

The Ocean is the Easy Part

Traveling in a US Camper in Europe

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So you want to try camper travel in Europe …

There are more options than you might think.

- Fly and Rent: Rentals are expensive, best for shorter, one time trip. (Germany said to offer the best/most options.)
- Exchange/swap. (No personal experience, but we met someone who loved it.)
- Buy a EU registered camper: More practical than you think,
  but requires that you establish some form of company in the EU - We
  have two friends doing this.
  https://tofu411.wordpress.com/
  https://travelintiger.com/
- Ship your own camper from the US: ***The focus of this presentation.***





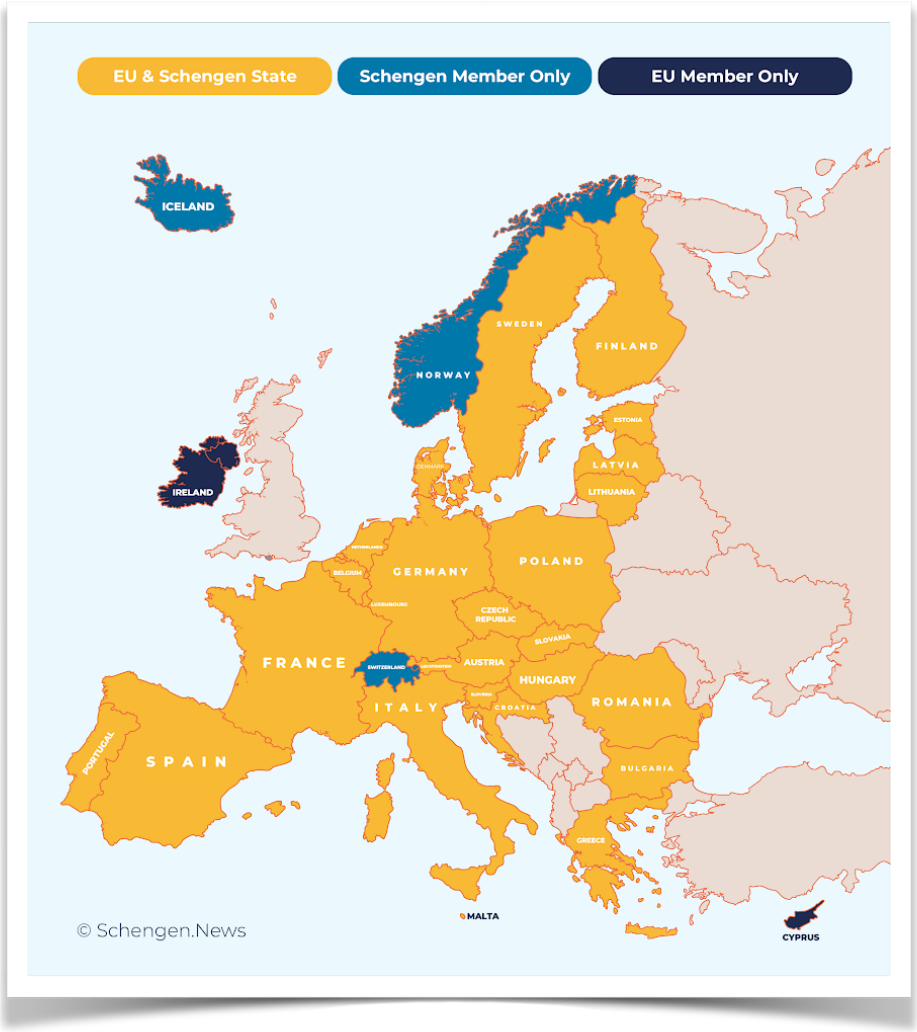
Vehicle Considerations

Mostly the same as the US - smaller is better when rolling and bigger is better when camped, but there are some special considerations:

- Weight matters: Everything, from roads to campgrounds, is easier if your vehicle is rated below 3,5 metric tons. Most toll discount plans are limited to 3,5 tons.

- Size matters: European campsites tend to be smaller and while some enforce a fire safety distance, it is NOT universal. At 7 metres long, we have not had problems parking, but at 3,6 metres tall, we have found lots of low bridges.

