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Coronavirus Outbreak: Should You Cancel a Trip to Europe?



by Johanna Read (<https://www.fodors.com/news/author/johanna-read/>)

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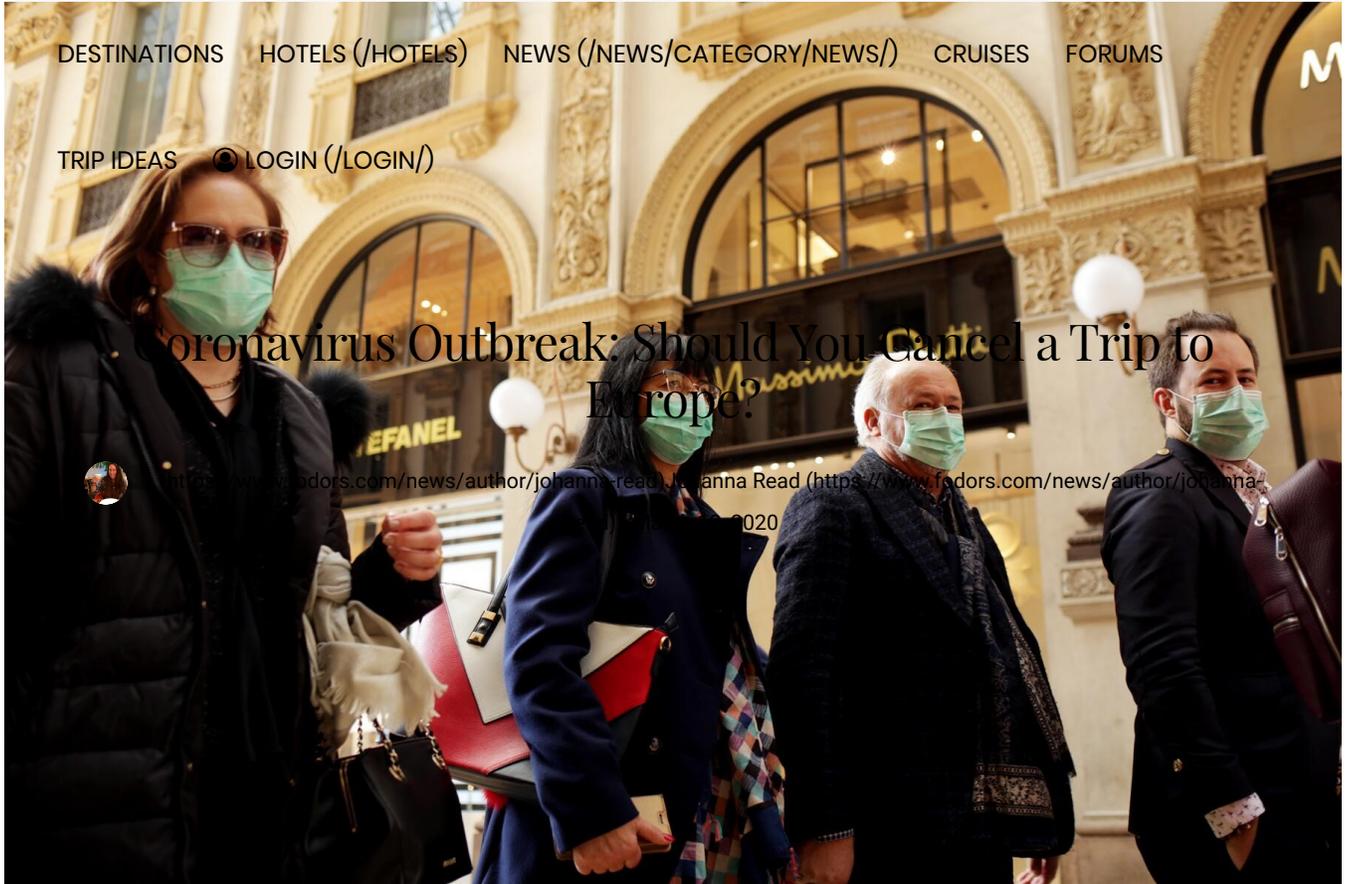


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From Iceland to Bulgaria, here's how COVID-19 is impacting European countries.

[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) (<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.

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The Latest

On March 17, EU leaders (https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/european-commissions-action-coronavirus_en) announced what [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/coronavirus-france-on-war-footing-as-europe-locks-down-macron) (<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 means 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. The [BBC](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51945180) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51945180>) reports on the effects on travelers on March 18, including a 31-mile long traffic jam at a Polish border crossing. 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 18, an announcement about closing the Canada-U.S. border to nonessential travel is expected.

