

# Bicycling Through Europe: The Easy Way

By PHILIP WAGENAAR, M.D.

"Impossible," she said. "No bicycles." My face fell. We were touring the island of Corfu in Greece and had struggled up a steep hill to the only hotel in the area. "Maybe put bicycles in office?" I tried in my best Greek. "Impossible, no bicycles," she repeated. "Bicycles inside room," I stammered, smiling seductively.

"Impossible, no bicycles," she reiterated. I racked my brain.

Bicycles on balcony of room. I asked with a sinking heart. Her face lit up.

En táksi (all right), En táksi (all right). As we were pushing our bikes through the hallways of the beautiful hotel, I reminisced about the vagaries of bike storage.

Even though it is often difficult to find a place for your bike in a hotel, most likely you will not have this problem at youth hostels.

These accommodations, graded from zero to four stars, are much cheaper than most other lodgings. The trade-off is, that sleeping is dormitory style with separation of the sexes. As such, you usually cannot sleep with the person of your choice, unless that person happens to be of the same sex. Some hostels offer private rooms for families. To stay in a hostel, you do not have to be a youth in age, only at heart. The exception is Bavaria in Germany, where they do not accept people over 25.

Most hostels belong to Hostelling International and require a membership card to stay overnight. Write Hostelling International: American Youth Hostels, 733 15th NW Suite 840 Wash D.C. 20005, phone (202) 783-6161 or in Seattle, contact Council Travel at 632-2448 or 329-4567. Local discounts are often available with membership. Many hostels in Europe will give you a temporary card if you are not a member. Unofficial youth hostels do not require a card.

Some hostels affiliated with Hostelling International occupy some of the most remarkable real estate in the world, including castles in Bavaria, mountain huts in Scandinavia, an old choir school in London, but some are hard to reach by bicycle. Price and degree of luxury vary with location. Quite a few of these lodgings close during part of the day and have an early curfew.

A sheet sleeping bag made of bed sheets is usually required. The dimensions of the this bag are 70x30 inches with an 18 inch

deep pocket to cover the pillow.

You can either buy this at AYH, can rent one at the hostel, or, if you are ambitious, you can make one yourself.

Be sure to obtain the all inclusive Hostel Guide called: "Budget Accommodation You Can Trust (Europe & the Mediterranean)" from Hostelling International, Council Travel or the World Wide Bookstore in Seattle.

Since there is a dearth of youth hostels in Europe, it behooves you to make advance reservations, especially in July and August. This can be done through Hostelling International's IBN (International Booking Network) for more than 100 youth hostels worldwide (Consult the Hostel Guide). Where this is not possible, get advance booking postcards and vouchers in the US, which you send with an International Reply Coupon (available at the post office) to the hostel overseas. Allow six weeks for an answer.

Campgrounds, contrary to youth hostels, are found in many areas. Most of these have showers and laundry facilities and are rated with a star system. Holland has even campgrounds exclusively for bicyclists. (Write to Netherlands Board Of Tourism, 1549 West Glenlake Avenue Itasca IL 60143-1185.)

To prepare for a camping trip overseas, obtain an international camping carnet (card) from the National Campers And Hikers Association, 4804 Transit Road, Building 2, Depew, N.Y. 14043, (716) 668-6242. This document is used for registration at campgrounds and is kept at the office until you leave. If you don't have a carnet, the management will often insist on keeping your passport.

Since it is better to keep this document in your possession at all times, ask if they will allow you to keep it if you pay in advance. If this ploy fails, inform them that you need your passport to exchange money at the bank and that you will return for it in ten minutes. This may sometimes work.

While camping in Europe can be a delightful experience in good weather, there are some disadvantages. The specific area allotted to you for your campsite is extremely small and it is not unusual to overhear your next door camper whisper sweet nothings (or maybe "some things")! into his or her companion's ears.



