

***The Social Tester's  
Unofficial***

**SUPER-QUICK GUIDE TO**

***EuroSTAR***

# Getting the most from EuroSTAR

## {An un-official guide}

So here's the scene.

You've got tickets for EuroSTAR. You've got your passport sorted (assuming you need it). You're looking forward to getting to the event and kicking about with other rock-stars of testing.

But aaaarrggghh - you've never been to a big conference before, let alone EuroSTAR and you're now a little worried you'll not get the most from it.

You're worried that you'll miss out on crucial conversations.

You're worried that you'll be all alone in the evening or maybe you've just not got your plans sorted for what you're going to do at the event.

Maybe you're just not sure what to expect?

What follows is a very quick guide to getting the most from a EuroSTAR conference.

I'm no seasoned EuroSTAR veteran but I'm slowly clocking up conference trips and learning from each one I attend.

This guide is my way of sharing a few hints and tips with you before EuroSTAR kicks off.

# Plan your Travel

Enjoying your conference means ensuring you're focused on it.

One common distraction to your enjoyment can be travel details and worries.

It's always best to triple check your plans before you go, document them well and quadruple check you've not set yourself up for any complications like tight transfers or overlapping travel times. (Unless you have to)

If you're travel is sorted, planned and achievable you can focus on the important task of conferencing.

Here are some ideas:

- Book your airport return taxi when you get to the event
- Use a tool like TripIt to organise your whole trip
- Keep an electronic copy of all documents should you lose the paper copies
- Use a cloud based system in case you lose your digital device with the electronic copies
- Ensure you have suitable travel insurance
- Make sure you have the right payment options with you like a credit card and a little cash
- Ensure you're mobile phone is set up for roaming and has enough credit
- Note down the useful conference phone numbers in case you need to get in touch with someone

TripIt - <https://www.tripit.com/>

## Find a conversation

Conversations outside of the presentations are where an array of opinions is aired.

It's a chance to find out more from others, share your view or simply sit back and soak up the dialogue.

### **Find conversations**



You'll also get to connect to people, meet people from very different contexts to yours and enjoy the serendipity that comes from simply chatting to people you don't know.

Most people in the community are more approachable than you might think.

Many will spend the time to get to know you.

Some will only spend time getting to know you until they find out you can't help them, offer any work their way or you disagree with a well reasoned argument to their core ideas. They'll make their excuses and go. Good. You'll

be glad of that fact and you can move on and find someone more interesting.

The interesting conversations are happening all over.

There's a Tribe for you somewhere. There will be groups of people gathering to discuss the Waterfall methodology and its merits, agile, exploratory, context driven testing, lean and anything else you care to talk about.

There is guaranteed to be someone at the conference who you'll get on with – your main challenge is finding them. Social media can help greatly, but so too can just talking to people.

# Have a go at Testing

What????? Testing at a testing conference?

Find the Test-lab. Play with some software in the lab. Find some bugs. Make some silly noises with the various noise creating devices. High-Five the lab rats. Meet interesting people. Watch others do cool approaches to testing. Test some more. Find some more bugs. Have fun. Make more noise. Listen to some demos. Get involved. Chat with the “experts” (you’re an expert though – aren’t you?)

**Welcome to  
the  
TEST LAB**



It’s definitely worth getting to the Test Lab. It’s the best way to learn about testing.

It’s also a welcoming and friendly area to chill out and people-watch if that’s what you want to do.

I spend a lot of time in The Test Lab – I’m not sure if that’s a good advert for it or not.

Last year the Test Lab was much easier to find than previous years. Fingers crossed it BANG in the centre of the event this time because it’s the best place to get mingling, learn some testing and share your testing with others.

# Network, network and network some more

If you go to a conference and come away having not spoken to anyone else then you've missed a trick.

Networking at a conference is great fun. It's a great chance to meet people.

