



# *The Nine Best European Cities to Visit in 2020*



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Dream travel lists have become a natural accompaniment to a new year filled with possibilities. While I've booked a flight based on little more than a sunny weather forecast, I have come to realize the most memorable trips are those with intention at their core. And intention can help you turn a big dream—say, a general desire to explore some of the best cities in Europe—into an actual travel plan.

That purpose need not be too serious. You might follow your taste buds in pursuit of sampling Sicily's distinctive wines or the Baltic's best brews. Or find inspiration exploring Glasgow's street art or immersing yourself in Beethoven's Viennese life. Exploring European cities—or anywhere else in the world—with intention can take you beyond the guidebook and beneath the surface of a place.

While there's no one-size-fits-all best city in Europe, there are nearly endless opportunities for immersion and purpose-filled pursuits in European cities, especially if you're willing to slow down, stay in one place longer, and savor the journey.

Ready to find your inspiration? Here are nine of the best places to visit in Europe this year, and some of the many reasons you should go.

## Rijeka, Croatia



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Strategically positioned where the Rječina river meets the Adriatic Sea, Rijeka (which means ‘river’ in Croatian) overflows with multi-cultural richness that reflects the port city’s shipping and trading heritage. Food and art offer portals to immersion beginning with [Croatia’s biggest carnival](#) and continuing throughout 2020 as Rijeka celebrates being crowned as [European Capital of Culture](#) (along with fellow recipient Galway, Ireland).

Experience classic influences with Violins Above Borders / Stradivari, an exhibit spotlighting violin craftsmen, paired with city-wide string of recitals and orchestral performances. Or, dive feet first into Rijeka’s famous rock and punk club scene in venues ranging from gritty to glamourous. Feast on [Unknown Klimt: Love Death Ecstasy](#), a rare exhibit of Gustav Klimt’s early works created for [Rijeka National Theatre](#); or, lean toward the cutting-edge with the third annual [Industrial Art Biennial](#), poetically themed “Ride into the Sun.” For foodies, a series of Gastro Weeks spotlight seasonal cuisine ranging from sardines and squid to cherries and figs.

Plus, Rijeka serves as gateway to the Adriatic islands Krk and Cres, making it a snap to cap culture-hunting with a beach vacay.

**Pro Tip:** Hilton’s Costabella Beach Resort & Spa opens nearby this summer as the brand’s first luxury resort in Croatia.

## Paris, France



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In 2020, the City of Light radiates irresistible energy. While sadness and hope mingle with the ongoing restoration of [Notre Dame](#), optimism builds for the 2024 Olympic Games. This heady mix promises to feed the traveler's mind, heart and belly, in ways only Paris is capable of.

A 60-year-quest comes to fruition as the vision of artistic team Christo and Jeanne-Claude to transform a Parisian icon is unveiled. For 16 days beginning in mid-September, [L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped](#), will shimmer with light reflected from over 250,000-square-feet of silver fabric covering the structure.

[Centre Georges Pompidou](#) traces the artists' years in Paris (running March 18 to June 15); while celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of another visionary with the largest exhibition of Henri Matisse's work in nearly 50 years (running May 13 to August 31). June brings the highly anticipated opening of a stock exchange reimagined as a contemporary art palace: The [Bourse de Commerce](#) promises a grand showcase for the collection of French billionaire François Pinault.

Adding to Paris' significant wow-factor, this year is the opening of luxury Art Deco resort [Cheval Blanc Paris](#), featuring a restaurant helmed by three-star Michelin chef Arnaud Doncke.

"Save to splurge" is my Parisian motto. [Paris Passlib'](#) ensures discounts on entry to attractions and transportation, along with queue-skipping. Another 2020 bonus: budget carrier [Norwegian Airlines](#) will debut a nonstop route from Austin to Paris in May.

## Galway, Ireland



*Luca Fabbian/Shutterstock*

Watching the sun set over Galway Bay or drinking Guinness in a cozy pub—those pursuits can be all the purpose one needs. However, 2020 offers even more reasons to experience the west coast of Ireland's beauty and hospitality. As a [2020 European Capital of Culture](#), Galway presents over 1,900 events inspired by the fusion of Celtic traditions and natural landscape.

