

Mediterranean Europe



- Albanian
- Croatian/Serbian
- French
- Italian
- Macedonian
- Portuguese
- Slovene
- Spanish
- Turkish

*Note: Language areas are approximate only.
For more details see the relevant introduction.*



mediterranean europe – at a glance

One of the most rewarding things about travelling around Mediterranean Europe is the rich variety of cuisine, customs, architecture and history. The flipside of course is that you'll encounter a number of very different languages. Most languages spoken in Mediterranean Europe belong to what's known as the Indo-European language family, believed to have originally developed from one language spoken thousands of years ago. Luckily for English speakers, most of these languages also use Roman script.

The Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) all developed from Vulgar Latin, which spread through Western Europe during the rule of the Roman Empire. The freedom with which English has borrowed Latin-based vocabulary means you'll quickly recognise many words from these languages. The Slavic languages are a branch of the Indo-European language family and share a large amount of basic vocabulary. Macedonian and Serbian which were traditionally associated with the Orthodox Church use the Cyrillic alphabet, while Croatian and Slovene, which were influenced by the Catholic Church, use the Roman alphabet. Albanian and Greek both form single branches of the Indo-European language family. Finally, Turkish is part of the Ural-Altai language family, which includes languages spoken from the Balkan Peninsula to northeast Asia. Arabic script was replaced by Roman script for Turkish in the early 20th century.

did you know?

- The European Union (EU) was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. It developed from the European Economic Community, founded by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Since the 2004 enlargement, it has 25 member states and 20 official languages.
- The EU flag is a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background – the number 12 representing wholeness.
- The EU anthem is the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.
- Europe Day, 9 May, commemorates the 1950 declaration by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, which marks the creation of the European Union.
- The euro has been in circulation since E-Day, 1 January 2002. The euro's symbol (€) was inspired by the Greek letter epsilon (ε) – Greece being the cradle of European civilisation and ε being the first letter of the word 'Europe'.
- The Eurovision Song Contest, held each May, has been running since 1956. For the larger part of the competition's history, the performers were only allowed to sing in their country's national language, but that's no longer the case.

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