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10 Underrated European Cities You Should Know About

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Image courtesy of Toile Blanche

Some of Europe's best travel experiences often happen away from the big-name capitals: along quiet coastlines, in artsy second cities, or within walled towns where life moves at a slower pace. This list is for travelers who've seen Paris and Rome and are craving something a little different—without giving up great food, gorgeous settings, or a standout place to stay at the end of the day. From Montenegro's calm bays to Puglia's sun-drenched towns, here are 10 underrated European destinations worth adding to your radar.

Kotor, Montenegro



If you are looking for a scenic, less-touristy alternative to Dubrovnik, Kotor delivers all the medieval magic without the crowds and cruise ships. Set on a serene, fjord-like bay backed by steep mountains, this UNESCO-listed town is as photogenic as it is peaceful, with medieval streets, winding alleys, and sea views. Days here are best spent exploring the old town, climbing to the hilltop fortress for panoramic views, or hopping over to nearby Perast for a boat trip to Our Lady of the Rocks. For a quieter experience, visit Kotor's old town early or late in the day, when the cruise crowds have cleared and the streets feel almost dreamlike.

How to get there: Fly into Tivat Airport (20 minutes away), or into Podgorica (1.5 hours) or Dubrovnik (2 hours, with a border crossing). Renting a car is your best bet if you're pairing Kotor with the Albanian coast or other Balkan road trip stops.

Where to stay:

Hyatt Regency Kotor Bay Resort. A sleek, sea-facing stay with panoramic views, a floating dock for dips in the bay, and a spa carved into the hillside. Rooms are modern and breezy, with terraces made for long, lazy breakfasts.

- Fora's **Hyatt Privé** partner perks include hotel credit, a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Mamula Island. A secluded, design-forward retreat set in a restored 19th-century fortress on its own private islet. Expect standout architecture and an intimate, artful atmosphere that feels worlds away from the mainland.

- **Fora Perks** include \$100 hotel credit, a complimentary massage for two, complimentary use of water or ebikes or an excursion to Blue Cave, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Ljubljana, Slovenia



Compact and charming, Ljubljana feels more like a storybook town than a capital city. Its leafy riverbanks, pastel baroque facades, and pedestrian-only center give it an unhurried, easygoing vibe. There's a strong café culture, plenty of local design shops, and a castle perched above it all. Bonus: It's one of Europe's greenest capitals, from car-free streets and bike paths to a deep-rooted sustainability mindset that keeps the vibe refreshingly local.

How to get there: Fly into Ljubljana Jože Pučnik Airport (25 minutes from the city) or arrive by train from Venice, Vienna, or Zagreb in just a few hours. The city's size makes it ideal for a short break or a jumping-off point for exploring the Julian Alps and Lake Bled.

Where to stay:

InterContinental Ljubljana. A polished, glassy high-rise with a rooftop restaurant, sweeping city views, and one of the best hotel breakfasts in town.

- Fora's **IHG Destined** partner perks include \$100 hotel credit, a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Vander Urbani Resort. A design-led boutique stay right on the river, with playful interiors and a rooftop plunge pool.

- **Fora Perks** include wine tasting accompanied by Slovenian cheeses, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Tallinn, Estonia



A beautifully preserved UNESCO-listed old town with stone walls and cobbled lanes—but just beyond, you'll find former industrial zones turned into hubs for art, design, and digital innovation. It's one of Europe's most tech-savvy capitals, with excellent restaurants, indie boutiques, and Baltic Sea views to top it all off. Visit in summer for the *white nights*, when the sun barely sets and the city stays buzzing late into the evening.

How to get there: Fly into Tallinn Airport (15 minutes from the centre), or take a 2-hour ferry from Helsinki. It's also easily reached by bus or train from Riga in about 4–5 hours.

Where to stay:

Hotel Telegraaf, Autograph Collection. Housed in a 19th-century telegraph building in the heart of Old Town, with elegant rooms, a small spa, and a cozy courtyard for post-sightseeing unwinds.

