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Planes and trains make it fast and easy to get around Europe, but the humble, slower tour bus provides cheap tickets and decent views with many windows.

## Don't rule out buses for European excursions

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When it comes to European travel, many people turn to the new budget airlines or the extensive train network (including overnight trains, which are seeing a revival). There is, however, another often overlooked travel mode, one that comes with an economical price tag, even for the most spontaneous traveler. It provides decent views with many windows, and more often than not, it's easily accessible right in the city center.

It's the modest coach bus.

Bus travel may not be as comfortable as that on a plane or in a first-class train compartment, but not dramatically less so. Much of the European bus infrastructure is a step up compared to many of the coach buses in the United States. European buses usually provide Wi-Fi and screens for entertainment, as well as decent leg room and plush seats.

And whatever you sacrifice in comfort, you gain in significantly cheaper tickets — even if you wait until the last minute.

For train travel, ticket prices aren't fixed. These can and often increase each passing day toward the date of departure, a problem if you enjoy traveling spontaneously. Eurail passes allow for more flexible travel, but they can cost hundreds of euros. Tickets for shorter city-to-city trips can be reasonable, but prices increase when traveling longer distances, especially if your travels are between different countries, on a high-speed rail line or an overnight sleeper car.

The cheap fares from Ryanair, easyJet or another budget airline are attractive, but additional fees are almost always required for extra baggage or boarding passes. And if you're traveling a shorter distance, the stress of the airport and airport security may not be worth the hassle. Not to mention the lovely countryside won't be part of the journey.

A couple of nifty apps are available to compare travel prices, not only for bus routes, but also trains, planes and even ferries and car pools. I have used Omio (formerly GoEuro) and FromAtoB, both available free on desktop, iOS and Android. These travel aggregators sift through hundreds of listings from transportation companies and display transit options for each mode of travel sortable by price, time and transfers.

Using Omio, I recently priced out a trip from Prague to Berlin. I set the sorting filter for "cheap and fast." The top result for trains came out to cost \$64 for a 4-hour, 17-minute journey. The bus, meanwhile, arrives two minutes earlier for just \$26.

If you have already decided on the bus, the U.S.-based search platform Wanderu has expanded to Europe, providing another option to compare and aggregate prices from multiple carriers.

Beyond savings, bus travel supplies a means of transportation to locations with no train service.

Above all, buses could be the perfect choice for the spontaneous traveler: Backpackers, students or those travelers who want to leave their options open can benefit. With its many borders and some smaller countries, Europe is easy to experience at the drop of a hat, and bus travel can provide an inexpensive and sometimes faster route to doing so should your plans shift for any reason.



Color World/TNS/STEVE HAGGERTY

Rocky ridges surround the Ranch at Emerald Valley near Colorado Springs, Colo.

## Finding gold in Emerald Valley

### Colorado guest ranch keeps traditions alive

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**M**ANITOU SPRINGS, Colo. — I was returning from a hike up Mount Vigil, the peak you can see from the Ranch at Emerald Valley, near Colorado Springs, when a leathery-faced cowboy walked by, humming a tune and leading a horse.

At the same moment, a car pulled up and the driver, eyes masked behind dark sunglasses, leaned out and asked for directions to the ranch, which just happened to be where I was staying.

I would have answered, but at that moment the old cowboy stopped dead, looked at the li-

cense plate — "Texas," he muttered — looped the reins around the saddle horn and unwrapped a piece of gum. Then he pointed down the road. "That way," he said.

"Thanks," said the driver, hesitating. "I'm Tony," he added. "Say, do you know why they call it Emerald Valley? Was there a gold mine here? Gemstones, maybe?"

Curious myself, and still out of breath, I stepped closer, the better to hear.

"Well now, I couldn't say," replied the cowboy, pulling a dented army canteen off his belt. "I've wondered on it myself. Might be for them green trees, a hideaway-like, where a person can git away and think

"They used to call it Camp Vigil, after that mountain there. Real special for old Mr. Penrose, Spencer Penrose he was, the man who built the first lodge up there on Cheyenne Mountain. Back in the 1920s, that was."

