

# *Traveling to Europe – You had better prepare!*

*By Mike DuBose*

Going to Europe can be a great deal of fun, but careful preparation is critical so your “*Great, Dream Trip*” does not turn into a “*Nightmare*” as in my case. This article gives the first-time European traveler tips and insight into how to reduce conflict and problems. I am going to take you back to 2005, as my family of four planned and traveled in Italy, France, and Switzerland.

**Deciding Where to Go:** Each European country offers its unique culture, history, tourist attractions, food, drink, and language. We decided to visit Italy, France, and Switzerland on our first trip because these countries were geographically grouped close together. If I had it to all over again, I would have stayed in one country. Having to pack on each move, combined with the extensive travel time added to our stress. And, the more places you visit, the greater the chances that something will go wrong. Above all, remember that going to Europe will not be a relaxing vacation.

**Determining When to Go:** We chose July, 2005 for our European excursion since we had a school-aged child who accompanied us, making our window of time limited. But, if I were to do it again, I would travel in the spring or early fall since July proved to be hot and the streets were crowded with tourists. Europe is on similar latitude as the US, so our seasons are about the same. The summer is also the heaviest in travel demand, so prices for everything are elevated since this is the high tourist season.

**Mode of Travel:** I chose to fly Delta Airlines since I am a Gold Medallion Member in their frequent flier program. The earlier you choose your flights, the cheaper the prices and the better your chances are of using those frequent flier miles you have been building up. Airlines typically open their routes and reservations 330 days prior to your departure dates. There are other great airlines to fly such as Air France, an Alliance Member with Delta. Pricing for airlines varies at different times of the year. Here are some of the best worldwide web sites to assess discounted airline tickets.

[farecast.com](http://farecast.com)

[farecompare.com](http://farecompare.com)

[airfarewatchdog.com](http://airfarewatchdog.com)

[kayak.com](http://kayak.com)

[hotwire.com](http://hotwire.com)

Also, go to [www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com) to view the different jets used by the airlines and the best seats to select – or to avoid! This has been a great resource!

When flying, you have the choice of traveling in coach or business class. I always prefer business class since one sits on larger, padded seats and receives more individualized attention with higher quality food, but it costs significantly more. The new jets will have seats that fold into a bed-like position. Traveling ten hours is a very long way to be crunched between two other people in small, coach seats. If you fly coach, be sure to examine [www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com) to find the best seat. Our articles on traveling, located under resources at [www.columbiameetings.com](http://www.columbiameetings.com) are

very helpful in choosing seats with some excellent tips on flying. You are better off selecting an exit row on a bulk head where two seats exist with more leg room. Be prepared for cooler temperatures and your location being noisier -- ask for a blanket early on!

**Group versus Individual Touring:** Folks like to travel to foreign lands in different ways. Some like the highly structured tour groups, while others prefer group tours with free time to mingle with the population. Some like to plan all the events and sight seeing. If I had to do it again, I would recommend hiring a private, local guide, with a van, who could carry our family to the key sights or go with a smaller group. You can go to Google or Yahoo and type in Italy Tour Guides. AAA has always been helpful in providing me with maps and tour recommendations.

**Obtaining Your Passport:** If you are planning to take a Caribbean cruise, Canadian trip, Mexican excursion, or European tour, you will need an updated US passport. If you already have one, check the expiration date since they need to be renewed every ten years or less for children. Because of terrorism, it takes longer to obtain a passport. You will need a certified or original birth certificate and a passport picture that must be a certain size. It takes about ten (10) weeks to obtain a passport and you generally can apply at the US Post Office. I suggest that you drop by the post office for the forms to complete and return later with the completed applications. You can also visit the US State Department's web site at <http://travel.state.gov/passport> for detailed information and travel alerts or suggestions. If you are in a rush, the US State Department has an expedited, more expensive application processes. Congressman Joe Wilson has also been very helpful in expediting passport requests. Without a passport, you aren't going very far! Guard your passport with your life because we heard thieves were stealing them. However, if you lose yours while traveling, you can visit the US Embassy in the country you are visiting for a replacement.

