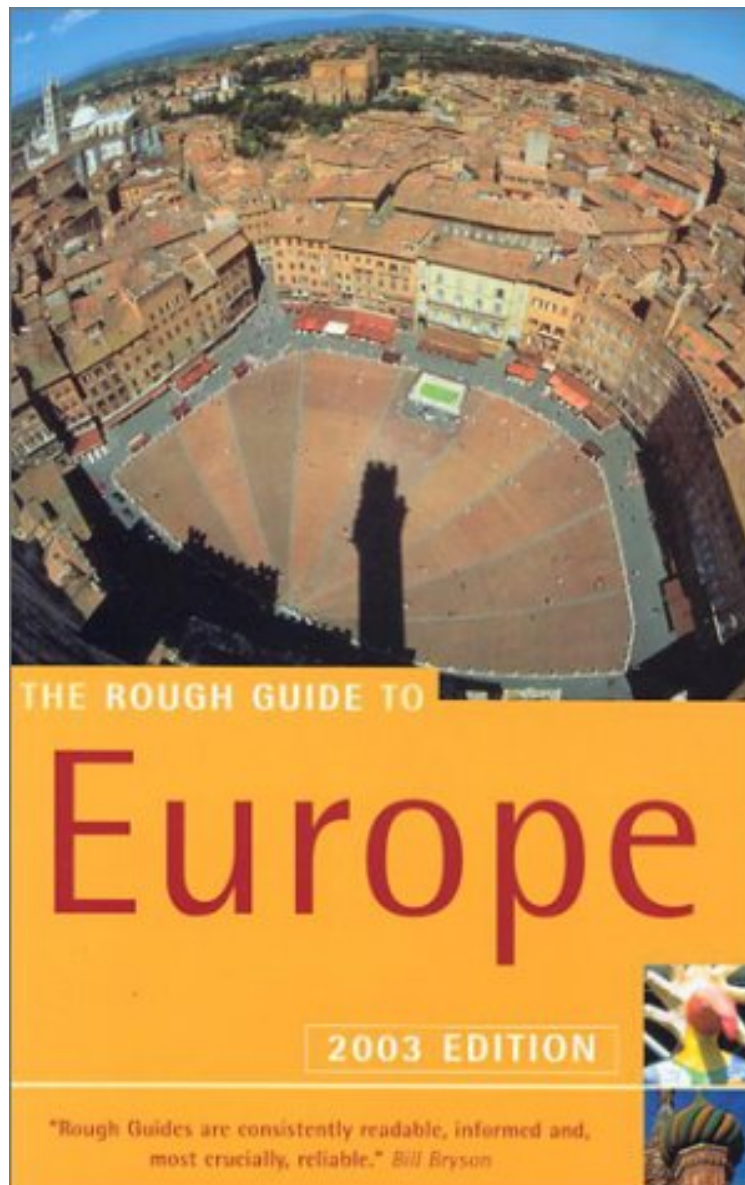


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Rough Guides : The Rough Guide to Europe, 2003 Edition before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rough Guide to Europe, 2003 Edition:

This guide to Europe features a full-colour section introducing the highlights of any trip to Europe, as well as lively

accounts of the main attractions, from Hamburg's nightlife to the beaches of Greece. There is a special focus throughout on budget travel and the needs of students and backpackers. The guide also features comprehensive reviews of the best-value places to stay, eat and drink, as well as practical coverage of the best ways to get around, from InterRail passes to organized tours.

About the AuthorWritten by a team of researchers, many of whom are the authors of other Rough Guide city and country guides.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.WHERE TO GO Where you head for obviously depends on your tastes and the kind of vacation you want: you can sample mountain air and winter sports in the Alps of France, Austria or Switzerland, lie on a beach in the swanky resorts of the south of France or Italy, or view architecture and works of art in the great cities of London, Paris, Florence and Amsterdam. Suffice to say, the lifting of restrictions on travel in eastern Europe, with only a handful of countries still requiring visas and nothing like the bureaucratic regulations there were before, means that the Continent really is there for the travelling something manifest in the increasingly good-value rail passes (see pp.2029) that cover most of the countries in this book. Although you may want to make a long hop or two by air, rail is the way to see the Continent, highlighting the diversity of the place when you travel in a few hours from the cool temperatures of northern Europe to the rich and sultry climes of the Mediterranean. In fact, with the richness and diversity of its culture, climate, landscapes and peoples, there is no more exciting place to travel. WHEN TO GO Europe's climate is as variable as everything else about the Continent. In northwestern Europe Benelux, Denmark, southwestern Norway, most of France and parts of Germany, as well as the British Isles the climate is basically a cool temperate one, with the chance of rain all year round and no great extremes of either cold or hot weather. There is no bad time to travel in most of this part of Europe, although the winter months (Nov-March) can be damp and miserable especially in the upland regions and obviously the summer period (May-Sept) sees the most reliable and driest weather. In eastern Europe to the right of a north-south line drawn roughly through the heart of Germany and extending down as far as the western edge of Bulgaria (taking in eastern Germany, Poland, central Russia, the Baltic states, southern Sweden, the Czech and Slovak republics, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and Romania) the climatic conditions are more extreme, with freezing winters and sometimes sweltering summers. Here the transitional spring and autumn seasons are the most pleasant time to travel; deep midwinter, especially, can be very unpleasant, although it doesn't have the dampness associated with the northwestern European climate. Southern Europe, principally the countries that border the Mediterranean and associated seas southern France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and western Turkey has the most hospitable climate in Europe, with a general pattern of warm, dry summers and mild winters. Travel is possible at any time of year here, although the peak summer months can be very hot and very busy and the deep winter ones can see some rain. There are, too, marked regional variations within these three broad groupings. As they're such large countries, inland Spain and France can, for example, see a continental type of weather as extreme as any in central Europe, and the Alpine areas of Italy, Austria and Switzerland and other mountain areas such as the Pyrenees, Apennines and parts of the Balkans have a climate mainly influenced by altitude, which means short summers and long winters that always see snow. There are also, of course, the northern regions of Russia and Scandinavia, which have an Arctic climate again, bitterly cold, though with some surprisingly warm weather during the short summer when much of the region is warmed by the Gulf Stream. Winter sees the sun barely rise at all in these areas, while high summer can mean almost constant daylight. There are obviously other considerations when deciding when to go. If you're planning to visit fairly touristed areas, especially beach resorts in the Mediterranean, avoid July and August, when the weather can be too hot and the resorts at their most congested. Bear in mind, also, that in a number of countries in Europe everyone takes their vacation at the same time (this is certainly true in France, Spain and Italy, where everyone goes away in August). Find out the holiday month beforehand for the countries where you intend to travel, since you can expect the crush to be especially bad in the resorts; meanwhile, in the cities the only other people around will be fellow tourists, which can be miserable. In northern Scandinavia the climatic extremes are such that you'll find opening times severely restricted, and even road and rail lines closed, outside the May to September period, making travel futile if not impossible. In mountainous areas, things stay open for the winter sports season (Dec-April), though outside the main resorts you'll again find many things closed. On the other hand, mid-April to mid-June can be a quiet period in many mountain resorts, when you may have much of the place to yourself.