Flory Wagenaar biking near the Adriatic coast in the former Yugoslavia (before the war)

You also have to carry much more gear than when using alternate accommodations; of course you can lighten your load by eating out.

Before you buy camping guides, ask the appropriate Government Tourist Offices for a list of campgrounds. If this information is not sufficient, you can buy one of the following three books, available in book stores in the US.

**FOR ALL OF EUROPE**

(Available in Bookstores in the US)

•Europa Camping And Caravaning: International Guide (Annually updated).

The most extensive and complete guide about camping in Europe.

•Camping And Caravaning In Europe (AA. England), Annually Updated.

•Camp Europe By Train. This book gives general tips and suggests camping areas along rail lines

In case you go to only one or two countries, you might consider:

**SPECIFIC COUNTRY GUIDES**

(From National Tourist Offices in the US and from Tourist Offices and book-stores overseas)

•ENGLAND: Camping And Caravan Parks In Britain (Syha Handbook For Scotland)

The Accommodation Guide England & Wales

•FRANCE: Guide Officiel Camping / Caravaning

Camping And Caravaning In France

(Michelin)

•GERMANY: Many Campgrounds In Eastern Germany rent Bungalows:

Address: DCC German Camping Club

Mandlstrasse 28 d-80000,

München 40, Germany

•HOLLAND: ANWB Annual Camping Guide: ANWB, VVV, Bookstores

•ITALY: Campeggi E Villaggi Turistici In Italia

Guida Di Campeggi In Europa

•PORTUGAL: Roteiro Campista (US Tourist Office)

•SPAIN: Mapa De Campings (US Tourist Office)

•SWITZERLAND: Swiss Camping Guide

Note that I will teach the course "Bicycling Through Europe--The Easy Way" at the Experimental College this month (see below for time and date.

Do not miss this great opportunity to increase your knowledge and pleasure of bicycle riding in Europe. I will give you innumerable tips, (four flat tires in 70,000 miles, how to keep your gear absolutely waterproof) and tell you everything you always wanted to know, but never dared to ask.

Flory and I will be leaving shortly on our annual bicycle trip in Europe, and I will continue the series of articles when I return.

I will continue teaching classes in the beginning of fall, at North Seattle and Shoreline Community Colleges and at the Experimental College.

**NEW COURSE**

**Biking Through Europe The Easy Way!**

**Biking Through Europe The Easy Way**  
Offered by the  
*ASUW Experimental College*  
April 5th and 12th  
7pm to 9:30pm  
For registration information, pick up an Experimental College Catalog or call 543-4375



# Bicycling Through Europe— The Easy Way

By Philip Wagenaar, M.D.

We had just reached the top of the hill when we heard a sudden wrenching noise. We feared something terrible had happened to one of our bikes. Indeed, Flory's derailleur had broken. The chain drooped dejectedly. Our faces mirrored the position of the chain. I tried to repair the damage, to no avail. As we coasted downhill, a woman came out of the village bakery with a baguette under her arm. We told her of our predicament. Alas, there was no bikeshop, she said, but the local mechanic could fix everything. The machine shop we entered looked as if a tornado had just gone through it. Everything was lying helter-skelter on top of each other. Workbenches were littered with rusty, broken-down parts. The owner welcomed us by blowing smoke in our faces. We showed him the incapacitated derailleur. He nodded knowingly. Lighting one cigarette after the other and coughing constantly, he shuffled through the shop, trying to find the necessary replacement parts. We just stood there, enveloped by smoke, afraid to ask whether he would be able to fix it. After half an hour of scurrying around, he had finally found what he needed. While he was working his way slowly toward the finishing line, we kept looking at our watches, wondering how much this was going to set us back. After forty-five minutes he looked up. The derailleur was fixed. When we asked how much we owed him, he said: "Nothing." After a long discussion, we persuaded him to accept five francs (one dollar).



Flory Wagenaar On the Back Roads in Switzerland

All this happened on our first bike trip in France. We had not outfitted our bicycles with new components before we left. Now we know better. We start every long tour with new tires, derailleurs, brake-blocks, etc. We stay away from first-entry equipment for which the bugs still have to be worked out.

