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To: Utterly Sophisticated Travelers
From: Teresa Beall Expeditions

Yes, it's true. Europe airfare prices have been outrageous this summer (and most likely will continue to be so, even into the typically lower-priced shoulder season of Fall and early Winter). Plus, the dollar is being beaten to a pulp by the Euro. Fortunately, there are still a few places that offer American travelers a good value. How to proceed? The first step is to get out of the cash-draining high-life hot spots and into those "pizza-maker" destinations – the ones that stretch your dough. If you can keep your accommodation low-cost, your thrills cheap and your food not-so-fancy, you can make your travels both epic and affordable. Why not buy your chow at the local market, learn the art of the haggles, and discover the cheapest ways to get from A to B?

This month's e-newsletter is all about yanking in those purse strings. After crunching the numbers on airfare, hotel and tour experiences and activities, we've come up with a list of five places that are both fascinating and reasonably affordable if not (dare we say) cheap. Let's hear it for Bulgaria! Give it up for Berlin! Props to Transylvania!

BULGARIA – Quick! Which European country is the continent's oldest state? The birthplace of a sophisticated ancient society that produced some of antiquity's finest gold artifacts and the gladiator Spartacus? Has topography ranging from white sand beaches to snow-capped mountains? Has a colorful culture that blends the ancient with the modern? Nope, it's not Greece. Not Turkey. Not even any place on the Mediterranean. It's Bulgaria. Yep. The European Union's newest member (along with Romania) is now a post-Communist country working hard to catch up with Western Europe. For travelers, this transitional period means that while things do not always work as they should (sometimes service industry workers do not practice the best customer service and occasionally the infrastructure is poor in rural areas), you can still enjoy things like great food (a blend of Greek and Middle Eastern), stunning scenery and seaside resorts for far less than you'd pay in other countries.

BERLIN – Berlin is Europe's funky butterfly. Metamorphosed from the epicenter of Hitler's Third Reich to the symbol of the Iron Curtain to finally (in the last 20 years) a mecca for artists, hipsters and cultural alchemists, it's sort of like Greenwich Village twenty years ago mixed with some of Tokyo's modernism and punctuated by reminders of the past – both the darker days and the more splendid imperial era. The city is dynamic, ever changing and alive with history in a way like no other city in Europe. It's young because of its students, full of culture because of its artists and a bit unpolished because of its past which makes a visit truly special. It is also much cheaper than any other major Western European city.

TURKEY TURQUOISE COAST – You may be priced out of a vacation on the Italian Riviera or the Greek islands, and costs for stays along Croatia's Dalmatian Coast are rising rapidly, but you can still find bargains along Turkey's Turquoise Coast. With a thousand miles of stunning shoreline, it rivals its Mediterranean neighbors for beauty and ancient history, but not costs. It's one of my favorite places in the world – laid-back and gorgeous. Think azure blue waters and ancient ruins... great food... culture and music. In terms of value, Turkey is a no-brainer and a steal compared to trips throughout Western Europe and even some of Eastern Europe.



TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA – For many, Transylvania conjures up images of an Eastern European backwater that produced one of the world's most frightening characters – Count Dracula. While it may be rough-around-the-edges, Transylvania (now part of modern-day Romania) is also a beguiling place to visit. It promises a chance to experience one of Europe's wildest landscapes and a proud culture that still practices old traditions. Imagine women leading broad-horned cows by rope and farmers using scythes to harvest hay jagged mountains covered with ancient-looking forests and farmland with medieval villages and castles. It feels mysterious and you can easily see how the land could breed myths like some of the best Dracula stories.

MORAVIA, CZECH REPUBLIC – If you want to go on a European wine-country ramble, biking or driving between vineyards and villages while sampling wines and seeing sights along the way, but can't afford to shell out for a trip to a traditional wine region like Provence or Tuscany, consider a vacation to the Czech Republic's little-known Moravia region. There you can stay in friendly inns for under a hundred bucks per night. You can also sample the area's prized white and ice wines for about the same price as a single bottle of ho-hum Napa Chardonnay. Located near Prague, just south of Bohemia, Moravia is one of the best traditional and rural Czech Republic areas. Some compare Moravia to the wine districts of France with its rolling hills covered with vineyards, 300-400-year-old architecture and little villages with traditional town squares and colorful houses. It hasn't been gentrified the way other wine regions in Europe have been, so it's a better choice for the pocketbook. You could easily spend a week hopping from one town to the next, visiting boutique wineries, castles, monasteries and other interesting sites.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE.... Congrats to our 2008 blog winner, Paula VanGalio, from Santa Maria, California for "Water Invasion". She earned the most votes from our TBE travelers. For a look at the other top two blog winners, "Wadi Rum: An evening under the stars with shadow puppets and Bedouin men" by Deb Barshafsky from Georgia, and "Halloween in the Holy Land" by Viv Harper from South Carolina, log onto <http://www.teresabeall.com/newsletters/2008-04.pdf>

TBE SPRING 2009 EXPEDITION... Details about next year's Spring trip are forthcoming – Think Green!

NOTE – Each month (sometimes more or less often than that) we send out an e-newsletter containing timely announcements, notices and tips intended as useful, up-to-the-minute information for discriminating domestic and international travelers - you, our clients. The intent is NOT to send unwanted information to anyone. If you are not interested, please let us know and we will promptly remove you from our database!

Best, Teresa

...Traveling makes people feel younger. It should be administered periodically, like medicine.