

Global Travel Planning Podcast

Episode 104 - How to Add Soft Adventure to Your European Itinerary

Tracy Collins in conversation with Lynne Nieman, founder of Wander Your Way

Tracy: Lynne, welcome to the Global Travel Planning Podcast. Can you introduce yourself and tell us about Wander Your Way?

Lynne: First of all, thanks for having me, Tracy. After heat waves and everything, we're finally able to record. So Wander Your Way is really all about independent travel to Europe. I think I started it because I felt like when you would Google Europe travel, it was always bringing up the motorcoach tours. And I realised that I wanted to help people be able to travel the way they wanted to, to Europe. A lot of people maybe didn't feel comfortable planning it themselves, didn't know where to start. So I decided to hang out my shingle, digitally of course, and start my own travel planning agency. That's really where Wander Your Way started.

Lynne: That was my philosophy: I really wanted to help people travel their way and follow their interests, and not necessarily go just to the big sites and tick those things off their list, but to find what their interests were and guide them into some lesser-known places. That's what started it, and it's now morphed. I had a blog, then I started the podcast during the pandemic, and then I decided that I wanted to have small group travel. So now I have Wander Your Way Adventures, which kicked off in 2025 with the first tour to the Dolomites. The idea there was, even though it's group travel, it's still trying to get to some of those places that most people aren't going to, and bringing together like-minded people who want to have those shared experiences in Europe.

Tracy: And was there a particular moment or experience that made you feel that that's what you wanted to do? Or was it just the realisation that there is a different way of doing things?

Lynne: I always go back to the one trip where my parents actually did make it out of the country. They went to Ireland with me in 2010. I was going over for a friend's wedding, and they were living back where I grew up in Cincinnati. I was still living in Colorado at the time, and I just said, "If anybody wants to go with me," and put that out there to family and friends. And my parents, surprisingly, who had never been out of the country, and were in their late seventies at the time, decided to go with me. And so the planning process, because we were all so far apart, we would email or have calls, and my mom and I kind of planned it.

Lynne: I gave them guidebooks. I said, where do you want to go? And so we put together an itinerary together, going back and forth: these are some things I'd like to do, these are some things I think you guys would like. My dad even came up with a place he wanted to see, and I was like, I don't even know where that is, Dad. He found places I wasn't familiar with.

Lynne: And then my mom and I would decide where to stay. I would send over three or four places and say, I'll let you make the final choice, these all look good to me. That's actually how I do things with my clients. So I think when I did that, I thought, well, this is kind of fun. And it gave us a chance to follow the interests and go to some different places that aren't on the main tourist track. We went to the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland, but we also went to the Beara Peninsula, because that was just something different. And my dad found the "Cliffs of Amazement", as I think Lonely Planet was calling them, the cliffs that are further south in County Clare. He said, let's go here, and I said, I've never

heard of this. Yes, let's go. This sounds amazing. So yeah, I think that lit a bit of a fire, and then it was in late 2013, early 2014 that I started the business.

Tracy: And you talk about soft adventure. If somebody hasn't heard about it, what exactly is soft adventure? What does it include, and what does it not include?

Lynne: I like to classify soft adventure as, I guess some synonyms would be adventure light or gentle adventure. If I say the word adventure, usually you think about somebody kayaking or whitewater rafting or hanging off a cliff, or scaling a big peak, or careering down a path on a mountain bike, all in the kit and the helmet and everything. That's not what soft adventure is. Soft adventure is you may be taking a nice little gentle walk through a local park or a forest, or getting on a bicycle and taking an easy cycle along the Loire River, stopping at a chateau or a winery or one of the towns. It doesn't require somebody to be some uber physically fit person, and not a lot of skill. The entry level is low. Most everybody can go out and have a walk.

Lynne: It makes nature more accessible. For me, I lived in Colorado for 15 years, so I loved being in the outdoors there. And I think that in Europe, the cities get all the top billing, and maybe some of the bigger sites. But getting into nature, and even the little villages, because sometimes you can walk village to village in some places. England is perfect for that. There are public footpaths everywhere in England.

Lynne: It's like, oh, there's a public footpath, where does it go? And that's the great thing about it. With soft adventure, you can just go and take a walk. You don't have to be out for long. You can go out for 30 minutes if you want. You can walk 20 minutes out and turn around and come 20 minutes back from a town. Maybe you're staying in a town and you see a path, you can follow that. If you are into cycling, you can rent a bike and get on a paved trail, and there are a lot of rails-to-trails kind of things too. To me it just makes it accessible, and it gets you away from the main cities. It can get you out into the small towns, the countryside, and you can have those connections with the people, which ultimately I think is the great thing about travel.

