

LIFESTYLE

TRAVEL



Don't be put off by the thought of busy airports - take it easy and enjoy these slow, lavish European breaks by ferry or train

Continental drift

Words: Richard Mellor, Gemma Bowes and Carolyn Boyd

Art and culture on the Rhine, Düsseldorf, Germany

Five hours by train from London
Düsseldorf will delight fans of art and architecture. Paintings by Picasso, Klee, Mondrian, Matisse are on display at the Kunstsammlung's two hubs, and there is a great graffiti scene along the easterly Kiefernstrasse, with many buildings entirely daubed in extravagant prints.

As for architecture, take a Rhine cruise with KD Cruises (beginning on 29 May) or join a Tours by Locals guided walking tour for an introduction to Medienhafen, an upscale riverfront district featuring three twisted, curvilinear Frank Gehry conceptions. A stroll along the swanky shopping boulevard Königsallee, keeping to its chestnut-tree-lined canal, leads to Kö-Bogen, a sinuous mall and office block designed by Daniel Libeskind.

Near here begins the ancient, boisterous Altstadt district, whose estimated 260 pubs and bars are known collectively as the "longest bar in the world".

On Sundays, as shops shut and

hangovers kick in, stroll Rhine-side promenades or the botanical and ornamental gardens hugging Benrath Palace a few miles south.

An appropriately artsy base is the Max Brown Midtown hotel (from €116 B&B, maxbrownhotels.com) with 65 pale-hued but boldly decorated rooms. The hotel, a 10-minute trot from the main Hauptbahnhof station, is in the city's Japanese Quarter: Düsseldorf is home to Europe's third-largest Japanese community and the streets surrounding Immermannstrasse are the place for great sushi and ramen. Eurostar from London from £180 return, changing in Brussels and Cologne

White sand shores, Jersey, Channel Islands

Four hours by ferry from Poole

It might be a British dependency yet Jersey feels like a proper escape, with white-sand shores and villages with French names and sea views. It is the largest of the Channel Islands, but since it covers only 45 square miles, you're never far from the water.

A Martello tower overlooking the white sands of Portelet bay, Jersey (left)



There's much fun to be had, too. Island RIB Voyages can speed you to the scarcely inhabited Écréhous skerries, with a chance of spotting dolphins en route, while the whitewashed Nude Food beach club promises healthy brunches by day and DJs on weekend evenings. Sample whites, reds and rosés at the La Mare Wine Estate - none of its 20,000 bottles are ever exported (hence their low profile), or learn to shuck during Seymour Oyster's champagne-fuelled tours around some of Europe's largest oyster beds. Then devote some time to capital St Helier's extensive, VAT-free shopping.

Jersey excels at wellness, and one of its spa attractions is the Sirène (day entry from £90pp), which offers treatments such as salt-crystal exfoliations and slimming wraps alongside a pool, an aromatherapy steam room and a whirlpool bath. It's close to the Old Court House (doubles from £167 B&B, liberationgroup.com), a 15th-century pub with stylish rooms overlooking St Aubin's quaint harbour. Condor Ferries from Poole to St Helier from £60 each way

Champagne moments, France
Four hours by train from London

Celebrations have been few and far between for the last two years, so toast our new relative freedom with a trip to the town synonymous with fine fizz. Épernay is at the heart of the Champagne region's Unesco-listed vineyards - and easy to reach by train, with one change in Paris.

At nearby Ay (four minutes by train from Épernay), the Pressoria visitor centre, set in a former grape press, is dedicated to showcasing the art of making champagne. Designed by Casson Mann, the British design practice behind Bordeaux's Cité du Vin, the centre charts the process using interactive exhibits, culminating in a tasting session. When you've heard how it's made, nip down the road to La Frigousse to sip some more.

Back in Épernay, the elegant Avenue de Champagne is home to champagne houses such as Perrier-Jouët, Moët et Chandon and Champagne Mercier, which offer tours and tasting from about €19 (maisons-champagne.com).

