OFF TO SOMEWHERE

You have a week. Europe is still an option.

Five itineraries. Six nights. One hotel.

A practical guide to seeing more, without changing hotels.



DANA KAPLAN

FLORENCE / NICE / MADRID / PORTO / GHENT

One base. A better week.

Choose one of these trips. This is not a five-city itinerary.

THE CALENDAR MATH

Six hotel nights means arrival on Day 1 and departure on Day 7. From the U.S., an overnight outbound flight often makes this an eight-calendar-day trip. Count the flights before asking for the time off.

THE PACE

Two full days in your base city, three optional outings and an easy arrival day. Want more city time? Drop an outing. Nobody is checking your homework.



Florence	Art, Tuscan towns and lunch that takes a while.	3-5
Nice	A Riviera base with very little suitcase management.	6-8
Madrid	Big-city evenings. Very good reasons to take the train.	9-11
Porto	River views, northern towns and a day among the vines.	12-14
Ghent	Canals, good evenings and Belgium by train.	15-17

A USEFUL RULE

One booked anchor per day. A museum, a guided outing or a special lunch. Fill the rest with walking, sitting and the occasional excellent detour.

These are suggested itineraries based on my experiences. Move days around opening hours, weather and tickets. Journey times are approximate; don’t forget to add the hotel-to-station journey for day trips using trains!

Florence

Art, Tuscan towns and lunch that takes a while.



The skyline makes a persuasive case.



The Duomo, framed.



Ponte Vecchio and the Arno.

Choose this if you want major art museums and smaller Tuscan towns without moving your suitcase. Expect busy sights, cobbles and plenty of walking in Florence. Three outings make this a sampler of Tuscany only; serious museum lovers should replace one with another Florence day.

Your six-night plan

Move the days around. Keep the breathing room.



01 **Arrive and settle in**

Check in or leave bags. Walk by the Arno if energy allows. Eat near the hotel; book no timed excursions today for flexibility.

02 **Florence: one major museum**

Choose the Uffizi or Accademia in the morning. Lunch, then walk the Duomo area and have an unhurried neighbourhood walk.

03 **Lucca**

Take a morning train, walk a section of the walls and explore the old town. Return before dinner.

04 **Florence across the river**

Browse Santo Spirito and the Oltrarno. Choose either a garden visit or another museum; leave a long lunch gap.

05 **Siena**

Visit Piazza del Campo and choose a cathedral visit. Leave time for the walk back to your departure stop. Siena is for exploring.

06 **Chianti, or more Florence**

Take the prebooked vineyard outing. If wine is not your thing, use this as a second museum day instead.

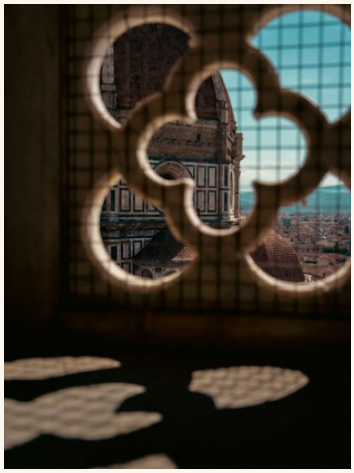
07 **Leave from the same hotel**

Allow time for the airport transfer and airline check-in requirements. Actually, I like the train to Rome instead of flying.

Make the week work.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A HOTEL

Start your hotel search around Santa Maria Novella or the western edge of the historic centre for easier train days. Santo Spirito and the Oltrarno suit evenings across the river, but allow extra time for train trips because of the distance. Don’t forget to ask hotels about lifts, air conditioning and street noise.



GETTING THERE

Aim to arrive at Florence airport if the flight connections work for you. If another airport looks cheaper, price and time the entire onward journey before choosing it. Keep arrival afternoon for a gentle walk by the Arno, dinner and sleep.

THREE OUTINGS, NO HOTEL CHANGE

Lucca. Look up Firenze Santa Maria Novella to Lucca on Trenitalia. Allow roughly 1½-2 hours each way, depending on the service and changes. Walk the city walls, explore the centre and have lunch; skip adding Pisa just because it is nearby.

Siena. Compare the 131R bus with the train. The bus serves the centre more conveniently; allow roughly 1¼-1¾ hours, traffic permitting. Check the actual departure stop: temporary Florence stop changes are posted by Autolinee Toscane.

Chianti. For a wine day, choose a small-group tour with transport from Florence. Check the exact pickup, number of wineries, lunch inclusion and return time. A public bus to a village is not the same as transport between rural wineries.

Book first: Book your priority museum through its official site, then the Chianti outing. Confirm any cathedral or dome ticket separately; a general area visit is not a dome reservation.