Schlössle Hotel. An intimate hideaway set in a 13th-century stone building, with antique-filled rooms, candlelit corners, and a quietly romantic feel.

Vence & Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



Image courtesy of Toile Blanche

Set in the hills above the French Riviera, Vence is a quieter, more soulful escape than its glitzy, coastal neighbors—winding lanes, Provençal markets, and sun-washed cafés without the flash. The town has long drawn artists and creatives (Matisse designed the Rosary Chapel here), and nearby Saint-Paul-de-Vence is home to world-class galleries, sculpture gardens, and some of the Côte d'Azur's most elegant boutique stays.

How to get there: Fly into Nice Côte d'Azur Airport, then it's a 30-minute drive into the hills. Vence also pairs well with a Provence or Côte d'Azur road trip.

Where to stay:

Le Domaine du Mas de Pierre. A peaceful countryside escape with fragrant gardens, a breezy indoor-outdoor spa, and the laid-back elegance of a private Provençal estate.

- **Fora Perks** include \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Toile Blanche. A contemporary, art-filled hideaway run by a family of artists, with suites that open onto olive trees and sweeping valley views.

- **Fora Perks** include €20 hotel credit, a welcome amenity, extended check-out, and an upgrade whenever possible.

Lecce, Italy



Image courtesy of La Fiermontina Luxury Home

Dubbed the “Florence of the South,” Lecce trades Renaissance grandeur for warm baroque stone, sun-baked piazzas, and a slower, southern rhythm. It’s a place to wander—between wine bars, artisan studios, and crumbling churches—while golden light bounces off every facade. Stop for pasticciotti at old-school bakeries, browse paper goods and ceramics in tucked-away shops, and linger over aperitivo as locals spill into the streets. And unlike Italy’s bigger art cities, Lecce still feels largely undiscovered.

How to get there: Fly into Brindisi Airport (30 minutes away) or Bari (1.5 hours). Trains run from both cities, or hire a car to explore the surrounding olive groves, beaches, and hill towns of Puglia.

Where to stay:

La Fiermontina Luxury Home. An elegant, family-run retreat in a former noble residence, with limestone walls, private gardens, and modern art throughout.

- **Fora Perks** include a welcome drink and art tour, Italian cocktail class, daily breakfast, and an upgrade whenever possible.

Palazzo De Noha. A stylish boutique hotel blending centuries-old architecture with contemporary design, right in the heart of Lecce's old town.

- **Fora Perks** include a complimentary bottle of wine and fruit plate upon arrival and an upgrade whenever possible.

Ericeira, Portugal



Image courtesy of Aethos Ericeira

Once a sleepy fishing village, Ericeira has evolved into Portugal's coolest coastal town—where surfers, chefs, and creatives come for the waves but stay for the vibe. Think whitewashed houses with blue trim, breezy cafés overlooking the Atlantic, and just enough edge to keep things interesting. It still feels authentically local, especially if you wander beyond the surf shops and beach bars.

How to get there: Fly into Lisbon Airport, then drive 45 minutes up the coast. It's a great day trip or long-weekend base just beyond the city.

Where to stay:

Aethos Ericeira. A striking clifftop retreat with clean-lined architecture, a coastal-inspired spa, and panoramic Atlantic views from nearly every corner.

- **Fora Perks** include €20 hotel credit, a welcome amenity, extended check-out, and an upgrade whenever possible.

You and the sea. A laid-back, apartment-style hotel steps from the Atlantic, with a surf-friendly spirit and breezy, modern design. Great for longer stays and families.

- **Fora Perks** include complimentary bike rental, a welcome amenity, and an upgrade whenever possible.

Rovinj, Croatia



A postcard-perfect fishing town on the Istrian coast with Venetian architecture, seafood feasts, and a surprisingly luxe hotel scene. The old town is a tangle of cobbled lanes and faded pastel facades, spilling down to a busy harbor lined with wine bars and gelato stands. It's romantic, walkable, and has just the right amount of buzz in summer—with an atmosphere that feels more Italian than Croatian in the best possible way.

