

DIY SMARTER HOME · TRAVEL

# Europe, four *countries*, nineteen days.

A complete itinerary across France, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria — late June into mid-July 2023. Hotels, daily plan, transport, reservations, and what I'd change.

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DATES	June 24 – July 12, 2023
COUNTRIES	France · Italy · Switzerland · Austria
CITIES	14
BACKBONE	Eurail Global Pass + 2 scenic supplements

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# What's *inside*.

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# Paris — two days, *classic*.

JUN 24 → 26 · EIFFEL · LOUVRE · ONWARD TO MILAN

## STAY

### IHG Paris (Night 1) · Residence Inn CDG (Night 2)

Central Paris first night, airport hotel before early flight to Milan.

~\$200/night

DAY 01 SATURDAY · JUNE 24

## EWB → *Paris*.

- Overnight flight EWR → CDG, arrive midday Sunday
- Hotel check-in mid-afternoon, snack, recover
- Eiffel Tower at 8:30 PM — golden hour, sparkle at 10 PM
- Late dinner near Champ de Mars

DAY 02 SUNDAY · JUNE 25

## Louvre, sunset *Eiffel*, transfer to CDG.

- Louvre — pre-book 3 PM entry slot to skip the line
- Optional: Musée d'Orsay if energy permits
- Late afternoon dinner near Île de la Cité
- Transfer to Residence Inn at CDG for early Milan flight

*Versailles is doable as a half-day add-on if you arrive earlier — RER C from central Paris, ~45 min each way.*

# Milan, Venice, *Rome*, Florence.

JUN 26 → JUL 1 · DUOMO · GONDOLA · COLOSSEUM · DAVID

## STAY

Milan (Expedia) · Venice (direct) · Rome (direct) · Florence (Booking)

Mix of platforms — direct hotels in Venice and Rome, Booking.com for Florence centro.

~\$180/night avg

DAY 03 MONDAY · JUNE 26

Paris → *Milan*, then to Venice.

- Morning flight CDG → LIN, arrive ~10 AM
- Drop bags, head to Milan Duomo — climb the terrace
- Quick lunch in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II
- Afternoon train Milan → Venice (~2.5 hrs)
- Evening: settle in, walk to nearby canal for dinner

DAY 04 TUESDAY · JUNE 27

Venice — *gondola*, Doge's Palace, Murano-Burano.

- Early: Rialto Bridge before crowds, St. Mark's Cathedral
- Doge's Palace tour
- Afternoon vaporetto to Murano (glass) and Burano (colored houses)
- Sunset gondola ride at 5:30 PM (Viator)
- Late evening train Venice → Rome (~3.5 hrs)

DAY 05 WEDNESDAY · JUNE 28

Rome — *Colosseum*, Palatine, Trevi.

- Spanish Steps morning walk
- Trevi Fountain (early to beat crowds)
- Palatine Hill + Roman Forum (combined ticket)
- Colosseum — 5:55 PM entry (gold hour)
- Dinner near Piazza Navona

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DAY 06 THURSDAY · JUNE 29

## Vatican, *Sistine*, Florence at night.

- Pasta-making class at Piazza Navona — 11 AM
- Pantheon walkthrough
- Vatican Museums + Sistine Chapel — 4:30 PM entry
- St. Peter's Basilica
- Dinner, late train Rome → Florence (~1.5 hrs)

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DAY 07 FRIDAY · JUNE 30

## Florence — *Duomo*, David, Uffizi.

- Duomo climb — 8:15 AM time slot
- Baptistery, Piazza della Signoria, Ponte Vecchio
- Accademia — David, 1:30 PM
- Uffizi Gallery — 4 PM (closes 6:30)
- Steak dinner — Trattoria Mario or Trattoria dall'Oste, 6:30 PM
- Sunset at Piazzale Michelangelo

*David (1:30 PM Accademia) and Duomo climb (8:15 AM) need to be locked weeks in advance.*