Skip the tour promising Pisa, Siena, San Gimignano and a winery in one day. You came to Tuscany, not to complete a boarding drill.

CHECK BEFORE BOOKING: Florence transport / Siena bus / Trenitalia

Nice

A Riviera base with very little suitcase management.



The waterfront. A perfectly good afternoon plan.



Colour in the old town.

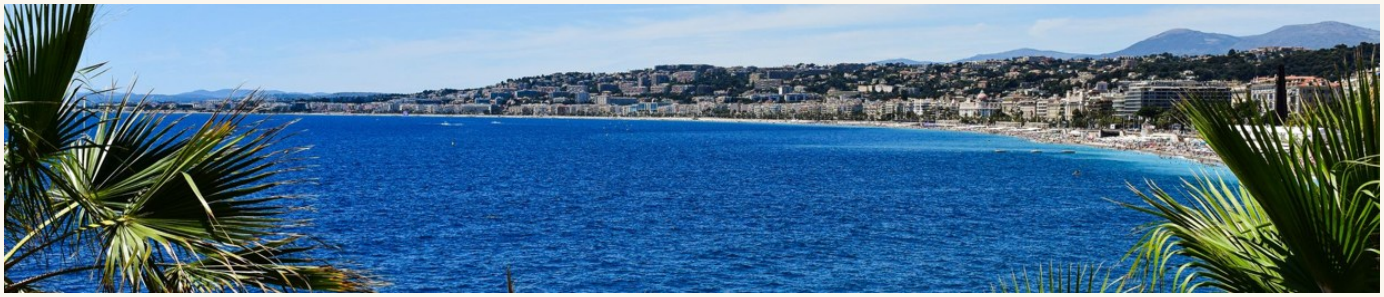


Look up between coffee stops.

Choose this for coastal walks, old towns and short train rides. It suits a trip with fewer museum deadlines. Beach time depends on the season; a seaside address does not guarantee swimming weather. Nice beaches are pebbly.

Your six-night plan

Move the days around. Keep the breathing room.



01 **Arrive and see the sea**

Leave bags, walk a comfortable stretch of the promenade, then find dinner near your hotel.

02 **Nice at an easy pace**

Explore Vieux Nice and the Cours Saleya area. Add Castle Hill if the climb or available access suits you.

03 **Menton**

Take a morning train. Explore the old town, stop for lunch and leave the afternoon loose.

04 **A second Nice day**

Choose a museum or a relaxed neighbourhood walk. Keep the afternoon for the waterfront, weather permitting.

05 **Antibes**

Walk the ramparts and old town. Visit the Picasso Museum if open and appealing. Return for dinner in Nice.

06 **Monaco, or a rest day**

Take the train and choose one main area to explore. If you need a slow day, stay in Nice without apology.

07 **Depart**

Check your airport transfer the night before. Leave time for the terminal connection and check-in.

Make the week work.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A HOTEL

Look around Jean-Médecin or the Carré d’Or for a balance of the seafront, restaurants and access to Nice-Ville station. The old town has atmosphere, but check stairs, street noise and the walk with bags before booking.



GETTING THERE

Fly into Nice if the route works for you. Compare the airport tram with a taxi based on your hotel and luggage. Do not assume the terminal, station and old town are all next to each other.

THREE OUTINGS, NO HOTEL CHANGE

Menton. Use a TER train from Nice-Ville to Menton; allow about 40-45 minutes on many services, plus the walk into town. Explore the old town, have lunch and spend time by the water.

Antibes. Take a TER to Antibes; allow about 20-30 minutes on faster services. Walk into the old town and along the ramparts. Make the Picasso Museum an optional anchor, subject to opening hours.

Monaco. Take a TER to Monaco-Monte-Carlo; allow around 25-30 minutes on many services. Pick the harbour and old town or the Monte Carlo area. Check station exits: the terrain is steep and lifts matter.

Book first: Reserve the hotel first. Check rail engineering works before fixing outing dates, and check museum opening days before assigning the Nice and Antibes days.

Skip trying to fit Monaco and Menton into one rushed checklist day. They are close enough to combine, but you have six nights. Use them.

CHECK BEFORE BOOKING: Menton trains / Antibes trains / Nice tourism

Madrid

Big-city evenings. Very good reasons to take the train.



A city worth keeping a few days for.



The Metrópolis dome.



Plaza Mayor, in the details.

Choose this for art, food and historic towns. Madrid is a substantial city, not just a departure point. Summer heat can make full sightseeing days demanding; build in indoor stops and afternoon breaks.

Your six-night plan

Move the days around. Keep the breathing room.



01 **Arrive and find your bearings**

Settle in. Take a short walk around your hotel and choose an easy dinner.