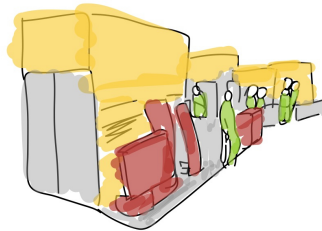
It's not about smarming your way around people, slipping business cards in to peoples pockets, laughing at bad jokes and generally being a "smooth operator".

It's about meeting people, chatting, making connections, putting faces to people you know on social networks and seeing where the action of talking to other testers may lead you.

# Products and Demos

No conference can function without some sort of funding.

Typically the funding comes from a number of sources, one being vendors who demo their goods and services.



**Vendors stalls and stands**

The expo centre at EuroSTAR is always impressive. There's always a chance to meet vendors who sell stuff you like, stuff that makes you rage and stuff that's cool but not suited.

There are always product demos and interesting giveaways so wander around, chat to people, seek out new tools/approaches and seek out new connections.

The vendors are partly ensuring you get conferences to go to. Without them you might be spending the week at work instead - it's worth taking the time to say "hi" to them all.

# Panels, Session, Tutorials and Keynotes

These are the central focus of a conference.

Most conferences have some sessions that won't float your boat.

Most conferences have sessions that will awe and inspire.

The EuroSTAR lineup this year looks great. I'm biased though ☺

Download the lineup, highlight the ones you want to get to and figure out a plan for the few days.

There is a lot going on at EuroSTAR so ensure you save some time to visit the Test Lab and the community stuff that's happening too. Don't pack your schedule with just track sessions otherwise you might miss other stuff throughout the day.

Pre-planning will give you a greater chance of finding a session that suits your needs.

I'm a geek so I've got an electronic copy with various sessions highlighted and clashes and potential conflicts. If you're normal then just grab a paper copy at the conference and a pen and get circling.

# Socialise. Socialise. Socialise

If you head back to the hotel after the conference and don't mingle with others then you could be missing a treat.

Sure, socialising is not for everyone. Some people are shyer than others, but to not spend the time socialising is to miss out on the networking, conversations and potential friendships that can form.

Some of my good friends have been people I have met at conferences. There are some people who I only get to see each year at conferences but it's like we've known each other for years.

The social side of a conference, for me, is the most important side. It's a chance to find like-minded people, or people to argue with, or people to sit and chat to about all sorts.

It's not always a load of testers sitting and talking about testing, it can be more or less. It's whatever you make of it, but to skip the socialising is to miss out on the real insights, learning and value of a conference.

## Pack a bag

Being at a conference without a bag full of things that you need is upsetting, frustrating and annoying.

Planning before hand and keeping a checklist of things to pack each day is a good idea.

# Pack a bag



At EuroSTAR there are water stations, regular tea and coffee sessions and the typical amenities but it pays to take the things you need to keep you going.

This could be medication, more water, food, pen and paper, chargers for gadgets, business cards, and layers of clothing.

Whatever you need. Get it packed and your day will be more comfortable.

# Get Away From It All

Despite being highly involved in many communities and social activities I often need to get away and get some peace.

If it's getting too busy or you need to reset your head then find some space, chillax for a while and get yourself centered again.

# Take Notes

Take notes - loads of them.

Jot down stuff you like, stuff that inspires you, new ideas or approaches, new tools, people who rock, people who don't rock and whatever else you'll think you might like to note down.

Use whatever system works for you; notebook, camera phone, Evernote, mind map. Whatever.

And share your notes if you think the community will benefit.

If you do nothing else with the notes then please do seek me out (@rob\_lambert on Twitter) to share your note taking method. I'm doing a long-term study on note taking and learning and would love to know what system you use.

Seek me out, share your ideas and become infamous the world over when I finally get around to writing my book. :)

# Give Feedback

One of the most frustrating things when organising an event is to receive no feedback on how it went.

Just as bad is to receive "meh" feedback - this is feedback where everything was "good" or "ok".

This is not useful either unless of course everything really was "ok".