If that doesn't give you enough of a lift, board the tethered hot air balloon Le Ballon d'Épernay. It rises to 150 metres for 360-degree views. Stay at one of Bubble 8's chic apartments in the centre of Épernay (sleeps two from



Clockwise from above: the Mount Juliet Estate in Kilkenny; splendid views from the Hotel Brittany restaurant, Roscoff; grapes waiting to be fizzed in Champagne

€109 a night, sawdays.co.uk). Rail Europe from London from £177.50 return, changing in Paris

Spa and food break in Roscoff, France
Ten hours by overnight ferry from Plymouth (five hours daytime)

Wake up in one of France's most enchanting coastal towns, disembark and then take the short walk from the port to the Hotel Brittany (doubles from €185 room-only, hotel-brittany.com), which has an indoor pool and spa (treatments from €50).

Its Michelin-starred restaurant showcases the area's abundant produce, including its eponymous pink onions, seafood and seaweed. The backdrop to chef Loïc Le Bail's superb food (six-course menu de plaisir from €85 pp) is a view through stone-arched windows of the sunset and colourful fishing boats sailing into the harbour.

The history of the Onion Johnnies, Breton farmers and labourers who travelled across the Channel to sell pink onions door-to-door, is told at the

small Maison des Johnnies museum. The impressive Roscoff Exotic and Botanical Garden, overlooking Morlaix bay, is home to exotic plants from the southern hemisphere.

For a mini-voyage, take the 15-minute ferry to the Île de Batz, hire a bike on the quayside and cycle across the gentle rolling countryside, stopping at the lighthouse, white-sand beaches and the Georges Delaselle Garden. The Crêperie du Phare makes a good pit stop for refuelling. Brittany Ferries' overnight service from Plymouth to Roscoff costs from £390 return for two people with car and a cabin or £252 for two foot passengers. Ferries run from the last week of March until mid-November

Bursts of blossom, County Kilkenny, Ireland
Seven hours by ferry and train from Holyhead to Thomastown

Part of Ireland's so-called "sunny south-east", County Kilkenny's most slumbersome residence is the 200-hectare Mount Juliet Estate, and especially the chic, country-style

bedrooms in its Hunters Yard Hotel (doubles from €217 B&B, mountjuliet.ie). The scenic surrounds include a 10-arch bridge in the village of Inistioge and Woodstock's arboretum, which sees bursts of blossom throughout spring. An alternative base is the 13-room Zuni (doubles from €140 B&B, zuni.ie) in nearby Kilkenny town (90 minutes from Dublin by train). Its award-winning restaurant is famed for its naughty chocolate bombs.

Surrounding limestone lanes and the Medieval Mile connect a riverside castle and St Canice's Cathedral, with a ninth-century Celtic round tower that rewards ladder-climbers with panoramic views. Just as alluring is the boutique shopping - womenswear at Folkster, fragrances from Valley of Roses, Nicholas Mosse's pottery in Bennettsbridge and Butler Gallery showcasing contemporary art.

Make sure to devote ample time to maximising Mount Juliet's facilities, which range from extensive gardens beside the River Nore and a championship golf course lauded by Tiger Woods, to afternoon tea



LIFESTYLE

TRAVEL

beside the creeper-covered manor house and the Michelin-starred restaurant Lady Helen. Most relaxing, however, is the health club; all hotel guests have full access to the heated 15-metre pool, gym and sauna (spa treatments and massages are extra). It's a five-minute taxi ride to Thomastown's railway station, on the Dublin to Waterford line.

Stena Line ferries from Holyhead to Dublin from £72 return. Irish Rail trains from Dublin to Thomastown from €28 return

Clash of colours, Paris
Just over two hours by train from London

Paris is probably the easiest, most obvious option for a short hop from the UK. To make it even easier - especially if only here for a night or two - get off the Eurostar and check in to the hotel across the road. Directly opposite is the 25 Hours Hotel Paris Terminus Nord (doubles from €131 room-only, 25hours-hotels.com), with cool interiors, a decadent-feeling cocktail bar and modern Israeli-Mediterranean-Arabic-Persian food in a glamorous pink restaurant.

