

Central & Southern Spain

14 DAYS/13 NIGHTS - GROUP TRAVEL
SUGGESTED ITINERARY - CAN BE CUSTOMIZED

Spend two weeks visiting some of the most beautiful and interesting areas in Spain. This itinerary packs a punch in terms of history and culture – but it also has down time, moments for relaxation, sunning on the beach and listening to flamenco. It features large capital cities, seaside towns and historic villages. While visiting four diverse regions of Spain - Castile and León, Castile–La Mancha, the Community of Madrid and Andalusia – you will visit no fewer than eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the Alhambra Palace, the Roman Aqueduct in Segovia and the Old Town of historic Toledo.



DAY 1 ~ ARRIVE MADRID

Arrival to Madrid, Spain's cultural capital city. Upon arrival to Barajas Airport, your group will be met by a local guide in the arrivals hall of the terminal. As hotel rooms will not be ready until 2:00 pm, the guide will take your group on a panoramic sightseeing tour by bus before dropping the group off at the hotel. This is the perfect way to get an orientation of Madrid, which as can be expected – is a large capital city with lots to see!

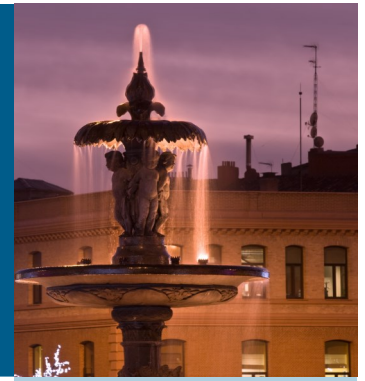
On the panoramic tour you will see the exterior of the baroque Royal Palace, which was constructed in the 18th century and contains over 3000 rooms - as well as the nearby Plaza de Oriente, Teatro Real and Almudena Cathedral. You will also see spectacular Plaza Mayor square. (During the days of the Inquisition, many a heretic was burned at the stake here). You'll also see the always bustling Porta del Sol and the lovely Paseo del Prado boulevard, home to the world-renown Museo del Prado. The tour will finish up at the hotel. Check in and relax before having a group

welcome dinner in the hotel's restaurant.



DAY 2 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide in the lobby and prepare yourself for a real treat: a visit to the historic city of Toledo. (note: Toledo is one of those incredibly picturesque, medieval cities with cobblestones and hills – so please wear comfy shoes today). Many moons ago, Toledo was actually the capital of Spain. This was from the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire when the Visigoths showed up (4th century AD) to the time when the Moors invaded the Iberian Peninsula (8th century). Because of its historic and cultural value, Toledo's Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its historical heritage is unparalleled. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of its history (which goes back to the Romans) is during the Middle Ages when Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted quite peacefully and lived in flourishing, cultural communities. Toledo has also had some pretty famous citizens including the painter, El Greco. While here your guide will take you inside Toledo's Cathedral, which is one of the best



INCLUSIONS

- 6 nights in Madrid
- 1 night each in Cordoba, Granada, and Seville
- 2 nights each in Malaga and Cadiz
- Breakfast daily
- Lunch and dinner per itinerary
- Ground transport via air conditioned luxury coach
- English speaking assistant and guides
- Admission tickets as outlined in itinerary

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sightseeing tours of Madrid, Seville, Cordoba, Granada and Cadiz
- Day trips to Avila, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Toledo and Segovia
- Travel on Spain's convenient high-speed trains
- Visit Granada's Alhambra Palace
- Experience Spain's Costa del Sol
- Attend a flamenco show in Andalusia
- See Spain's oldest bullring

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examples of Gothic architecture in the world; the House & Museum of El Greco, which is located in the old Jewish Quarter; and the 14th-century Synagogue del Tránsito, a remarkable building that once served Toledo's pre-Inquisition Jewish community.

During the tour, there will be a lunch break (on own). In the mid-afternoon, your group will return to the hotel in Madrid. The remainder of the day is at leisure. For those group members that want to relax but not necessarily in the hotel- consider spending the remainder of the afternoon in Madrid's beautiful Retiro Park.



DAY 3 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, you have a full day to yourself to explore Madrid.

Consider visiting the Reina Sofia Museum or the Prado Museum. While they are both superb and definitely merit a visit, their collections are different. The Reina Sofia Museum contains artwork by modern painters (Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso – including his masterpiece Guernica) while the Prado Museum contains masterpieces by traditional, Spanish painters like Diego Velázquez (yes, inside is his famous Las Meninas), Goya, Murillo and El Greco.



DAY 4 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide for a full-day excursion to visit the towns of San Lorenzo de El Escorial and Avila. In San Lorenzo de El Escorial, you will visit its famous monastery, which was commissioned by King Phillip II in the 16th century. This massive structure stands as an outstanding example of Renaissance architecture and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. While in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, you will also see the controversial

monument, called "The Valley of the Fallen" which was commissioned under Franco and remains a stark reminder of the Spanish Civil War. After the guided tour of El Escorial, enjoy some free time for lunch before continuing your daytrip to Avila.

