Coronavirus Outbreak: Should You Cancel a Trip to Europe?

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March 17, 2020

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From Iceland to Bulgaria, here's how COVID-19 is impacting European countries.

[Editor's note: This is an updated version of an earlier article that originally ran on March 4.]

The new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, is spreading rapidly around the world. Italy is currently Europe's hotspot with Spain's cases falling not far behind. Read up on the coronavirus situation generally, including how to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 at The Latest: Should You Change Your Travel Plans Due to the Coronavirus? (https://www.fodors.com/news/news/should-you-change-your-travel-plans-because-of-the-coronavirus) (Short answer: yes, we should all be avoiding travel right now). Here's what you need to know specifically about Europe.

The Latest

On March 17 EU leaders are expected to announce what The Guardian (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/coronavirus-france-on-war-footing-as-europe-locks-down-macron) calls "the strictest travel ban in its history." This will mean a 30-day suspension of all travel by non-EU citizens for all the 26 member countries. There are a few exemptions including permanent residents, U.K. citizens, and medical workers. Countries around the world are adding new bans barring entry of non-nationals. For example, on March 16, Canada announced the suspension of entry into Canada by Europeans and most other non-Canadians.

On March 16, France announced that, as in Italy and Spain, the country would now have an enforced lockdown. It began at noon March 17. Germany announced that only stores carrying essential items food may remain open and that religious services can no longer take place. More countries, including the U.K. and Germany, recommended their citizens avoid all nonessential travel.

Airlines are curtailing flights in response to border closures and reduced demand. Travelers in Europe, as well as the rest of the world, report showing up at the airport to have their flight canceled and needing to try to reschedule.

Last Week

Many countries, including the U.S. and Canada, are advising their citizens not to travel abroad. As of March 13, the Canadian government is recommending Canadians who are traveling make arrangements to return home as soon as possible.

On March 11, Donald Trump announced a new travel ban against Europe's 26 Schengen countries (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/schengen_visa_en) and on March 14, the U.K. and Ireland were added. The ban means that, as of March 14, foreign nationals who have been in any of those countries within the last 14 days are barred from entering the U.S. for the next 30 days. It does not apply to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and their immediate families. They are able to return home but may be required to self-isolate or be quarantined for 14 days.
On March 12, the CDC issued a level-3 warning to avoid non-essential travel in Europe (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/coronavirus-europe) and listed the countries this applies to. As of March 17, it is still excluding the U.K. and Ireland. At the same time, the CDC (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/coronavirus-global) announced a global outbreak with a level 2 alert recommending Americans “practice enhanced precautions.” The U.S. State Department (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/covid-19-information.html) raised their travel advisory to level three, recommending “reconsider all travel”.

**Europe Overall**

COVID-19 was reported in Europe almost a month after the first cases were confirmed in China. Europe is currently the most affected continent after Asia and called the COVID-19 epicenter. The end of February 2020 brought a rapid spread of the disease across the continent. Italy remains the most affected country but Spain is not far behind.

Within Europe, actions to combat COVID-19 continue to increase. On March 2, 2020, the President of the EU raised the risk level for coronavirus from moderate to high. Nonessential foreign travel is banned for 30 days. As of March 17, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) says that 61,098 cases and 2,740 deaths have been reported (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) in the EU/EEA, the U.K., Monaco, San Marino, and Switzerland. All EU/EEA countries and the U.K. are affected.

The ECDC posts regular COVID-19 updates (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china) on the situation in the European Union, the European Economic Area (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European_Economic_Area_(EEA)) (EEA) and the United Kingdom. They cover the countries commonly considered as “Europe,” between Iceland and the U.K. in the west and Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria in the east. Technically, this means the ECDC does include Andorra, Cyprus, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, and Switzerland, but does not include countries like Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Russia. Some, but not all, of the ECDC’s reporting does include these latter countries. A listing of COVID-19 cases by country is on the ECDC’s Situation Update (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) page.

More and more countries are advising their citizens to reconsider or avoid nonessential travel. If you cannot avoid traveling, check the latest with the World Health Organization (WHO) (https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019), with the ECDC (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china), and with the public health agency of the destination you plan to visit. There you’ll find the latest case numbers, the restrictions and quarantine requirements in place, and how overwhelmed the country’s health care system is.

As of March 17, only EU nationals may enter European Union countries. Several airlines have canceled or curtailed flights to many European locations and more are expected. Mandatory 14-day self-isolation or quarantine is the norm upon arrival into most countries. For those leaving Europe, know that many countries are requiring anyone who has traveled in some parts of Europe to undergo a mandatory 14-day self-isolation or quarantine period upon returning home.
Here's the latest in some of Europe's most popular tourist countries.

**Italy**

Italy is the European country currently most affected by COVID-19, with 27,980 cases (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) and 2,158 deaths as of March 17, 2020. Over 2,700 people have recovered. Italy's first two cases were reported on January 30 and the first death was February 22.

Many in Italy are sick and many more have tested positive. Italy's hospitals are overwhelmed. While mid-March has brought several days where the number of daily deaths in Italy have far surpassed the deadliest days in China, there are signs that the enforced self-isolation is working.

There are many factors that are likely contributing to Italy's high numbers and why the significant outbreak began there, as described in this Wired (https://www.wired.com/story/why-the-coronavirus-hit-italy-so-hard/) story, Italy has been testing a large proportion of citizens. As Pharmaceutical Technology (https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/features/covid-19-italy-coronavirus-deaths-measures-airports-tourism/) reports, of all countries in Europe, Italy has the highest number of flights to China (where the first cases of COVID-19 were seen), with the number recently tripling. Italy also has the oldest population not only in Europe but the world, which means more people susceptible to getting sick and at greater risk of complications and death.