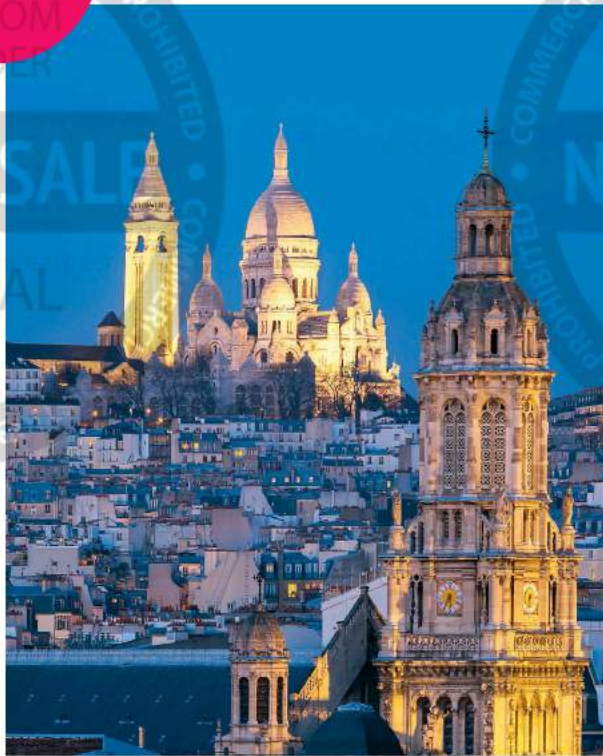
It may be a chain hotel on a busy road, but it's great fun; a clash of colours and cultures where loud-patterned east African fabrics pop against walls painted indigo, chartreuse or plum. And this northern part of Paris is handy for wandering between the cafes along the Canal Saint-Martin, visiting Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre and evenings in the Marais - plenty for a brief jaunt.

Eurostar from London from £78 return

Beers and arty food, Ghent
Three hours by train from London

Although Ghent has gables, cobbles and waterways to rival nearby Bruges, the atmosphere here is funky and modern rather than fusty and medieval. It's an easy train journey from London (with a change in Brussels) to Sint-Pieters station, then a 10-minute tram ride into the city centre.

A great way to explore is a cycling tour with Bike Gent, which takes in street artist Roa's large animal stencils. The city's foodie scene has an arty side too - try Asian-influenced pralines in palate-tingling flavours such as lemon, ginger and Sichuan pepper at Yuzu, and then two local specialities: exalted mustards made from a secret recipe at retro deli



From top: Sacré-Coeur in Paris is close to the Eurostar terminal; quirky street art in Ghent; gourmet boutiques in Saint-Malo



Tierenteyn-Verlent and raspberry-filled, cone-shaped *cluberdon* sweets at Temmermans.

For dinner, try baharat-spiced whitening followed by honey-and-apple pannacotta at homely Alix. Evening fun continues at 't Dreupelkot, a teeny, living room-style bar which stocks 200 varieties of jenever, gin's Dutch forebear, some homemade. And old riverside pub Waterhuis aan de Bierkant serves brown, blond and red Belgian beers to university students and professors.

Stay centrally at 1898 The Post (from €170 room-only, 1898thepost.com), a high-ceilinged sorting office turned upmarket hotel. It's seconds away from the fetid old-world cocktail den The Cobbler, all red lamps and wooden cigar boxes. *Schol!* Eurostar from London from £125 return, changing in Brussels

Emerald Coast, France
Twelve hours by overnight ferry from Portsmouth to Saint-Malo

Roll off the ferry from Portsmouth into Saint-Malo ready for a food-loving journey along the Emerald Coast, stopping first at the old walled city. Explore gourmet boutiques along the cobbled streets, such as the Epices Roellinger, a spice emporium with products sourced from around the world; visit Beurre Bordier for hand-churned butter flavoured with Madagascan vanilla or yuzu; and then dip into Maison du Sarrasin for all things buckwheat, from pasta to beer.

Along the coast at Cancale (there are buses for car-free travellers), the Mont-Saint-Michel is on the horizon and freshly caught oysters are sold at the seafront market; just swig them back and toss the shells on the beach. To learn about the extraordinarily hard work of oyster production, take a tour with former farmer Inga from Ostreika. The towns of Dinard and Saint-Lunaire (half an hour in the other direction from Saint-Malo) still reflect the elegance of their heyday as Belle Epoque resort towns. When the tide is out, take a dip in tidal swimming pools or walk the headlands that jut into the Channel.

