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Life / Travel

Family travel: Packing for Europe? Don't forget the kids!

Exposing your children to new experiences in unknown European countries will help prepare them for what life has to offer

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Schönbrunn Palace is one of the many kid-friendly spots in Vienna. Kids can romp on the large, park-like grounds, then be immersed in history while touring the interiors.

By: **Becca Hensley** Freelance Travel writer, Published on Thu Mar 19 2015

Europe. It's not that far away. If you decide you want to make a trip there and you are wary about lugging your kids with you, consider this: a trip to the old continent will challenge them and broaden their horizons.

Stocked with incomprehensible languages, exotic foods and unusual customs, Europe inspires kids to learn. With its different money, cool trains, unconventional foodstuffs, pretty shop windows and two-tiered merry-go-rounds, the continent is a puzzle kids yearn to investigate. Seeing a place through fresh eyes rubs off on parents.

Here are some great cities to visit and a few great things to do as a family while you are there:

London

London appeals to everybody's inner Sherlock Holmes. Trendy, historical, sophisticated and sometimes bawdy, London entertains on a host of levels. Kids will love how they drive on the "wrong side" of the street in funky London cabs and red double-decker buses. As the British speak our mother tongue and understand our "funny" accent, a journey here breaks the ice for first-timers abroad.

- **Things to do:** Go to Shakespeare's Globe theatre and pose as a character on the stage; fly on the London Eye, a towering Ferris wheel on the banks of the Thames; ogle the mummies at the British Museum, and check out The Tower of London, where Anne Boleyn was beheaded and where the 12-year-old Edward V and his younger brother Richard were sent to the Tower by their uncle, the Duke of Gloucester and never seen again.

Paris

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Arguably the most gorgeous city in the world, Paris dazzles with gilt and glitter. Kids love their first glimpse of well-known icons such as the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame's gargoyles or the Mona Lisa. They marvel, too, at the adventure of discovering all things French. Surprisingly compact, Paris is a walkable city. When the feet get tired, the extensive Metro gets you where you want to go. And there are always chocolate crepes from mom-and-pop stands to sustain the gang along the way. Things to do: Sail the big wooden boats with a long stick in the Tuileries Gardens, see the most famous Impressionist paintings at the Musée d'Orsay and marvel at the street acrobats outside the Centre Georges Pompidou.

Vienna

Exotic, cosmopolitan Vienna, once the showplace for the Hapsburg dynasty, the richest family on earth, seems like a fairyland to kids. Palaces in the city and castles along the Danube nearby dazzle. As does the musical culture of Mozart, Hayden, Strauss and Beethoven; everywhere they wander a tune floats in the air. Visiting Vienna, children truly grasp the sense of old world elegance. Things to do: Take a bike ride along the Danube, where well-built bike trails lead through vineyards and medieval towns. Watch the famous Lipizzaner horses perform at The Spanish Riding School. Or stop for Sachertorte at Demel.

Rome

The ancient meets the ultra-modern in Rome, where Vespas fly past Etruscan tombs and elegantly clad fashionistas lean against Imperial temples to have a smoke. Children are awestruck in the presence of so much history. Legendary, sacred and infinitely fascinating, the Eternal City takes a few days to digest. This city will transform your cartoon-watching children into historians. Things to do: Stick your hand into La Bocca della Verità, in the portico of the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. If you are a liar, it will bite off your hand, or so the legend claims. Marvel The Colosseum where gladiators fought and mock-sea battles were staged. Throw a coin in the spectacular Trevi Fountain.

Brussels

Brussels, defined by Art Nouveau, Baroque and Gothic structures and cobbled streets, is Europe distilled. What child won't love a city that invented the saxophone, cartoons, French fries and instituted chocolate? Things to do: Gaze upon Brussels' beloved MannekinPis, the city's famous fountain of a little boy having a pee in public — much to the delight of children of all ages. So endeared is he to the citizens of Brussels that they change his clothes each day, choosing from over 675 costumes.

Amsterdam

Unique and vibrant, Amsterdam is a city of canals, tulips and exquisite art collections. Kids feel like they've entered a storybook tale when they see the tall, narrow houses that line the canals. Ubiquitous bikes lean against buildings and fill the streets, which puts children in mind of a giant playground. Things to do: Ride the trams! Catch the one from Haarlemmermeer Station, which is old-fashioned and has wooden seats and a loud bell. A 20-minute ride will take you to AmsterdamseBos, a park filled with peacocks and stands that sell Dutch pancakes.

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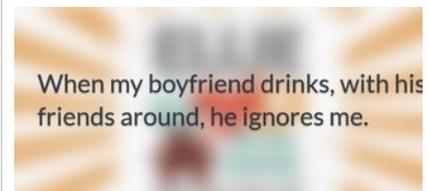
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