



*Guest writer:* Within a week of my retirement ceremony, my spouse and I were on our way, each with just one carry-on bag and backpack. I had experienced all the Pacific nations I cared to see during Navy tours of duty in World War II and Korea.

As a new retiree, I wanted to roam Europe when, where and linger as long as we chose. No schedules, no tourist traps, no pressures, no job that required hurrying back. We did it, and in our happy memories, these are the top ten cities we enjoyed most in Europe.

London: There are so many historic sites and sights. We especially liked the Covent Garden area of shops, cafés and street performers. London theater is the best in the world, especially if you can be at the two-fer booth in the morning and get two tickets for the price of one for that evening's performance.

St. Petersburg: The people are friendly, especially to senior American wanderers. The Hermitage is one of the most fantastic museums in the world, and we could have spent a week there and never get through the entire Katharine the Great collections.

Paris: Of course, Paris has to be on the list. We stayed at a little hotel next to the Sorbonne, and our window looked across a narrow alley into the art classes. We watched junior Monets, Gauguins, Degas' and Seurats at work with some very interesting models. The cafés were great for people-watching. We also spent fascinating hours at the Louvre and other museums.

Barcelona: My spouse loved the late, late night cafes that offered menus of Spanish and Basque delicacies. The city's architecture features all kinds of original works, from the Byzantine to the bizarre.

Rome: The Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain, Forum, Colosseum, Vatican. We saw them all. Also, we found some great little cafés far away from the tourist traps, where Romans do their dining and discussing.

Brussels: We somehow got a cheap, second-floor corner room with a balcony that looked out on one of the city's busiest downtown intersections. We sat there in the evening and watched the people scene. This city also has great restaurants, and unfortunately for our waistlines, great chocolates.

Dublin: We got ourselves invited to a private home for dinner, and enjoyed an evening with a typical Irish family. It wasn't corned beef and cabbage, but as good a meal as you could find at any upscale New York restaurant. Then to the Abbey Theater for a performance of a play, where the actors spoke in 18th Century Irish brogue. I didn't understand a word, but knew the hero and the heroine got together at the end.

Monte Carlo: Beautiful little picture-postcard city-state on the French coast resembling a posh Las Vegas resort. All the pit bosses wear tuxedos, and gamblers have to dress up to lose their money. A bit snooty and rich for my taste, but got to be a James Bond at least for one night. We visited the tomb of fellow Philadelphian Grace Kelly, but were disappointed when we saw it was just a slab on the church floor.

Amsterdam: A very eclectic city that boasts great museums, legal marijuana and touristy red light district. It was springtime, and we also toured the enormous tulip farms just outside the city, cruising by fields and fields of brilliantly flowering reds, yellows, oranges and whites.

Venice: Fabled city of endless canals, great cafes and Renaissance buildings. In gondolas, enjoyed the glimmering cityscape. Visited artisans in their shops, crossed the Bridge of Sighs, fed pigeons on San Marco Square and did the museum tours.

Just a few memories of our favorite European cities. In a few months, dragging our own bags, we'll go back to make new memories.