- Emissions matter: Many big cities have low emission zones and all of these are growing. If you have a modern camper you will need a windshield sticker which shows your emission rating. Can take a few weeks to get this.



Schengen Agreement

The Good News: Once in, only limited border controls.
The Bad News: Only stay 90 out of any 180 days. No easy solutions.
The New News: Electronic visas coming next year or so.

Can be very hard to calculate: We use this: https://schengeninsuranceinfo.com/90-180-day-rule/calculator/



Insurance

You will probably have to be self-insured. Comprehensive insurance, even if available, is extremely expensive. Third Party insurance is expensive, but available, and mandatory.

WARNING: You may have to maintain US insurance to avoid cancellation of vehicle registration.

Drive carefully!

We use: Tourinsure - https://www.tourinsure.de/en/home





Things that can make a surprising difference:

- **Season**: The shoulder seasons are much less crowded, but many camping options and attractions start to shut down as early as October and stay closed until March or April.
- **Country**: European nations can be very, very different. Everything, politics, language, money, driving, camping rules, shopping, can change, and dramatically, as soon as you cross a border.
- **Latitude**: Changes climate and geography.







Camping and How to Find it.

The Internet is your friend.

- Park4Night is our primary resource: https://park4night.com/en
- iOverlander offers more informal sites: https://ioverlander.com/ camping
- UK camping clubs: https://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/
  https://www.caravanclub.co.uk/
- France Passion and BritStops for pub and farm stays.





Campgrounds

Campgrounds are much like those in the US. Many are vacation destinations with pools, club houses, restaurants, and other facilities. Sometimes require minimum stays of three days to a week.

- Can be strict on reservations (required), arrival (not before a fixed time, not after 7 PM, not during lunch, etc.), and departure (before noon, at the latest)
- Can get crowded and fill on weekends and holidays. Beware British Bank Holidays!
- More expensive, especially near cities, tourist attractions, etc.

Our least preferred option except for laundry, water, charge, etc.





Up in the Aires

Aires (“Stellplatz” in German, “Area” in Spanish, “Sosta” in Italian) are parking lots, typically run by the municipality. Services offered vary from nonexistent to being indistinguishable from campsites.

- Focus is on overnight stays and most are limited to three days or less.
- Can get crowded and can fill early, as early as 10AM in high season.
- Can be totally automated, you may need to purchase a card. https://www.campingcarpark.com/en_GB/
- Sometimes coin only.
- Less expensive.

Our preferred option





Other Options

Perhaps the best stays are places like pubs/restaurants, farms/vineyards, and others. Most of these have no facilities, but are often much more interesting. Wild camping is hard, but more available the further east you go. Use sites like iOverlander, BritStops, and France Passion.

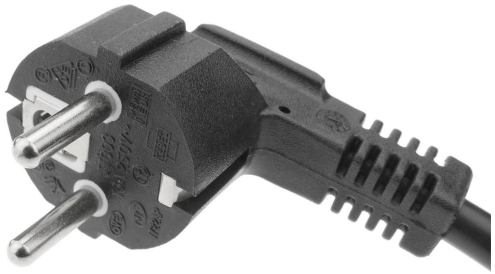
https://ioverlander.com/ https://www.britstops.com/ https://www.france-passion.com/











Shore Power

Part One - Connections:

There are three connectors that you are likely to encounter. These will get you through most countries.

— The CEE “Commando” Most common at aires and campgrounds.
— Standard UK residential plug
— EU common or “Schuko” residential plug
— There are a few others

Part Two - Voltage and Frequency:



All of Europe is 220v/50hz

— Use a transformer
— Add a second charger - This is what we did.

Part Three - Practicalities:

Need a ***L O N G*** chord, 50 feet minimum. Very few campsites have power at each pitch.

— Use a US cord and change the shore end, or
— Buy a European cord and change the vehicle end

Hot tip: Talk to Tough Leads about their low profile 'letter box” connector. https://toughleads.co.uk
Talk to Adrian South



Water

The good news is that most places use a Gardena or a Hozelock fitting.