The cowboy paused for another long swallow. "The way they tell it," he said, "he'd git down here with his friends, sittin' up late, telling stories about mountain climbing and all. That's a purty fine log cabin he had, the one they still got. It's renovated now, with a real bar, all chinked up, nice and tight. You'll see. No rain gittin' in there."

"All kind of trees shades them log cabins, and your creek has a waterfall and lakes stocked

regular with trout. The cabin on the hill is a palace, big enough for weddings and such. The cook's in the kitchen most days, handy with the fixin's. I stop in now and then and he makes me a plate."

When the cowboy took another swallow I spoke up. "Is Spencer Penrose the one who built the zoo at the bottom of the mountain, and every time there was a parade he rode the elephant through town?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the cowboy. "He bought the land for them animals. It's what happens to folks from the east when they git to this here west. The land took old Penrose and

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Color World/TNS/STEVE HAGGERTY

Recording artist Jeff Houlton, 40 years a guitarist and a campfire tradition, entertains on Wednesday and Saturday evenings at the Ranch at Emerald Valley.



Color World/TNS/STEVE HAGGERTY

Guests saddle up at the Old Stage Riding Stable, for a morning on horseback at the Ranch at Emerald Valley.

## Czech Republic has lots to offer outside of Prague

Few cities can match Prague's over-the-top romance, evocative Old World charm ... and tourist crowds. To escape the masses and experience more of the real Czech Republic, take a bus or train ride outside of the city to see a rich medieval town, a sobering concentration camp memorial, or a grand Czech castle.

Kutna Hora, a beautifully preserved and down-to-earth town, is just a one-hour direct train ride from Prague. With a current population of just 20,000 it can hardly be categorized as a "second city" to Prague, but it was considered the second city of Bohemia in the 17th century. Kutna Hora sits on top of what was once the world's largest silver mine and, in its heyday, much of Europe's standard coins were minted here. At the town's Czech Museum of Silver, you can join a tour and spelunk in the former miners' passages that run beneath the entire town center.

In addition to financing much of Prague's grand architecture, the glittering silver deposits also paid for Kutna Hora's opulent Gothic cathedral, St. Barbara's, dedicated to

### TRAVEL IN EUROPE



RICK STEVES

the patron saint of mining. Its dazzling interior celebrates the town's sources of wealth, with frescoes featuring mining and minting.

Kutna Hora's most popular sight is actually on its outskirts, in Sedlec: the evocative and offbeat bone church, within a serene graveyard. Unassuming from the outside, the 16th-century Sedlec Ossuary is filled with the bones of 40,000 people. The raw material inside was provided by 14th-century plagues and 15th-century wars. The chandelier supposedly includes at least one of every bone in the human body. Neat, 20-foot-tall pyramids of bones decorate the walls and ceiling.

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Rick Steves' Europe/CAMERON HEWITT

Kutna Hora's Gothic cathedral was funded by the town's once-lucrative silver mining and minting industry.





Color World/TNS/STEVE HAGGERTY

Flags and a once-a-season patch of manicured grass celebrate a holiday at the Ranch at Emerald Valley.



Color World/TNS/STEVE HAGGERTY

Trail guide Marco keeps tabs on his riders as they pass the gate into the Ranch at Emerald Valley.

# Gold

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it's took the new owner, too. The rocks, the hills and your meadows, they call you to put down roots.

"You buy an acre, build a cabin, git some chickens and you think you're done. Then the place next-door gits a sale sign so you buy it, git a rail fence and a cow and call it a ranch. Then that homestead down by the creek, well, you need water in these parts, so you buy it, too. That's history, hereabouts."

With that, the old cowboy tipped his hat, nodded to both of us, clucked to the horse and they disappeared down the road.

"Guess I'll see it for myself," said the driver, adjusting his sunglasses and revving the engine. "Can I give you a ride?"

"No thanks, I'll walk," I said. "The ranch is pretty close now, down around the corner."

Alone again, I got to thinking. That cowboy was right. Gossip is just another word for history, especially in ranch country. In the late 1890s, the dirt track here was known as Gold Road. I'd seen the mine

tailings myself, a heap of yellow dirt pushed up past the trail, where our horseback ride turned toward the corral. And for all that, they never did find gold.

