

PREMIUM GUIDE · EUROPE · 7 DRIVES

The Europe Road Trip Planner

Seven legendary drives. Four realistic trip lengths. One plan for the family who wants the road photo without the road stress.

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All numbers verified the month of publication. Prices are directional and shift with season · verify at the source before booking · updates quarterly · corrections welcome at hello@driftvistas.com.

The Europe Road Trip Planner

Seven legendary drives. Four realistic trip lengths. One plan for the family who wants the road photo without the road stress.

A PREMIUM GUIDE FROM DRIFT VISTAS. LAUNCH PRICE: \$7 ON GUMROAD (RISES TO \$12 AFTER THE FIRST 50 sales).

Last updated: May 2026 · prices, tolls and seasonal road closures are directional estimates from public listings and research, not live quotes; verify before travel.

01

What you get in this guide



Photo: Kostiantyn Zavhorodnii · Pexels

- **Three realistic trip lengths** - the **5–7 day single drive**, the **10–14 day two-drive combo**, and (as a bonus) the 28-day all-seven master.
- **Per-drive deep-dive** - what to do each day, where to stop, where to sleep, what the road *actually* feels like.

- **3 bonus drives** the free version skipped: Black Forest, Transfăgărășan (Romania), Iceland Ring Road.
- **Family-friendliness ranking** for every drive with kid notes per route.
- **Cross-border rental car logistics** - which companies allow which crossings, surcharges, automatic-vs-manual availability.
- **Fuel + toll calculator** template - drop in your route, get a real number.
- **An accommodation database** of vetted places along the routes.
- **Driving difficulty rating** per leg - for couples, for solo, for nervous drivers.

If the free guide showed you the seven drives, this one is the full trip plan - at whatever length your calendar allows.

02

Which trip length works for your family?