- Easiest solution is to simply buy a ***L O N G*** European hose. Water taps are usually centralized.
- If you want to use a US hose, splice in a US purchased Gardena fittings (to fit the US hose diameter) and also buy a male to male fitting, that way you can connect to Gardena fittings and still attach to a US tap.
- You also should buy your own EU threaded fittings (There are two sizes), as the campsite fitting is sometimes stolen. You may also want an adapter for smooth taps.
- Finally, you may want a bucket or similar.









Propane



Most campers do use LPG, but:

- Tanks and fittings vary greatly by country.
- Refillable tanks are rare. Most campers use tank exchange. (Gaslow make bottles and whole systems.)
- Many dealers will not refill any tank. (Italy, Morocco, Spain)
- The best option is motorway stations that have pumps for LPG cars, but this is not always legal.

The LPG Shop is an essential resource for bottles, Adapters, and good, patient advice.
https://lpgshop.co.uk/

Also: https://www.motorhomemedics.co.uk/

And: https://www.mylpg.eu/stations/

We have NOT regretted having an all electric camper.

(We DO have a small gas grill. Doing it again, we would use an electric grill.)

See obligatory LPG scare photo, taken in Sweden:





Poop!

99.9999999% of all EU campers use Thetford Cassette toilets.

— Easiest solution is to fit your camper with a cassette. (Get a SOG as well. https://www.sog-systeme.de/?lang=en)
— We prefer a composting toilet. (There are US and European options.)
— If you want to use a US black tank, get a macerator pump and a long, 50 foot +, hose.



Where do you dump?

Grey water is easy; almost every camping spot has a drive over grate.

Toilets are another story - unbelievable variety of dump points

— All are set up for cassettes and most (but not all) accept chemical treatment.
— The variety of shapes, sizes, and locations is bewildering.



Hot Tip: Get a rolling grey water tank/caddy.

Allows you to dump without moving your vehicle.



Laundry

Full service campgrounds may have a laundry, but the machines tend to be small, slow (3 hours!), and occupied.

The BEST solution we have found is WashME: https://www.wash-megroup.com/en-uk/ - Big machines and easy to use. Challenge is to find them and then to park when you do.



Money

You will will need more than you expect/hope. Some countries and places require cash, usually when you least expect it. (Bicycle repair shop in Netherlands.)

- Have at least two credit cards and two ATM cards, from different banks and companies. Many credit card transactions will require text confirmation. May have to do a travel notification before you travel. Good to have a spare if you lock up your card(s).
- Use ATM at banks or post offices; avoid tourist stores, etc. Some post offices have no fees.
- Apple Pay offers some advantages against having your card cloned.
- Understand fees. Always better to let your bank/credit card do conversion.
- Some businesses want bank transfers. We used XOOM from PayPal.



Telephones and Internet

Not just for keeping in touch, can be essential for finding campsites. Many UK sites, for example, require telephone reservations. What's App is the most common messaging service: https://www.whatsapp.com/

- Extend your US plan overseas - can be expensive. We use T-Mobile.
- Use European phone or SIM.
- Rent European MiFi. We use Hippocketwifi: https://hippocketwifi.com/
- Some combination of the above.





Bicycles and Public Transport

There is a reason every Euro camper you see has bicycles on the back. Much of the time time, there is simply no place to park. (And it is even worse if your truck can't pass the emission standards.)

The good news is that, even at their worst, European public transport and bicycle infrastructure are wonderful. Most Americans are simply shocked at how convenient they are - everything simply works.

Using a bicycle or public transport from a campground is an excellent option.

- We used folding E-Bikes. https://gocycle.com/
- Trainline is very useful service: https://www.thetrainline.com/en-us.
- Google maps, Waze, and Rome2Rio are essential resources: https://www.rome2rio.com/





Ferries and Tunnels

You are likely to use ferries and tunnels more than you expect, and not just for the English Channel. Most are located where there is no option or where they are cost effective alternatives to driving, especially with tolls for heavy trucks.

Most are easy to use, and easier with their telephone apps.







Finally, Just do it!

There are some pictures you simply can’t get in Kansas.