Avila is a walled city whose medieval walls were constructed in the 11th century. The walls are some of the finest in all of Europe and surround the Old Town's remarkably well-preserved Romanesque churches, Gothic palaces and the city's 11th-century Cathedral. It's no surprise that Avila's Old Town is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's also a place of religious importance as it was the birthplace of Saint Teresa, who was born in Avila in 1515. Your group will have a 2-hour walking tour of Avila before returning to Madrid. Upon arrival back to the hotel, the rest of the day is at leisure.



DAY 5 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, today is your final daytrip from Madrid. Meet your guide in the lobby for an excursion to Segovia, an ancient city that lies north of Madrid, in the region of Castile and León. It was inhabited by indigenous Iberians long before the Romans arrived to settle there. During the Middle Ages, Segovia was an interesting, multicultural city with a strong trade industry, and Queen Isabella I herself was crowned here in the 15th century. Today you will visit its Old Town and its incredible aqueduct, both of which form a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Romans finished building the Aqueduct of Segovia during the 2nd century. Today it is still remarkably intact. While in Segovia, your group will also visit the dramatically stunning Alcazar (Royal Palace), which is almost 1000 years old - and the Cathedral of Segovia, a superb example of 16th-century, Gothic architecture. (There will be free time for lunch during today's



excursion). Your group will return to Madrid in the late afternoon and will have the remainder of the day at leisure.



DAY 6 ~ CORDOBA

After breakfast in the hotel, all group members will check out and transfer by private bus to the train station, where it will board the very convenient, high-speed train to the city of Córdoba. Your next week will be spent in one of Spain's most beloved regions: Andalusia. Travelers and locals alike love slower-paced, flamenco-loving, sherry-producing Andalusia. Its mudejar architecture, whitewashed villages, fantastic beaches and friendly locals represent a glimpse of what this region has to offer. Out of all of Spain, this is the area that has been most influenced by its Moorish past. The Moors lived in what we today know as Spain for 800 years. In fact the name Andalusia comes from the name of the Muslim Kingdom "Al-Andalus." Many of the cities that you visit on this itinerary were all heavily impacted by the Moorish culture – Toledo, Seville, Cadiz, Granada, Córdoba, Malaga. Despite the fact that the Catholic Kings (Ferdinand & Isabella) kicked the remaining Moors out of Spain in 1492 – you will still evidence of the highly sophisticated, multicultural and scholarly Muslim culture that once existed in Andalusia.

As you will arrive to Córdoba in late morning - when your hotel rooms will not yet be ready for check-in – your group will meet a guide and set off on a walking tour of this truly fascinating city. 1000 years ago, not only was Córdoba the capital of the entire Muslim kingdom of Iberia, it was also one of the most advanced, cultured and economic cities in all of Europe. It was a city of universities, bath houses, incredible mosques and libraries. Córdoba was home to some of the greatest

philosophers, writers and scientists of its age. Unsurprisingly, its Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Your group will begin its guided tour walking through Córdoba's ancient quarters. A group lunch will be provided in a local restaurant during the tour – and after lunch the group will continue the guided tour with a visit inside Córdoba's crowning achievement: its Mosque–Cathedral. The tour will finish at the hotel where group members can check in, relax and spend the rest of the evening visiting Córdoba's mesmerizing Old Town.



DAY 7 ~ GRANADA

After breakfast in the hotel, your group will check out and transfer by private bus to Granada. Upon arrival to the hotel, group members will store their baggage with hotel's reception staff and go off in search of a quick lunch before reuniting for this afternoon's sightseeing tour of the Alhambra Castle Complex (a UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, as soon as you arrive to Granada, you'll feel that you have gone much higher in altitude – and you have. Compared to other parts of Andalusia, Granada - while only being an hour from the Mediterranean Coast – is much greener and cooler than other cities. Another practical aspect (due to its higher altitude) is that Granada strategically offers its residents a pretty great view when about to be attacked. All these reasons contributed to why the Muslim sultans decided to build their magnificent Alhambra citadel here in the 9th century, which you'll tour this afternoon. Granada was the last Muslim city in all of Spain to fall to the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand & Isabella, in 1492. (Yes, the same year that they financially backed Christopher Columbus' voyage to the "East" and led the raging Inquisition; it was



a busy year for the Spanish monarchs). Their Christian “Re-conquest” finished here in Granada, just in front of the city’s legendary Alhambra Palace, whose beauty we will not attempt to describe here. We will say though that your jaw is sure to drop a few times while inside. After the visit, the group will return to the hotel and have free time to relax and have dinner before tonight’s flamenco show.



