



escapes in europe

Europe offers variety, culture and sunshine, all within easy reach. Travel there by train or ferry for a lower carbon footprint. Sharon Henshall reports.



El Duende is a delightful little getaway in the mountains just 30km from Malaga in Spain. It is the new found amigo to anyone looking for some fresh air, fabulous views and peaceful surrounds.

Perched on a mountain top in the tiny village of Ventorros, El Duende is an idyllic place. The surrounding white-washed houses, wild flowers and fig trees all add to the charm. Ruth Fellner, the beating heart behind El Duende, opened the doors 11 years ago and has nurtured its growth ever since. The guest accommodation works well, a rambling house with plenty of space for its guests. The self catering facilities help keep you within a budget, and the small terrace with dipping pool provides a picturesque spot to chill out. There are two separate apartments and several adjoining bedrooms. The house can sleep 10 people, making it ideal for all types of booking, from large family gatherings to a holiday for one.

Ruth also runs an 'Aladdin's cave' shop. She has recently reduced the shop size, but it's still is a great place for getting your incense and Moroccan pottery. Yoga classes run regularly for locals and guests alike. When free, the large airy yoga studio is available for guests' personal practice. Ruth's training is from the 'Sivananda School of Yoga' as well as studying Iyengar/Bihar at the Marie Quail School of Yoga in Northern Ireland. Her yoga class begins with a beautiful chant which pays respect to the masters of yoga and invokes their energy into the session. Ruth caters to all levels and one-to-one sessions can be organised if required. She can also teach meditation for those seeking inner peace during their stay.

If you've been struggling with the pace of everyday life and need a bit of extra holiday pampering, Ruth can organise an array of therapy sessions for you. Choose from massage, aromatherapy, crystal healing, shiatsu or maybe a session with a homeopath or osteopath. They also have a kinesiologist and a flower essence practitioner to hand, who can also do testing for allergies (from foods or other substances). There's positively something for everyone!

Ruth hosts yoga retreats at various points throughout the year and can also provide the space to other teachers to bring students. Full details can be found on the El Duende website www.elduendeandalucia.com

For those who enjoy hiking, pull on your walking shoes and choose from the many nearby paths. If you enjoy exploring further afield, head up the road to Comares, a picturesque village with stunning coastal, lake and mountain views. Here you can find a small supermarket, bakery, restaurants and a labyrinth of pretty winding streets. If you fancy some sea air, head down the mountains and be a beach bum for the day. Or, take a side trip to Granada and visit the magical La Alhambra, a Moorish fortress which is unrivalled for beauty and architectural splendour.

El Duende is a peaceful place, perfect for those wishing to step off life's tread-mill for a while. Saying adios at the end of your stay won't be easy. Try 'hasta luego' instead, and leave it open for a return visit one day!



get wwoofing

Wwoof is a world wide network started in the UK back in 1971. It has since become an international movement that is helping people share more sustainable ways of living. This is a great opportunity to get first-hand experience of organic farming methods. Wwoof basically works like an exchange programme, volunteers offer their services and, in return, the Wwoof hosts provide accommodation, food and the opportunity to learn about organic lifestyles.

In order to Wwoof in Europe, you need to contact the appropriate organization for the country you would like to work in. There are national Wwoofing organizations for the vast majority of European countries. You simply pick the country you'd like to work in and then contact the relevant organization to become a member. You will then receive the list of farms where Wwoofing is available. Then you can start planning your trip. Can you believe there's 290 in total for Germany alone!

There are a number of European countries covered by Wwoof Independents – a non-profit organization that covers those countries without a national organization. Memberships and the farm lists for these countries are run from the UK office. For comprehensive information on how to Wwoof in each European country visit www.wwoof.org. Travel, visas and insurance are all left to the individual. The Wwoof organization you are dealing with may be able to recommend where to get your insurance etc but these expenses are not covered by the programme.

Wwoofing is a fantastic way to learn about organic farming and the communities working hard to maintain an organic lifestyle. You will meet some wonderful people and gain great reward from offering your help.

cool camping in summer

The Cool Camping books are a series of guides started by Jonathan Knight after an enjoyable camping weekend with friends in South Wales. Unlike the shelves of mundane caravanning directories out there, the Cool Camping guides offer comprehensive information in a readable style on a full range of tent-oriented campsites.

'Cool Camping: Europe' is the latest release and their most voluminous guide yet. The book covers Portugal, Spain, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, and Greece. Camping can be one of the best ways to experience any country, seeking out those special secluded spots, stunning views and nature all around. With the usual wit and wisdom, the Cool Camping guide to Europe advises on the ups and downs of a whole range of campsites across this diverse continent.

Many jewels are waiting to be found including an uninhabited island off the Spanish coast, yurts and tepees in Andalusia and the heavenly seclusion of a cliff-top in Greece.

whale watching in Ireland

Nic Slocum's 'Whale Watch West Cork' guides you through the whale and dolphin sanctuary off the South West coast of Ireland. These waters are an important feeding ground frequented by a number of whale and dolphin species for over 7 months of the year. Conservation of cetaceans around the world is of huge importance to Nic. He has developed a Code of Conduct to manage marine wildlife tourism and reduce disturbance to an absolute minimum. "The aim is to introduce a proper accreditation process that will bring all operators up to speed with a minimum set of standards" explains Nic.

In the same vein, Nic's tours have a real focus on teaching customers about the marine life they are observing as well as illuminating the bigger picture of marine conservation. There has been a total of 24 different whale and dolphin species recorded in Irish waters to date. You can hop aboard the Voyager, a purpose built whale-watching catamaran, up to three times a day during the summer months. Sunset trips come highly recommended from past customers, providing a magical end to the day.

Nic's team can offer awe inspiring sights of these incredibly beautiful animals. Whilst, at the same time, ensuring that this privilege is fully appreciated and understood from a conservational point of view. "It is essential that we monitor the impact of whale and dolphin watching operations" claims Nic, "to ensure our interaction with the animals is not having any detrimental effects".

If you are planning a trip to Ireland, be sure to book whale watching into the itinerary. If you don't have any immediate intention to visit this diverse and illustrious country, get planning! Visit the website at www.whalewatchwestcork.com or just give the ever friendly Nic a call on +353 (0) 86 120 0027.

Articles by **Luke Bell**

platform changes

It is now faster and easier than ever to see Europe by train! Inter-railing is by far the cheapest way to explore Europe. There are numerous rail passes on offer, allowing you to pick and choose a selection of European stop-offs, with flexible dates. Inter-Rail is perhaps the most well known supplier of rail passes, but Eurail actually offer a more flexible selection. For more details visit www.eurail.com

For trips to a single destination, air fares can appear cheaper on the face of it. Yet, if you take into consideration travel to and from airports (many of which can be a long way from the city centre), luggage fees, air taxes etc. then the train starts to look a little more attractive. For a fast, flexible and efficient means of exploring this diverse continent, take the train.