**Reading about the Countries You Plan to Visit:** I recommend that you read the excellent publication *Frommer's Guide* because it rates all the hotels, points of interest, and restaurants, while giving you excellent advice on things to do and see – or, avoid. You can buy the guide at most book stores like Books-A-Million, Barnes and Noble, etc. If this is your first trip to Europe, I would recommend that you stay in one country in a centralized point so you can take excursions from a central hotel and you will not have to pack and unpack many times. I enjoyed Italy because the people were very friendly, most citizens spoke English, and there were tons of things to see, great food and drink to consume, and wonderful scenery and history. The Internet is also filled with information.

**Packing and Your Luggage:** Plan on your luggage getting lost!! I REPEAT LOST! Lost clothes seemed to be a common problem in Europe and we learned why! I recommend that you travel light and take most of your clothes onto the plane with you or ship them ahead using a service. **If I have any advice, this is the most important!** A Delta flight attendant recommended to tightly roll each piece of clothing in your suitcase. Take the least amount of clothing (mostly light ones) and wash during your trip. Wear your heavier clothes aboard the plane. If you check any baggage, place a bright colored cloth or ribbon on each piece of your luggage handle that can be seen very easily (i.e., bright red) and purchase some of those large ID tags for quick identification to avoid someone else picking up your luggage. Remember that the new weight limit for each piece of luggage is 40 pounds (50 pounds for business class). Another piece of advice is to purchase luggage insurance. For about \$15 per person, American Express will guarantee delivery of your luggage within a few hours of arrival or provide reimbursement if

they cannot secure them within a certain time frame. Never pack medicines or valuables in your checked luggage. Take them aboard the plane with you. If you are taking any prescriptions, ensure that you take a physician's written prescription to verify that they are legal. While most hotels will have electrical conversion kits, I would recommend that you purchase a kit with different attachments (most countries have their own devices) for about \$15 from a luggage store. We found that Columbia Luggage and Leather Goods in Columbia, SC had many overseas travel aids or you can go on-line to order one with multiple adapters. Because of tighter security, you can only take liquids such as toothpaste, mouthwash, and shampoo in containers that do not individually exceed about 3 ounces. Be sure to have any liquids out of your suitcase in a plastic bag when going through security, unless they are in checked baggage. When flying, prepare for a very cold plane!

**Money Exchange:** Of course, if you are traveling to the European countries, 13 countries accept the Euro. Prior to leaving, I recommend that you obtain about \$700 in Euros. I made this exchange through American Express. One dollar equates to about \$1.33 for one Euro in April, 2007. Once you arrive in Europe, then change your way of thinking from dollars into Euros. I was pleasantly surprised to find that my Bank of America Debit Card could withdraw Euros from any ATM machine in Europe and deduct my withdrawals from my checking account back home. ATMs were widely available throughout Europe and my bank was connected to all of them, so I did not have to carry around large sums of cash with me. Check with your bank prior to leaving to ensure that your debit card will work. Most guides recommend that you primarily use credit cards to charge your purchases.

**Credit Cards:** Nearly all stores accepted credit cards, especially American Express, MasterCard, and Visa. You want to check with your credit card company before traveling to see if there is an additional fee when merchandise or services paid for on a Euro exchange to American dollars (American Express charged me a 1% fee for all charges). **IMPORTANT** – alert your credit card companies when you will be traveling overseas. We have heard stories where traveler's accounts were frozen because the credit card computer recognized that suddenly a lot of suspicious overseas transactions were occurring! This is a serious problem in the credit card industry where overseas' thieves are stealing many US citizens' identities and credit card information; then, using them to order merchandise.

**Cell Phone and Long Distance Calls:** Your cell phone will probably not work in Europe. Carriers like Verizon offer pre-programmed, expensive cell phones that work in Europe. You can rent cell phones in the country once you arrive or purchase an International long distance card from the airport or tobacco shops (recommended). These calling cards are specific to each country (i.e., an international calling card that is purchased in Italy will probably not work in France). The rates were very reasonable -- about 5-10 cents per minute for calling back to the US. If you use the calling cards with a public telephone, 30 minutes will be deducted from your card's allotment of time for each call, in addition to the time actually used during the conversation. So, it is best to use it in your hotel room. But, sometimes, hotels will charge you by the minute for using their phones (We had a \$90 hotel bill for using our calling card!). Later we learned from a traveler that you can use the hotel's business center's telephone to call home with our long distance card at no charge.

