

# Visiting Europe's literary touchstones



**Rick Steves**

Getting close to one of the big icons of Western civilization — the Acropolis, the Palace of Versailles, the Colosseum — can be the spine-tingling high point of a European trip. But don't paper over Europe's "smaller" achievements. Many of Europe's lasting cultural contributions are captured on dusty sheets of vellum or parchment, and paging through the Continent's literary treasures can raise a few goosebumps of their own.

Here are some of Europe's best cities and sights for bookworm travelers.

**London:** The vast British Library has managed to cram everything that really matters into a two-room exhibition called "The Treasures." Early Bibles, a First Folio of Shakespeare's works, Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," the Magna Carta and multiple early Jane Austen manuscripts vie for your attention. Surrounded by this bounty, it's clear that the British Empire built some of its greatest monuments out of paper.

Fans can pay their respects to Britain's literary masters in the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. Geoffrey Chaucer was the first literary great to be buried here (in 1400), and those interred nearby include Charles Dickens, Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson and Edmund Spenser.

**Prague, Czech Republic:** Given their imaginative, sometimes fanciful culture, it's no surprise that the Czechs have produced some famously clever writers. Prague native Franz



In Paris, "bouquinistes" sell used books and memorabilia from green metal stalls that line the Left Bank of the Seine River. **CAMERON HEWITT**

Kafka wrote his renowned "Metamorphosis" (elevator pitch: man wakes up as cockroach) in an Old Town apartment overlooking the Vltava River. That building was destroyed in 1945, but fans can visit the good Franz Kafka Museum and the Franz Kafka Society Center.

Ironically, until recently, many Czechs weren't too familiar with Kafka, a Jew who wrote in German. During World War II, his writings were banned when Germans occupied the city and, after the war, his work was caught up in a wave of anti-German feeling. The ensuing Communist regime had little use for him either. Locals began to take him more seriously after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when tourists from around the world started showing up wearing Kafka T-shirts.

**Edinburgh, Scotland:** The lives and literature of Scot-

land's holy trinity — Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson — are the focus of Edinburgh's inviting Writers Museum. Burns was Scotland's bard, extolling his native land in poetry. Stevenson stirred the Scottish soul with evocative classics like "Kidnapped" and "Treasure Island." Scott, who wrote the historical novels "Ivanhoe" and "Rob Roy," revived his countrymen's pride in Highland culture and the Gaelic language.

With exhibits mingling first editions with personal artifacts like Scott's pipe and Burns' writing desk, the museum gives an intimate view of the masters. To enliven all the history, follow up a museum visit with Edinburgh's popular literary pub tour, where actors wittily debate whether Scotland's great literature was high art or creative recreation fueled

by a love of whiskey.

**Paris:** The European love affair with books is charmingly demonstrated in the green metal bookstalls that line the Left Bank of the Seine River. Secondhand booksellers, called "bouquinistes," have been a Parisian fixture since the mid-1500s, when such shops and stalls lined most of the bridges in Paris. (Business boomed after the Revolution, when entire libraries were "liberated" from rich nobles.)

Another writers' landmark is the Shakespeare and Company bookstore. Founded in 1919 by free-thinking American Sylvia Beach, the original shop on Rue de l'Odeon was a meeting place for Paris' expatriate literary elite. Ernest Hemingway regularly borrowed books from the store. When James Joyce struggled to find a publisher for his now-clas-

sic "Ulysses," Beach published it.

The Nazis shut the shop down in 1941, but its postwar incarnation near the banks of the Seine carries on Beach's tradition by supporting struggling writers.

**Dublin:** Of all the places I've traveled in Europe, Ireland excels in literary passion. Around the turn of the 20th century, Dublin produced some of the world's great writers. Oscar Wilde wowed Britain with his quick wit and clever satires of upper-class Victorian society. William Butler Yeats won a Nobel Prize for his Irish-themed poems and plays.

Most inventive of all, perhaps, was Joyce, who captured literary lightning in a bottle when he profiled Dublin's seedier side in his stream-of-consciousness "Ulysses."

The Museum of Literature Ireland is the place to view authorial bric-a-brac. But to experience the Irish gift of gab in its highest form, treat yourself to a night out at the Abbey Theatre. Founded by Yeats to bring to the stage the "deeper emotions of Ireland," the theater has been promoting Irish writers and artists for more than a hundred years.

It's no exaggeration to say that Europe's literary documents changed the course of history. From pubs to museums to libraries, if you decide to target the literary culture of Europe, the entire continent can be a good read.

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## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Ocean storm top memory for comic

By **Jae-Ha Kim**  
Tribune Content Agency

Comedian and author JT Habersaat is a keen observer of life, which is why a lot of things he hears make their way into his stand-up shows.

"I tend to pull from real life quite often," said Habersaat, who resides in Austin, Texas. "I'm a bit of a storyteller. The constant travel of stand-up comedy lends itself well to adventure and insane situations. I try not to include specific people by name unless they are crucial to the material, but that happens sometimes too."

