

Telegraph Travel Awards



BEST EUROPEAN COUNTRY Italy

Runners up
Greece, Norway

There has always been a strong connection between the *Telegraph* readership and the various holiday hotspots of our home continent. This affinity is apparent again in the results of the 2023 Telegraph Travel Awards, where cherished European destinations take up seven of the top 30 places in the list of your favourite countries – and 12 of the top 50.

What are you looking for in these near-at-hand places? Mediterranean sunshine and the comforts of the familiar, certainly – you named Italy as your best-loved corner of Europe, and demonstrated a similar fondness for Greece, in second. There was love shown, too, for another five countries where you might reasonably expect a fortnight of solid summer weather on the edge of the continent’s great sea (or one of its side-arms): Croatia (fifth), Portugal (sixth), Spain (seventh), France (eighth) and Turkey (ninth) also won your votes.

And what of third and fourth? Here, by contrast, is evidence of an affection for another version of Europe – something a little colder, maybe more mysterious, certainly more northerly. Neither Norway (third) nor Iceland (fourth) are options for sun-and-sand escapes, but, in their hard contours and giant fjords, are part of your thinking, all the same.

Chris Leadbeater

Best European country

- | | |
|-----------|-------------|
| 1 Italy | 6 Portugal |
| 2 Greece | 7 Spain |
| 3 Norway | 8 France |
| 4 Iceland | 9 Turkey |
| 5 Croatia | 10 Slovenia |

Italy’s delights are boundless, its landscapes strikingly diverse

The country has topped the charts once again as the best country in Europe in the Telegraph Travel Awards. But what is it about this glorious destination that people love so much? Kiki Deere reveals all



ing past of one of the world’s most powerful maritime republics.

As you travel south, Roman ruins grow increasingly numerous and the influences of foreign rulers more apparent; the Greeks and Arabs have left an indelible mark in the south, from Sicily’s magnificent ruins to Puglia’s cuisine. The topography of the landscape varies dramatically too, from snow-capped mountains in the north to the rolling hills of Tuscany in central Italy, and the wild, arid landscapes of Basilicata in the south.

ART

Italians are taught to appreciate art from a young age, although possibly on account of the country’s immense quantity of artistic masterpieces (Italy is home to more world heritage sites than any country in the world). Italians often take some of their cultural delights for granted – not surprising when you are surrounded by such beauty. These delights, however, are not lost on our readers, who put Venice (first), Rome (third) and Florence (fourth) at the top of the charts in the Best European City category in this year’s Telegraph Travel Awards.

FOOD

While art and culture hold great importance for Italians, it’s their cuisine that fills them with the utmost pride. Every meal is a ritual, with simple, locally sourced ingredients lovingly prepared to enjoy a convivial moment together. Walk around any town at noon and the streets begin to empty gradually as people retreat indoors for a long, lazy lunch; the sweet smell of bubbling ragù wafting down alleyways, the sound of rolling shutters echoing throughout the streets as small, as family-run businesses temporarily shut up shop. The Italian proverb *l'appetito vien mangiando* (“appetite comes with eating”) sums up the importance of good food and the concept of enjoyment that arises from indulging in an excellent meal in pleasant company.

FAMILY

Family takes pride of place, with children doted upon and always made to feel welcome, never excluded from a meal or family event. At Michelin-starred Peter Brunel Ristorante Gourmet, the chef has thoughtfully set aside some toys for his little guests as, in chef Brunel’s words, “children need to learn to appreciate good food from a young age”. Whether at a restaurant or in a hotel, you will be hard pushed to find a place that won’t welcome little ones with open arms.

There is something quite special about seeing children running free around a piazza on a summer’s evening, their laughter reverberating through the square. The warmth of the sun still hangs in the air, yet it is finally cool enough to enjoy a leisurely passeggiata and gelato with one’s family. And that’s what Italy ultimately boils down to: a country where you are taught to savour every moment in the company of family and friends – all while making the most of what the locale offers.

WHEN TO GO

The beauty of Italy is that each region offers a distinct holiday experience. The peninsula’s superb location in the heart of the Mediterranean basin makes it the perfect destination at any time of year. In summer, there is no shortage of glorious beaches or alpine adventure activities, while autumn is the best time to discover the country’s vineyard landscapes. In winter, you can ski Olympic runs or glide through fresh powder on some of Europe’s highest peaks, while come spring you can revel in the beauty of sumptuous gardens and marvel at artistic delights before the summer crowds descend.

‘A dream that keeps returning for the rest of your life,’ is how poet Anna Akhmatova described Italy, a country whose ethereal beauty has served as inspiration to writers, artists and composers. Italy has long been a reader favourite, retaining its position at the top of the leader board for Best European Country in this year’s awards. Not only that, but in the overall Best Country in the World category, it has leapt from 10th place up to sixth – the first time in a decade that it has placed higher than the number 10 spot.

It is easy to see why you love Italy so much. The country’s delights are boundless – its artistic patrimony is arguably the richest in the world, its arresting landscapes strikingly diverse, its cuisine a perennial favourite.

Italians feel a deep sense of loyalty to their country and are fiercely proud of their culture, traditions and culinary excellence. It is quite possibly this profound admiration for their homeland and eagerness to share their heritage that underpins the warmth and hospitality that is often so apparent to visitors to their country.

Italians appreciate the simpler things in life and are blessed with the seemingly innate ability to live life to the fullest. Whether that’s enjoying the pleasure of a convivial meal with friends and loved ones or spending quality time with one’s children, it all comes down to relishing life’s simple pleasures, a skill

▲ Floored: for awe-inspiring architecture, Florence doesn’t disappoint

Italians appear to have mastered with unparalleled perfection.

HISTORY AND LANDSCAPES

Italy was only unified in 1861, its 20 regions forming a tapestry of identities, with distinct customs, culinary traditions and dialects to this day. Layers of history intertwine in each region, with a motley of influences from the past abounding in every corner of the country. Head to Piedmont and you will catch a glimpse of the grandeur associated with the House of Savoy, while if you travel east to the Veneto you will gain an insight into the glorious seafar-



BEST EUROPEAN CITY Venice

Runners up
Seville, Rome

Oh to be in Italy on a summer evening, with church bells pealing across the rooftops, and a glass of frascati in hand at a restaurant on the piazza’s edge. That, at least, is the message audible in the latest list of *Telegraph* readers’ favourite European cities. It is not just that you have named an Italian – Venice – as your ideal option for a long weekend, it is that Rome (third) and Florence (fourth) also rank highly in your thoughts.

But then, much of Europe is in your sights. Of the top 30 cities in the world – as voted for by you – 16 are European. As are 22 of the top 40, and 27 of the top 50. If it is a case of two or three nights away, a short flight and a near neighbour are a winning combination.

And not just in Italy. There is plenty of room in your affections for Spain – Seville, the Andalusian capital, is your second favourite – and for Croatia, with Dubrovnik managing a solid fifth. Then there is Portugal. How to choose between its two great cities? Maybe it is impossible to do so. Porto narrowly eclipsed Lisbon in this latest poll, coming in sixth to the capital’s seventh. But with such fine margins in play, perhaps it is best to visit both.

Chris Leadbeater

Best European city

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1 Venice | 6 Porto |
| 2 Seville | 7 Lisbon |
| 3 Rome | 8 Krakow |
| 4 Florence | 9 Kiev |
| 5 Dubrovnik | 10 Prague |



▲ Unsurprisingly, Venice is your ideal option for a long weekend. We don’t blame you

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