On March 16, France announced that, as in Italy and Spain, the country would now have an enforced lockdown. It began at noon on 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. On March 18 at noon, Belgium is the latest EU country to enter a lockdown.

Airlines are curtailing flights in response to border closures and reduced demand. Travelers in Europe, as well as in 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) (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) (<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/coronavirus-europe>) and listed the countries this applies to. As of March 18, it is still excluding the U.K. and Ireland. At the same time, the [CDC](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/coronavirus-global) (<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) (<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 the World Health Organization (WHO) calls it 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.

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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 18, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) says that 70,989 cases and 3,309 deaths have been [reported](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) (<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) (<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)) ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European_Economic_Area_\(EEA\)](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) (<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) (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>), with the [ECDC](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea)

<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 31,506 [cases](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) (<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea>) and 2,505 deaths as of March 18, 2020. Over 2,900 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 has 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/) (<https://www.wired.com/story/why-the-coronavirus-hit-italy-so-hard/>) story. For example, Italy has been testing a large proportion of citizens and the younger generation visits often with Italy's seniors, a prime way for COVID-19 to spread. As [Pharmaceutical Technology](https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/features/covid-19-italy-coronavirus-deaths-measures-airports-tourism/) (<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 in 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

The first COVID-19 cases in Europe were reported in France, on January 24, 2020, and the first death was February 15. It was Europe's first COVID-19-related death. As of March 18, France has 7,730 cases of COVID-19 and 175 deaths. France's public health agency, [Santé Publique](https://www.santepubliquefrance.fr/maladies-et-) (<https://www.santepubliquefrance.fr/maladies-et->

[traumatismes/maladies-et-infections-respiratoires/infection-a-coronavirus/articles/infection-au-nouveau-coronavirus-sars-cov-2-covid-19-france-et-monde](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/coronavirus-advice-for-visitors-to-france/)), provides regular coronavirus updates in French. France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs provides [advice for visitors to France](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/coronavirus-advice-for-visitors-to-france/) (<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/coronavirus-advice-for-visitors-to-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. If anyone leaves their home, they must carry a document explaining the reason. The restrictions will be in place for at least 15 days and 100,000 officers are deployed to enforce the new rules and issue fines if necessary. The French president also announced on March 16 that paying bills (for example, electricity, rent and taxes) is suspended.

Germany

Germany's coronavirus cases are at 7,156 as of March 1, 2020. Germany has had 13 deaths attributed to COVID-19. Germany's first case was reported on January 28. Al Jazeera (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/europe-closes-borders-curb-coronavirus-spread-live-updates-200318000201088.html>) reports on March 18 that the head of Germany's health agency said that if citizens don't follow the new measures put in place, Germany could have 10 million COVID cases within the next few months,

Coronavirus information in English is available on the [German government's website](https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/issues/ausbreitung-coronavirus-1726158) (<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) (<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>) is updated daily at 2 p.m. London time. As of March 18, the U.K. has 1,950 cases and 60 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>) 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, both the U.K. and Ireland are included as of March 14. New restrictions were announced by the prime minister on March 16 and everyone in the U.K. is encouraged to practice social distancing. Events are canceled and sites closed, but restaurants and pubs remain open for now. Travel is discouraged.

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) 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 11,178 cases and 491 deaths as of March 18, 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 into 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 are shut for at least 15 days. Residents are asked to stay home. Spanish hotels must close by March 24. Spain has also 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.

If you must travel, follow the advice of health authorities like the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice) and the [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html), both in terms of where to limit travel and how to protect yourself from getting infected and infecting others. When in doubt, double-check other governments’ advice, like [Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html)’s and the [U.K.](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-for-travellers/)’s. It’s wise to also check the website of the public health authority of the country you plan on visiting.

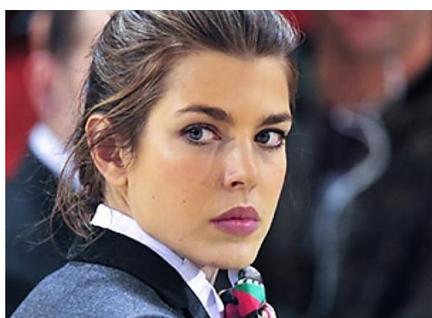
Be prepared for self-isolation or quarantine when you return home. Seniors and those with underlying health conditions will want to take extra precautions, as will anyone who has close contacts in those categories. We all need to do whatever we can to prevent vulnerable populations from becoming ill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

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