

Europe . . . just pennies a day!

At the Barcelona train station, I met an Aussie who was traveling through Barcelona on his way to Bilbao. After a four-year stint in the Australian army, he was backpacking around the world and had already been in India, Pakistan, South America and Morocco. The globe-trotting Aussie had the right idea: all he had with

him was the clothes he was wearing and a little fanny pack.

My new acquaintance told me

of a hostel in the old part of Barcelona called "New York." The cab ride from the station to the hostel was quick, but the hostel was full. They gave me the name of another cheap hostel and, on the way

there, I stopped in a cerveseria called El Cid for some Catalan cuisine. I hadn't eaten a normal meal in two days, so the meal was especially satisfying. The bar owner was a thirty-something guy, and his wife worked the register while his young daughters clamored and played on the bar. I complimented the beauty of Barcelona to the restaurant owner

and got a free Cervesa out of it (compliment the bartenders and people you meet on their cities - Europeans are very provincial and take great pride in their cities. If you are low on cash, this tactic never seems to fail.)

I found the hostel near the Square of Jaume and my decision to stay there turned out to be a mistake. The room's ceiling couldn't have been over 5-1/2' high and I am 5' 7" tall. The sheets on the bed hadn't been changed from the previous guest and there were cockroaches running

around. I didn't mind the fact that there was a group bathroom and shower; what I minded was that I hadn't brought my sandals. I bit the bullet and used the group shower with no sandals, then went out for a night on the town.

Barcelona is much more aesthetically pleasing than Madrid. The women are generally a littler taller and are always smiling. The city is livelier, and the people are even friendlier than those in Madrid. I found myself in a bar owned by an Estonian native. She'd worked as a translator and saved her pesetas to open her own bar. The decor of the bar was

great. All over the walls were pictures: movies, historical events, triumphs and tragedies and everyday life. The music was across the board. At the bar, I met a couple from London enjoying a romantic

weekend in Barcelona and a bunch of local students. The discussions that resulted were off-the-wall and covered just about every topic.

The next day, I was off to Gaudi's unfinished cathedral and to the Placa del Rei, a museum of Roman ruins under a small cathedral in Barcelona. After the Gaudi cathedral, I walked around town. I made my way to the Gaudi Museum and noticed a few of his buildings along the way.

The next day, eager to leave the hostel where I was staying, I gathered my things

and left the cockroaches behind me. I walked around the old center of Barcelona, snapped a few final pictures and then took a cab to the Picasso Museum, which was absolutely spectacular. I then stopped in a few Barcelona cafes and walked around the town before I departed the city on an overnight sleeper train headed for Paris.

I arrived in Paris early the next morning after enjoying the best night's sleep I'd had since my arrival in Europe. From the train station, I hopped on the Metro and got off at San Martin for no particular reason. I found a hotel room and after dropping off my things, headed back out again to the Metro, which makes getting around Paris simple.

My first stop was the Louvre. To see and actually enjoy everything in the Louvre, you really need at least a week; I had three hours. I spent my time in the Greek and Roman sections, then went to the Le Invalides (the Military Museum), which houses Napoleon's tomb. The section was closing, but I pleaded with the guard and was allowed to wander around for a half hour.

My next stop was the Eiffel Tower, which was much higher than I'd thought and provided a staggering view of Paris. I did not realize that Paris was so huge. As the sun set, I had dinner in the new restaurant in the Eiffel Tower. The wine was good, and the view was even better. I walked to the Champs Elysees and stopped in a few cafes.

I must say Paris is beautiful. The cuisine was much better than described, the architecture was mesmerizing, the people weren't that pompous and the culture was overwhelming.

My train ride the next day into

Germany was great. I saw much of northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. In Hamburg I boarded a train to Luneburg.

A friend had given me the name of a classmate of his in Luneburg, so for the next two days, Eric showed me around the area. In Germany, it's good to remember that the food is served in typical epic German proportions. Eric and I went to a smorgabord one day where I ate Germanic super-servings and then became super-sick. I didn't let that stop my picture-taking and sightseeing though.

Luneburg is the type of picturesque city you see depicted on Christmas decorations. The city streets are cleaned twice a day — with soap. Every single brick seems to have a purpose, everything is orderly. While walking around I was tempted to call cadence to myself because the order was inspiring.

Eric and I traveled to Hamburg, but, unfortunately, I was still too sick from the smorgasbord to enjoy the city. I got a hotel room near the train station, and the next morning, took a bus to the airport and reluctantly bid Europe farewell - for now.

There is too much to see and do in any city, town or village in Europe. I took a tiny sip of what Europe has to offer, and I still thirst for more. The next time I go, it will definitely be for an extended period of time. Next spring break, tell your friends to have a good time at a tourist trap in Mexico or Florida while you head somewhere new and exotic with a pack on your back and no plans other than general destinations. You learn a lot and have a lot more fun that way. Keep your money in the socks you're wearing, your passport in your front pocket, and your camera in hand.

The world is here to be explored. Unfortunately, too many Americans get stuck on their couches watching television instead of experiencing the world. There is so much to see, learn, and do. Get off your couch and go see the world.