Highlights include high-tech illumination of the Connemara Mountains in a groundbreaking work from Finnish light artist Kari Kola. “This work will underline the beautiful nature of Ireland using light art on an unseen scale,” says Kola. “The lighted surface will be around five- to 6,000,000 meters square (approximately two square miles), so in terms of a lighted area, this is probably the largest installation ever created.”

Other ambitious projects include *Borderline*, a project from American artist David Best, the visionary behind the temples of Burning Man; and *Mirror Pavilion* created by Irish artist John Gerrard who uses LED technology to reflect and expand a 4000-year-old bog.

Fittingly, two of the most buzz-worthy events are literature-centric. The event [Wild Atlantic Women](#) welcomes Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid's Tale*, as part of International Women's Day celebrations. And [Arts](#)

[Over Borders](#) will stage readings of Homer's *Odyssey* on regional beaches near where many believe parts of the journey took place.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> annual [Galway International Arts Festival](#) showcases blockbuster performances (including Sinead O'Conner, The Pixies, and The Flaming Lips) in July; while the [International Oyster and Seafood Festival](#) features oyster shucking and eating competitions, along with cooking demonstrations in September.

## *Berlin, Germany*



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Continually redefining what it means to be 21st century Europe's cultural catalyst, Berlin ensures new experiences with every visit. "Berlin is constantly changing, constantly becoming," says Kirsten Schmidt of [VisitBerlin](#). Schmidt says Berlin is welcoming "new neighborhood and scenes, and openings of major sights like the James Simon Galerie at [Museum Island](#) in 2019 and the [Humboldt Forum](#) (housed in the reconstructed Berlin Palace) in 2020." Powerhouse events such as the 70<sup>th</sup> edition of the prestigious [Berlin Film Festival](#) and the [11th Berlin Biennale](#) anchor the calendar and promises that the city's affinity for technical and artistic experimentation will shine in 2020. The whole city becomes a stage when Berlin Leuchtet (Berlin Illuminated) introduces its first digital-mapping [Spring Light Festival](#) from Feb 27 to March

8; as well as with the return of beloved [Berlin Festival of Lights](#) for 10 days in October. The fall celebration illuminates the city's most famous landmarks including [Brandenburg Gate](#) and the [Berlin Cathedral](#).

Experiment with high-tech time travel and journey to the divided Berlin with [Time Ride Berlin](#), or enjoy new paths for old-school exploration with 20 [urban hiking trails](#) covering over 350 miles.

Use public transport and get free or discounted entry into over 200 attractions with a [Berlin Welcome Card](#), starting at \$25 for 48 hours. Autumn travelers may fly into Berlin's long-awaited new airport.

## Vienna, Austria



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New energy flows through the old-world's most prestigious coffeehouses and concert halls in Vienna. This year, Europe's capital of classical music celebrates the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of Ludwig van Beethoven, the visionary who called the city home for over 35 years.

Immerse in the artist's life with a special exhibit titled [Beethoven Moves](#) from [Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna](#) from March 25 to July 5; and visit the [Beethoven Museum](#), where the artist composed many marquee works.

Move from history to history-in-the-making with a performance by [Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra](#), led by artistic director and conductor Marin Alsop, the first woman ever at the helm. Don't miss The Cindy Sherman Effect: Identity and Transformation in Contemporary Art, a new exhibition at [Kunstforum Wien](#).

Pro Tip: Starting in late March, Austrian Airlines offers a non-stop flight from Boston to Vienna.

## *Riga, Latvia*



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Beer, beaches and an art biennial—and that's only the beginning. With the Daugava River running through it and Baltic Sea on the horizon, Riga makes a beautiful and strategic base for exploring this fascinating former-Soviet nation. [Intrepid Travel](#)'s European specialist Stefan Hellmuth says the city's layers of Art Nouveau architecture, thought to be the largest collection in the world, combined with medieval guildhalls, cobbled streets of Old Town, plus lush green spaces, make Riga one of Europe's most pleasing destinations.

For deeper immersion, Hellmuth recommends spending time in the eclectic central market set within former zeppelin hangars. "Also, make sure you try

Riga's specialty, the famous Black Balsam, a liquor made from over 20 natural ingredients, among them raspberries, birch buds, peppermint, ginger, oak bark, nutmeg and black pepper," adds Hellmuth.