02 **Madrid: art and a park**

Make the Prado your booked morning anchor. Have lunch and walk in Retiro if the weather suits.

03 **Toledo**

Take a morning train, transfer into the centre and explore. Choose the cathedral or one other interior, then lunch.

04 **Madrid without a stopwatch**

Walk the old centre. Choose the Royal Palace or another museum, then leave the evening for a leisurely meal.

05 **Segovia**

Transfer from Guiomar to town. See the aqueduct, walk through the centre and choose an Alcázar visit if desired.

06 **El Escorial, or more Madrid**

Visit the monastery if open. Prefer more city time? Replace this outing with a neighbourhood and gallery day.

07 **Depart**

Allow enough time to reach the correct airport terminal. Keep the morning free of paid reservations.

Make the week work.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A HOTEL

Search the Barrio de las Letras for central walks and restaurants, or the Retiro side of the centre for park access. A hotel near Atocha helps with Toledo, but Segovia services use Chamartín: one station will not solve every outing.

GETTING THERE

Use Madrid-Barajas as the flight gateway. Compare public transport and a taxi for your exact hotel. Arrival day is for a short walk, a meal and adjusting to the time zone, not a Prado marathon.



THREE OUTINGS, NO HOTEL CHANGE

Toledo. Book a train from Madrid Puerta de Atocha-Almudena Grandes to Toledo. Allow roughly 30-35 minutes on the train, plus the transfer uphill into the historic centre. Reserve the return as well.

Segovia. Search Madrid Chamartín-Clara Campoamor to Segovia-Guiomar. Fast trains take roughly 25-30 minutes. Guiomar is outside the centre: budget for a bus or taxi before you reach the aqueduct.

El Escorial. Compare the coach from Moncloa, roughly 50 minutes, with a suburban train. Allow around an hour for rail depending on your starting station, then time to reach the monastery. Check opening days first.

Book first: Reserve Toledo and Segovia trains in both directions, then your priority museum. Check monastery closure days before assigning El Escorial to Day 6.

Skip treating Toledo and Segovia as two stops on the same day. Give each a proper lunch and enough time to enjoy being there.

CHECK BEFORE BOOKING: Toledo / Segovia / El Escorial / Renfe

Porto

River views, northern towns and a day among the vines.



The riverfront, stacked in colour.



Tiles, balconies and everyday life.



A closer look is usually rewarded.

Choose this for tiled streets, wine and a base with a strong sense of place. Expect hills and uneven paving. A location that looks close on a map can involve a meaningful climb; check the route, not just the distance.

Your six-night plan

Move the days around. Keep the breathing room.



01 **Arrive and settle in**

Check in, take a short local walk and eat near the hotel. Save the long hill climbs for another day.

02 **Porto and the river**

Explore São Bento and the historic centre. Walk down to Ribeira, with a lunch break and a gentle return route.

03 **Guimarães**

Take a morning train. Explore the old town, linger over lunch and return to Porto for the evening.

04 **Porto across the bridge**

Spend time on the Gaia side of the river. Book one port tasting if interested; leave room for river views.

05 **Braga**

Explore the centre. Add Bom Jesus only after planning the onward transport and checking the time it leaves you.

06 **Douro day**

Take your booked guided outing or planned Pinhão train trip. Treat this as the longest day, with an easy dinner after.

07 **Depart**

Confirm airport transport and leave a generous buffer. Avoid a morning tasting or distant brunch reservation.

Make the week work.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A HOTEL

Start around Aliados, Bolhão or São Bento for central access. Ribeira puts you by the river, but means uphill journeys to many other sights. Check lift access, luggage access and whether your room faces a noisy street.

GETTING THERE

Use Porto airport if the flight connections suit. Compare Metro do Porto with a taxi for your particular address. Keep your first walk short: jet lag and steep streets are an unnecessary partnership.



THREE OUTINGS, NO HOTEL CHANGE

Guimarães. CP urban trains link Porto with Guimarães. Use the current timetable to choose São Bento or Campanhã and allow roughly 1¼ hours each way. Walk from the station to the historic centre; leave the castle area optional.

Braga. CP urban trains also serve Braga. Budget about an hour to 1¼ hours each way, depending on the service. Explore the centre. Bom Jesus is a separate transfer, not something you step off the train into.

Douro Valley. Choose either a guided outing with transfers and winery bookings, or a train day to Pinhão. Rail can mean about 2½ hours each way, depending on the service. Confirm origin station, changes and return before booking lunch.

Book first: Book the Douro experience first, including all transfers. If using rail, verify the exact train and station on CP. Reserve any winery visit separately; do not rely on walking in.

Skip assuming a Douro train ticket includes winery access. It gets you to a station. Tastings, estate transfers and lunch still need a plan.

