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Coronavirus Outbreak: Should You Cancel a Trip to Europe?

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


**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. The end of February 2020 brought a rapid spread of the disease to at least 20 European countries with Italy being the most affected.
On March 2, 2020, the President of the EU raised the risk level for coronavirus from moderate to high noting “in other words, the virus continues to spread.” As of March 4, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) says that 3,351 cases and 85 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.

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 ECDC country is on the ECDC’s Situation Update (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) page.

As in the rest of the world, some coronavirus decisions in Europe are being made based on sensible precautions and science, and some are being made more because of fear and political pressure to be seen to be doing something.
Al Jazeera reports how many of Europe's right-wing populist politicians are calling for sealing borders, particularly from migrants and refugees, and are using the opportunity to criticize the EU and push for their own power. Some have called for the Schengen agreement—which allows passport-free travel between the 26 members of the EU—to be suspended.

In helping you decide whether to travel, keep our general coronavirus advice in mind. While COVID-19 should not be taken lightly, experts like Paul Hunter, a professor of health protection and World Health Organization advisor, estimate that the effects of COVID-19 will be similar to a bad flu year.

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 2,502 cases and 79 deaths as of March 4, 2020. The number of recovered cases is listed at 160. Italy's first two cases were reported on January 30 and the first death was February 22. Italy, like Korea, is doing more testing than most other countries so these statistics don't necessarily mean there are more cases of COVID-19 in Italy and South Korea than in other places.

A government announcement is expected on March 4 recommending people stay three feet apart from each other and to stop shaking hands, kissing and hugging.

Al Jazeera reports that Italy is contemplating expanding its quarantine zone. A dozen towns in the northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto have been under lockdown since February 20, 2020, to try to keep COVID-19 from spreading. The new area which may be quarantined is northeast of Milan around the city of Bergamo with a population of 120,000. On March 4, Italy announced the closing of all schools and universities until mid-March.

For those visiting Italy, know that many public events and attractions have been canceled and closed. However, Milan's Duomo cathedral reopened on March 2 and other Italian museums are starting to reopen with limits on large group gatherings. Performances at Milan's La Scala opera house remain closed until at least March 12. The Vinitaly wine fair has been postponed from April to June. Football (soccer) matches have also been canceled. The Pope was rumored to be ill, but the Vatican reports he just has a cold and has tested negative for COVID-19.
On February 29, 2020, the CDC (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) increased its warning for Italy (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/coronavirus-italy) to level 3 from level 2, recommending that Americans avoid nonessential travel. Canada (https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/italy), on the other hand, issued an advisory not for the whole of Italy, but to avoid non-essential travel to eight regions in the north that include the popular tourist cities of Milan, Genoa, Turin, and Venice. Several airlines have canceled and curtailed flights to northern Italy and some airlines are waiving change fees.

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 4, France has 212 cases of COVID-19 and four deaths. France's public health agency, Santé Publique (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), provides regular coronavirus updates in French.

In France, workers have the right to stop work for health reasons and on March 1, 2020, workers at the Louvre (https://www.louvre.fr/en) exercised that right. The museum was closed Sunday and Monday, in addition to its regular closed day, Tuesday. The Louvre was open again Wednesday, March 4. Other sites like the Eiffel Tower (https://www.toureiffel.paris/en) remain open. Visitors will want to check the status of any of their must-see sites daily. Public transportation in France has not (yet) been affected.

On February 29, France announced that events of more than 5,000 people in confined spaces are canceled (https://www.toureiffel.paris/en) until further notice and has closed schools in areas most affected by COVID-19. The health minister also advised that handshakes and la bise, the traditional French greeting of a kiss on both cheeks, be curtailed.

To ensure face masks are available for those that actually need them (i.e. COVID-19 patients and the people caring for them), on March 3, 2020, President Macron announced that the government will requisition production and current stocks of masks (https://www.france24.com/en/20200303-coronavirus-france-to-requisition-face-masks-for-use-by-health-professionals-those-infected). In response to price gouging, the Finance Minister announced he was prepared to regulate the pricing of hand sanitizer and face masks if needed.

Germany

Germany’s coronavirus cases are at 244 as of March 4, 2020. No deaths in Germany have been attributed to COVID-19. Germany’s first case was reported on January 28.
Germany's minister of health is holding a crisis management meeting on March 4 to discuss the situation. Coronavirus information in English is available on the German government's website (https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/issues/ausbreitung-coronavirus-1726158) and, on March 4, the risk of COVID-19 in Germany is reported as low to medium.

Travelers are being asked to provide more information on where they will stay within the country so they can be more easily tracked down and monitored when COVID-19 cases are reported. Some major events, such as the Leipzig Book Fair and the travel fair ITB Berlin, have been postponed. Some workplaces, including BMW, are being closed when an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19. Major sites and the transportation system remain open.

**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 4, the U.K. has 85 cases and no 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 was raised from low to moderate (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-four-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-novel-coronavirus) on January 30, 2020, and, on March 3, the U.K.’s health secretary warned that widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the UK is likely. Reducing or canceling large-scale gatherings started on March 4 with the announcement that the March 10-12 London Book Fair is canceled. The London Marathon (https://www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com/en-gb/) is still planned for April 26, 2020.

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 reviewing plans for a possible surge of COVID-19 patients, how to enforce isolation of sick people, and how to deal with high levels of absenteeism from workplaces. The U.K. is proposing emergency legislation in case it is needed.

Travelers returning from China’s Hubei province, Iran, and specific parts of northern Italy and South Korea are asked to self-isolate even if they do not have symptoms. Similar advice is given for travelers with any symptoms, even if mild, who have been in other affected areas including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and several Southeast Asian countries.

**Spain**

Spain has 202 cases as of March 4, 2020. The country's first COVID-19 case was on February 1. The first and, so far, only death was reported on March 3.

On February 25, some guests at the Costa Adeje Palace hotel on the island of Tenerife were asked to remain in their rooms after an Italian tourist tested positive for COVID-19. However, guests who didn't show symptoms weren't all quarantined and, as of March 4, 2020, seven people have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Guests who tested negative (https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-51713552) were allowed to leave as of March 1, 2020, and are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days after returning home.
Several sporting events in Spain are going ahead but without spectators. Some large conferences are being canceled or postponed, but Spain has not canceled large events such as the March 1 fireworks show which kickstarts Valencia’s La Fallas (https://www.visitvalencia.com/en/events-valencia/fallas-program-2020) festival.

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