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DAY 08 SATURDAY · JULY 1

## Florence II — *market*, breathing day.

- Mercato Centrale morning — sandwiches, leather, food
- Optional: Pisa day trip (1 hr each way)
- Evening train Florence → La Spezia (~2 hrs)
- Check in, dinner near the harbor

# Cinque Terre, *Lake Como*, Bernina Express.

JUL 2 → 5 · FIVE VILLAGES · FERRY TO BELLAGIO · SCENIC TRAIN TO SWITZERLAND

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## STAY

La Spezia / Monterosso (Airbnb) · Bellano (Airbnb) · Tirano (Eco Rooms)

Coastal Airbnb for Cinque Terre, lakefront for Como, simple direct in Tirano.

~\$150/night avg

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DAY 09 SUNDAY · JULY 2

*Cinque Terre* — five villages by train.

- Cinque Terre rail pass — unlimited hop-on-hop-off
- Riomaggiore → Manarola (postcard sunset)
- Corniglia (cliff-top, 380 stairs up)
- Vernazza — best for swimming
- Monterosso — sandiest beach
- Sunset at Riomaggiore from the rocks

*The full coastal hike (Sentiero Azzurro) is partially closed most years — check before committing. Train + boat is more reliable.*

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DAY 10 MONDAY · JULY 3

La Spezia → *Lake Como*, ferry to Bellagio.

- Morning train La Spezia → Milan → Varenna (~4 hrs)
- Ferry Varenna → Bellagio (~15 min)
- Walk Bellagio's stepped streets, Punta Spartivento
- Ferry to Menaggio for dinner
- Return ferry to Bellano for the night

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DAY 11 TUESDAY · JULY 4

## Bellano → *Tirano*, gateway to the Alps.

- Morning ferry to Varenna for a final lake walk
- Train Varenna → Tirano (regional, ~2 hrs)
- Easy evening — Tirano is small
- Rest before early Bernina Express tomorrow

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DAY 12 WEDNESDAY · JULY 5

## Bernina *Express* — into Switzerland.

- Bernina Express 8 AM Tirano → Chur (~4 hrs of glaciers)
- Reserve panoramic seats well ahead
- Chur → Lucerne (~2 hrs)
- Lucerne walk: Chapel Bridge, lake promenade
- Train Lucerne → Interlaken (~2 hrs, Brünig Pass)
- Boat from Brienz to Interlaken if timed (~1 hr scenic)
- Train up to Wengen — overnight, alpine village base

*Long travel day on paper, but each leg is a scenic showcase. Bernina has a mandatory seat reservation fee on top of Eurail.*

# Wengen, *Zermatt*, Zurich.

JUL 5 → 10 · JUNGFRAU HIKES · MATTERHORN VIEWS · GLACIER EXPRESS

## STAY

Wengen (Booking) · Zermatt (Capital One) · Zurich (IHG)

Wengen for Jungfrau, Zermatt for the Matterhorn, Zurich as final base.

~\$220/night avg

DAY 13 THURSDAY · JULY 6

## Wengen — *Männlichen*, Grindelwald hike.

- Cable car Wengen → Männlichen (panoramic ridge)
- Männlichen → Kleine Scheidegg ridge hike (1.5 hrs)
- Train back to Wengen, or continue to Grindelwald
- Lauterbrunnen valley waterfalls if energy holds

DAY 14 FRIDAY · JULY 7

## Grindelwald *First* + Schilthorn option.

- Cable car to Grindelwald First — Cliff Walk, First Flyer
- Bachalpsee hike (2-3 hrs RT, alpine lake under the Eiger)
- Alternative: Schilthorn (Piz Gloria) for Bond views
- Evening: relax in Wengen

DAY 15 SATURDAY · JULY 8

## Wengen → *Zermatt*, Glacier Paradise.

- Trains Wengen → Spiez → Visp → Zermatt (~3 hrs)
- Drop bags, up Klein Matterhorn (Glacier Paradise)
- Highest cable car in Europe — glacier palace, panorama deck
- Sunset back in Zermatt village