CHECK BEFORE BOOKING: CP trains and timetable / Porto urban network / Porto tourism

Ghent

Canals, good evenings and Belgium by train.



Gabled façades along the water.



A quieter corner.



Even the doors make an effort.

Choose this for historic streets, a lively base and several easy city outings. This is a walking-and-train week, not a warm-weather promise. Bring a rain plan and shoes that tolerate cobbles.

Your six-night plan

Move the days around. Keep the breathing room.



01 **Arrive and walk the canals**

Transfer to your hotel. Take a short evening walk by Graslei and Korenlei, then dinner.

02 **Ghent: the historic centre**

Choose Gravensteen or St Bavo’s Cathedral as your main visit. Leave the afternoon for streets and cafés.

03 **Bruges**

Take a morning train. Explore the canals and centre. Allow time to get back to the station after lunch.

04 **Another Ghent day**

Visit the attraction you skipped on Day 2, or choose a museum. Leave the evening open for dinner in town.

05 **Brussels**

Arrive at the station that suits your route. Explore Grand-Place and one other neighbourhood or museum.

06 **Antwerp, or stay put**

Take the train for a full city day. Prefer a slower finish? Spend the last day in Ghent instead.

07 **Depart**

Include the hotel-to-station transfer as well as the airport train. Check engineering works in advance.

Make the week work.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A HOTEL

Search the historic centre around Korenmarkt or the edges of Patershol for evenings on foot. Gent-Sint-Pieters is the main rail hub, but it is not in the old centre. Decide whether station convenience or evening atmosphere matters more.



GETTING THERE

For flights, compare Brussels Airport with the full rail connection to Ghent. Brussels Airport and Brussels South Charleroi are different airports; compare total journey time before choosing. Then allow for a local transfer to your hotel.

THREE OUTINGS, NO HOTEL CHANGE

Bruges. Direct trains connect Gent-Sint-Pieters with Brugge; allow about 25-30 minutes on the train, then a walk or bus into the centre. Choose canals, a museum or simply a long lunch.

Brussels. Use SNCB/NMBS to compare services to Bruxelles-Central for the historic centre. Allow roughly 35-45 minutes on the train, depending on the service. Start with Grand-Place; choose one additional area.

Antwerp. Look up Gent-Sint-Pieters to Antwerpen-Centraal; allow roughly an hour, with the actual service determining the journey. Enjoy the station, then walk or use local transport into the historic centre.

Book first: Reserve timed attractions you particularly want, including the Ghent Altarpiece if chosen. Check rail works and the local route to Gent-Sint-Pieters before setting outing days.

Skip adding Bruges, Brussels and Antwerp to one day. Belgian distances are small. Your attention span still has limits.

CHECK BEFORE BOOKING: Ghent by train / SNCB/NMBS planner / Visit Gent

Book in this order.

The cheapest flight is not always the cheapest trip.



01 / COUNT THE ACTUAL DAYS

Write down departure, local arrival, six hotel nights and return. An overnight flight is not a hotel night.

02 / COMPARE THE WHOLE JOURNEY

Include baggage, airport transfers and arrival times. A distant airport can consume the saving in money and vacation time.

03 / CHOOSE THE HOTEL LOCATION

Map the walk to dinner and transport. Check lifts, air conditioning, noise and cancellation terms. Book all six nights together.

04 / BOOK THE SCARCE EXPERIENCES

Secure the museum, winery or guided day you would hate to miss. Check closure days, then move flexible outings around it.

05 / MAKE TRANSPORT REAL

Save station names, outbound and return options, and the last sensible train home. Check disruption and ticket validation rules.

06 / LEAVE SOMETHING BLANK

Keep one afternoon unbooked and one outing you can drop. A holiday with no margin is a work schedule in better shoes.

Before departure: check official passport and entry requirements, insurance, mobile data and accessibility needs. Recheck hours and transport close to travel.

Off to Somewhere

Travel for people with jobs, limited vacation days and a life to get back to.



Hello, I’m Dana.

I’m a lawyer, a travel writer and a firm believer that your holiday does not need its own performance review.

Off to Somewhere is about good places, excellent meals, the occasional glass of wine and making the most of the days you actually have.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Pick one base. Put six nights on the calendar. Compare two flight options and three well-located hotels. That is enough for today.

MORE STORIES. MORE PLACES.

Read and subscribe at danakaplan1.substack.com.
Instagram: @journeygirldana_ / Hotels With Stories

PLANNING NOTES

Prepared November 2026. Official tourism and transport links appear on each practical page. Times are approximate planning ranges, not live journey quotes. Check dates directly with the operator before purchasing. Neighbourhoods and itineraries are editorial suggestions; personal visits or hotel stays are not implied by inclusion.