If you're enjoying the event, then tell the organisers.

If you're not enjoying it, then tell the organisers.

Without feedback no one can change the things that are niggling you, no one can change things for the next time and no one has a solid idea of what is working and what isn't.

# Get Social

If you're that way inclined then join the online social streams.

The “#esconfs” hash tag on Twitter is a good place to start.

This will give you the tweets that have included this hash tag. It's a way for tweeters to share content relevant to certain audiences.

Follow EuroSTAR themselves - @esconfs. (<http://www.twitter.com/esconfs>)

Join in the conversation and take the time to try and find the peeps that are tweeting.

Follow the blogs that will be spawning from the event.

Contribute to the social stream too. There are often many people who are not at the event following the stream. Join in the conversation and put your thoughts in the mix.

Of course, if you don't do the social networking then you can still have a cracking time. It just gives you an added dimension of interaction should you wish to get involved.

## Eat Food

I've not yet been to a EuroSTAR event where the food didn't rock.

If you like food (I do) then dig in.

## Enjoy Culture

The EuroSTAR event is hosted in a different place each year. Sometimes it's abroad and some times it may be in your home country.

It means you'll likely get to explore a different city, eat some different food and drink some different drinks.

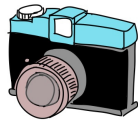
Saying that, most cities have the usual fast-food chain restaurants in and around the city centre so if that's your bag, then that's cool too.

I once went for a cultural weekend to Iceland with a large group of mates. Some of them spent the entire weekend in their tent drinking Vodka and eating peanuts - never to venture out to see anything of Iceland. They had a good time though apparently – so each to their own.

## Take a Camera

Take photos. Plenty of them.

# Take photos



Take photos of the venue, the speakers, the delegates, the food, the test lab, the city, the hotel – what-ever (within reason ☺).

You'll look back on them in years to come and they will trigger memories.

Memories of people who may no longer be with us, people who made you laugh, people who made you cry, conversations that are forever lodged in the deep recesses of your brain, ideas about testing and hopefully - good times.

# Don't Take It All So Seriously

Although you are at EuroSTAR to learn stuff, network and gain insights to testing it's also important to have fun.



**Don't take it all so seriously**

The easiest way to have fun is to not take your-self too seriously.

Taking yourself less seriously can be tricky.

Some people achieve this by dressing up in Fancy Dress, others through a natural ability to find anything funny and some through a lot of hard work and forced discomfort.

If you're finding having fun at a conference tough, and I know there are many reasons why people will, then don't despair.

Seek out some like-minded people, join a small huddle, chat to smiley

people and seek out the activities that you find relaxing.

You need to do what is right for you, don't feel pressured and if it's all getting too much then find some space to reset your mind.

It pays to empty your head when it's getting full. Spending a few minutes resetting or emptying your head can often help you find the space and energy to have some fun.

If all else fails then feel free to seek me out and laugh at my lack of fashion sense.

# Plan how you're going to share your experience

This might not apply to everyone but I suspect that many people attending EuroSTAR are part of a wider team than just you.

In which case it would be rude not to share what you've learned with your team. Therefore it's important to think about how you are going to share your experiences.

Presumably you're not going to go back to the office and just say:

*"Yep. It was ok. I learned some stuff. We're doing some stuff right, some stuff wrong but on the whole we're doing ok. The venue was cool. The airport was nice and clean. The flight was good. I slept ok. The testing world is interesting. I ate too much."*

What a rubbish experience report.

When you plan how you're going to articulate your experience to others you start to absorb, filter and accommodate a whole new level of insights.

It makes you think about the event. It makes you live in the moment. It makes you listen.

## Take your badge off when you leave the venue

I've ignored this advice before.

I've stood on a train with random people saying "Hi Rob" before.

**LEFT YOUR NAME BADGE ON?**



## Dress comfortably

I once took nothing but smart wear to a conference. I was so uncomfortable.

The next conference I attended I took nothing but casual wear and I felt woefully scruffy.