After the last gold strike petered out, arrivals included a settler, a Girl Scout Camp and finally Spencer Penrose, who leased the 16-acre parcel from the Pike National Forest for his newly created social club, the Pikes Peak Camping and Mountain Trails Association. The club didn't last, but the cabin survived the years, including an interval as a dude ranch, in the 1970s.

After the Broadmoor Hotel changed hands in 2011, new owner Philip Anschutz bought the property, eventually restoring and enlarging the lodge and building guest cabins, hoping to re-create the ranch and its era, along with an authentic touch of wilderness.

When the work was finished, it was so accurate that I couldn't tell the old walls from the new ones, or the antiques from the reproductions. The custom made interior furnishings not only echoed the era but added a decided touch of luxury. The 10 guest cabins — for two, four or eight guests — had their own chinked logs and period decor; all outfitted,

## The nitty gritty

A half-dozen hiking trails and climbs start at the ranch and explore the surrounding Pike National Forest. For guests combining a visit to Cloud Camp and to the Ranch at Emerald Valley, the 5.3-mile hike from the top of Cheyenne Mountain down to the ranch is a favorite.

**For information:** Learn more about the Ranch at Emerald Valley; about Cloud Camp, the lodge atop Cheyenne Mountain; and about the parent property, the Broadmoor Hotel, in Colorado Springs, at [broadmoor.com](http://broadmoor.com). Rates vary depending on the season and weather.

**Included in daily rates:** Transportation between the Ranch at Emerald Valley and the Broadmoor Hotel, a nine-mile drive. On-site activities and equipment, trail hikes, nature walks, fishing gear, horseback rides, all meals, snacks, beverages, wine, beer and bar drinks. Because the Old Stage Riding Stable is a concession, long horseback rides, such as the popular cattle drives, are priced separately.

**Getting there:** Fly into Denver; then drive or fly to Colorado Springs.

of course, with modern amenities.

As for the so-called "palace," that's where I stayed. By the time I tried to make a reservation, every cabin was booked, except that one up the hill. Climbing uphill on a winding stone path, I thought I'd been banished to the barn. Then I saw the flagstone patio — large enough for a 50-guest reception, and opened the front door. The living room, furnished with hand-tooled leather chairs, luxurious sofas and a man-size fireplace,

begged me to sit down; the walls, hung with western and American Indian art, insisted that I take a closer look.

The kitchen, large-party size, included a long center island, surrounded by walls covered with cupboards, and counters with three sinks and the latest appliances. With bedrooms upstairs and down (and bathrooms for each) there was room for eight.

After that, no day was like another. You could sleep late, or eat breakfast early, then climb the ridge to see the

views. Five or six other trails climbed peaks or crossed through the forest, or you could ride horseback. A hot lunch and farm-fresh salad or sandwich was followed by a game of Scrabble, a walk around the perimeter or a nap in the hammock.

Come 4 p.m., I fetched the fly rod and headed for the lake where the rainbow and brown trout were breaking the surface. Used the wrong fly and came away empty. Cocktail hour followed, improved by the chef's hors d'oeuvres. Dinner time lasted as long as you could eat or talk, in the dining room or stargazing around the campfire.

Wednesday and Saturday evening campfires, when recording artist and cowboy singer Jeff Houlton entertained, were the biggest surprise of all. Corny, you're thinking? Maybe, but don't laugh yet.

I was watching the fire toss up sparks and sipping a smooth cabernet, expecting to hear the usual background thrumming, elevator music, usually, when Houlton tuned the strings and tore into the "Orange Blossom Special," astonishing everyone with his lightning-fast picking and perfect rhythm. Not only did he wow us with some of

the smartest flat picking ever — and faultless two and three-finger work — but he sang each song differently, turning the most ordinary lyrics into a drama with an ending.

As the guests called out requests, he called on the vast repertoire he hides under that cowboy hat and performed as asked. Country & western, pop, bluegrass, Pete Seeger, Elton John, the Grateful Dead — he knew them all.

Listening, I couldn't help wonder why it felt so familiar. Then I remembered. The evening reminded me of Stead's Ranch, founded in 1904 and long gone now, a historic guest ranch and lodge tucked among the pines, beneath snowy peaks, in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park.

For many a golden summer, a worldwide procession of guests came through Stead's, from mountain climbers and presidents to stage celebrities, opera singers and families with kids, all sitting around the campfire together, sharing the West's special brand of hospitality.