Tracy: You've painted a lovely picture there of the kind of soft adventure you could include in your travels. But if somebody's planning a trip to Europe at the minute, what could they realistically add into an itinerary they've already started putting together? I guess maybe some out-of-the-way places, because obviously there are always the top cities that everybody wants to go to, but there are some amazing places not too far from a lot of cities as well.

Lynne: I think that's exactly it. The first thing to do is look at the map and see what might be nearby. If you are going to be in London or Paris or Rome or somewhere like that, look at the map and see what might be close by. It may be a train or a bus ride away. If you are going to rent a car and hit some other places, that opens up probably even more. But I would first look and see what's around you. Look for those green spaces. Look for parks. They might be local parks, regional parks. You might be lucky and there's a national park.

Lynne: The other thing that often gets overlooked as a resource is the local tourism boards, because a lot of times they will have things there. It might be that you're looking at the tourism board for a specific region, Normandy in France for example, and then you might even be able to look at a certain city or town in there, and they may have a small local tourism board. It never hurts to reach out to those people. There's usually some sort of contact person, and you can say, I'm interested in

someplace where I can get into nature and maybe take a walk, or get on a bicycle, or paddle in a nice little lake, something like that. It's out there. It's just not the first thing that Google is going to give you.

Tracy: Absolutely. And actually, sometimes you don't have to plan it. I was in the Lake District in June, and we'd been on a tour all day, got back, and we were thinking, what should we do? Now, I'm not a big one for hiking, and I'm always a bit concerned about what level I hike at. Is it going to be too much for me? Is it going to be too hard? I don't mind a stroll or a walk, but when it gets into what feels to me a bit more intimidating hiking, I'm a bit wary.

Lynne: Ooh.

Tracy: But I did exactly what you're saying. I went into the information office in Windermere, beside the train station, and just said, I want to do a walk. Where's the nearest walk? And it was literally across the road and up a hill. It was about an hour up the hill, a slow stroll, a beautiful view of Windermere, and back down again. I was very proud of myself, because it was a very warm day. But that wasn't even planned in, it just happened.

Tracy: And exactly like you say, they asked, what sort of walk do you want? There's one just across the road. And they described it: this is what you do, follow that, and away you go. It's actually sometimes a lot easier than you think. Sometimes we put our own barriers up by thinking, oh, that might be a little bit too tough. But actually, sometimes it's taking that step and going and asking and finding out, and going, okay, I'm going to give that a go.

Lynne: And you're right when you say we can put our own barriers up, because you think, oh, you can't do it. But the thing of it is, I've been out on so many easy strolls, easy walks that are mostly level, even mostly flat. There might just be a little bit of undulation. And I feel like for most people, there will be something there that you are capable of. And yes, asking the locals, whether it's going into the local tourism office, they're always great. Or even asking wherever you might be staying. If you're staying in a B&B, you might be able to ask there. Ask shopkeepers or store owners. A lot of times your server in a cafe might know of something. So it doesn't hurt to ask the locals and use those local resources.

Tracy: Absolutely. And when it comes to actually planning a trip to Europe, are there any particular resources, apps or websites, that you'd recommend people look at for finding walking routes and gentle nature experiences across Europe?

Lynne: Well, AllTrails is one of the more famous apps that a lot of people use. You can definitely do hardcore hiking on there, but the nice thing is you can use it for free to a certain degree, and then of course there's more when you pay for it. Usually it's a good place to start, because they grade the routes, and you can see the ones that are easy. If that's where you're starting, you can look at that, and a lot of times you can see on a map where it is. It's a good overall app to use. Again, I would say for more specific information on exactly where you're going, the local tourism boards are probably going to have even better information. They'll list things like family walks or discovery walks or cultural walks. Those are some of the keywords I would look for when you are looking in a specific area, if you are just getting into it and not really sure.

Tracy: Perfect. Now, are there any destinations in Europe, and I can't wait to hear what you're going to say about this question, that particularly lend themselves to soft adventure but might actually surprise people? Places they might not necessarily think of?

Lynne: Well, I would definitely say where you're from, and where I am currently: the UK. I think England in particular. Scotland has the whole right-to-roam thing, so you can go anywhere. But England has, as we were talking about, so many footpaths. These public footpaths are just everywhere. You can literally walk out of your cottage or your B&B and you will probably find some sort of public footpath, and you can just walk along it. Now, there might be sheep out in the field, but that's part of it. That's one place that I think surprises a lot of people.

