

# Away We Go!

By Tara Puckey



Man wearing Panama hat and striped jacket watching a game of cricket at the New Road County Cricket Ground, with Worcester Cathedral in the background.  
Photo courtesy of the British Tourist Authority

The military lifestyle is full of challenges and everyday struggles. But it also gives service members and their families the chance to experience the world, one country at a time. Germany, Italy and England are home to the majority of the European-based American forces, giving service members the opportunity to explore rich history and amazing cultural treasures.

Before you get too excited to browse the streets of Vatican City and explore the canals of Venice, you'll need to make sure your move is properly planned, leaving you relaxed enough to enjoy the sights and sounds once everything is complete. Then again, taking a trip while waiting for your household goods to be delivered may be a good way to let off some steam.

Although European churches and castles may be massive, the general living quarters are not. In comparison, housing both on and off-base is typically smaller than those of which most Americans are accustomed. Consider storing some of your belongings in the states during your time in Europe. Plus, you'll just have more room for all the great souvenirs you'll acquire on your travels.

But make sure your Rosetta Stone materials don't end up in a storage unit somewhere since you should attempt to learn the local language. Most Europeans are fluent in more than one language, and knowing how to communicate — even a little — will often make things easier for you.

But language isn't the only thing you'll need to adapt to — if you don't plan ahead, you might not be able to use that computer or curling iron, as electrical currents and components differ greatly from the United States. Most items will require adapters that can be expensive, so consider checking out your options ahead of time. Make sure you have enough adapters prior to your move for essential items. One idea is to check at your installation's thrift shop for adapters left behind by fellow service members heading back to the U.S.

Speaking of technology, once you have an adapter for your television, you'll have to pay an annual "T.V. tax" to watch it. The cost helps subsidize the country's public television stations and ranges from \$150 to \$300, depending on the country. And if you're looking for English-speaking channels, you might also need to use satellite television. Make sure you check with your installation on rules and regulations regarding satellite installations.

Service members receive two benefits that help offset the cost of living in Europe. The Overseas Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) is a supplement used to balance the cost of goods overseas in

## Free (or very cheap) Things to Do

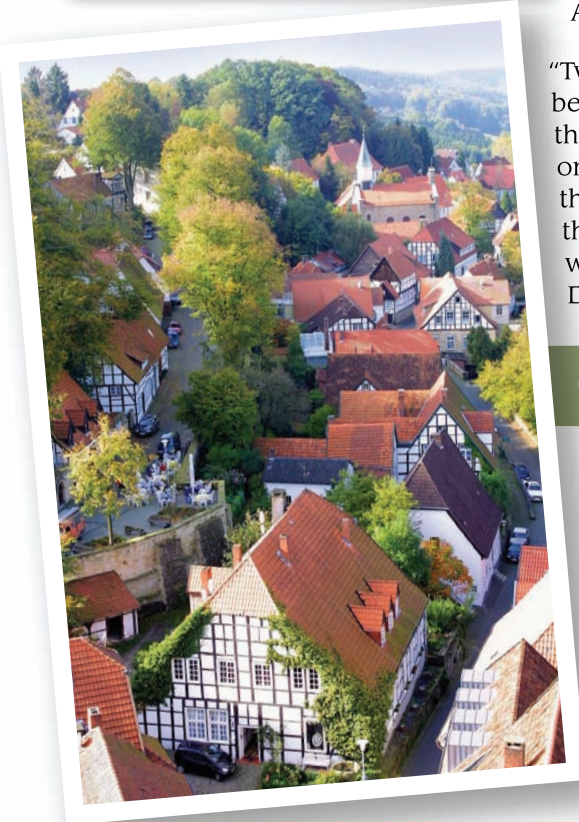
There are many free or cheap things to do in Europe, along with some very expensive things. Be sure to check with your new neighbors for their suggestions, and with your installation's Information, Tickets and Travel (ITT) office to take advantage of any discounts that may be available for attractions near your new community.

comparison to the United States. Because housing costs differ greatly overseas, the Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) compensates service members for most of their housing expenses. [Editor's note: For more information on COLA and OHA, please see page 12]

Once you've settled into your new home, make sure you're able to get out and enjoy your surroundings. Service members and their dependents are required to have a passport to travel to and from foreign countries and, depending on orders, may be required to obtain "no-fee" passports. Not only is it in the rulebook, but who doesn't like all the stamps detailing their adventures?

And adventures you'll have. There's no shortage of things to visit, experience and enjoy. As Mark Twain said:

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."



Tecklenburg: a little hill town  
Photographer: Tecklenburg Touristik GmbH

## Germany

### Historical treasures

An island of museums? That's right. If you're ready to absorb some knowledge, head to Berlin's Museum Island, home to five world-class museums and the Dom, a protestant Cathedral, dating back to the 18th century.

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## Outdoing Central Park

Traditional beer gardens, winding paths, lakes and lush, green lawns welcome visitors of the English Garden in Munich. The green heart of the city, the park spans a massive 1.4 square miles, making it one of the world's largest urban public parks.

## To the heavens

In Cologne, don't miss one of Germany's most important architectural monuments: The Cathedral of Cologne. A gothic masterpiece, the foundation of stone was laid in 1248 and remained intact after the bombings of World War II. The spires are among the tallest in the world and the view from the tower is breathtaking, but you'll have to climb more than 500 stairs to get there, so rest up.

## England

### Be artistic

Spend a day in London admiring more than 2,200 masterpieces by greats like Van Gogh, Monet and more at the National Gallery. Check out the guided tours, also free, to learn the history behind the great works of art.

### Ring in the New Year

If you're around in February, don't miss the celebrations surrounding the Chinese New Year, which in 2012, happens to be the Year of the Dragon. A packed Albert Square in Manchester welcomes dragon dances, martial arts demonstrations, fireworks and more.



### Find Robin Hood

Head to Nottingham and spend some time under the Major Oak, the tree that Robin Hood used as a hiding spot while fleeing from the Sheriff of Nottingham. The visitors' center at Sherwood Forest Country Park will sort out the fact from the fiction, once you're done enjoying the myth, of course.

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## Italy

### Don't lie

If you're into folklore, take your chances at La Bocca della Verita, also known as "The Mouth of Truth," in the Eternal City, Rome. Made famous by Audrey Hepburn in Roman Holiday, legends say that if you put your hand in the gaping mouth and tell a lie, you'll pull back nothing but a stump. Uh oh.

### Swinging through the sky

That's what you'll see if you attend the grand opening celebration for the Venice Carnival in February. In addition to costumed characters, snacks and drinks and fireworks high above St. Mark's Square, tradition involves an "angel" swinging on harnesses from the bell tower into the Piazzetta San Marco. Don't forget your costume if you plan on attending one of the famous masked balls!



Photos courtesy of the Italian Government

### The boar that brings luck

Shopping costs money, of course, but it's free to visit the Mercator Nuovo, a covered market located in the historic center of Florence. While you're browsing, find the big statue of a wild boar, locate the shiny spot on his nose and rub. The well-polished snout is said to bring good luck or, even better, return trips to the beautiful city. ●

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