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DAY 16 SUNDAY · JULY 9

## Gornergrat sunrise, *Glacier Express*.

- Gornergrat Bahn — early train for clearest Matterhorn views
- Hike Gornergrat → Riffelberg → Riffelalp
- Glacier Express Zermatt → Zurich — 8 hours, panoramic
- Evening Zurich, dinner near the lake

| *Glacier Express needs seat reservations (~\$50 supplement on top of Eurail). Worth every cent.*

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DAY 17 MONDAY · JULY 10

## Zurich — *Lindt*, lake, then to Vienna.

- Lindt Home of Chocolate (Kilchberg)
- Old town walk: Niederdorf, Grossmünster, Bahnhofstrasse
- Lake Zurich boat tour (1 hr)
- Evening flight Zurich → Vienna

# Vienna — two days, *imperial*.

JUL 10 → 12 · SCHÖNBRUNN · BELVEDERE · STEPHANSDOM

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## STAY

### IHG Vienna

Central Vienna, walking distance to Stephansplatz and the Ringstrasse.

~\$170/night

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DAY 18 TUESDAY · JULY 11

## Vienna — *Schönbrunn*, Belvedere, Stephansdom.

- Schönbrunn Palace and gardens — morning
  - Belvedere — Klimt's "The Kiss"
  - St. Stephen's Cathedral — south tower climb
  - Naschmarkt for late lunch
  - Café Central or Café Sacher for the classic Sachertorte
  - Evening walk along the Ringstrasse
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DAY 19 WEDNESDAY · JULY 12

## Fly home.

Last walk through the Innere Stadt, coffee at Café Hawelka, transfer to VIE for the flight back to EWR.

# Transport & *tickets.*

Most of this trip ran on rail. Eurail Global Pass covered the bulk; supplements (Bernina, Glacier Express) and city-specific passes filled the gaps. Book timed entries the day reservations open.

ITEM	WHEN TO BOOK	NOTES
Eurail Global Pass	2–3 months out	10-day flexi covered most of it
Bernina Express	1 month out	~\$25 seat reservation, panoramic car
Glacier Express	1 month out	~\$50 reservation, 8-hour scenic
David / Accademia	3–4 weeks out	1:30 PM is sweet spot
Duomo Florence climb	3–4 weeks out	8:15 AM slot, small groups
Vatican / Sistine	1 month out	4:30 PM combined ticket
Colosseum	2 weeks out	Combined w/ Forum + Palatine, 5:55 PM gold hour
Pasta-making class Rome	2 weeks out	Piazza Navona, 11 AM
Sunset gondola Venice	1 week out	Viator, 5:30 PM, shared boat

# What I'd *change*.

Honest notes after 19 days — what worked, what I'd reroute.

## PACING

### One night in Milan was the right call.

The Duomo and Galleria are stunning, but Milan is more of a transit and shopping city than a destination. One day, terrace climb, train onward — perfect ratio.

## ADD

### Three nights in Rome, not two.

Rome packs in more than you can metabolize in two days. The Vatican alone deserves half a day clean. Three nights would have let me fit Trastevere properly.

## SKIP

### Pisa is a 30-minute photo stop, not a destination.

Lean tower, miracles square, done. Don't build a day around it. Treat it as a stretch on the way between Florence and the coast if convenient — otherwise skip entirely.

## BEST OF TRIP

### Bernina Express was the surprise highlight.

Better than Glacier Express, honestly. Tirano → St. Moritz → Chur, four hours of glaciers, viaducts, and pasture. The Brusio circular viaduct alone is worth the ticket.

## STAY

### Wengen beats Lauterbrunnen as a base.

Car-free village, alpine quiet, instant access to Männlichen and Kleine Scheidegg. Lauterbrunnen has the famous waterfalls but is busier and lower; Wengen is the better sleep spot.

## TICKETS

### Book reservations as a system.

David, Duomo climb, Sistine, Glacier Express — all on the same day reservations open. Block your calendar 90 days out and knock them out in one sitting.