DAY 8 ~ MALAGA

After breakfast in the hotel, group members can check out, store their baggage with the reception staff and explore Granada on their own. We recommend wandering the Albaicín, the city’s historic Muslim quarter. After lunch (on own) all group members should arrive back to the hotel to pick up their baggage and board the bus to drive south to Spain’s sunny Costa del Sol. You’re heading for Málaga, the seaside birthplace of Pablo Picasso. Upon arrival to the hotel, the group will check in and have the rest of the evening at leisure to enjoy Málaga’s night scene.



DAY 9 ~ MALAGA

After breakfast in the hotel, enjoy a full day on your own in Málaga. While we strongly recommend visiting the Picasso Museum – we also like spending the day on the beach; this is after all a pretty great stretch of Mediterranean coastline! Beach suggestions: try La Malagueta or El Palo.



DAY 10 ~ CADIZ

After breakfast in the hotel, the group will check out and travel west by private coach to the beautiful, mountain town of Ronda. Ronda’s history dates back to the Romans, but upon arrival- your group will meet a local guide for a guided tour of the town’s Plaza de Toros, the oldest bullring in

Spain. After visiting inside the bullring, enjoy a couple hours of free time to have lunch and explore Ronda’s scenic Old Town before re-boarding the bus to travel to tonight’s destination: the coastal city of Cadiz. En route to Cadiz, you will pass by many vineyards and the town of Jerez de la Frontera. This is “jerez” country! (Or as we say in English “sherry.” Why not try a glass this evening?) Upon arrival to the hotel in Cadiz, check in and enjoy some free time before tonight’s group dinner.



DAY 11 ~ CADIZ

After breakfast in the hotel, meet your local guide for a morning sightseeing tour of the wonderful city of Cadiz. Unusually located on a small stretch of land and surrounded by sea – Cadiz is one of Europe’s oldest cities. Originally founded by the Phoenicians, the strategically-located port city of Cadiz has played host to Greeks, Romans, Visigoths, Moors – and even the English Royal Navy. In addition to its world-renown Carnival celebrations, Cadiz is particularly known for its lovely squares (plazas), which your guide will include on this morning’s tour. After the walking tour has finished - enjoy the rest of the day to continue sightseeing, shop or relax on the beach.



DAY 12 ~ SEVILLE

After breakfast in the hotel, the group will check out and travel north by private coach to Seville, Andalusia’s colorful capital city. Seville has great architecture, flamenco and sightseeing – and the ambience couldn’t be any better. In any old neighborhood bar you’re liable to see local sevillanos passing around a guitar, playing flamenco melodies as everyday patrons sing along. Don’t pass Seville off as all fun and drinks though. This former



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Experience

Flexibility

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Roman city is oozing with cultural heritage; in fact - its Old Town contains no fewer than three UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

As your group will arrive mid-morning to Seville - before your hotel rooms are ready for check-in - upon arrival store your bags with the hotel staff and meet your local guide for a terrific sightseeing tour (walking & bus), during which free time will be given for lunch. On the tour, you will go inside tour two of the aforementioned UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the 14th century- Alcázar palace complex and the Cathedral. The Alcázar palace, which is still used today by the Spanish royal family, is a superb example of mudejar architecture, and you will see similarities between this stunning palace and the Alhambra palace in Granada. While the alcázar's rooms are out-of-this-world, perhaps the most beautiful part of your visit will be inside its gardens. After the palace visit and a quick walk, your group will then visit Seville's magnificent, 15th-century Cathedral (the largest Gothic building in the world). Inside are the presumed remains of Christopher Columbus.

The sightseeing tour will finish back at the hotel in the afternoon, when group members can check-in, relax and freshen up. This evening, everyone will meet back in the lobby and head to Seville's Barrio de Santa Cruz with a local guide. Enjoy a one-hour, pre-dinner-warm-up walking tour of this medieval, Jewish neighborhood. The guide will leave your group at a neighborhood restaurant for its final evening in Andalusia.



DAY 13 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, until the early afternoon you are free to enjoy Seville as you please. (As check-out is at midday, if you don't want to return to the hotel until

the exact meeting time, the most convenient option would be to go ahead, check out and store your baggage with the hotel's reception staff). This morning art lovers may wish to check out the Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes de Sevilla.

By early afternoon all group members should return to the hotel, pick up their bags and board the bus to transfer to Seville's train station for their return high-speed rail journey to Madrid. Upon arrival to the station in Madrid, a local assistant will meet your group and accompany it to the hotel by private coach. By now, you are quite familiar with Spain's capital city - so we'll leave you to it! Enjoy your final evening in Spain!



DAY 14 ~ MADRID

After breakfast in the hotel, all group members should check out and transfer to Madrid's Barajas Airport by private bus for their departure flight back to the USA.



For information and reservations, please see your professional travel agent