Stay at La Métairie du Vauhariot guesthouse in Cancale (doubles from €140 B&B, metairie-du-vauhariot.com). *Brittany Ferries from Portsmouth to Saint Malo return from £288 for two people with a cabin and a car; foot passengers from £170*



LIFESTYLE

TRAVEL

Gouda taste, the Netherlands

Four hours by train from London

There's no doubting Gouda's star turn. Devoted emporiums such as 't Kaaswinkeltje and numerous local farm tours focus on this small Dutch city's namesake - one of the world's most popular cheeses - as does the market in the main-square, in operation since 1395 and still utilising 17th-century scales (Thursday mornings only, from April to August). The cheesy theme continues at the just-opened Gouda Cheese Experience, where families can attempt virtual milking or try on traditional farmers' outfits for a giggle.

There are plenty of non-dairy distractions, too. Bicycle routes and boat excursions pass red-brick

medieval buildings and flower-lined, cobblestone canals en route to the Red Lion windmill (entry possible on Thursdays and Saturdays).

You can try superior examples of crunchy *stroopwafels* - two waffles encasing sticky caramel - on Kamphuisen factory tours and rummage around the sole physical shop of ethical, oh-so-stylish childrenswear maker Louloudi.

Equally easy on the eye is Gouda's gorgeous new hotel. Opened last June, the Weeshuis (doubles from €165 room-only, wshs.nl) occupies a 16th-century orphanage sleekly renovated by interior designer Judith van Mourik. Inspired by colourful, early-20th-century Gouda pottery, its 25 vibrant bedrooms surround casual fine-dining restaurant Lizz and coffee,

cocktail & champagne bar Coco. The main train station is less than 15 minutes' walk away.

Rail Europe from London from £160 return, changing in Brussels, Rotterdam or both, daily

Cycle through tulip fields, Haarlem, the Netherlands

Four hours by train from London or overnight ferry from Newcastle

It's only a 15-minute train ride to Haarlem from Amsterdam, served by the Eurostar, and so worth that tiny bit of extra effort if you've done the Dam before and/or fancy a more chilled break. This small medieval city feels relaxed and outdoorsy, especially if you spend time cycling to beaches such as Zandvoort, to the

tulip fields when they're in bloom, or join a stand-up paddle tour with SUP Adventures.

Have a wander through the *hofjes*, peaceful 14th-century courtyards all over the city; hit the Grote Markt to shop, eat or people-watch; and pop into the Frans Hals Museum, dedicated to the 17th-century portrait artist.

Boutique Hotel 't Vosje (doubles from €100 B&B, hotelvosje.nl) has a lovely garden, rooms with chandeliers and exposed brick walls and is next to a forest in the city.

Eurostar from London to Amsterdam from £86 return, Amsterdam to Haarlem from £4 single. Overnight ferry from Newcastle to Amsterdam from about £145pp return for a foot-passenger with DFDS

All prices are for travel in April 2022



The Gouda Cheese Experience, above; tulips galore in Haarlem, right



SJOERD VAN DER HUICHT; REINIER SNIJDERS/GETTYEYEEM

Puzzle solutions

(puzzles on page 101)

Answers to quiz
by Thomas Eaton

- 1 Thomas Hardy.
- 2 VHS and Betamax.
- 3 Australia (geographic centre of mainland).
- 4 Henry III (1216-72).
- 5 Pufferfish (blowfish).
- 6 Tate Modern.
- 7 Self-replicating nanotechnology.

- 8 Las Vegas.
- 9 Deaths of Rome's first triumvirate: Julius Caesar; Pompey; Crassus.
- 10 Founders of United Artists film studio.
- 11 Capitals of French overseas territories: French Guiana; French Polynesia; Guadeloupe; Mayotte; New Caledonia.
- 12 Chemical elements

- named after Norse deities.
- 13 British female tennis grand slam singles champions: Emma Raducanu; Virginia Wade; Sue Barker.
- 14 Panini: Italian plural; ancient Indian grammarian; made by Italian company.
- 15 Films based on short stories/novellas by Stephen King.

Answers to Weekend Crossword
by Sy