This brings us back to my article in the October *Courier*, in which I discussed the air fare as the first item on the list of pre-trip expenses. The second one is outfitting your bike. Below is a complete list of expenditures for a bicycle trip.

1. Air Fare
2. Outfitting a Bike
3. Bicycle Accessories, Tools and Spares.
4. Clothes
5. Raingear
6. Panniers
7. Guide and Accommodation Books Maps
8. Camera and Film (Take Rolls With 36 Exposures)
9. Money Belt (A Must!)
10. Passport
11. Medications
12. Camping Gear if applicable
13. Personal Items

After having bankrolled all the preparations for your tour, you wonder how

much money will be left, so that you can actually afford the trip. I will answer these concerns in the following paragraphs.

### How much should you budget?

The biggest unknown of your costs is the fluctuation in foreign currency exchange rates. The dollar may be worth more or less than what you had anticipated, depending upon the actions or often inactions of our exalted government.

If you do not camp or stay in youth hostels, your major expense, besides food,

will be accommodations. The cost of these varies tremendously with the country. To get an idea what overnight lodging costs for one and two people, look in current accommodation books (for example, the red Michelin Guide), available in larger bookstores. The red Michelin Guides provide information about hotels and restaurants in the native language only, but do not be deterred, you will find a legend of the English translation in the front of each volume. As a rule: the farther North one travels in Europe, the higher the price of lodging. You should budget an extra twenty per cent for unknowns and unpleasant surprises.

How Can You Make Your Trip As Economical As Possible? Considerations in the planning stage:

Do not travel during the European vacation season. In general, prices are cheaper in April and May, tend to go up in June and skyrocket during July and August, while September and October give you a break again. In Scandinavia, on the other hand, June, July and August are the times when you often get the best deals.

Before you leave, look in the guide books for every possible saving you can find. Remember that some passes and discount options must be bought before leaving the US.

Be sure to bring all informational material with you from the US. Guide books, accommodation books and maps are often very hard to come by once overseas.

Get a student discount card. Take the Entertainment card (Entertainment Publications 1-800-374-4464).

Write to the National Tourist Office of each country to get all possible information before you leave. Most of it is free.

Though my advice is to get most maps before departing, maps are cheaper inside the country where they are issued.

Considerations while you are overseas:

### Accommodation

Instead of hotels, use B & Bs, Guest houses and Pensions. For a classification, which varies by country, look in guide books. If you arrive early, go to the local tourist office to find out where to get accommodation that fits your budget. This is not always practical, when you arrive late in the day and the tourist office is closed.

When you call ahead for a reservation, ask what the charge for the room is. Make sure you specify exactly what kind of room you desire. To entice you, hotel clerks or owners will often quote you a cheaper rate on the phone than when you arrive unexpectedly.

As I have indicated earlier, staying in youth hostels or camping makes your trip much cheaper.

In France, a room with a grand lit (double bed) is cheaper than a room with twin beds.

Note that in some countries hotels quote their price per person (Notably in Austria).

When visiting a large city, stay in one of the smaller towns nearby. The accommodations are much cheaper, train transportation to the big city is fast and excellent and you are not stuck with your bicycle, which you often cannot ride anyway.

Expensive hotels often give big discounts on weekends.

If you stay in a hotel where breakfast is included in the room rate and you leave before breakfast, see if you can strike a deal for a better rate.

Ask for a discount in every place you stay. I started doing this on our tour in the spring of 1994 and was successful 80% of the time.

### Food

#### Buying your own food

Purchase supplies at supermarkets rather than smaller stores, and make a picnic lunch. If it is pouring rain and you cannot eat outside, sit in a covered bus stop (brrr, may be cold). Better yet, go into a bar, cafe or restaurant and ask if they will let you eat the food you have just purchased, when you buy something to drink.