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As for those beautiful three Bs: From May to October, visitors can experience the return of one of Europe's most anticipated art fairs, [Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art](#), also known as RIBOCA2, led by daring French curator Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel. This year's exhibits showcase artists from the three Baltic nations in tandem with an international roster of boundary-pushing art-makers.

The Baltic's largest beer festival returns for nine days in May with the 10th annual [Latvabeerfest](#). Project manager Anna Vairoga says to expect over 50 breweries set up in the heart of Riga, serving over 500 brews to taste. In July, drum beats lead to the sands of nearby beaches for [Summer Sound Festival](#) and further along the coast for buzzy [Positivus Festival](#), this summer concert anchored by Of Monsters and Men and A\$AP Rocky.

## Glasgow, Scotland



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While much about the UK's post-Brexit future remains uncertain, what we know for sure is Scotland is one of the planet's most beautiful and welcoming places. For now, the dollar remains strong, making 2020 an exceptional year to chase those *Outlander* dreams.

Scotland's cultural capital Glasgow offers an intoxicating blend of contemporary art, pedestrian-friendly streets, and whiskey. All purposes are achieved through one of the city's walking tours. Layers of the Glasgow's soul are revealed on a [walking tour](#) along the City Mural Trail, while UNESCO's "City of Music" recognition rings truly during a [Glasgow music tour](#). And, you can embrace the country-wide passion for its signature spirit with a [Once Upon a Whiskey Tour](#). Yearn to earn your whiskey? Embark on [West Highland Way](#), one of Scotland's epic long-distance walking trails, spanning 96 miles from just outside Glasgow to Fort William in the Scottish Highlands.

Football fans will cheer as Glasgow hosts [UEFA's EURO 2020](#) championship matches in Scotland's National Stadium Hampden Park.

## Catania, Sicily



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Deep blue sea, golden sand beaches, and rugged coastline resting beneath terraced vineyards and ancient hilltop villages. If these images fill your European vacation dreams, consider the Mediterranean's largest island: [Sicily](#). Andrea Traina of [My European Vacay](#) says that for wine lovers, the *terroirs* of snow-capped Mount Etna, one of the world's most active volcanos, produce distinct wines and unforgettable tastes. To experience the full spectrum of varietals and styles of *Vini dell'Etna*, it's smart to hire a guide/driver.

Traina recommends the island's second largest city, the seaside gem Catania, as a base. Not only are wineries within easy reach, the ancient Greek and Roman ruins of Syracuse and baroque towns of Noto, Modica, and Ragusa are near. While in Catania, be sure to visit the excellent WWII Landing Museum ([Museo dello Sbarco](#)) to discover stories of Italy's liberation from Nazi occupation and Fascist rule.

And, for cycling fans, follow the route of Italy's most famous cycling event when [Giro d'Italia](#) 2020 finishes a mighty stage on the top of Etna, in May.

## Cordoba, Spain



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A bright orange sun reflects the River Guadalquivir onto the arched bridges and tiled roofs of Cordoba. It's the epitome of Andalusian magic. The city boasts four UNESCO World Heritage designations, including for the mosque-turned-cathedral [Mezquita-Catedral de Cordoba](#), its red and white striped columns and arches famously showcasing the region's rich Moorish heritage.

Local guide José Fabra-Garrido says off-season is a sweet spot, particularly from November through March, when temperatures are mild, prices are lower, and the vibe is more relaxed.

Cordoba is the perfect place in 2020 to indulge your foodie fantasies. The city's most acclaimed restaurant [Noor](#), led by celebrity chef Paco Morales, recently received a second Michelin star. While coveted reservations are for the few, the restaurant has become a catalyst for a city-wide celebration of regional tastes, from traditional *taberna cordobesa* to hip new tapas bars.

Discover the pleasure that comes in small bites with Tapas Tours from Fabra-Garrido's [Foodie & Experiences Cordoba](#). Visitors can enjoy every bite accompanied by the sweet sounds of flamenco and jazz during Cordoba's renowned [International Guitar Festival](#), celebrating its 40th anniversary in July.