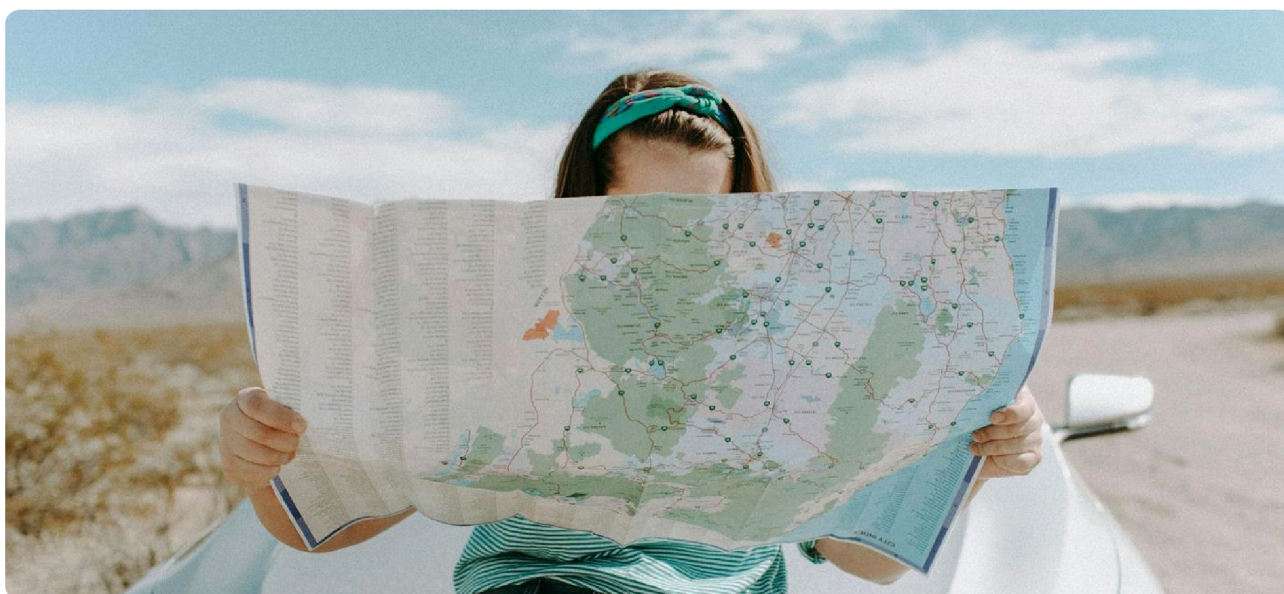


Photo: Leah Newhouse · Pexels

TRIP	FAMILY-OF-4 ALL-IN	TIME OFF NEEDED	BEST FOR
5-day single drive	\$2,500 – \$4,500	Long weekend + 2 days	One legendary road; the no-jet-lag version
7-day single drive (with city)	\$3,500 – \$5,800	One school break	One drive + the gateway city (e.g. NC500 + Edinburgh)
10-day two-drive combo	\$5,500 – \$8,500	School break + extra days	The sweet spot - two routes, one trip
14-day two-drive combo	\$7,500 – \$11,500	Two school breaks	Two drives + cities at each end
28-day all-seven (<i>bonus chapter</i>)	\$14,000 – \$22,000	Summer holidays	The grand tour, for the rare family with the time

Most families should do the 7-day single drive. It's the format that fits a single passport stamp, single rental car, and one school break - without the rental-handover gymnastics of multi-country combos.

☰ The 5–7 day single drive – pick one route

DRIVE	BEST MONTHS	FAMILY RATING	FAMILY-OF-4 7-DAY TOTAL	BEST GATEWAY CITY
Algarve EN125 (Portugal)	Apr–Jun, Sep	★★★★★	\$3,500 – \$4,800	Lisbon (3 hr drive)
Plitvice approach (Croatia)	Apr–Oct	★★★★★	\$3,800 – \$5,200	Zagreb (2 hr) or Zadar (1.5 hr)
NC500 north (Scotland)	May–Sep	★★★★	\$4,200 – \$5,800	Edinburgh or Inverness
Maloja Pass (Switzerland)	Jun–Sep	★★★	\$4,500 – \$6,000	Zurich or Milan
Great Dolomites Road (Italy)	Jun–Sep	★★★	\$4,000 – \$5,500	Venice (2.5 hr)
Tre Cime di Lavaredo (Italy)	Jun–Sep	★★	\$4,000 – \$5,500	Venice (2.5 hr)
Amalfi SS163 (Italy)	Apr–Jun, Sep	★	\$4,200 – \$5,800	Naples (1.5 hr)

Best 7-day family single-drive: Algarve EN125 + Lisbon. *Easy driving, beaches every 10 km, year-round, cheap by European standards. Lisbon as a 2-day bookend gives kids a city day before/after the coast. Total family-of-4: \$3,500 – \$4,800 incl. US flights.*

Sample 7-day Algarve family week – \$3,500–\$4,800 all-in

- **Day 1** - Land Lisbon. *Memmo Príncipe Real* or *Vincci Baixa* (€110–180). Tram 28, sunset at São Pedro de Alcântara.

- **Day 2** - Lisbon morning (Belém pastéis, Jerónimos Monastery). Pick up rental car after lunch. Drive south to **Lagos** (3 hr).
- **Days 3–4** - Lagos: EN125 west drives (Praia da Marinha, Ponta da Piedade by boat, Praia do Camilo).
- **Day 5** - Lagos: EN125 east (Tavira old town, Cacela Velha viewpoint, Olhão fish market lunch).
- **Day 6** - Lagos → Sagres (end of Europe). Stay *Memmo Baleeira* (sea-cliff views).
- **Day 7** - Drive Sagres → Faro airport (1.5 hr). Fly home.

Sample 7-day NC500 Scottish Highlands family week - \$4,200–\$5,800 all-in

- **Day 1** - Land Edinburgh. Stay *Cheval Old Town Chambers* or *The Witchery* (splurge). Climb Arthur's Seat at sunset.
- **Day 2** - Drive Edinburgh → **Inverness** (3.5 hr) with Glencoe stop for lunch (*Glencoe Cafe*, soup + sandwiches). Loch Ness boat tour at Urquhart Castle.
- **Day 3** - Inverness → **Ullapool** (1.5 hr). Lunch at *The Seafood Shack* (fish + chips on the harbour - the trip highlight for kids). Stay *The Ceilidh Place*.
- **Day 4** - Drive north along the coast to **Durness** (3 hr with stops). Wander Sango Sands beach (cold but unforgettable for kids). Stay *Mackays Rooms*.
- **Day 5** - Smoo Cave + drive east to **Thurso** (1.5 hr). John o' Groats photo stop. Stay *The Marine Hotel*.
- **Day 6** - Long drive south to Inverness (3 hr) for a final dinner at *Number 27*. Overnight Inverness.
- **Day 7** - Drive Inverness → Edinburgh (3.5 hr) or fly direct from INV. Home.