Dress as you feel comfortable. EuroSTAR is not a shirt and tie conference, but there are events and meet-ups that may require smart dress, and don't forget; you are always representing you and your brand (your company or yourself).

I have no experience of what the weather will be like this year so I'll be taking a raincoat, hat, gloves and fancy dress outfit (I'm trying to take myself less seriously this year).

## Look after yourself

It is very easy indeed to get lured in to the late nights and early mornings only to find you're a mess during the day.

Look after yourself as best you can, you'll find you get a lot more enjoyment from the conference.

# Actions speak louder than words

One of the main things to do when taking notes at a conference is to ensure you differentiate between notes and straightforward actions.

Actions are things you need to do.

They are tangible things that can be completed.

Actions are things you've identified as things you want to do, it would be an awful shame to lose them in a sea of notes.

Use whatever mechanism suits you.

I find a capital A in a circle next to the action is enough to identify these bad boys. People use other symbols, some people use dedicated tools.

Do what suits you best but remember - you highlighted it as an action for a reason, best not to file it away and never see it again.

# Bring business cards

Business cards are still the de-facto way of weighing down everyone you meet with pieces of card and paper. I'm a fan of social connections like Twitter and LinkedIn but the modern world is still relying on business cards.

Take yours.

**Don't** hand them out to EVERYONE.

Give them out selectively.

Why give one to that person selling that service that makes your blood boil? Don't do it.

Don't give them out to someone before you've even said hello to them – that's presumptuous.

Make your cards count. Make sure they are easy to read, interesting and not covered in unnecessary details. Make them a representation of your personality if you can. Make sure they are accurate.

When you get a card from someone don't pocket it and forget about it. When you've wandered away from the giver of the card, write some contextual details on the back of the card so it makes more sense in a few days or weeks time.

Was it a funny conversation you'll remember? Jot it down.

Were they selling a cool tool with a wicked UI? Jot it down.

Were they wearing something funny or interesting? Jot it down. (Maybe they are taking themselves less serious this year)

Believe me, if you end up with more than about 8 business cards you'll typically find that a number of them will draw a blank in your mind. Add context, but not whilst you're actually talking to the person – that's rude.

It's always best to keep **your** business cards in a different place to other people's cards you've received. I once gave out someone else's business card instead of my own when they got all jumbled together.

Having no business cards is hard work if you intend to mingle. You'll be forever looking for scraps of paper and pens.

# Have Fun

No one can force you to have fun and if you want to attend EuroSTAR and talk to no one then that's cool. It's your choice. But the one thing I've learned from all the conferences I've been to is this:

*The more you socialise at the event, the more you learn about testing.*

That's testing from the heart, testing from the people on the shop floor, testing from the people occupying a variety of contexts and testing from the people passionate enough about testing to share it with you.

It's also a massive opportunity to make friends and meet interesting people.

# Now What?

I know what you're thinking now. You're thinking:

*"What an amazing guide that this nice chap has created for us, but where do I now go to find out more about EuroSTAR?"*

Well, here you go:

Website: <http://www.eurostarconferences.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/esconfs>

My website: <http://www.thesocialtester.co.uk>

Me on Twitter: [http://www.twitter.com/rob\\_lambert](http://www.twitter.com/rob_lambert)

# Disclaimer

I spent no more than about 1 hour putting this guide together. It might therefore be rubbish.

It comes with no claims of amazement – except in the closing “Now What” statement – but I made that statement up.

I offer no warranties.

There is no refund. (What you paid for this guide?)

This guide is completely unofficial.

I wrote this to help others, to connect to others and to raise awareness of the conference.

I didn't get paid for writing this guide. I wasn't commissioned to write this by the peeps at EuroSTAR. It is not an official guide.

This guide can be used for most conferences. Some sections might not apply, but the general ideas are true for most.

If you want to share your note taking process then I'd love to hear about it. Connect with me at the event and we'll link up.