

SEIZE THE DAY TRIP

A selection of excellent European day trips, with villas to match, get the most out of the continent

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Be impulsive. YOLO. Live every day like it's your last. But when you've shelled out for a couple of much needed weeks in the sun, reckless quasi-philosophical utterances skitter into irrelevance like lizards making for the shade. Planning is everything, and all the more so when it comes to day-tripping abroad—essentially, planning a holiday within a holiday.

While what makes a successful day trip is highly subjective (gelato; adrenaline; minimal family strife), there are certain fundamentals that underscore every memorable dawn-to-dusk sojourn: a destination worth the trouble; a journey worth the time; and a starting point worth returning to. With these criteria in mind, we've compiled a Europe-based selection for your consideration.



Lot Valley, France



CYCLE THROUGH FRANCE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES AVEYRON, FRANCE

DAY Cycle through the region that contains the highest concentration of France's most beautiful villages. For the sporty, a good loop destination point is World Heritage site Conques, arguably the pick of the region's plus beaux villages with its winding medieval streets and 9th-century abbey. Start out from the charming village of Loupiac (Causse-et-Diège) and reach Conques (and a memorable lunch by the Dourdou River at Hôtel-Restaurant Hervé Busset) via the serene Lot Valley. Worthwhile stops along the way include the villages of Flagnac, Saint-Parthem, La Vinzelle, and the Château de Gironde. For the return journey, loop back through Decazeville, taking in the local coal mining heritage along the way.

STAY Villa Boussou is a converted stone barn dating from the 1800's. Set in tranquil countryside (one kilometre from the village of Loupiac), the villa comfortably houses six. Bicycles are included.

GOOD TO KNOW Other beautiful villages within striking distance of Villa Boussou are Belcastel and Najac.

SAIL THE DALMATIAN ISLANDS DALMATIA, CROATIA

DAY Charter a yacht from the town of Supetar on Brač, and strike out for the island of Vis. Vis has been referred to as one of Croatia's 'best-kept secrets' for the best part of ten years (it's only been open to the public since 1989, due to its military past), so it's extraordinary how much the island has retained its gentle, unspoilt feel. Moor up in the emerald waters of Stiniva Bay for a beach picnic and snorkel (loggerhead turtles frequent the bay). In the afternoon, make for the fading Venetian swank of Hvar Town on neighbouring Hvar island. After wandering the town's marble streets, dine on Divino Restaurant's terrace (book ahead) before sailing for home as the sun sets.

STAY Villa Gumino is a stone's throw from Supetar, Brač's largest town and a short walk from a beach of typical Croatian prettiness and pebbliness. If that sounds like too much exertion, expansive sea views are also available from the comfort of the infinity pool.

GOOD TO KNOW Visit in late August and September following the summer rush (Hvar Town attracts an estimated 20,000 tourists a day in the high season). ☺



Hvar Harbour

CULTURE IN SEVILLE
ANDALUSIA, SPAIN

DAY Vivacious Seville is often admired for its full-throated fiestas, delicious tapas and throbbing nightlife. But there's a quieter, more contemplative side to the city that's exemplified by its numerous superb museums. Make a beeline for the impressive Museo de Bellas Artes (regarded as second only to Madrid's Prado as a repository of Spanish art). Tucked away inside a salmon-pink former convent, you'll find extensive examples of work from Spain's best painters and sculptors including Murillo, El Greco and Velázquez. Afterwards, fuel up on aguacate langostino at Bar Estrella before finding your way to the Museo del Baile Flamenco or the Museo de Arte Andaluz Contemporánea for your second helping of Spanish art bliss.

STAY An hour's drive from Seville, the Cortijo Viejo near gleaming Arcos de la Frontera is a fairy tale country estate. A prime example of traditional Andalusian architecture, it's ideal for those seeking isolation amid orange trees and olive groves.

GOOD TO KNOW The region is renowned for its sherry, and a circuit starting at nearby Jerez before passing through Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Chipiona, Rota, and El Puerto de Santa Maria can make for an enjoyable day's tasting.



Cortijo Viejo, Arcos de la Frontera



The 1,000-acre Limavady Estate

WALK THE NORTH ANTRIM COAST
COUNTY ANTRIM, NORTHERN IRELAND

DAY The North Antrim Coast is one of the great coastal walks, where the Atlantic wears away at this rough-hewn edge of Ireland, the dramatic contours of which contrast strikingly with the pastoral scenes tucked into the serene glens. That would be enough in itself, but the coastline is blessed with an astonishing geological centrepiece: the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With the Causeway as start or finish point, enjoy a day's walking topped off by a visit to the world's oldest distillery, Bushmills, on the way home.

STAY Match the grandeur of the North Antrim Coast with the neo-classical majesty of the Limavady Estate. With accommodation for 16 and six baths, this is the perfect base for pre and post expeditionary activities. Enjoy the indoor pool, home cinema, or full size cricket pitch while the butler ferries out refreshments.

GOOD TO KNOW When visiting the Causeway, aim for low tide: much of the Causeway is covered when the tide is high.



View of Lake Como from Villa De Sogni



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II
Image by Wojtek Chmielewski / Shutterstock.com


BARGAIN HUNTING IN MILAN
LOMBARDY, ITALY

DAY Reverse the traditional Milanese pilgrimage by staying at Lake Como and day tripping into the city. For bargain hunters

new to the ways of the Italian fashion capital, pick up a copy of Scoprioccasioni, a guide to the city's reputable factory outlets (available at local bookstores). Il Salvagente (translation: the Lifesaver) is the most famous of these, with racks upon racks of discounted big names (cash only). If you haven't the appetite for the hunt, make for the Quadrilatero d'Oro and the flagship stores of Versace, D&G, and Prada; Via Brera or Corso di Porta Ticinese for more alternative fashions; and luxury shopping at the glass-roofed Emanuele II near the central Duomo. For sustenance, sit down at Antica Trattoria della Pesa or stroll past Bar della Crocetta for a panini. Of course, coffee is plentiful (if better and more pleasantly served the further from the centre you look) while seeking out the Pasticceria Martesana just

north of the Quadrilatero d'Oro will reward you with chocolate cake made by a world champion maître chocolatier. Return home and show off your new acquisitions while dining at Bellagio's Hotel Suisse Restaurant.

STAY Luxurious and modern Villa De Sogni offers matchless lake and mountain views, and its four rooms are all spacious and well appointed. Added extras include a well-stocked wine cellar, sauna, and heated pool.

GOOD TO KNOW Drive time into Milan is about 1hr 20minutes. Avoid most of the traffic by taking the A9 autostrada route through Como towards Milan's city centre, find the 'Lampugnano' multi-storey parking lot on Via Giulio Natta (in the city outskirts), park there and take the metro to Duomo. 

All the villas in this article can be booked through Oliver's Travels, oliverstravels.com. Rental cars are available in all destinations from Hertz, hertz.co.uk.