**Travel, Automobile, and Medical Insurance:** Check with your agents to determine if your medical and car insurance policies will cover you while in a foreign country. Things can go

wrong on your trip and you may want to consider purchasing travel and medical insurance which will guarantee reimbursement and assistance while on your trip. *Frommer's Guide* outlines the details of these temporary policies and reputable vendors. You do not need additional immunizations for travel to Europe.

**Hotel Reservations:** If you travel with a tour group, your hotels are generally included in the cost of the trip. However, inquire into the quality of the hotels the group will be using since we have heard some stories about groups staying in poor hotels. Always go with reputable tour companies that have been in business for more than ten years. AAA or AARP are usually safe companies to deal with. Also check the airlines and hotels for group packages. We like Hilton hotels because we know the quality will be good. Also, you want to select a hotel that is centrally located so you can walk out of your hotel into the business or tourism district. We stayed at the best hotel -- the Rome Cavalieri Hilton. If there is a six star hotel rating, this is it! The luxury hotel is located on 15 acres on top of a hill where we could view Rome and the Vatican. The view at night was awesome and once a week, the hotel had a fabulous display of fireworks. However, it was about ten miles from Rome. Transportation to and from the city from our hotel was complimentary at certain times. But, our location took away time and the hotel was situated away from most restaurants. A cheeseburger plate at the hotel was 25 Euros or \$30 each. I about passed out when the bill for four cheeseburgers and drinks ran about \$150! However, if you shop in Rome, most food was reasonably priced, especially off the less traveled, side streets. Most hotels accept AAA or AARP discounts on their room pricing. Remember as you book your hotels, think smaller rooms as compared to America. And, ensure that you have your own, private bathroom since some hotels require unrelated guests to share!

**Train Reservations:** The fast trains in Europe are the way to travel. You should order your tickets prior to leaving and *Frommer's Guide* provides recommendations on where to purchase them in the US. You can also go to Google and type in Eurail and select the American locations to buy tickets. When we called, our Eurail agent was an experienced European traveler and an excellent resource. The key is to determine the exact ticket you need by selecting the number of countries you plan to visit and days you will be traveling, and the time frame over which the travel will occur. We selected three countries, eight days of travel, over a two-month period and the cost was \$828 for two adults. We used the train to travel to Rome, Florence, Milan, and Venice, Italy and then to Switzerland and France. So, \$414 for two, first class train tickets for our travel was reasonable. Once you have secured tickets, you can travel to any country that you select within a window of time. I recommend that you purchase first class train tickets. The quality of persons who ride in these train coaches is better, and the car is quieter, less crowded, and has larger, comfortable seats. We have provided additional information on trains in this article.

**Automobile Reservations:** Don't plan on traveling by car in Rome, Paris, or any larger city. Parking is horrendous and people drive like it is their last day on earth! Ensure you have plenty of insurance if you decide to take your life into your hands and rent a car. I was surprised how expensive cars were to rent as compared to the US. We chose to use a taxi or the train between cities. Driving in the countryside would be fun and less hectic, but think carefully about your luggage and if all the pieces will fit into the smaller cars that are prevalent in Europe. Gas will be running around \$5 per gallon. (April, 2007).

**Tour Reservations:** Unless you are selecting a private tour guide (recommended), you can purchase most of your tours at the hotel where you are staying. Europe has the red, double deck, open-air tour buses. Travelers have access to earphones with an English voice guide as you tour through the city. If the weather is nice, the top, open air buses were fun. You can get off and on anytime you wish without notice. However, when you are touring on your own, there are long lines; whereas, tour groups with guides will channel you in and out of sites faster. If you visit the Vatican, watch out for hot temperatures inside (there is no air conditioning) and you must wear appropriate clothes (Women must wear head covers and shorts, on anyone, are not allowed). They refused to allow me to enter the Vatican because my shorts were not below my knees, even after I spent one hour in line and made it through security.

**Prepare for Pick Pockets:** Crime is not a great problem in Italy, but pick pockets and thieves are your greatest threat, especially around the Vatican and train stations. Don't leave valuables in your hotel room or car and take a fanny pack or concealed pouch where you can guard your valuables while traveling. Gypsies are also prevalent. You have to watch them around train stations because they act like they work for the station and offer to provide you assistance – then demand a tip.

