
 - i. Luggage
 - ii. Clothing
 - iii. What about the electricity? Adapters and such
 - b. Getting overseas
 - c. Surface and air travel within Europe
 - i. Eurail pass or low-cost air carriers? Pros and cons of each
 - d. Public transportation 101
 - e. Driving in Europe
- 5. Doing what you want to do
 - a. What's your fancy?
 - i. Architecture, art, gastronomy, wines, performing arts, people watching, history, shopping ...
 - b. Planning and getting the most from your sightseeing
 - c. Photography and journaling
 - d. Staying in touch with loved ones at home
- 6. Sleeping, eating and miscellany
 - a. Finding the right accommodation
 - b. What are your comfort needs?
 - c. Learning about the best foods each region has to offer
 - d. How to order food and pay
 - e. What about tipping?
 - f. Learn how to ask for the "toilet"

Instructor: Dana McMahan

Dana first traveled to Europe in 2001 on a 25-day backpacking trip through five countries with her husband. She planned the trip for 14 months, covering every detail of budgeting, transportation, accommodation, sightseeing and eating. The trip was intended to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but Dana and her husband have now been to Europe seven times, traveling to England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Estonia, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Monaco. Their next two trips will take place in October 2006 and June 2007.

Dana has learned to use the Internet, books and magazines to research and plan affordable, challenging and rewarding trips. She planned a trip to Italy once with only a week's notice and has twice traveled with companions who had never been to Europe. She has stayed in youth hostels, guesthouses, apartments, villas, pensions, and hotels with 1 through 4 stars. She has traveled by low-cost air, business class air, free air, first and second class train, taxi, boat, ship, ferry, bus, subway, tram, cable car and rental car. She has gone beyond just sightseeing to enjoy activities such as a cooking class in Italy, finding and meeting family in Slovakia and eating lunch in a kind stranger's house. Along the way she has made many mistakes that she likes to help others learn from.

Dana graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a degree in Psychology and has worked primarily in project management and web development for a tourism agency, an Internet marketing firm and for a homebuilder. She currently works as a Web Content Developer.