Kids' won't-want-to-leave moment: *the Summer Isles ferry from Ullapool (90 min round trip). Seals, sea birds, occasionally dolphins. Pack warm layers; even July is 14°C.*

Sample 7-day Plitvice + Zagreb family week - \$3,800–\$5,200 all-in

- **Day 1** - Land Zagreb. Stay *Hotel Esplanade Zagreb* (old-world grand) or *Hotel Jagerhorn* (family rooms central). Old town stroll, dinner at *Vinodol*.

- **Day 2** - Zagreb morning - Tomic Museum (kids love the model train), funicular to upper town. Drive to **Plitvice Lakes** in the afternoon (2 hr). Stay *Plitvice Etno Garden* or *Hotel Jezero* (in the park).
- **Days 3–4** - Two full days in the park. Lower lakes (Path C, boardwalk, 3 hr) on Day 3 — easy and stroller-friendly. Upper lakes on Day 4 if kids are 6+. Bring rain shells; the spray is real. Lunch each day at *Restoran Lička Kuća* outside the park gates.
- **Day 5** - Drive south to **Zadar** (1.5 hr). Stay *Bastion Heritage Hotel* in the old town. Sea Organ + Sun Salutation at sunset (kids love both).
- **Day 6** - Zadar old town walk, beach morning at Borik. Lunch at *Pet Bunara* (fresh fish). Drive to Split (1.5 hr) or stay in Zadar.
- **Day 7** - Fly home from Zadar (ZAD) or Split (SPU).

Kids' won't-want-to-leave moment: *the waterfalls at Plitvice. The boardwalk goes right through them — they get sprayed, they laugh, they ask to do it again. Pack the rain shells you'd otherwise leave home.*

04

The 10–14 day two-drive combo

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME, PAIR TWO DRIVES THAT SHARE A FLIGHT OR GATEWAY. **FAMILY-OF-4 ALL-IN:**
\$5,500 – \$11,500.

COMBO	DAYS	FAMILY-OF-4 ALL-IN	LOGIC
Algarve + Andalucía	10	\$5,500 – \$7,800	Drive Lagos → Seville (3 hr); two cultures, one flight
Plitvice + Dolomites	10	\$6,800 – \$9,500	Fly Zagreb → Venice; mountains + lakes
NC500 + Edinburgh→Glencoe	10	\$6,500 – \$9,000	One Scotland flight; Highland + city
Maloja + Dolomites	12	\$7,200 – \$10,200	Italian-Swiss Alps loop; one rental car if you cross-border insure
Algarve + Lisbon + Porto	12	\$5,800 – \$8,500	All Portugal, all easy roads, big variety
Plitvice + Amalfi (older kids)	14	\$8,500 – \$11,500	Croatia + Italy via Venice; SS163 only worthwhile with kids 10+

Best 10-day family combo: Algarve + Andalucía. *Easy drive across the border, two countries one rental car, beaches transition to white villages and flamenco shows. Kids over 6 handle the variety well. Total \$5,500 – \$7,800.*

Family-friendliness by drive



Photo: Atlantic Ambience · Pexels

Not all seven drives work the same with kids. Here's our ranking from most to least kid-friendly:

DRIVE	KID RATING	NOTES
1. Algarve EN125 (Portugal)	★★★★★	Easy, year-round, beaches every 10 km, short flat walks to the famous viewpoints
2. Plitvice approach (Croatia)	★★★★★	Park has wide boardwalks, no real driving challenge, kids love the waterfalls
3. Scottish Highlands NC500 north	★★★★	Long, but no traffic stress; sheep counts and seal sightings carry younger kids
4. Maloja Pass (Switzerland)	★★★	Short drive, dramatic; needs an early start (which kids hate); pull-offs lots
5. Great Dolomites Road (Italy)	★★★	Gorgeous, but switchback motion sickness is real for under-8s; plan stops every 30 min
6. Tre Cime di Lavaredo (Italy)	★★	Requires 07:00 parking; the actual rifugio walk is 4 hours with kids; only worth it for ages 8+
7. Amalfi SS163 (Italy)	★	Hard with kids - narrow, oncoming buses, no easy pulled-over breaks; the dawn run is the only sane option, and dawn means waking everyone at 5am

If you only do two with younger kids

Algarve + Plitvice. Both wide, both easy, both gorgeous in photos, both forgiving if a kid melts down 90 minutes in.

If your kids are 8+

Add Maloja and the Dolomites. They'll love the cable cars at Pordoi and the gondola at Lavaredo.

If you have teens

Add NC500 - they'll bring up the Highland history themselves on the drive, especially after one pub dinner in Ullapool.

Each drive in depth



Photo: Magda Ehlers · Pexels

Drive 1 – Maloja Pass (Switzerland)

Length	35 km
Best months	Jun–Sep
Driving difficulty	Moderate (32 hairpins)
Time of day	Dawn
Toll/parking	Free road; parking €1–3/hr in villages

Route: Start at **St Moritz**. Drive west along the Engadine via **Sils Maria** (10 min stop at Lake Sils). Climb to **Maloja village** at the summit. Begin the descent toward **Chiavenna** in Italy. Stop at the 5th hairpin from the top (signposted pull-off) – the best long-view shot.

Sleep: St Moritz (€180+) or **Bondo** (Italian side, €70–110) for half the price.

The thing nobody mentions: the pass closes overnight in shoulder season (Oct + May) when weather flips. Check the SwissTouring webcam before leaving.

With kids: the dawn light is the photo, but the dawn drive means waking everyone at 5am. Compromise: drive Maloja at sunset on Day 1, then again at sunrise the next morning if anyone is willing. Lake Sils has a flat walking trail at lunch - perfect kid break.

Drive 2 – Tre Cime di Lavaredo

Length	70 km loop from Cortina
Best months	Jun–Sep
Driving difficulty	Easy (paved, well-signed)
Time of day	07:00 or 17:00
Toll/parking	Rifugio Auronzo: €30 per car

Route: Cortina → Misurina (45 min) → toll road to **Rifugio Auronzo** (15 min, steep climb) → return. Build in time for the 2 hr round-trip walk to the Locatelli viewpoint at the top.

Sleep: Cortina (mid €120, splurge €250) or **Misurina lakeside** (€100–140, quieter).

The thing nobody mentions: parking fills by 09:00 in July/August. Arrive at 07:00, walk, leave by 11:00 before the bus crowds.

With kids: the 2-hour round-trip walk to the Locatelli viewpoint is moderate, doable from age 7+ in good weather. Pack a picnic, a layer per person, and 1L of water per child. Carriers for under-5s.

Drive 3 – Plitvice approach (Croatia)

Length	40 km (Zadar → park)
Best months	Apr–Oct
Driving difficulty	Easy
Time of day	Any
Toll/parking	Park entry: €25 pp (summer); car park €10

Route: From **Zadar** north on D1, branching east to the park entrance. The road climbs through karst hills – pull off at any of three signposted viewpoints.

Sleep: in the park villages (Rastovača, Plitvička Selišta – €60–90) or in Zadar and drive in (€40–70).

The thing nobody mentions: the park's official car park is fine; the "village" car parks are €5 cheaper and a 5-min walk further.

With kids: the lower lakes loop (path C in the park) is fully boardwalk, stroller-friendly, takes about 3 hours with kid pace. Skip the upper lakes if you have under-6s – steeper and longer. Pack rain shells for everyone; the spray off the waterfalls is real.

Drive 4 – Amalfi Coast SS163

Length	50 km (Sorrento → Salerno)
Best months	Apr–Jun, Sep
Driving difficulty	Hard (narrow, oncoming buses)
Time of day	Dawn run only in summer
Toll/parking	Free road; parking €4–8/hr

Route: Start in **Sorrento**. Climb up and around to **Positano** (the famous shot from above). Continue to **Praiano**, **Amalfi** (cathedral, lemon stalls), **Ravello** (detour up – worth it), **Salerno**.

Sleep: Praiano is the smartest base - between Positano and Amalfi, half the price of either, easier parking.

The thing nobody mentions: large rental cars are a nightmare on SS163. Book the smallest car you can stand. Compact > SUV every time.

With kids: the dawn run is the only kid-tolerable version. Mid-day SS163 has gridlock, no shade, and motion sickness for younger kids. Better family plan: **base in Praiano and take the boat between Amalfi villages** instead. The ferry network is the secret to family Amalfi.

Drive 5 - Scottish Highlands NC500 north

Length	250 km (Inverness → Durness → John o' Groats)
Best months	May–Sep
Driving difficulty	Moderate (single-track passing places)
Time of day	Long days - drive whenever
Toll/parking	Free roads; free wild lay-bys

Route: Inverness → Ullapool (lunch, fish & chips at The Seafood Shack) → Lochinver (scenic detour) → Durness (Sango Sands) → Tongue → Thurso → John o' Groats → loop south.

Sleep: book ahead - beds are scarce in summer. B&B €80–130/night. Hostels in Ullapool and Tongue (€20–35).

The thing nobody mentions: passing places are a *law*. If you're in a passing place and an oncoming car approaches, pull in. If you're holding up a faster local - pull over and wave them past. Camper-van rage is a real thing here.

With kids: plan a beach stop every 90 minutes. Sango Sands at Durness is a kid magnet - bring buckets and warm layers (even July is 14°C). The ferry to the Summer Isles from Ullapool (90 min round-trip) is the unsung wildlife highlight for kids - seals, sea birds, dolphins if lucky.

Drive 6 – Algarve EN125

Length	150 km (Tavira → Sagres)
Best months	Year-round (peak Apr–Jun, Sep)
Driving difficulty	Easy
Time of day	Anytime; golden hour for cliffs
Toll/parking	A22 motorway has electronic tolls (~€10 end-to-end); parking free in most beach towns

Route: Tavira (quiet old town) → Olhão (fish market) → Faro (skip the centre, head to Praia de Faro) → Albufeira → Lagos (base) → Sagres (the end of Europe).

Sleep: Lagos (€50–90) or Sagres (€60–110 for sea-cliff views).

The thing nobody mentions: the **electronic toll** on the A22 motorway is automatic – your rental company will charge it back to you with a service fee. Some travellers prefer to stay on the EN125 (parallel, no toll, slower).

With kids: this is the easiest family drive on the list. Beaches every 10 km, all with calm Atlantic coves. Praia da Marinha and Praia do Camilo are both kid-perfect (and shorter walks to the sand than the photos suggest). Lagos has a fish-stall lunch at Mercado Municipal – kids over 6 will eat their first squid here.

Drive 7 – Great Dolomites Road SS48

Length	110 km (Bolzano → Cortina)
Best months	Jun–Sep
Driving difficulty	Hard (passes, switchbacks, slow trucks)
Time of day	Start early – passes get cloudy by midday
Toll/parking	Free road; lay-by parking

Route: Bolzano → Lake Carezza (dawn) → Costalunga Pass → Canazei → Pordoi Pass (cable car to Sass Pordoi optional) → Falzarego Pass → Cortina.

Sleep: Bolzano (€100–160) at the start, Canazei (€80–130) mid-route, Cortina (€140+) at the end.

The thing nobody mentions: the passes are *closed* late October to mid-May depending on snow. Even in early June some sections need chains overnight.

With kids: motion sickness on the switchbacks is real for under-8s. Drive in the morning (cooler, less sun glare), break every 30 minutes, and let kids walk a 100m loop at each pass. **Lake Carezza** is the family stop of the route - flat lakeside walk, mountain view, mirror water for skipping stones.

07

Bonus chapter - the 28-day all-seven master itinerary (if you really have the time)

FOR THE FAMILY THAT HAS A FULL SUMMER BREAK: ALL SEVEN DRIVES, LINKED. START LISBON, END Edinburgh, broadly following warming weather. **Total family-of-4 cost: \$14,000 – \$22,000.** Worth flagging that this is a *lot* of trip - six rental-car handovers, five flights, four time zones. Not for first-time-abroad families.

Week 1 - Portugal coast (Drive 6)

- **Day 1:** Land Lisbon. Drive south to **Lagos** (~3 hr).
- **Day 2:** EN125 west - Praia da Marinha, Ponta da Piedade, Praia do Camilo.
- **Day 3:** EN125 east - Tavira old town, Cacela Velha viewpoint.
- **Day 4:** Drive Lagos → Faro airport. Fly **Lagos** → **Naples** (or Lisbon → Naples direct).

Week 2 – Italy coast (Drive 4)

- **Day 5:** Land Naples. Drive to **Praiano** (between Positano and Amalfi). 1.5 hr.
- **Day 6:** Drive SS163 dawn run (Sorrento → Salerno).
- **Day 7:** Ferry from Positano to Capri, return at sunset.
- **Day 8:** Pompeii morning, drive Naples → Rome (2.5 hr), train/fly **Rome** → **Venice**.

Week 3 – Italian Alps (Drives 2 + 7)

- **Day 9:** Pick up car in **Venice**. Drive to **Cortina d'Ampezzo** (2.5 hr).
- **Day 10:** Tre Cime drive - early start (07:00 at Misurina parking).
- **Day 11:** Great Dolomites Road: Cortina → Falzarego → Pordoi → Sella → Bolzano (full day, with stops).
- **Day 12:** Bolzano rest day (or hike Alpe di Siusi).
- **Day 13:** Drive Bolzano → **St Moritz** via the Stelvio Pass (long, dramatic, 5 hr).

Week 4 – Swiss Alps + Croatia (Drives 1 + 3)

- **Day 14:** Maloja Pass - drive down from St Moritz to Chiavenna at dawn.
- **Day 15:** Drive back over Maloja, continue to **Bregenz** (Lake Constance).
- **Day 16:** Fly **Zurich** → **Zagreb** (return car in Switzerland, pick up new one in Croatia).
- **Day 17:** Drive Zagreb → **Plitvice Lakes** (2 hr).
- **Day 18:** Full day in the park.
- **Day 19:** Drive south to Zadar (return car). Fly **Zadar** → **Edinburgh**.

Week 5 – Scotland (Drive 5)

- **Day 20:** Pick up car in Edinburgh. Drive to **Inverness** (3.5 hr).
- **Days 21–25:** NC500 north - Ullapool, Durness, John o' Groats, Wick, back to Inverness.
- **Day 26:** Drive Inverness → **Edinburgh** with stop at Glencoe.
- **Day 27:** Rest day in Edinburgh.
- **Day 28:** Fly home.

Bonus: 3 drives the free version skipped



Photo: Alina Chernii · Pexels

B1. Black Forest High Road (Schwarzwaldhochstraße) – Germany

- 60 km, B500 from Baden-Baden to Freudenstadt.
- Best in autumn (Sep–Oct) when the larches turn.
- Pair with a half-day in Strasbourg (45 min drive).

B2. Transfăgărășan – Romania

- 90 km, the road across the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Only open July–October.
- Pair with Brașov + the painted monasteries (3-day add-on).

B3. Iceland Ring Road (south section) – Iceland

- 380 km, Reykjavík → Höfn.

- Skógafoss, black-sand beaches, Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon.
 - Best Jun–Sep; the rest of the year requires real winter-driving experience.
-
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09

Cross-border rental car logistics



Photo: Michał Robak · Pexels

FROM → TO	CROSS-BORDER ALLOWED?	SURCHARGE	NOTES
Italy → Switzerland	Yes (most companies)	€0–30	Confirm at booking
Italy → Slovenia → Croatia	Usually yes	€30–60	Confirm at booking; some require notice
Portugal → Spain	Yes, no surcharge	€0	EU standard
Switzerland → Italy	Yes	€30+	Swiss vignette already paid via rental
UK → Ireland (ferry)	Yes	€50–150 + ferry	Plan ahead
Any → Iceland	Local rental only	N/A	Iceland is ferry-only for cars

Master rule: the per-leg trip plan above assumes you **return the car at country borders and rent a new one** at the next country. It's not cheaper - but it avoids cross-border surcharge and one-way fees that often exceed the day rate.

Fuel + toll calculator (template)



Photo: Alex Fu · Pexels

Per drive, plug into your spreadsheet:

LEG	KM	AVG L/100KM	FUEL €/L	TOLLS €	TOTAL €
Lagos → Lisbon	280	6.5	1.85	25	59
...	...	...	...	...	...

Full 28-day trip estimate (small petrol car, mid-range fuel): **€700–900 fuel + €120–180 tolls.**
Add ~€60 for the Swiss vignette if entering Switzerland.

🛏 Accommodation database (highlights – full list in the spreadsheet)

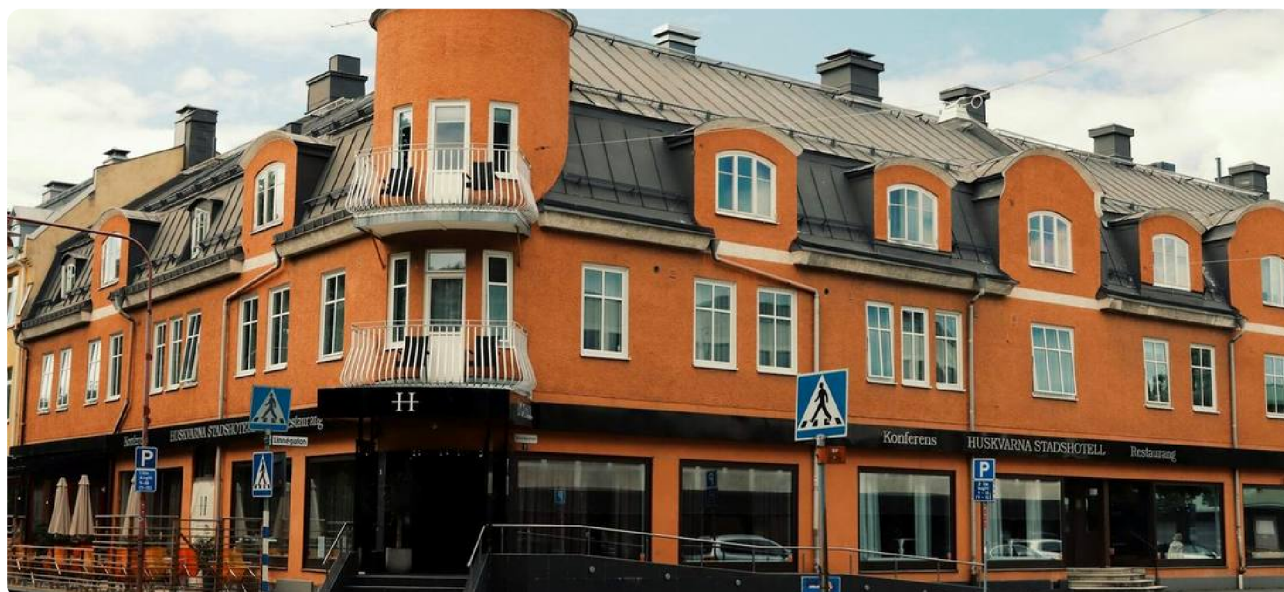


Photo: Efrem Efre · Pexels

LOCATION	BUDGET	MID	SPLURGE
Lagos, Portugal	Hostel Rota Vicentina €25	Tivoli Lagos €90	Cascade Wellness €220
Praiano, Italy	Casa Angelina Studios €120	Hotel Margherita €170	Casa Angelina €450
Cortina	Bolzano	Youth Hostel €30	Hotel Greif €170
St Moritz	Plitvice village	Pansion Breza €60	Hotel Jezero €130
Ullapool	Durness		

What to pack (Europe road trip-specific)



Photo: Katya Wolf · Pexels

-  [Phone car mount](#) + USB-C cable in glove box.
- **Offline maps** for every country (Google Maps regions + Maps.me).
-  [A small foldable cooler](#) - picnic lunches are the cheapest road-trip food.
- **Layers.** You'll go from Algarve 26 °C to Maloja Pass 8 °C in the same trip.
- **Cash in 3 currencies** if doing CH + UK + EU (CHF, GBP, EUR). €100 each is enough.
- **Adapters:** Europe is Type C/F; UK is Type G. Pack both if doing Drive 5 -  [universal travel adapter](#) covers everything.

Resources

- **Rental:**  [DiscoverCars](#)

- **Stays:**  [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com)
 - **Tours:**  [GetYourGuide](https://www.getyourguide.com) - Europe tours
 - **Insurance:**  [SafetyWing](https://www.safetywing.com)
 - **Free version:** driftvistas.com/guides/europe-road-trip
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