#### Eating out

The following establishments are usually cheap and good:

Italian restaurants in all European countries, especially in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

#### University restaurants.

Buffet-style restaurants (cafeterias). These are found in larger stores and are usually open until 6:30 p.m. during the week, and until mid-afternoon on Saturday.

Use the recommendations in guide books for restaurants with inexpensive meals. Let's Go has good listings of cheaper and excellent restaurants.

When dining, order the "Menu of the Day" which is the cheapest menu available.

Eat a warm meal at lunch time. At that time menus are much cheaper than in the evening.

Ask for water from the faucet instead of soda water, which the restaurant own-

ers invariably want to foster on you.

In many countries it is cheaper to eat or drink standing at the counter than sitting at tables.

### Discount Passes

Inquire at the local tourist office and the place where you are staying, whether discounts are available on public transportation passes and entertainment. Learn the following words in the foreign language: "student", "senior" and "discount." The simple memorization of a few words in the foreign language paves the way to great savings.

### Telephone

A separate article will deal with the vagaries of telephone use overseas. Many travel magazines print letters from readers who complain that they could not use the telephone abroad. Before you leave, find out how to make a call in foreign countries both locally and internationally. One good way to do this of course is, to take my classes.

Since there often is a hefty surcharge when you use the telephone in a hotel room or even in the hotel lobby, dial from pay phones in the street or at the post office.

Look for cheaper hours for international calls, often, but not always, evening, night and weekends.

Buy telephone cards in the largest denominations. Do not use a bank credit card to make calls. Learn the words for telephone booth in the native language.

For international calls compare the cost of the following three options:

Dial the number yourself. For this you will need a telephone card and/or coins.

Use USA Direct (AT&T) or its equivalent from MCI or Sprint. You dial an access number, which you get from your long distance phone company. When you dial this number you are connected to an American operator, who will call the requested number. You charge the call to a telephone company or bank credit card.

Reverse charges. This can sometimes be difficult, since not every phone booth has the capability of incoming calls.

### Fax

This is the fastest and cheapest way to send information about yourself back home. The least expensive way is to send a fax from a store, where you have just bought something. I have found many people quite willing to do this for me. An alternative is, to send a fax from a hotel, but ask first how much they charge. Stay away from the post office; in many countries this is the most expensive option.

### Tips and Taxes

Note that tips and taxes are always included in your charges, unless specifically noted. While many guide books tell you to leave additional money for a tip anyway, I have seen very few Europeans do this. Do as the locals do. Do NOT over-tip, or you will ruin it for everybody.

If you want to get more tips and detailed information about European bicycle touring, join my classes "Bicycle Touring Europe—The Easy Way."

See ad on page 10.

Next month, I will discuss the easiest way to obtain cash overseas and the use of ATM, Credit and Debit Cards.

# Bicycling Europe the Unique and Easy Way

## A Guide to the Guides

By Philip Wagenaar, M.D.

It is Monday, 3:05 p.m. Thirty miles to ride. The Michelin guide unequivocally states "ferme le lundi". The hotel is closed on Mondays.

A specter of spending the night outside, in the cold, in a police station?

We ask. "Oh yes, there is another hotel, a hotel with eight rooms". Shall we try our luck?

We arrive. Eight rooms, one toilet, one bath. Nature calls. "No soap, no paper, no lock," Flory shouts. "Make sure nobody comes in" I hear her yell again. I stand guard outside the door. Another outcry: "Everything is dirty!"



Phil Wagenaar compares costumes with beautiful Dutch farmers' wives.

*We should have looked in our guide; the hotel, indeed, is not listed.*

The guides you carry are of invaluable help, if you just listen to their advice.

**General guide books** have no bicycling data, but provide detailed information about each country. Make sure that you acquire the most recent edition. I list the following publications in order of my preference:

**Lonely Planet guides (LP)** (not updated annually).

These guides are by far the best. If I had to buy one general book, it would be the LP one (to my great chagrin, I own no stock in the publishing company).