Lynne: And surprisingly enough, I've spent a lot of time in the Dolomites in Italy, and there are places there where you can get on trails that are a lot easier than you think. The Alpe di Siusi in particular, and some of the towns around there are Castelrotto and Ortisei. You can take a cable car up, and then you're up in this high alpine meadow. Yes, there are more difficult climbs you might be able to do, but there are also roads, and people rent e-bikes up there. So it's actually a place, surprisingly enough, that is very accessible and very easy for a lot of people to get out onto a trail.

Tracy: In a beautiful part of the world.

Lynne: It's stunning there. It's one of my favourite places. And I always say look for those little local parks. I remember being in one of my favourite little towns in Ireland, Kenmare in County Kerry. Nearby is Killarney National Park, and there are some easy things right there, like right around the lake. But right in Kenmare, I remember looking at Google Maps and spotting this little park, and that's exactly what it was: a little woodland right on the outskirts of Kenmare. There was a treesy area, and you were along the Kenmare River that runs out into the sea. The walks were easy. It's not like there were miles and miles of paths, but it was a great little place right there in the heart of the town where you could just go and have a wander about for an hour. And it felt like all the local people were there. I saw friends walking together, people out with their kids. Those little local parks can be great places to get that local flavour of a spot, and that's part of soft adventure.

Tracy: Absolutely, that sounds amazing. It is always lovely when you do that kind of wander. I think about when I was in Puglia a couple of years ago, wandering around in the evening, and all the couples would go out after dinner for a wander around the little village. It was a really beautiful atmosphere and a lovely thing to do. Now, for people preparing themselves if they're going to do any walking, and I'll talk about gentle walks rather than hiking, is there anything they should do to prepare, things they should always take with them? Anything people should do but tend not to? What would be your tips?

Lynne: Well, I'm the person that lived in Colorado for 15 years, so I always have more than I need, just because I knew how the weather could change out there. And that's something that applies in places like the UK or Ireland too, as you know. It can change that way. I'd say the first thing is always take water with you, just in case the walk or the cycle is a little bit longer than you think. I think you always take a rain jacket, unless you really know it isn't going to rain. Having a rain jacket is always a good thing.

Lynne: Obviously have your mobile phone, and know the emergency numbers for the country that you're visiting, because it's different everywhere. For us in the States it's 911, but it's different elsewhere, so know what that is just in case something happens. And I would say dress appropriately, with proper footwear, especially if you're walking. If you have a map or access to a map, that could be on your phone. I always think it's a good idea to take a charger for your phone just in case. I do. Or you might just want to grab a paper map. And sometimes when you start there are

placards at a trailhead. Snap a quick picture of it. I do that all the time, just so I know, because even on a simple walk there might be three different trails, and you want to make sure you stay on the yellow route or the red route. Sometimes they're coloured or named or numbered. So you might want to do that just to make sure.

Lynne: Those are a few things I can think of. And I would say just be prepared for the weather to change, depending on where you are in the world. It never hurts to have an extra layer with you.

Tracy: That's true. As you say, we never know with the weather in Europe these days, actually. It's all a bit different from what it used to be, not as predictable. One thing I will add to that is travel insurance as well. We never go anywhere without travel insurance, because you just never know. You can trip over and twist your ankle in the blink of an eye, and I've been on trips where that's happened. So I always say, whatever you're going to do, whether it's soft adventure or just going to sit on a beach, always make sure your travel insurance is sorted.

Lynne: Agreed.

Tracy: Now, we talked a little bit about weaving some soft adventure and nature experiences into an itinerary. But what happens if somebody's sitting here thinking, I love the idea of doing that, but I don't really want to plan it myself? Can you talk about what a small group tour like yours offers that independent travel does not?

Lynne: So what we do is, most days, and a lot of the trips are eight or nine days, so they're not particularly long, we are getting out on a trail with a guide or guides, depending on how many travellers we have. You don't have to think about it. You're just following the guide, and as you're going along, you're getting some interpretation of what you're seeing. It might be some of the natural things, it might be some of the cultural things, some of the stories about a place. You're getting somebody who is leading you, and you don't really have to think about where you're going, which is really nice.