Which is just how it felt that night at the Ranch at Emerald Valley, at the end of the track they once called the Gold Road. I think they've hit pay dirt after all.

## New York Times Crossword Puzzle

Answers on the next page

No. 0707

### FLIP 'PHONES

By Emily Carroll / Edited by Will Shortz

#### ACROSS

- 1 Crawling marine mollusk
- 8 Victorious cry
- 14 At first, say
- 20 So-called "Crossroads of America"
- 21 Wife in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tender Is the Night"
- 22 Uprights, e.g.
- 23 Low end?
- 25 What sunblock blocks, briefly
- 26 Rushes
- 27 Hangout on "The Simpsons"
- 28 One of two for a buck?
- 30 Somewhat, slangily
- 32 Go astray
- 33 Part of town that may be dangerous
- 35 Tater \_\_\_\_\_
- 38 Extraterrestrial from the planet Melmac
- 40 Emphatic ending with yes or no
- 42 Bulging bicep, in slang
- 43 Raise
- 44 Wet
- 48 Agreement for exporting essential oils?
- 51 Raggedy \_\_\_\_\_
- 52 Around an hour after noon
- 54 Spend all weekend solving crosswords, say, with "out"
- 55 Dummkopfs
- 56 Movie-rating org. \_\_\_\_\_
- 58 Semi-essential part?
- 59 Driver of "BlackKkLaddo"
- 61 Most pallid
- 63 Exercise program done in formal attire?
- 66 Horse operas
- 68 Top squads
- 69 Sports-page listings
- 71 Avoid cooked foods
- 75 Beyond prim and proper
- 77 Sturdily built friend on "Friends"?
- 79 Relative of a flute
- 82 Statement often starting "I ..."
- 84 Egg head?
- 85 Train transportation
- 86 "Baby Blues" or "Rhymes With Orange"
- 87 PC key
- 89 Rita who played Anita in "West Side Story"
- 92 Setting for many "Twins games; Abbr.
- 93 Spotted animal with a lot of sore spots?
- 96 Squirrels away
- 98 "What \_\_\_\_\_?"
- 99 Maestro's gift
- 100 \_\_\_\_\_ Rousey, first female fighter inducted into the U.F.C. Hall of Fame

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- 102 Animal in un zoológico
- 103 First letter of "tsar" in Russian
- 104 Father of the Constitution
- 106 PC key
- 108 Extended family
- 112 Utterly useless
- 113 Totally abandon one's plan
- 114 Letter-shaped fastener
- 115 Laugh riot
- 118 Cause of a work stoppage at a shoe factory?
- 123 Tropical scurrier
- 124 Put on a pedestal
- 125 Charm
- 126 A cobbler might use one
- 127 Expunge
- 128 Word before shot or plot
- DOWN**
- 1 Some turban wearers
- 2 Film composer
- 3 Doe follower, in song
- 4 Breaks along the Panama Canal?
- 5 "Well, \_\_\_\_\_-di-dah!"
- 6 Commercial prefix with lever
- 7 "That's so-o-o gross!"
- 8 Is a willing participant?
- 9 Runs out of gas
- 10 Here, to Henri
- 11 Underworld boss
- 12 Troy story
- 13 Joan of Arc, at the the of her death
- 14 Fit for a king
- 15 Skin care brand
- 16 Attorney general under both Bush 41 and Trump
- 17 Santa \_\_\_\_\_ winds
- 18 \_\_\_\_\_ sauce
- 19 Symbol on a Mariners cap
- 24 \_\_\_\_\_ d'oeuvre
- 29 Slangy affirmation
- 31 Rare solo voice in opera
- 33 Arthur with a Tony
- 34 UnitedHealthcare competitor
- 35 Back-comb
- 36 Multi-time Pulitzer finalist, including for the volume "Lovely, Dark, Deep: Stories" (2014)
- 37 Meet on the down-low
- 39 Confines
- 41 Fixes up, in a way
- 43 Circuit-board component
- 44 Fearsome snake
- 45 Stoned
- 46 Dumbstruck
- 47 Undiluted
- 49 Like Easter Island
- 50 Full of enthusiasm
- 53 Construction girders
- 57 Not without sacrifice
- 60 Call into question
- 62 Permeate
- 64 Shout from a lottery winner
- 65 Kid-lit character with the catchphrase "Thanks for noticing me"
- 67 In regard to
- 70 Big name in 2008 financial news
- 72 Jurisdiction
- 73 Stomach
- 74 Painful paintball mementos
- 76 Rapid movement of the eye from one point to another
- 78 Surrealist Tanguy
- 79 Groups in the quarterfinals, e.g.
- 80 Loses enthusiasm
- 81 Elicit a smile from
- 83 Last Oldsmobile ever produced
- 88 Sent
- 90 Pearl clutcher's cry
- 91 Bit of brewing equipment
- 94 "Sure thing, dude!"
- 95 Boatload
- 97 Untangle
- 101 "In your dreams!"
- 104 2016 film set in Polynesia
- 105 Reckon, informally
- 107 Section of a high school yearbook
- 109 Native Alaskan
- 110 Popular corn chip
- 111 What radio signals travel through, with "the"
- 112 Spring's opposite
- 113 Nongreen salad ingredient
- 115 Merest taste
- 116 Part of a sci-fi film's budget
- 117 French way
- 119 The Braves, on scoreboards
- 120 One of many extras in air travel nowadays
- 121 A little fun?
- 122 Letters on some luggage to New York