**On the Day You Leave the US:** Be sure to plan for a flat tire and any other problems that you may face on the way to the airport. I suggest that you check the status of your flight before leaving home. We arrived at the airport for our first leg of our flight, only to learn that it had been delayed. I recommend that you consider driving to your main airport from which your European flight leaves such as Atlanta or fly in a day early and spend the night at the airport hotel. Plan your flights to allow plenty of time to check in. Our horror trip began when the first leg of our 45-minute flight to take us to Atlanta, Georgia was delayed three times. I thought I had considered everything by allowing four hours to travel from Columbia, SC to Atlanta, GA. When we arrived in Atlanta, we witnessed our Rome, Italy flight pulling out of the gate! We had missed our main US-Rome flight by minutes!

**IMPORTANT:** What I learned is that the specially designed jets used for the international flights are not arriving from another city like most US flights, but rather have been sitting in the gate overnight. They always leave on time and the airlines will not wait on you, even if inclement weather has delayed your flight, or you are one of their best customers. Delta was good enough to put my family on a flight going to Madrid, Spain with an offer to pay for us to get from Spain to Rome once I landed. However, our bags, unknowing to us, stayed in Atlanta! When we arrived in Spain, few people could speak English and we were trapped there for a day. When we finally arrived in Rome, we looked pretty rough and had no clothes! While I am pampered by Delta as a Gold Medallion Member in the US, once I landed on foreign soil, I am nobody! And, the toll free 800 Delta customer service numbers I knew did not work in Europe. When we finally arrived in Rome from Spain, it was late at night, everything was closed, and nobody spoke English! We decided to go to our hotel about ten miles outside of Rome.

When we arrived at our luxury hotel, we looked like the Clampetts of the Beverley Hillbillies television show – with only the clothes on our backs -- ready to kill someone! That was after riding in one of those Italian taxis, which scared us half to death! Those taxi drivers drive like they have a Ferrari wanting to be let loose!

To make matters worse, we were one day behind because we were diverted to Spain on my carefully organized and planned schedule. I had to call all my hotels and make adjustments. The Rome airport was twenty miles away from my hotel and taxi costs were about \$80 each way. After two days of trying to figure out where my luggage was, I just hopped into a taxi and told them, “*Take me to the airport!*” I was determined to find my luggage. Once I arrived and was directed to several, large rooms where lost luggage was stored, I was simply amazed to find hundreds of pieces of luggage that were clearly marked with address and contact information that had been sitting there for more than six months. No one seemed to care!

**The message – prepare for everything to go wrong!** Remember the American Express luggage in insurance I mentioned earlier?

**Cultural Differences:** Europe is definitely different from the US, but it is a great place to visit. Overall, the people in Italy were the friendliest and nearly everyone spoke English as a second language. Some of the items I noticed were:

- 1- Coffee is stronger and Europeans do not offer Equal and Sweet-N-Low artificial sweeteners, so plan to take your own. Europeans sell drinks like Coke and Pepsi, but are sometimes called different names (i.e., instead of Diet Coke, it was Light Coke).
- 2- Use of ice is limited and unless you ask, you will not receive any ice with your drinks. They consume a great deal of bottled water (called Aqua) and you have to differentiate between carbonated water referred to as “*Aqua with gas*” and “*Aqua with no gas.*” We got a few laughs from that one!
- 3- Customer service, while pretty good, is not the quality as in America and waiters don’t seem to want to work for a tip.
- 4- Most tobacco and grocery stores sell alcohol. The Europeans drink a lot of wine since that is a main commodity. Their diets are also rich in pasta, cheese, and dairy products. Grocery stores were hard to find.
- 5- Europe is on a 220 electrical volt system, whereas American is more on the 110 system. Be careful about plugging expensive equipment to these converters (My son’s DVD player was fried). Therefore, you will need to bring a conversion kit. Most of the nicer hotels will lend you an electrical converter kit or have them built in the room. It was interesting that each country or hotel we visited used a different adapter with the 220 system. Every hotel also had a different shower system that was very complicated to use.
- 6- Internet cafes (rooms with more than 100 computers) were very reasonably priced at \$5 per hour for a computer rental with access to the Internet; whereas, the hotel charged \$20 per hour. At the Internet cafes, we were able to access our AOL Internet account and check e-mails each day. Watch your hotel bills carefully. Europeans will tax and nickel one to death! One hotel charged us \$5 to access a toll free 800 number and we dialed that number eight times before we realized this! Ask questions about charges when you check in and check your bill each day for any surprises versus having a heart attack when you check out! And, remember that Europe has an additional 10% value added tax called VAT.
- 7- Automobiles are smaller in Europe because of the high price of gasoline. If you are taking a lot of luggage, the chances of obtaining a taxi diminishes because of limited room inside the smaller automobile. Most taxi drivers will negotiate on prices, while others were offended when we tried to cut a deal. Sometimes, it requires approaching

