

Quirky Europe

Why walk around a city when you can take the beer bike or the vodka tram? Check out our favourite unusual tours of Europe

WORDS GILLY PICKUP

Gone are the days when sightseeing tours meant traipsing behind a yawn-inducing, umbrella-toting tour guide. These days, there's no end of quirky ways to see the best of Europe's greatest cities. How about Amsterdam by beer bike? Venice by kayak? Krakow by vodka tram? Bring it on.

See Amsterdam by beer bike

WHAT: Drinking and pedalling whilst taking in the Netherlands' beautiful capital. You and your mates climb aboard an 18-seater bar on wheels manned by a (sober) driver and help yourselves to unlimited free beer while lending a foot with the pedalling. On this two-hour tour, you'll enjoy famous sights such as the Canal Belt without worrying about being nicked for drunk driving or speeding – the bar's top speed is just 6kmph.

WHY: Can you think of a reason why not? Plus there's a karaoke machine on board, and the best drinker wins a yellow jersey.

COST: About £354 for up to eight people and £396 for a group of nine-18 people.

SEE: damtours.nl; sightseeingbike.com

See Stockholm by hiking across the rooftops

WHAT: This is no run-of-the-mill walking tour. You'll be a dizzying 140ft above the city, but not to worry – you're secured with safety equipment. And how else could you get a bird's eye view of the islands on which Stockholm is based? The vista is particularly extraordinary from the rooftop of the Old Parliament building. If you go after dark, your guide will treat you to bloodcurdling stories of murder and mysterious things that go bump in the night.

WHY: If you laugh in the face of normal sightseeing tours and fancy yourself a bit of a daredevil, this is the way to go.

COST: £30 for 45 minutes.

SEE: upplevmer.se

See Krakow by vodka tram

WHAT: See Krakow's sights by tram. No ordinary tram, however, as along with the video screens, pumping sound system and plush sofas, it comes with a vodka expert to guide you through the world of Polish vodka, its heritage and how to drink it. See Grand Square with its plethora of imposing landmarks, flower sellers, mime artists and street

musicians, all while necking the finest firewater that Poland has to offer.

WHY: Krakow is one of the biggest party zones in Eastern Europe, and the Old Town has more than 400 clubs, bars and pubs. So the tram is the perfect way to get the party started.

COST: One-and-a-half hours of exclusive tram hire with vodka tasting (four shots) and two local beers is around £33 per person, based on a group of 10.

SEE: funincracow.com

See Venice by kayak

WHAT: Forget gondolas – the only way to discover Venice and visit parts of the city that few tourists get to see is by kayak. Plus, sharing the waterways with local 'road users' provides an authentic slice of everyday life in La Serenissima. See St Mark's Square, the Bridge of Sighs and the Rialto Bridge; paddle your way past the palaces and homes to the toffery; and bob along the Grand Canal. Then strike out to see the islands that are all but inaccessible to tourists, but simply visited by kayak.

WHY: A unique experience for adventure seekers – and those looking to tone up their arms. And what better way to see the floating city than from the water? »



Retro: tour Paris by 2CV, the classic French economy car

Odd tours

EUROPE

Krakow's vodka tram



Amsterdam by beer bike



See Stockholm from the city's rooftops

MORE QUIRKY TOURS

WEIRD WAYS TO SEE THE SIGHTS



GLADIATOR SCHOOL, ROME

If you've seen all the Roman sites but have a hankering to indulge in more Roman life, the Gladiator's School is for you. You'll get dressed up in tunic, sandals and protective gear and are taught basic fighting techniques. Whether they then release the lions is unclear.

SEE gsr-roma.com

SPECIAL INTEREST WALKS, PRAGUE

Choose a saunter suited to your liking with tour company Prague Walks. There are fashion tours, pub tours (more of a Prague stagger?) and ghost walks, on which tourists are told: "You can still smell blood and tears from murders, suicides and executions." Maybe chug some Staropramen first to steel your nerves for that one.

SEE praguelwalks.com

TAPAS TOUR, MADRID

Munch your way around Madrid with Walks of Spain. Visit the old town's very best tapas bars where you'll sample both the food and the wine. The tour promises at least six different dishes and five selections of wines, so have a light breakfast if you want value for money. Available every day except Monday.

SEE walksofspanain.com



Let your chauffeur do the pedalling on a trixi triycle



Take to Venice's canals in a kayak

COST: An all-day trip with guide costs about £100pp for two-to-five people.

SEE: venicekayak.com

See Barcelona by trixi triycle

WHAT: On these state-of-the-art tricycles – imagine a futuristic-rickshaw-ride and you're pretty much there – you choose the route and your guide does the pedalling. As an optional extra, you can pay for someone to fan you as you're whisked along. The decadence! If you choose the Gothic Quarter city tour, you'll ride past visual delights including the majestic square Plaça del Rei, littered with medieval buildings and the remains of the ancient Roman city. You can work plenty of lively bars and tapas restaurants into your route, too.

WHY: A two-person bike taxi offers a relaxed way to see along the roads other taxis can't reach. And, by virtue of being pedal-powered, they're eco-friendly to boot.

COST: Prices vary according to tour; see the Gothic Quarter from £12.50 for 30 minutes.

SEE: trixi.com

See Paris by 2CV

WHAT: Razz around Paris in a Citroen 2CV, the much-loved French economy car that sadly went out of production in 1990. There are a few 2CV tours around town, but we like 4 roues sous 1 parapluie (or 'four wheels under one umbrella'). The company's cars come in a variety of colours, and you'll be driven around by smart chauffeurs who, the operator tells us, "are polite, cultivated, elegant (dressed by Saint-James) and pleasant". Good to know. The convertible cars take in a whistlestop tour of the city of love's main sights.

WHY: The 2CV is to Paris what the gondola is to Venice and the yellow cab is to New York. Throw in a striped shirt, an onion necklace and a baguette and you couldn't get any more French.

COST: £15pp for three, or £24pp for two. Tours last 30 mins.

SEE: 4roues-sous-1parapluie.com ■