As of March 9, the entire country and its 60 million residents is in lockdown. Everyone in Italy is encouraged to stay home as much as possible and permission is needed to travel not only outside the country but often outside the municipality or region. During the weekend of March 13, police issued fines to 20,000 people for not complying with the lockdown.

All bars and restaurants are closed. Stores that do not sell essential goods are closed. There's a 6 p.m. curfew. People are encouraged to keep a distance of three feet from each other and requested to stop greetings involving handshakes, kisses and hugs. Almost all events, whether they be funerals, weddings or sporting events, are canceled and most sites, including schools, museums, and theaters, are closed. Restrictions are now expected to be extended past April 3.

**France**


Incremental closures were not as effective as needed, and on March 16 the French president announced a lockdown similar to that in Italy and Spain, it was in full effect at noon March 17. People are to stay home and go out only for essential purchases. The restrictions will be in place for at least 15 days and 100,000 officers are deployed to enforce the new rules.
**Germany**

Germany's coronavirus cases are at 7,974 as of March 17, 2020. Germany has had 20 deaths attributed to COVID-19. Germany's first case was reported on January 28. The German chancellor said March 11 that, as epidemiologists have been predicting, roughly a third of Germany's population is expected to contract the virus. She stressed the importance of slowing down the spread to allow the health care system to care for seriously ill patients.

Coronavirus information in English is available on the [German government's website](https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/issues/ausbreitung-coronavirus-1726158). Everyone in the country is encouraged to limit contact with others to help slow the spread of the virus. On March 16, the chancellor announced that only essential businesses and services may remain open. Germans may not travel unless it is essential, including within the country. There is intensive screening at land borders with France, Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Switzerland; borders with the Netherlands and Belgium are not yet affected. Only those deemed on essential business are allowed into Germany. News outlets like [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/15/trump-offers-large-sums-for-exclusive-access-to-coronavirus-vaccine) are reporting that Donald Trump has offered the German pharmaceutical company, CureVac, "large sums of money" to provide a vaccine "for the U.S. only." Germany's health minister has said that if CureVac is able to develop a vaccine, it would be available "for the whole world" and "not for individual countries."

**United Kingdom**

The U.K.'s latest coronavirus information and advice ([https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#risk-level](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#risk-level)) is updated daily at 2 p.m. London time. As of March 17, the U.K. has 1,543 cases and 55 COVID-19 deaths. The U.K.'s first cases were in England and reported on January 31. February 28 saw the first cases in Northern Ireland and Wales. Scotland's first case was on March 2.

The U.K.'s risk level ([https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)) was raised from low to moderate on January 30, 2020, and is now at high. Though initially excluded from the U.S.-Europe travel ban, the U.K. as well as Ireland are included as of March 14. New restrictions were announced by the prime minister on March 16 and everyone in the U.K. encouraged to practice social distancing. Events are canceled and sites closed, but restaurants and pubs remain open for now.

The U.K. published a [Coronavirus Action Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan) on March 3, 2020. The National Health Service has declared a "national major incident" and is preparing for the predicted surge of COVID-19 patients. Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 are in place to reduce transmission risk and, if advised by public health professionals, keep individuals in isolation. The Guardian reports ([https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/15/uk-coronavirus-crisis-to-last-until-spring-2021-and-could-see-79m-hospitalised](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/15/uk-coronavirus-crisis-to-last-until-spring-2021-and-could-see-79m-hospitalised)) on a National Health Service briefing that said the coronavirus-related crisis is expected to last until spring 2121 and that 80% of citizens could contract it. While some are criticizing the U.K. approach, the transport secretary said that the government is following the evidence-based advice of scientists rather than "doing things that just sound good," reports [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/government-response-to-coronavirus-led-by-science-grant-shapps).
Spain

Spain has 11,409 cases and 499 deaths as of March 17, 2020. The number of new cases is rising rapidly, essentially doubling every three days. The country’s first COVID-19 case was on February 1 and the first death was reported on March 3.

A 15-day state of emergency was declared March 14 and the country is in lockdown. As of March 17, only Spanish citizens and permanent residents are allowed in the country. The prime minister announced March 14 that, similar to measures in Italy, all non-essential businesses be closed. All bars, restaurants, cafes, hotels, and most stores will be shut for at least 15 days. Residents are being asked to stay home. Spain has requisitioned private health care facilities to be used for fighting COVID-19 and has done the same for supplies like face masks.

So, Should You Change Your Travel Plans?

Yes. Many governments are advising their citizens to reconsider and cancel nonessential travel to Europe (and the rest of the world) in an effort to slow the spread of disease and cushion health care systems. Many governments are strongly encouraging their citizens to return home if they are abroad. Given the CDC warning, the U.S.-Europe travel ban, and the ban of entry of non-EU nationals, travel to Europe is significantly affected. Further reductions in flights are expected.


Be prepared for self-isolation or quarantine when you return home. Seniors and those with underlying health conditions will want to take extra precautions, as will anyone who has close contacts in those categories. We all need to do whatever we can to prevent vulnerable populations from becoming ill and to slow the spread of COVID-19 so our health care systems are able to respond, as outlined in our general coronavirus advice (https://www.fodors.com/news/news/should-you-change-your-travel-plans-because-of-the-coronavirus).