Rick Steves' Europe/CAMERON HEWITT

The Sedlec Bone Church on the outskirts of Kutna Hora incorporates the bones of 40,000 victims of wars and plague.

# Steves

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ings, and giant chalices made of bones flank the stairwell.

To explore more of the Czech Republic's history, specifically how the Czechs were affected by the Nazi regime, a one-hour bus ride from Prague takes you to the walled town of Terezin. Built in the 1780s with state-of-the-art, star-shaped walls designed to keep out the Prussians, it became a horribly overcrowded Jewish ghetto under Hitler. Ironically, the town's medieval walls, originally meant to keep Germans out, were later used by Germans to keep the Jews in.

The various museums, memorials, and points of interest of the Terezin experience are spread over a large area in two distinct parts: the walled town, which today feels like a workaday, if unusually tidy, Czech town, with a tight grid plan hemmed in by its stout walls; and (a half-mile walk east, across the river) the Small Fortress, which was a Gestapo prison camp for mostly political prisoners of all stripes (including non-Jewish Czechs).

Here, in a supposedly "self-governed Jewish resettlement area," Jewish culture seemed to thrive, as "citizens" put on plays and concerts, published a magazine, and raised their families. But it was all a carefully planned deception. As the Nazis' model "Jewish town" for deceiving Red Cross inspectors, Terezin fostered the illusion that its Jewish inmates lived relatively normal lives — making the sinister truth all the more cruel. As I explore memorials such as this one, I always ponder the message: Forgive, but never forget.

Day-trip opportunities from Prague include several castles. The Neo-Gothic Konopiste Castle, 30 miles south of Prague, has some captivating stories to tell about its former inhabitants, including Archduke Franz Ferdinand — the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose assassination sparked World War I. Historians get goose bumps here.

Inside Konopiste are halls upon halls of hunting trophies, paintings of royal relatives, and photographs of Franz Ferdinand and his family's travels. More importantly, the castle stands as a reminder of what his assassination (chillingly

illustrated by items displayed inside the castle) meant for Europe — the end of the age of hereditary, divine-right empires, and the dawn of Europe as a collection of nationalistic, democratic nation-states. If you listen closely, you can almost hear the last gasp of Europe's absolute monarchs.

You'll see Franz Ferdinand's dressing room (with his actual uniform and his travel case all packed up and ready to go), his private study (which feels like he just stepped away from his desk for a cup of coffee), and — in the final room — a glass display case containing the dress his wife, Zofie, was wearing when she was also shot that fateful day in Sarajevo. Down the hall are the royal couple's death masks, Franz Ferdinand's bloody suspenders, and the very bullet that ended Zofie's life.

Ninety percent of tourists who visit the Czech Republic see only Prague. But if you venture outside the capital, the country offers a little of everything for the traveler. Traditional towns and villages? Check. A friendly and gentle countryside? Check. Grand castles and intriguing history? Czech, Czech, and Czech.