

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Americans Are All Over Europe This Summer. Here's How to Outsmart the Crowds.

Expect even more tourists than usual in the U.K., Italy, France and wherever Taylor Swift is performing



By Allison Pohle

June 23, 2024 9:00 pm ET

Who is headed to Europe this summer? You and everybody else.

This year is shaping up to be a record one for American tourism to the continent. The first five months of this year saw nearly 7% more trips by U.S. citizens to Europe compared with 2023, according to air-traffic data from the International Trade Administration.

The crowds have continued as summer has officially kicked off. The top destinations from the U.S. to Europe this season are London, Rome, Paris, Athens and Amsterdam, according to ticket-sale data from Airlines Reporting Corp.

The European leg of Taylor Swift's Eras tour and the Summer Olympics in Paris have given U.S. travelers extra reasons to visit. And airlines have added dozens of nonstop flights as travelers prioritize vacations abroad.

Travel executives and advisers gave the following tips to save money and headaches this summer:

Forget spontaneity

To combat the influx of visitors, major attractions like the Louvre museum in Paris have set daily visitor limits. Venice charges a 5-euro fee, equivalent to roughly \$5.4, for day-trippers on certain days through July 14, and the Acropolis in Athens now requires travelers to buy tickets with predetermined entry times.

Travelers who don't plan ahead can miss out on these sites, says Nora Blum, vice president at Travel Leaders in Maple Grove, Minn. "People love thinking they want to be free and to go with the flow," but that is inadvisable, she says.



Visitors should skip spontaneity and book ahead for popular attractions like the Alhambra in Granada, Spain.

PHOTO: FERMIN RODRIGUEZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS

While you are purchasing ahead of time, Blum suggests looking into skip-the-line passes for popular attractions. They cost more but save time. Don't give up if the biggest draws are sold out. Instead, check for promotions from the city. In Spain, passes to the Alhambra fortress in Granada sell out quickly. But the city sells a tourist pass that guarantees entry to some of the most popular monuments, as well as trips on public transit.

Barcelona, Rome and the Greek island of Santorini are among the destinations with popular cruise ports. They list scheduled cruise arrivals and the number of passengers on board. Checking the schedule, even if you aren't on a cruise, can help you plan your day to avoid long waits and big crowds, says Margi Arnold, owner of Creative Travel Adventures in Denver.

She suggests getting up early to visit the most popular attractions or traveling to areas that are harder to reach during day trips.

Dinner reservations often make sense in crowded tourist cities, especially for families or larger groups. Some veteran travelers recommend downloading WhatsApp. Many restaurants will correspond over the free messaging app regarding reservations.

Prep for disruptions

It is common for rail and airport workers to strike. These actions are announced in advance, so travel advisers suggest checking schedules ahead of time to see how you might be affected.

Regardless of strikes, delays can occur because of air-traffic control, weather or other scheduling issues. Before you depart, download relevant apps for flights and trains and sign up for alerts so schedule changes don't catch you off-guard.

International airports are no place for cutting it close, since options for expedited security screening are limited. Travelers can reserve a time to go through security at six international airports through Clear Reserve, a free service. London Heathrow and Frankfurt Airport in Germany are some of the airports that take reservations.

And read up on rules for liquids. Heathrow requires travelers to remove liquids and put them in clear, resealable bags provided at the checkpoint.

When you return to the U.S., try using mobile passport control, a free app that lets you speed up entry into the country. Travel advisers also recommend taking photos of your passport in case it gets lost.

Keep the heat in mind

Europe is facing another scorching summer. Check whether your lodging has air conditioning—it isn't a standard offering in many regions, says Arnold, the travel adviser.

Travelers should also bring water bottles and plan breaks indoors during the hottest parts of the day, she says.

Check your health-insurance policy

Medicare and Medicaid don't cover international medical bills. Some private insurances won't cover all expenses, either. Before you depart, check your policy and consider buying travel health insurance to avoid pricey charges in a medical emergency.

Bring the right credit card

Travel with a credit card that doesn't charge

foreign-transaction fees. Many cards can add charges of 3% or 4% for a transaction. Not every vendor accepts American Express, though it is becoming more available in Europe.

Consider the Olympics

It isn't too late to attend the Paris Olympics, though it isn't necessarily a cheap ticket. About 30% of hotel rooms in Paris are still available, according to Hotels.com, with the average rate of \$455 a night during the Olympics. In Paris, available rates for short-term rentals are averaging \$481 a night during that stretch, according to AirDNA, a market-research firm.

Each Thursday, new Olympics event tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. local time—yes, that is 4 a.m. Eastern—as part of a promotion called Ticketing Thursday. There are also official resale tickets available.

Sign up for the WSJ Travel newsletter for more tips and insights from the Journal's travel team.

Write to Allison Pohle at allison.pohle@wsj.com

Appeared in the June 25, 2024, print edition as 'How to Outsmart the Crowds in Europe'.



Athens is one of this year's most popular destinations for U.S. travelers. PHOTO: SOCRATES

BALTAGIANNIS/PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES



The Summer Olympics begin in Paris on July 26. PHOTO: KIRAN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES