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20 fabulous European cities to visit this spring

Springtime and city breaks are a winning combination. Our expert rounds up the best choices, from Cordoba to Copenhagen, all a short flight or train ride away

The thrill of exploring a new European city never gets old
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Siobhan Grogan | Thursday February 20 2025, 12.00am, The Times

Spring is a great time for a European city break. It's the ideal stop-gap until summer, and the perfect pick-me-up when you're flagging after winter's gloom. Just two or three nights is plenty to switch off, dip into a city's culture or just sit at a pavement café, watching the world go by and soaking up the year's first delicate rays of sun. There's no need to take a suitcase or even make much of a plan. In a city, there's always somewhere to eat or an attraction to visit even if you haven't booked ahead.

Across Europe, cities also start to wake up after winter with dedicated — and largely free — festivals and street parties to celebrate the chance to be outdoors again. Some have Easter markets or open-air concerts, parades or street-food events where the whole city welcomes warmer weather, longer days and brightly coloured blossoms. Even locals seem excited to rediscover their city in lighter months, especially as many rooftop bars, amusement parks and outdoor dining terraces start to reopen in spring after winter closures.

I first got the city-break bug at university. Buoyed with new-found independence, I bought a dirt cheap National Express coach ticket on a whim and travelled through the night to Paris, arriving just after dawn, utterly clueless but already smitten.

I never looked back. EasyJet was still fairly new (don't do the maths) and suddenly the whole of Europe felt within touching distance. I had no money for fancy hotels, pricey galleries or even the most basic restaurants, but I could happily while away a weekend eating supermarket baguettes, taking in churches, bridges and architecture, and people-watching in parks.

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In the years since, I've digested the Continent in bite-sized chunks, from Hamburg to Helsinki, Milan to Marseilles. I've hired bikes in Copenhagen, visited museums in Berlin and hiked the (many) hills of Lisbon. The thrill of exploring a new-to-you city never gets old.

Here are some of my favourites for this spring, and all are easily reached in just a few hours by plane or train.

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1. Cordoba, Spain

The colourful Jewish Quarter in Cordoba

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A Roman city that became a centre of Islam in the Middle Ages, Cordoba is a fascinating meeting point of cultures, with its cobbled streets, flamenco museum and the Mezquita-Catedral de Cordoba, a Unesco-listed site that began life as a mosque then became a cathedral. The boutique hotel La Ermita Suites is a short stroll away in the old town. Go for the Cordovan Patios Festival when residents open their flower-filled courtyards for all to enjoy (May 5-18; patios.cordoba.es), or for the Spring Fair on the banks of the River Guadalquivir (May 24-31; turismodecordoba.org).
Details Room-only doubles from £131. Fly to Seville

Book a stay

2. Budapest, Hungary

A tram by the Danube in Budapest

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Hungary's capital swaggers with golden-age glamour. From sensational art nouveau façades to stately baroque architecture, the photogenic backdrops are often reflected in the Danube, which separates hilly, historic Buda and vivacious Pest. Soak in the 16thcentury thermal baths at Rudas (£14; rudasfurdo.hu), or visit for the city's Sakura Festival for Japanese dance demonstrations, concerts and picnics under the blush-pink blossoms at Fuveszkert Botanical Gardens (£6; March 29-30 and April 5-6; fuveszkert.org). Stay at the elegant 19th-century Hotel Nemzeti Budapest, where the city's famous chocolate cake, Rigo Jansci, was invented.

Details Three nights' B&B from £225pp, including flights

Book a stay

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3. Galway, Ireland

The bay at Claddagh in Galway

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Perched on Ireland's west coast and straddling the River Corrib, Galway is a beautiful city. Spend chilly spring days in historic pubs with cosy snugs; or if the sun peeks out, cycle to Salthill on a rocky coastline dotted with lighthouses. Come spring there are tourist-friendly celebrations almost weekly, including the world's largest Irish language festival, Seachtain na Gaeilge (March 1-17), Galway Food Festival (May 1-31) and of course, the lively St Patrick's Day

Festival (March 15-17). The main parade passes right by the nearly 200-year-old Hardiman hotel on Eyre Square which has its own pub, with live music each weekend.
Details B&B doubles from £109. Fly to Shannon or Ireland West

Book a stay

- Move aside, Dublin — this is Ireland's perfect summer city break

4. Tbilisi, Georgia

A bohemian spirit breezes through hidden bars and vintage-style cafés in Tbilisi
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The cobbled streets of Georgia's capital were once ruled by Prussian and Russian forces. Now art nouveau buildings share the skyline with modernist Soviet structures and 6th-century Orthodox church towers, and a bohemian spirit breezes through hidden bars and vintage-style cafés. British Airways and easyJet launch flights to the city from April, just in time for the free annual New Wine Festival in May (dates tbc), where you can sample local vino in the mountaintop Mtatsminda Park (georgia.to). Whizz up there on the restored Soviet-era cable car, which opened last October. Stay in the Stamba Hotel, a former publishing house turned arty boutique hideaway with 52 rooms featuring curated record collections, bare brick walls and freestanding tubs.
Details Room-only doubles from £132. Fly to Tbilisi

Book a stay

5. Dubrovnik, Croatia

The dramatic skyline of Dubrovnik, made famous by Game of Thrones

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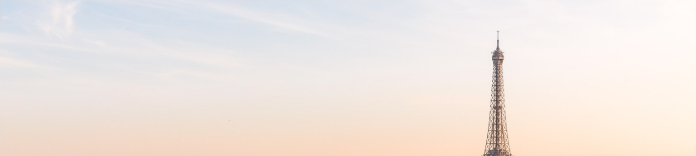
Lapped by shimmering Adriatic waves, Croatia's prettiest city is a Unesco-listed gem. The old town is an open-air museum surrounded by ancient walls, with cobbled streets, gothic and baroque architecture, and backdrops that featured in *Game of Thrones*. Dubrovnik Musical Spring kicks off in April, with a series of concerts from the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra (dso.hr), though foodies should wait for May's street food festival Bavarin (visitdubrovnik.hr). For day trips, hop over to the lush, forest-covered island of Lokrum or car-free Kolocep. At the end of a peninsula, Hotel Dubrovnik Palace has a resort vibe but is just a short bus ride into the old town.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £513pp, including flights

Book a stay

6. Paris, France



The French capital continues to live up to expectations

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Paris in the springtime is a cliché that lives up to every expectation, with artists setting up easels in Montmartre and cherry blossom trees in full bloom in the Tuileries. Lighter nights are marked by the arrival of the oldest traditional funfair in France which has more than 350 attractions, food stalls and firework displays (free entry; April 4-June 9; foiredutrone.com). The city will also host the first exhibition on the work of the director — and Paris resident — Wes Anderson (£12; March 19-July 27; cinematheque.fr). Splash out on a stay at the central Hôtel San Régis for easy access to the luxury boutiques of the Champs-Élysées.

Details Room-only doubles from £480. Take the train to Paris

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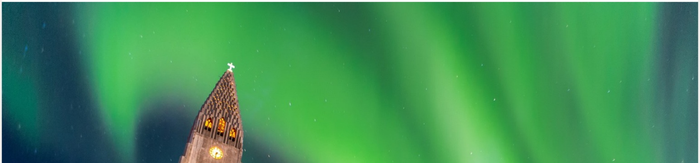
7. Reykjavik, Iceland



The Northern Lights over Reykjavik

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Framed by snow-glazed mountains and lurid green lava fields, Iceland’s capital is an excellent base for day trips and a standalone city break destination. Whale-watching season starts in April with tours departing from the harbour (£76; elding.is) or go in March to still stand a chance of spotting the northern lights. Spring can be chilly, which is the perfect excuse for a warming dip in the Blue Lagoon’s hot springs (£57; bluelagoon.com), or visit the glass-domed Perlan museum for an overview of Iceland’s geology and wildlife (£34; Perlan.is). The Reykjavik Edition is one of the most luxurious stays in the city, with mountain views, a rooftop bar and its own underground nightclub.
Details Three nights’ room-only from £775pp, including flights

Book a stay

8. Lisbon, Portugal

Rossio Square in Lisbon

GETTY IMAGES

Once the starting point for 15th-century explorers, the azulejo-tiled Portuguese capital is now the big discovery. An explosion of

fashionable bars and restaurants has invigorated the downtown neighbourhoods of Bairro Alto and Principe Real, but there's still something seductive about the city's dusty art nouveau venues. May also brings the chance to snoop round Lisbon's most beautiful private gardens when they're opened to the public during the twice-annual Jardins Abertos (free; jardinsabertos.com). Stay at Sublime Lisboa, a boldly designed 15-room boutique hotel that hosts a complimentary daily afternoon tea of custard tarts, cakes and a cheese board.
Details B&B doubles from £188. Fly to Lisbon

Book a stay

9. Athens, Greece

The Acropolis above Athens
GETTY IMAGES

Originally centred around 5th-century BC hilltop citadel the Acropolis, the Greek capital is now an urban mass with gritty appeal, independent boutiques and accomplished street art between ancient ruins. May is the best time to explore as the city holds its month-long This Is Athens City Festival with more than 350 free events including history walks, bike tours, wine tasting and theatre performances (cityfestival.thisisathens.org). Have your camera ready to stay at Neoma — this photogenic property has transparent temperature-controlled pods on the rooftop for year-round dining with views of the Acropolis.
Details B&B doubles from £88. Fly to Athens

Book a stay

10. Prague, Czech Republic

Prague is both a historic and modern, cosmopolitan city

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Amid the historic spires, domes and cobblestoned streets of Prague, you'll find a modern, cosmopolitan city with industrial areas transformed into arty hubs and a hip avant-garde restaurant scene. Step inside St Vitus Cathedral to admire its stained glass, then tour the quirky Lobkowicz Palace with its dazzling balcony views. May heralds the Prague Spring International Music Festival with concerts from the world's top orchestras (prague.eu). In a grand art nouveau building, W Prague opened in November and dazzles with its elegant interiors, wood-panelled cocktail bar and a seasonal rooftop terrace due to be unveiled in spring.

Details Room-only doubles from £328. Fly to Prague

Book a stay

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11. Brussels, Belgium

Spring sunshine brings a host of free events to Brussels

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Brussels is full of delightfully absurd architecture, gothic spires, bars serving interesting beers and the world's best chocolate. Spring sunshine brings a host of free events to the streets in May, including Brussels Jazz Weekend (May 23-25; lottobrusselsjazzweekend.be) and the Iris Festival (May 3-4, visit.brussels), which coincides with the blooming of the yellow variety of the flower and offers food trucks, street performers and special events inside the grounds of the Brussels Parliament. Stay at the photogenic Craves hotel, next to the Grand Place. Its striking, petrol-blue rooms have art deco touches including vintage phones, velvet headboards and retro china tea sets.
Details Room-only doubles from £131. Fly or take the train to Brussels

Book a stay

12. Amsterdam, Netherlands

Spring is the perfect time to visit Amsterdam

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There’s no lovelier time to visit Amsterdam than spring when the free Tulip Festival celebrates the Crayola-bright blooms with citywide displays (March 20-May 11; tulipfestivalamsterdam). Better still, go for King’s Day on April 27 when residents wear orange for lively street parties (free; iamsterdam.com). Enjoy sunny days strolling pretty canals, or meander round museums including the celebrated Van Gogh Museum (£20; under-18s free; vangoghmuseum.nl). The Noblemen hotel is a 20-minute walk away in a converted 17th-century canal house where all 13 rooms are inspired by men who shaped Dutch history.
Details B&B doubles from £152. Fly or take the train to Amsterdam

Book a stay

- 24 of the best things to do in Amsterdam

13. Vienna, Austria

St Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna

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With its majestic castles, imperial palaces and baroque streets, Vienna is endlessly elegant — especially when cherry blossom trees turn the city pink in April. The Easter markets will be open all month, offering decorative eggs, traditional snacks, live music and handicrafts (free; wien.info). Neighbourhoods are arranged in rings, so you can explore outwards from the fairytale St Stephen’s Cathedral, starting in the cobbled old town, then the old Jewish quarter, Leopoldstadt, with its many riverfront bars. Max Brown 7th District has a mid-century swagger, with in-room potted plants and record players, pops of primary colours and free screenings at the in-house cinema.
Details Room-only doubles from £74. Fly to Vienna

Book a stay

14. Florence, Italy

Hotel Lungarno has a terrific view over Florence

The birthplace of the Renaissance still bears artistic fruits. While works by Botticelli, Michelangelo and Da Vinci are on display in the city's world-class galleries, Florence will also host Italy's first Tracey Emin exhibition this spring at Palazzo Strozzi (£13; March 16-July 20; palazzostrozzi.org). Shop for the first picnic of the year at the open-air food market Sant'Ambrogio, then climb one of the Tuscan city's surrounding hills to eat with a view of Brunelleschi's terracotta-tiled Duomo. Stay at Hotel Lungarno, owned by the Ferragamo family of Salvatore Ferragamo fashion fame — a pinnacle of Italian design with a Michelin-starred restaurant.
Details B&B doubles from £423. Fly to Florence

Book a stay

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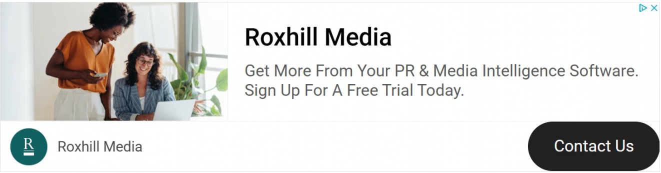

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15. Copenhagen, Denmark

The Nimb Hotel in Copenhagen

With its waterside cycle lanes, harbourfront cafés and canal boat tours, Copenhagen comes to life in spring as it emerges from a long Scandinavian winter. Reffen, the largest street food market in northern Europe, reopens on March 20 (reffen.dk), while the retro amusement park Tivoli Gardens kicks off its summer season on April 4 (adults £39, under-7s £19; tivoli.dk). The city also hosts its own Sakura Festival to herald the arrival of pink cherry blossom, with Japanese cultural workshops and martial arts (free; sakurafestival.dk). Nimb Hotel is on the doorstep of Tivoli Gardens and has 38 unique rooms and a rooftop pool that reopens in April.
Details Room-only doubles from £380. Fly to Copenhagen

Book a stay

16. Stuttgart, Germany

Schillerplatz, a lovely square in the old town of Stuttgart, in bloom
GETTY IMAGES

The state capital of Baden-Würtemmberg hosts the largest spring festival in Europe, with fairground rides, food and beer stalls, craft markets and musical performances (free entry, April 19-May 11; stuttgarter-fruehlingsfest.de). Bus tours of the city's surrounding wine-growing region restart on March 22 if you fancy sampling its world-renowned riesling (£13; citytour.de) or hire a barbecue boat to cruise past the vineyards over lunch on the Neckar (£415 for eight people; riverhouse.de). Act fast to nab one of the five minimalist rooms in the cute boutique hotel Das Edith, with its honesty bar and organic breakfast served by the owner.
Details Room-only doubles from £117. Fly to Stuttgart

Book a stay

17. Lucerne, Switzerland

Lucerne combines stylish hotels with mountain views
GETTY IMAGES

Lakeside Lucerne is one of Switzerland's prettiest cities and the perfect place to start Easter celebrations early. Join an interactive tour at the Swiss Chocolate Adventure (adults £16, under 16s £9; verkehrshaus.ch) or take part in a two-hour tasting and chocolate-making workshop at the artisan Max Chocolatier (from £634 for four; maxchocolatier.com). Wander the cobbled streets of the terracotta-

roofed medieval old town, then shop for souvenirs at the handicraft market, held on the first Saturday of every month from April (handwerksmarkt.ch). The boutique Hotel Beau Séjour is a 15-minute walk away along the lake and has 27 rooms with preserved 19th-century details alongside modern art.
Details Room-only doubles from £115. Fly to Lucerne

Book a stay

- The unstuffy Swiss city break that's surprisingly good value

18. Krakow, Poland

An Easter market is held in Krakow's medieval Main Square

GETTY IMAGES

Although better known for its Christmas markets, Krakow also goes all-out to celebrate Easter. A market is held throughout April in the old town's medieval Main Square, with chocolate goodies, local food and handicrafts on sale. Make the most of warmer days by renting a bike to cycle along the Vistula river (£10 per day; cyclingpoland.co.uk) or take a day trip to the Tatras mountains to see the region's famous purple crocuses. Stay in the old town's five-star Hotel Stary, a 19th-century palace with two swimming pools under vaulted ceilings, a salt cave and a rooftop bar that reopens in April.
Details Three nights room-only from £286pp, including flights

Book a stay

19. Stockholm, Sweden

The historic old town of Stockholm

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The whole of Sweden marks the arrival of spring on April 30 with Walpurgis night, when bonfires, street parties, food trucks and choir performances fill the streets of the waterfront capital. The city-centre amusement park Grona Lund reopens after winter on April 26 (£9 entry; gronalund.com), and restaurants will once more spill out on to terraces for alfresco dining. Book the new Stockholm Stadshotell, a stylish 32-room boutique property with a courtyard garden, cocktail bar and a Nordic restaurant in a restored chapel due to open in spring.

Details Room-only doubles from £259. Fly to Stockholm

Book a stay

20. Ljubljana, Slovenia

Ljubljana has a wonderful pedestrianised centre
GETTY IMAGES

Sunny spring days are ideal for pottering around the Slovenian capital's compact, pedestrianised centre with its riverside cafés and hiking trails. Start by catching the glass-walled funicular to the hilltop castle for views over the rooftops and mountains beyond (£12 including funicular; ljubljanskigrad.si). Stand up paddleboard tours through the heart of the city on the Ljubljanica river restart from April (£49; bananaway.eu), while Open Kitchen takes place every Friday from mid-March in Pogacar Square, with pop-up stalls from top Slovenian chefs and live DJs (odprtakuhna.si). Hotel Heritage is a five-minute stroll away and has 20 smart, contemporary rooms in a 16th-century townhouse.
Details B&B doubles from £71. Fly to Ljubljana

Book a stay

Have we missed any? Share your favourite spring city break destination in the comments

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