several drivers to obtain a discount. And, watch those taxi meters. Be sure you have a clear price before they take you off into Euro Land!

- 8- European airlines are very competitive and sometimes it is cheaper to fly between your destinations than take the train. We found the Italian or Alitalia Airlines provided great customer service. They even served complimentary wine in the coach section.
- 9- The metric system is utilized in Europe, so forget the miles, pounds, miles per hour, gallons, etc.

**Using the Train:** The train system is used extensively in Europe and connects to most cities. In fact, some children used it to go to school and many traveled to work versus using a car. However, just having a ticket does not guarantee you a seat! It is first-come-first-served! A frequent traveler clued us in to make a reservation for our next stop immediately when we got off the preceding stop. Thus, we could reserve our seats one day ahead and that worked really well. A word of caution -- you have to physically write onto your train ticket the dates of travel for each trip you take. Over our two-week vacation, I wrote in seven travel dates for each train trip. It is like an honor system that is randomly checked by the conductor. One time we made a mistake by inserting the wrong date and the conductor threatened to confiscate our tickets and fine us! So, write in your information very, very carefully and legibly with the exact dates! Don't even think about scratching through anything!

Eurail train tickets are honored in most European countries since they are part of a European Alliance which includes thirteen countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, and Finland. Be sure to obtain a map where all the different Eurail trains travel, in addition to the booklet of discount coupons that come with your tickets. The Eurail map will illustrate the different routes and the types of trains that you can take.

Trains come in two categories: slow, standard trains (50 MPH) or fast ones like the Eurostar that reaches speeds of 150 MPH. We took the fast trains, but even at 150 MPH, one does not know you are going that fast. They were great for touring the countryside.

As you enter the train stations, watch your luggage, both in the train station, as well as on the train. Experienced travelers warned us about thieves and we watched a thief in action right before our eyes in the station!

Look for conductors and customer service reps standing near the end of the tracks. Most spoke English and were helpful in guiding us to the correct train. Trains are similar and you need to find the large sign that displays when trains are arriving and departing. Remember that most of the trains are on a twenty-four hour time system similar to the military. Then, find the track number. I always asked customer service reps just in case. If you have first class tickets, there are certain designated cars. We recommend that you bring a small, collapsible cooler filled with ice from your hotel since drinks served aboard the train were not cold. Ideally, you want to place your bags above your seat, but many times you have to store them at the train car's exit door. Local travelers warned us that thieves would get off the train and take your bags with them if you were not paying close attention since bags are stored right at the exit door!

Trains usually run about 15 minutes late, but leave on time! While the European countries are part of the Eurail Alliance, each country has its own trains and staff. The Italian train system was

the best and served complimentary drinks. They had battery chargers or converters in the bathrooms. Their food was good in the dining car and we recommend that you eat aboard the Italian dining car for the experience. The Swiss sold drinks and food from carts similar aboard an US airline; and, the French required you to stand in line at the bar on the train to pay for food.

Each coach has its own air conditioning system and if it quits working, train staff is not alerted. So, it is important to tell the conductor, if you can find him.

As stated earlier, when you reach your destination, be sure to make a reservation for a seat on your next ride. You will be issued a ticket with a specific train car and seat number. Otherwise, it is every man or woman for themselves. You can walk between the cars if a seat is not available in one car, but don't forget your luggage. If you are traveling within the country to another city, you will need to stand in the domestic line – not international. That bit of knowledge saved us hours!

The train will stop at different towns on the way to your destination. You can disembark and stretch your legs or stay in the city of your choice without notice to the conductor. One can travel on any route without having your luggage inspected. The security was very lax. Occasionally, we would have a SWAT officer walk through the train with a machine gun and trained dog.

