

# Chunnel Surfing

*Our inveterate sports traveler recommends an extended low-cost stay in Europe this summer*

**A**t a recent holiday gathering, I was asked by the college-aged son of a friend what I would recommend that he do in Europe after concluding a junior-year-abroad program in the United Kingdom.

I started to offer insights on the standard trip through Europe with obligatory stops at historical sites and music festivals until an idea came to me. It struck me that this guy had a chance to do something in one summer—even on a backpacker's budget—that took me three decades to do. My advice was to take advantage of this opportunity and see the full smorgasbord of legendary sporting activities that take place in early summer around the United Kingdom and France.

There will always be time to see Stonehenge or the Cathedral of Chartres. They are there to see 365 days a year. So, my advice—which you can use for yourself or for an equally eager college kid—is this: Become a sports tourist! It's not too early to start your planning now.

Here is a possible itinerary in case you have the time or know someone who will be in Europe early this summer. I'd suggest you start your sports journey in May. While your friends are stateside enjoying Memorial Day, you will begin your sports-travel adventure in Monaco. If you're on a budget, you will probably not be staying in Monaco; you'll be staying in more affordable France, just across the border.

The Monaco Grand Prix, the granddaddy of the Formula One Circuit, takes place on May 25. You can get there several days beforehand, find an outdoor hot spot by the harbor, and watch the Formula One teams arrive in town. It is a spectacular atmosphere. On race day, you can even get in touch with your inner Leonardo DiCaprio by attempting to penetrate the glitterati despite traveling around on a budget.

From Monaco, work your way up to Paris for the French Open, May 25 to

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by **Bob Latham**

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June 8. The French Open at Roland Garros is by far the best experience for a spectator of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments. The food is good, the weather is generally cooperative, the matches last longer because they are on clay and the access from virtually anywhere in Paris is relatively easy.

Monday, June 2, would be the optimal day to be there since you will be

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able to see most of the seeded players. And hey, you're a sports traveler, so let everyone else go back to work that day and you can enjoy a full day at Roland Garros in peace. In fact, while you're at it, stay there for the week.

On June 11, the first practices for the 24 Hours of Le Mans will be held. Get into town, find yourself a spot at the primary campground used for the race, and catch up on your sleep before the 24-hour race starts on June 14.

It will then be time to work your way through the Chunnel to jolly old England. If traveling through a tunnel is not your thing, then you can go over land and sea if you prefer (or if your budget requires it). Either way, make sure to arrive by the start of Wimbledon on June 23.

Even though the French Open is by far the most enjoyable tennis Grand Slam event, Wimbledon does need to be experienced and seen at least once. It is a little bit easier to deal with during its first week, before the really large crowds pile in for week two. The tournament runs from June 23 to July 6.

Seize the opportunity to see some reasonably well-known players on the

outer courts. And, don't worry about seeing the last four days of Wimbledon. Trust me, you will have seen plenty of tennis by this point in your journey.

Instead, head a short distance west from London and catch the Henley Royal Regatta on the River Thames, July 2 to 6. The first regatta was staged in Henley in 1839 and the lively and festive event has grown each year.

Now it is time to start making your way back to France in order to arrive in time for the start of the 95th annual Tour de France, which lasts for almost the entire month, running from July 5 to 26.

The tour's start coincides with Wimbledon's last week and the weekend of the Henley Royal Regatta. Thus, if you hurry, you could head back across the English Channel in

time to catch the tour's start in Brittany. The mountain stages are also always exciting to watch and this year the tour even enters into Italy for two days.

After that, work your way back to England for the British Open at Royal Birkdale, July 17 to 20. The British Open is sometimes a challenging tournament to see—both because of where it is sometimes held and the often less than pleasant weather. You are lucky this year: Royal Birkdale in Liverpool is fairly accessible compared to other courses. So, seize the opportunity and enjoy some serious links golf.

What a way to spend a few months in Europe! Just thinking of the sports-related excitement that takes place there in such rapid succession makes me want to experience it all over again. It's simply amazing how much you can see, even on a backpacker's budget. It just takes a little ingenuity and creative planning to make this kind of a trip happen. So, take advantage of my travel advice, enjoy and bon voyage! ■

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