This interview with Habersaat has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: Are there places you're reluctant to return to for whatever reason?**

**A:** Oh, for sure. I have a story on my comedy special, "Misanthrope," about touring through a small town in Oregon and basically being run out of the city by a Misfits cover band that did not enjoy humor. (Laughs.) My most recent special, "Swamp Beast," has a whole lot of almost-unbelievable Florida tales. There are certain cities I have never had a good show in, and I'm not completely sure why. Little Rock, Arkansas, comes to mind. Mississippi has always been a bit of a battle.

**Q: Where are some places you've had better experiences?**

**A:** At this point, I've performed in every state except Montana and Idaho. Those two seem tough to route through.



Stand-up comedian JT Habersaat said there is nothing like Cape Cod for a relaxing vacation. **MINDY TUCKER**

I did a five-night residency in Anchorage that was pretty wild. I've done festivals all over, including Akumal (Mexico), Las Vegas, Denver and Green Bay.

**Q: Did you write any of your book, "Doing Time: Comedians Talk Stand-Up," on the road?**

**A:** Yes, a bunch of interviews were done while I was on tour performing stand-up. I sat down with some fantastic comedians while in Los Angeles, including Todd Glass, Tom Rhodes, Jackie Kashian and Eddie Pepitone. While in New York, I spoke to folks like Joe DeRosa. It was a constant game of who-is-in-the-city-I-am-in-this-week?

**Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?**

**A:** Lots! I tour a bunch, and right now I have shows looming in Minneapolis, Wilmington (North Carolina), Indianapolis, Boston, Des Moines and beyond.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** I really enjoy Cape Cod, mainly because I went there a bunch as a kid and it's nostalgic relaxation.

**Q: What untapped destination should people know about?**

**A:** Marfa, Texas, is a pretty magical little town. I like Asheville, North Carolina, too. I like artsy places.

**Q: What's a trip you took**

**as a child that stands out?**

**A:** The Jersey Shore. I went there every summer growing up, and it holds really great memories for me.

**Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?**

**A:** Don't be an obvious tourist. Be aware of your surroundings and lean into the local culture and cuisine.

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** Iceland and New Zealand.

**Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?**

**A:** My backpack is pretty much designed to carry my merch for post-show sales with ease. Also, earbuds and a comfy sleep mask for the plane.

**Q: What is your best or worst vacation memory?**

**A:** Watching a huge thunderstorm over the ocean when I was 13 in Cape Cod was the best. Our summer cottage was like 20 feet from the crashing waves, and my parents woke me and my brother up in the middle of the night to see it. Just massive waves and lightning. It was awe-inspiring. Worst was probably altitude sickness one time in Boulder. Would not recommend!

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Airlines shift blame on denied boarding, overnight stranding

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

My husband and I were stranded in Toronto on our way from Stockholm to Cleveland after Lufthansa rebooked our flights due to a flight delay. The flights included a leg on Air Canada from Toronto to Cleveland.

But even though we had boarding passes and a rebooking itinerary, Air Canada denied me boarding, claiming that my ticket wasn't valid. (My husband's boarding passes were valid.)

Lufthansa refused to help, leaving me to pay \$178 for a hotel. Neither airline will take responsibility. We flew home the next day.

What can I do?

— *Bonnie Thiel, Broadview Heights, Ohio*

**A:** When Lufthansa rebooked your flights, it should have ensured that your ticket was valid on all segments, including the Air Canada leg back to Cleveland.

Under EU Regulation 261/2004, which governs your initial delayed flight from Stockholm, Lufthansa had a duty to reroute you and cover the necessary expenses that were caused by its delay. Issuing a faulty boarding pass and leaving you stranded in Toronto is a clear breach of this obligation.

Air Canada also failed you. The Montreal Convention requires airlines to honor valid tickets and boarding passes. If there was a ticketing error, it should have worked with Lufthansa to resolve it immediately, not abandon you at the gate. Both airlines' responses of "not our problem" are unacceptable.

You did almost everything right. You kept records and escalated your case to both carriers. Could you have done more? Maybe.

First, booking a hotel yourself should have been your last resort.

If you're stuck in a stopover city, you need to apply pressure to your airline to help you then and there. Don't book a hotel then try to negotiate a refund because airlines will always try to avoid paying.

Second, a brief, polite email to one of the airline's executives might have helped. I list the executive contacts for Air Canada and Lufthansa on my consumer advocacy site, [elliott.org](http://elliott.org).

Also, an appeal to the U.S. Department of Transportation could have helped the airlines see the error of their ways.

So, what went wrong? This was classic code-

share confusion.

In the correspondence you provided, Lufthansa wanted Air Canada to take responsibility for the flight because it was the "operating" carrier.

But Air Canada wanted Lufthansa to take responsibility because its flight from Frankfurt, Germany, to Toronto was delayed.

As a result, no one would take responsibility. Come on!

I recommended that you send a complaint to the DOT, which regulates airlines in the United States (where you booked your ticket). You did, and you received a full refund for your hotel from Lufthansa.

*Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at [elliott.org/help](http://elliott.org/help) or [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org).*