Once we understood how it works, it was easy to maneuver. Some trains also had sleeping coaches, but these special rooms need to be reserved. But, beware that if you do not reserve all of the car's sleeping room, you could have company! The conductor locks you in for the night with your luggage. Instead of sleeping on the train, we decided to take a break midway in our trip by staying overnight in Milan.

### **An Overview of our Trip:**

**Rome, Italy** was just great! It is a modern city filled with history and outstanding food. All the Italians were friendly (except a few taxi drivers) and most citizens spoke English fairly well. Our hotel was a castle in itself and so luxurious, we stayed there a good bit of the time while we were searching for our luggage. There were shops all over the place in Rome with good deals. All the merchants would "*wheel and deal*" with you and were very friendly. We learned in Rome and other cities, that if you ordered directly inside a small restaurant that offered outside service, the price of food and drink was 50% less inside. A coke was \$3 inside and \$7 outside. If you sat outside at the table, sometimes, waiters would slip in a 12% service fee and a tip was expected on top of that. You pay to sit! We would always ask the customers who were sitting at the restaurant about the quality of food.

I would recommend that you consider staying at the Airport Rome Hotel on your last night if you are flying out from Rome. Most airlines now fly into Rome, Milan, Florence, and Venice, Italy. The Airport Rome Hotel is located at the airport and the train goes directly to both the hotel and airport. You can literally wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, and walk to your plane. This hotel had one of the best food buffets I have ever seen!

Of all the cities we visited, Rome was my favorite.

**Milan, Italy** is a major train center for connecting many countries. We stayed at the Hilton Hotel which was a couple blocks from the train station and served as an overnight break traveling between Paris and Rome. This city was filled with a great deal of history, but we did not have time to visit.

**Florence, Italy** was recently featured by the NBC Today Show and we felt like we had gone back into medieval times. This was the heart of the Renaissance. Unfortunately, we only had a day to visit, but the shops were great; the food was wonderful, especially on the side streets; and, there were hundreds of shops throughout the city. Florence is centrally located between Rome and Venice.

**Venice, Italy** was a very unique city surrounded by water with canals that ran down the streets. When you arrive, you have to carry your luggage from the train (so have rollers) to the port about three blocks away. Just ask for a water taxi which runs about \$50. Venice had a romantic feeling throughout the city. Be careful about making reservations because hotel rooms are very expensive; what you see on-line is not what you get; and, most rooms are very small. There are many shops, especially in the town square. Be sure to ride on the gondola boats. But, they too are very expensive -- \$75-\$100 per person! My wife, Deb, reminded me that we should have taken a ride, even if it was a rip off!

**Lake Geneva, Switzerland** was one of the cities on our way from Milan, Italy to Paris, France. We saw some magnificent sights going through the French and Swiss Alps. We stayed in the Hilton in Lake Geneva and it was beautiful. In Switzerland, we had to convert some of our currency to francs since they are not part of the Euro monetary system.

**Paris, France** was awesome, but it rained for part of our stay so we left early. The Arc de Triumph was neat and the Eiffel Tower was stunning. The tower is lit at night by brilliant lights that made the Eiffel Tower appear like shining gold. Seeing the Eiffel Tower was worth the trip. The French were not overly friendly and we expected that attitude. Sometimes, one thinks that they must have forgotten World War II.

**Pisa, Italy** was on our agenda to visit, but Americans who had visited indicated that other than the leaning tower of Pisa, it was not worth the trip. So, we canceled that portion of our adventure.

As I write this article, I am re-living the memories of our great times in Europe and the fun we had! Yes, part of the trip was horrific and frustrating. **But, I can taste that great Italian food and wonderful wines, while recalling the friendly people, and the history! That was great!**

As Arnold Schwarzenegger says, *“I’ll be back!”*

*About the author: Mike DuBose is an avid traveler and president of several Columbia, SC based corporations, including Research Associates [www.grantexperts.com](http://www.grantexperts.com) and the Columbia Conference Center [www.columbiameetings.com](http://www.columbiameetings.com). Visit [www.columbiameetings.com](http://www.columbiameetings.com) and select “resources” for other, excellent travel articles.*

*You may copy and distribute this article provided that it is copied in its entirety and credits are given. © Copyright Mike DuBose, April, 2007. All rights reserved.*