Four volumes are available:

- Western Europe.
- Mediterranean Europe
- Eastern Europe
- Scandinavia and Baltic Europe

No books have been published for individual countries.

Why am I raving about these books?

They answer all your pre-trip questions: (money, business hours, telephone, etc.) in a concise manner.

They provide you with excellent touring details, clear maps, and infinite details of public transportation.

They list all the sightseeing attractions in the foreign language, (besides English). This is of great help when you have to ask for directions.

They have a small language chapter for each country, so you can ask or point to the right questions.

They classify many different types of accommodations. Go to the bookstore and buy this book: if it does not meet your requirements, you will get your money back (not from me, of course).

### Fodor guides (updated annually)

These are available as individual guides for each country of Western Europe and Fodor Europe, covering all European countries.

The Fodor publications have the following advantages: They list the addresses of all US branch offices of the National Tourist organizations. This is useful, because often one branch provides you with considerably more brochures than another one.

They suggest itineraries for one to four weeks. They give hotel and restaurant listings in all categories. They give an excellent description of walking tours in the cities. Unfortunately, Fodor often mentions only the English names of sightseeing attractions.

Let's go guides. (Updated annually).

The following guides are available:

- Let's go Europe
- Individual volumes for
  - Germany, Austria and Switzerland
  - Great Britain & Ireland
  - Greece & Turkey
  - Italy
  - Spain & Portugal

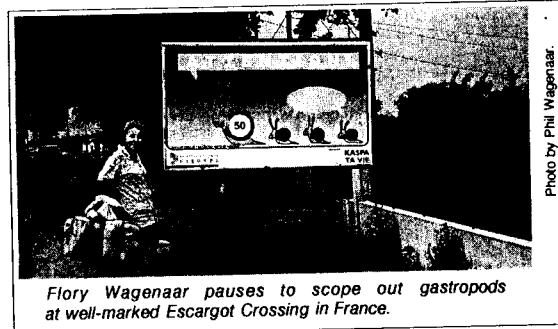
They offer first-rate advice on good and inexpensive restaurants. The recommended hotels and pensions are often full.

**Eurail guide**

The best reference book for railroad travel. It includes plans for one-day train excursions and scenic rail trips. Photocopy the pages you think you might need.

**Michelin green guides.**

These are primarily sightseeing books. They are full of interesting historical and architectural gems. Each green



Flory Wagenaar pauses to scope out gastropods at well-marked Escargot Crossing in France.

guide is a compilation of noteworthy attractions in every city, town and village. They also list tours of unusual appeal.

English language editions are available for

- Switzerland,
- Germany and
- France

There are also twenty-four regional guides for France, ten of which are in English. Buy the appropriate volume before you leave, since the English translation may be hard to find in Europe.

European planning and rail guide, a free, (hurrah)!, thirty-three page brochure you can obtain from Budget Europe Travel Service (2557 Meade Court Ann Arbor MI 48105, (1-800-441-2387))

This brochure provides a lot of information about train travel and gives good sightseeing suggestions in many countries

**Ferry Books**

These are primarily of value, if you want to skip long distances by bike. The most helpful ones cover the Mediterranean and discuss travel between

- Europe and North Africa,
- Italy and Greece
- Continental Europe and its offshore islands of

Corsica and Sardinia.

(Malta is too far away for a poor cyclist, except for those who as aspiring presidents may decide to meet with their Russian counterpart.)

In the Baltic, the one-hour ferry between Puttgarden in Germany and Rødby in Denmark is the quickest connection between the mainland and Copenhagen.

During the ferry voyage, the bicycle will feel very much at ease, since its body is firmly attached to a stanchion. You may not fare quite as well, especially when the seas are rough and the Dramamine does not work.

There are many other books but I have found the ones above the most helpful.

*Next month, we will discuss how you can easily carry all this material with you and in addition, there will be many other interesting topics.*