Lynne: And you're getting something more from it. On this recent one that we did here in Scotland, which was in the Cairngorms and some of the Highlands, we were listening to and learning some of the bird songs, and we were learning about some of the geology. We took a walk around Balmoral Castle and saw some of the cairns of Queen Victoria's family. Ray, our guide, was explaining who was who and the relationships, so you got some history as well. That's where going on a tour gives you that nice mix. We didn't have to worry about packing our lunches, because that was all taken care of. We brought our snacks, and Ray had snacks and was always feeding us. We certainly didn't go hungry.

Lynne: And it's not like you're walking all day. There may be a stop somewhere. On this recent one in Scotland, we went to Ruthven Barracks, we went to Blair Castle, we did a distillery tour. You're getting a little bit of that weaved into getting out into nature. And I think you're also getting to places that maybe you wouldn't even know about. Some of the places that we went are definitely more well-known, but some of the places not as much. That's the nice thing.

Tracy: And what's actually included in the tour? I hear often about your bags being moved for you if you walk from one place to another. Was it that kind of walking from A to B?

Lynne: No, not on this one. I do have one coming out for 2027 which is walking Hadrian's Wall. That is different: that will be walking place to place, and your things are moved. This one was more that every two nights we moved to a different hotel, and everything went with us. We all packed up, put our cases in the van, and away we went. But the nice thing is, yes, all accommodation, all transportation, and most of the meals: every breakfast, and probably six or seven out of eight nights of dinners are covered. Same with lunches. There might be one or two that weren't, where we had a day taking care of things on our own. So all of that is included.

Lynne: And then a lot of the entrance fees. On the Scotland one, we went to the Cairngorm reindeer herd, which was a more touristy thing to do, but it was so much fun, because the reindeer come up to you and you get to feed them. They had their babies when we were there, so the little ones were still running around, and it was such a fun experience. Everybody really loved it, despite the fact that it was definitely a more touristy thing to do. But it was amazing. Things like that, some of your experiences, our entrance into Blair Castle and our distillery tour, that was all included as well. So really, most everything is included, which is nice. You don't have to worry about paying for a lot of things.

Tracy: That's amazing. And I'm very excited to hear that you are doing a walk along Hadrian's Wall, because that's my part of the country. In fact, I was born not very far from Hadrian's Wall.

Lynne: I'll tell you what, I've done one long-distance walk. I've done the West Highland Way here in Scotland, where I am right now, back in 2017. So I'm going to have to get in shape for this one, since I'm the host of this tour. But Hadrian's Wall has been one of the ones that I've wanted to do for the longest time, so I'm really excited about it.

Tracy: Yeah, that's fabulous. You'll have to come on the UK Travel Planning Podcast and talk about that one, I think. Now, Lynne, if someone is listening and they're curious, but they have never done anything like this before, what would you say to encourage them to take that first step?

Lynne: The first thing is know yourself, and know what you're going to be comfortable with. With that in the back of your mind, if you're planning a trip to Europe sometime and you're thinking, yes, I want to get out, I want to do something: well, where are you going? If you already know that you're going to be in a certain country, certain city, certain places, look and see what's nearby, and then begin to dig. You almost have to keep digging a little bit deeper, like I said, until you get down into those local tourism board areas. Look at the map and start to see what's there. Google is going to be your friend, or whatever your search engine is, and just keep looking. And I would certainly say if you need help, reach out to a travel advisor, such as myself, to help you find some of that.

Lynne: But I think that's what you have to do. Ask, what would I be comfortable with? If you'd be okay walking from village to village along a nice rural road, or through the sheep fields or something like that, see if something like that is nearby to where you're going to stay, and then start finding out what's available. Again, I think the tourism board sites are sometimes not utilised enough. We forget about them and start going down other rabbit holes. The other thing is, if you find somebody who specialises in a certain part of the world, like where you're going, the UK or France for example: I found some great information for the Loire Valley through a blog I just happened upon, and they had wonderful information. So if you have somebody that you've already followed, and you trust the information they're giving you, and maybe they're even pointing you to some resources, that's not a bad place to start as well. Or a good podcast.

Tracy: One hundred per cent. Absolutely agree with you. A good podcast, exactly. Travel specialists. Now then, where can our listeners find you and find out more about Wander Your Way Adventures?

Lynne: So you can go to Wander Your Way, that's wanderyourway.com. That is the main website where the blog, the podcast and the travel planning services all are. And then there is wanderyourwayadventures.com, and that's where the small group tours are. You can find out more about those there if you are interested.

Tracy: Perfect. And we'll link to those in the show notes. But thanks very much for coming on to the podcast this week and having a chat all about soft adventure. It sounds a great way of including something a little bit gentle but fun into your itinerary.

Lynne: Thanks, Tracy. Appreciate it.