How to get there: Fly into Pula Airport (40 minutes away), or drive from Trieste or Ljubljana in 2–3 hours. Rovinj also connects easily with ferry routes from Venice.

Where to stay:

Grand Park Hotel Rovinj. A contemporary stunner with a sleek spa, marina views, and a front-row seat to the old town skyline.

- **Fora Perks** include \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Monte Mulini Adults Exclusive Hotel. An upscale, adults-only resort tucked into a quiet bay, with warm, attentive service and direct access to the beach promenade.

- **Fora Perks** include a complimentary 50-minute massage for two, daily breakfast, extended check-in/out and upgrade whenever possible.

Vilnius, Lithuania



Image courtesy of Hotel Pacai

Vilnius is one of Europe's most quietly captivating capitals—baroque and bohemian in equal measure. Its old town is a sprawl of pastel facades, candlelit cellar bars, and hilltop views, while nearby neighborhoods like Užupis buzz with street art, third-wave cafés, and a strong creative streak. It still feels low-key and undiscovered, and that's exactly what makes it so fun to explore.

How to get there: Fly into Vilnius International Airport (15 minutes from the center), or arrive by train or bus from Riga or Warsaw.

Where to stay:

Hotel Pacai. A Design Hotels standout set in a former baroque palace. reimagined with moody tones, sharp lines, and a distinctly modern Baltic aesthetic.

- **Fora Perks** include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, extended check-in/out and upgrade whenever possible.

Stikliai Hotel. A longtime Vilnius favorite with vintage charm, Lithuanian touches, and a quiet garden tucked behind ivy-covered walls.

- **Fora Perks** include a welcome amenity and daily breakfast.

Valletta, Malta



Europe's tiniest capital packs a serious punch—honey-hued limestone streets, baroque architecture, and a Grand Harbour that lives up to its name. Walkable from end to end in about 20 minutes, Valletta is a place where history feels alive: cannons still fire daily, locals swim off stone piers, and golden-hour light makes everything glow. It's compact, cinematic, and surprisingly cool.

How to get there: Fly into Malta International Airport, then it's a 20-minute drive to Valletta's historic city gate.

Where to stay:

Iniala Harbour House & Residences. A high-design hideaway with rooftop plunge pools, curated interiors, and front-row views of the Grand Harbour.

- **Fora Perks** include \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Phoenicia Malta. A grand, art deco–inspired landmark just outside Valletta’s city gates, with manicured gardens and sweeping harbor view

- **Fora Perks** include \$100 hotel credit, a complimentary bottle of prosecco upon arrival, daily breakfast, extended check-in/out and upgrade whenever possible.

Thessaloniki, Greece



Part port city, part cultural powerhouse, Thessaloniki is Greece's cool second city, pairing ancient ruins and Ottoman architecture with gritty, creative energy. The streets are full of contrasts: bakeries turning out warm bougatsa at sunrise, contemporary galleries tucked behind Byzantine churches, and a waterfront promenade that stays lively well into the night. It feels lived-in and local, with just the right dose of edge—and a killer food scene that rivals anywhere in the country.

How to get there: Fly into Thessaloniki Airport (25 minutes from the center) or connect via train or short flight from Athens. It also pairs well with a road trip through northern Greece or nearby Halkidiki.

Where to stay:

The Modernist. A sleek, minimalist stay in a former consulate, with design-led rooms and a rooftop terrace.

- **Fora Reserve** perks include 20% off food and beverage, a welcome drink, daily breakfast, extended check-out, and an upgrade whenever possible.

ON Residence. A neoclassical beauty on the seafront with elegant interiors, a buzzy restaurant, and views over Thermaikos Bay.

- **Fora Perks** include \$50-100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, extended check-in/out and an upgrade whenever possible.

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